RUTH & HANNAH: Two Women of Faith in God
RUTH Chapters 1-4; 1 SAMUEL Chapters 1-3

- **What happened when two women of faith trusted in God for a son.**
- **How God helps all people of faith even when things go wrong.**
- **How Ruth and her redeemer husband Boaz fulfilled the plan of God in their son.**
- **How Hannah and her redeemer husband Elkanah also fulfilled the plan of God.**
- **How two women and their sons prepared the way for Jesus, Israel's Messiah.**

THIS BOOK gives the true stories of two women of God over 3000 years ago. Hannah prepared the way for the prophets of Israel. Ruth prepared the way for Israel's kings and Messiah, Jesus the Christ. They did not know these things at the time. Each woman stepped out in faith to ask God to meet their personal need of a son. Both received God's blessing through their faith and worship of Him and through their redeemer husbands. Their first-born sons were part of the salvation plan of God to bless Israel and the world through His Redeemer 1000 years later. Today, we are all blessed when we truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God and our Saviour, who was born through the virgin Mary.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS publish small Bible teaching commentaries written by the late Fred Morris to use on your own or to study in a group. Fred and his wife Lorna, originally from Australia, travelled round the world teaching and preaching before retiring to the USA. Their low-cost books are easy to read, understand and translate into other languages. The books explain basic New and Old Testament teaching of God's word and the new life found in Christ plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

THESE BOOKS will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven. These are important teachings for these last days before His return.

WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return.

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"MANNA FOR ALL" BIBLE TEACHING COMMENTARIES
"The secret of God's Kingdom has been given to you" (Mark 4:11)

RUTH AND HANNAH

Two Women of Faith in God

A Bible Teaching Commentary for personal or group study

Written by Fred Morris

MANNA FOR ALL

RUTH
Chapters 1 to 4 and

1 SAMUEL
Chapters 1 to 3

To the Reader or Leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. You can use Fred's books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.

Bible reading: Where you see this heading, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible verses first before reading this book.

Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.

Think about this: Where you see this, the questions require more time for personal meditation.

Pray about this: Where you see this, ask God to help you understand and apply what you have read.

Additional text boxes: Where you see these, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible passage was written and helps to apply the teaching for today.

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THE STORIES OF RUTH AND HANNAH

This Bible teaching commentary is mainly about God's provision through Ruth and Hannah for His long-term salvation plan for the salvation of all who believe in Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah. It is also about their supporting husbands Boaz and Elkanah as redeemers for Israel at that time. It began when Naomi left Israel because God's people were being punished for disobeying God's laws. But righteousness and peace were restored at the time of Ruth and Boaz.

Both Ruth and Hannah were blessed with sons who were important in God's plans for the future of Israel. Their first-born sons also became a blessing to Israel at the time they lived. In the long term, they were both part of the salvation plan of God to bless the world through Israel's Messiah, as He promised Abraham many years before (Genesis 12:2-3). They prepared the way for the prophets and kings of Israel and finally Israel's greatest Prophet and King, our Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

Like Ruth and Hannah and their sons, we can all be used in different ways to prepare for God's plan to establish His Kingdom on Earth, in good times or in bad times. Like them, we must have faith in God today, despite times of personal suffering and national disobedience, to help prepare the way for the return of Israel's Messiah.

Boaz and Elkanah were also examples of faith in God and His redeeming salvation for the eternal good of God's people, then and now.

Praise God for His covenant of salvation offered to the family of Noah after God destroyed the ungodly world by a great flood. Praise God that His covenant was confirmed with the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and was written down at the time of Moses for all to obey. Praise God that Ruth and Hannah were part of the preparation for the arrival of Israel's Messiah. In Him, God's covenant was finally fulfilled for all to receive salvation through His sacrifice and through the anointing of His promised Holy Spirit. May we stand firm in these 'end times' before our Saviour's return, when many cities and nations will experience Satanic persecution or disobedience, especially through political and economic controls and ungodly religions.

[Ruth & Hannah 2016 2nd edition 2026]

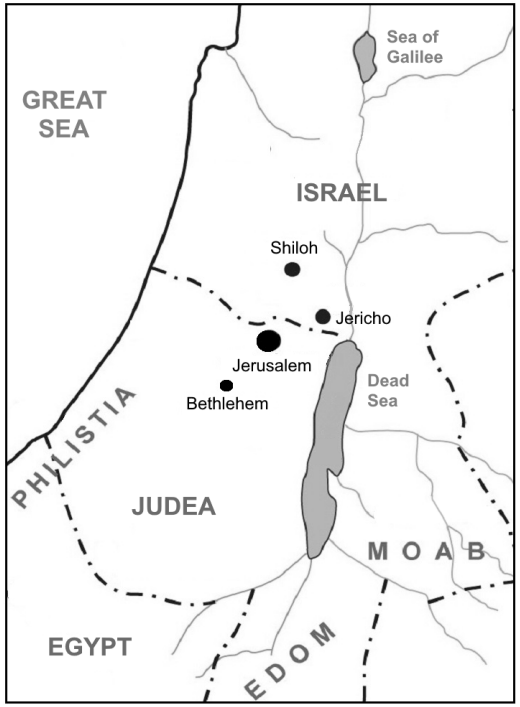
THE STORY OF RUTH

RUTH Chapters 1 to 4

INTRODCTION

The Old Testament book of Ruth is often read by Jews at the Feast of Pentecost. The story of Ruth, a non-Jew, covers approximately 12 years. It happened around 3,300 years ago when the nation of Israel was ruled by judges. The judges were leaders of Israel before the time of the prophets of God and the kings of Israel.

It was not a prosperous time for the people of God in Israel. Their leaders often disobeyed Him and led the people into sin. God allowed them to experience the results of sin in their lives and in their country, including serious climate changes. It was at the time of a great famine in Israel that Naomi, Ruth's future mother-in-law, left home in Bethlehem with her husband and two sons to live in Moab, the country where Ruth lived.



This book tells us how Ruth later chose to leave her home in the country of Moab and go back with Naomi to live in Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem. She chose to give up her false gods and trust in the one true and living God, the LORD God Almighty of Israel.

This is the amazing story of how Ruth married Boaz in Bethlehem whose son became the grandfather of King David in the family line of Jesus (see Matthew 1:1-16). Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit to the virgin Mary (1:18). Joseph, who was a descendant of David (1:16,20), became the husband of Mary. And Jesus was the promised Christ or Messiah of Israel who became the Saviour of the world, "and will save the people from their sins" (1:21).

The book of Ruth begins with the story of Naomi and her husband Elimelech. They lived in Israel at the time of the judges, approximately 1300 years before the birth of Christ. They chose to move from Bethlehem to the country of Moab and took their two sons with them.

Moab and Israel

The people of Moab descended from Lot, a nephew of Abraham. They did not keep faith in the LORD God Almighty of Abraham. Ruth was born in Moab and worshipped their false gods until she put her faith in the One True God. The people of Israel descended from Jacob, the grandson of Abraham. Israel and Moab were often at war against each other. At the time of Ruth, there was peace, so people moved freely between Moab and Israel. There was no famine in Moab at the time Naomi and her husband and sons moved to Moab.

The book of Ruth also gives the story of Boaz, a family relative of Elimelech in Bethlehem. Boaz was the son of Rahab from Jericho. (Read how Rahab, also a non-Jew, was spared death in Jericho, recorded in our Manna commentary on Joshua, Chapter 2). Boaz married Ruth soon after Naomi returned with her to Bethlehem, where their first son was born.

This story of Elimelech, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz shows us their parts in the great salvation plan of God. He is the LORD God Almighty and is the God of the Jews and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This book tells us of the plan of God to offer salvation from sin to men and women of all nations through His Son Jesus. Jesus is the Christ or Messiah whom God sent as Saviour to Israel who was also born in Bethlehem to the virgin Mary. Mary's future husband Joseph adopted Jesus as part of his family after they were married.

Bible reading: Ruth Chapter 1

ELIMELECH, NAOMI AND FAMILY LEAVE ISRAEL

The book of Ruth begins sadly. Many of the people of Israel at the time had turned away from God. There were no kings and no prophets of God to guide them. Only judges ruled Israel. Often, each person went their own way. "The people did anything they thought was right" (Judges 21:25). They had their own ideas of what to do and failed to put their trust in God.

So, God allowed a great famine in Israel. Soon, there was not enough food in the town of Bethlehem. The name of Bethlehem means 'house of bread' but God allowed a shortage of bread at that time. The land no longer had plenty of the milk and honey promised by God to the people of Israel (Exodus 3:8).

There was a man in Bethlehem whose name was Elimelech. He was from the family line of Ephrath. Ephrath is the ancient name for Bethlehem. Elimelech believed in the LORD God Almighty of Israel.

Elimelech and his wife Naomi, moved with their two sons to the country of Moab. They wanted to escape the famine and live there (Ruth 1:1-2). They did what they thought was right. However, it was a risky choice to make. They decided to move away from Israel, which was and still is the Promised Land of God.

Think about this: Samuel served Eli and through him he learned to listen to the voice of God. Samuel replaced Eli and his sons as priest of Israel. He was also the last judge and the first prophet of God. What other purposes of God were also fulfilled in Hannah's prayer for a miracle son?

Pray about this: Praise God that He continues to speak to people today. Ask Him to speak to you when you read the Bible. Pray for others to hear the voice of God. Pray that they will see and understand that Jesus suffered and died to save them and to serve Him. Ask God today to guide you in faith for miracles to happen in your country in line with His will.

CONCLUSION TO THE STORY OF HANNAH

This is the true story of Hannah. She lived during some of the bad times of the judges of Israel. Hanna knew she could put her trust in God despite His anger towards Israel at that time. Hannah was distressed and mocked for not giving birth to a son. She came to God in prayer and found true peace in the midst of personal grief and national disobedience. God heard and then answered her prayer for a son, whom she offered back to serve God. God used Hannah's offering and dedication of her son to bless Israel and the world. God used Samuel to prepare the way for the prophets, priests and kings of Israel. Many of the prophets who followed Samuel spoke of God's plan in Jesus the Christ. Jesus (Yeshua) was Israel's promised Messiah and is our Saviour today of all who believe that He is the Son of God.

A prayer: Thank You God that Hanna was prepared to dedicate her first born child to You to assist Eli the priest and to help others in their worship and obedience. Thank You that this led to a series of Your prophets to prepare the nations of the world to believe in Your Messiah. May we share in the preparation for His return.

God called out as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

This time Samuel answered as Eli had told him. God spoke to him with a message for Eli. Samuel listened and obeyed. God said, "I am about to do something terrible in Israel. It will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle! I will do everything to Eli and his family that I said I would. I will finish what I started." (3:12)

These things are written about in Chapter 4. God's message to Eli was the same as before, only more urgent. Eli failed to stop his sons from sinning (3:13). So God refused to accept their offerings and sacrifices for sin (3:14).

This was a sad message. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the message he had received (3:15). In the morning, Samuel got up and started his work. Eli called out, "Samuel, my son … what did the LORD God Almighty say to you? Do not hold from me anything He told you." (3:17)

So Samuel told Eli everything. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD God Almighty. Let Him do what He thinks is best" (3:18). "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31)

This is a strong warning to all fathers. Do all you can to raise your sons and daughters in the training and instruction of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:4). Do not ignore their sinful ways. Love them, but stand against the things they do.

GOD CONTINUES TO SPEAK TO SAMUEL

From this time Samuel was always ready to listen for God's voice. He obeyed even when it was difficult. God chose Samuel and trained him to do what was right for God's people. He was the last judge and the first prophet of Israel.

'As Samuel grew up, the LORD God Almighty was with him. He made everything Samuel said come true.' (3:19) When Samuel spoke, all Israel listened. 'So all the people of Israel recognised that Samuel really was a prophet of the LORD God Almighty.' (3:20)

'The LORD God Almighty continued to appear at Shiloh. There He made Himself known to Samuel through the messages He gave him. And Samuel gave these messages to all the people of Israel.' (3:21)

Through the prayer request of Hannah and her promise to God, her son became prophet of Israel. He was the first of a long line of Old Testament prophets to bless and to guide Israel.

Many of these Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God and Saviour of the world for all who believe.

Talk about this:

1. Why do you think God gave His message to Samuel and not to Eli?
2. What did the warning in 3:14 mean for the sons of Eli?
3. How did Hannah and her son prepare the way for the Son of God?
4. What part did Elkanah have in the salvation plan of God for Israel and the world?

God shows mercy when we make mistakes

It was a difficult decision for Elimelech to move his wife and family to Moab. Sometimes, we fail to put our trust in God and suffer as a result of following our own ideas. Despite our mistakes and lack of trust, the long-term purposes of God are not defeated. The Old Testament describes how God saved some of His people from their risky decisions:

- Abraham went to Egypt away from the Promised Land at a time of famine. He risked losing his wife who became the mother of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob whom God named Israel (Genesis 12:10-20).
- The mother of baby Moses left him in a basket on the River Nile. She risked losing the child who became the saviour of the people of Israel who were living at that time in Egypt (Exodus 2:1-10).
- The future king David secretly cut off a piece of cloth from the robe of King Saul. He risked losing his life to prove he was righteous and became the ancestor of Joseph who married Mary, the mother of God's Son, Jesus Christ (1 Samuel 24:1-7; Matthew 1:16).

While in Moab, Elimelech died. Naomi was left a widow with two sons in a foreign land (1:3).

The people of Moab worshipped false gods. The two sons of Naomi risked the anger of God Almighty and married girls from Moab. Mahlon married Ruth, Kilion married Orpah (1:4). They were not blessed with children. Both girls worshipped the gods of Moab.

The family of Naomi lived in Moab for over ten years. Then the two sons of Naomi also died. Naomi was left with no sons, no grandchildren and no husband (1:4-5).

NAOMI PREPARES TO RETURN TO ISRAEL

Naomi heard that God had forgiven and blessed Israel with food. The sorrowful Naomi planned to return to Bethlehem (1:6). So Naomi and her two daughters-in-law travelled on the road towards Israel (1:7-8).

Naomi stopped along the road near the border. "Both of you go back" she said. "Each of you must go to the home of your own mother. You were kind to your husbands who have died. You have also been kind to me. So may the LORD God Almighty be just as kind to you." (1:8)

In this way she asked for the blessing of the God of Abraham on both the girls from Moab. "May He help each of you find a secure place in the home of another husband. May He give you peace and rest." (1:9) Naomi witnessed to her faith in God by boldly asking for His blessing on herself and the two girls. God answered in ways she did not expect!

Naomi kissed both girls and they wept loudly. They said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." (1:10)

However, Naomi said, "Go home, my daughters. Why would you want to come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? … No, my daughters. My life is now more bitter than yours. The power of the LORD God Almighty is against me." (1:11,13) Naomi had faith in Almighty God but little hope for her future at that time.

The two women wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth held on to Naomi (1:14).

"Look," said Naomi, "Your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." (1:15) Both girls had a choice of following the false gods of Moab or following the LORD God Almighty of Abraham and Israel whom their ancestors had rejected.

Ruth replied with these now famous words. "Do not try to make me leave you and go back. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die. And there my body will be buried. I will not let anything except death separate you from me. If I do, may the LORD God Almighty punish me greatly." (1:16-17) This decision changed the world!

Ruth chooses to follow her mother-in-law Naomi and trust in the One True God of Israel while Orpah returns to her mother and the false gods of Moab.

Naomi realised that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her. Ruth had chosen to leave behind her false gods and put her trust in Naomi's God who is our Creator. Orpah left Naomi but Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law. Naomi saw that Ruth would not go home. Naomi stopped trying to make her go back (1:18).

RUTH TRAVELS WITH NAOMI TO LIVE IN BETHLEHEM

Ruth's belief and trust in the LORD God Almighty grew strong. Her faithfulness to Naomi was also strong. Sometimes the faith of new believers is stronger than the faith of older believers! This new faith of Ruth encouraged Naomi in her own faith.

God wants to increase our faith in Him. He also wants us to help increase the faith of others. Faith is a gift of God which all may receive. We grow in faith by using our faith.

Naomi and Ruth travelled on to Bethlehem (1:19). Ruth gladly trusted in God for her new life in Israel. However, Naomi's faith was very weak at this time.

Think about this: Describe how the gift of a son from God to Hannah later blessed Israel and all nations. Can you pray a 'song of praise' to God with increased understanding of His provision and purpose? What shows the love, provision, knowledge and purpose of God in your life? How can this bless others?

Pray about this: Ask again for faith to praise God in good times and in bad times. Praise God for how He has worked in your life and has blessed you. Give thanks for learning about what is right and what is wrong. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal more of the love and truth of God. Ask to understand fully His amazing plans for the salvation of mankind through Jesus. Acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

Bible reading: 1 Samuel Chapter 3

SAMUEL SERVES GOD AND GOD CALLS TO HIM

Samuel grew up under the care of Eli. He guarded the Ark in the Tabernacle. In those days there were very few messages or visions from the LORD God Almighty (3:1).

The old priest taught Samuel how to serve before God in the Tabernacle. Samuel opened the doors to the worshippers. He received their offerings and looked after them. He lit the lamps and kept the oil full. He guarded the Holy of Holies and the Ark with its Ten Commandments.

Samuel knew the wicked ways of the two sons of Eli. He saw, too, that Eli had lost authority in Israel. Men and women did as they pleased. There was no true judge or priest who could call the people back to God.

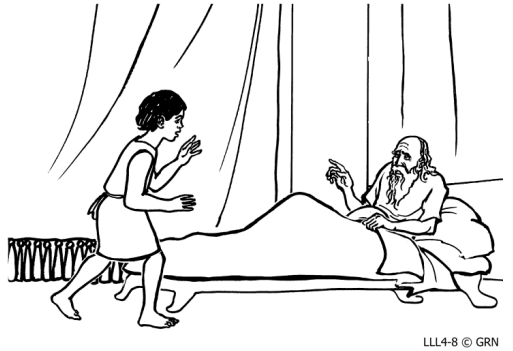
One night, the lamp of God was still alight in the Tabernacle (3:3). This witness of God's holy presence still shone in Israel. Samuel was lying on his mat. Only a curtain hung between him and the Ark of God. Then he heard a voice.

God called out to Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." (3:4) He thought it was Eli calling. So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. You called out to me."

Eli said, "I did not call you. Go back and lie down." (3:6)

This happened twice more. Then Eli knew that God had called to Samuel. Samuel did not yet know the voice of the LORD God Almighty (3:7).

Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If someone calls out to you again, say, 'Speak, LORD. I am listening.'" (3:9) So Samuel went back and lay down.



Eli the priest tells Samuel to listen to the voice of God when He calls out in the middle of the night.

God had told him. God announced, "I will honour those who honour Me. But I will turn away from those who look down on Me." (2:30)

The sons of Eli opposed God and did not repent. Eli honoured his sons more than he honoured God. He let God down. He let himself down. He let his own sons down. He let Israel down.

Judgment may take time to come, but it will come in the end. If you cheat on your wife or steal from your boss, be sure of one thing. "God will judge everything people do … good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 1 Corinthians 3:13) The apostle Paul further warns, "We will have to explain to God the things we have done." (Romans 14:12)

God then announced to Eli:

- "I will cut your life short. I will also cut short the lives of those in your family line of priests." (2:31)
- "You will see trouble but good things will still happen to Israel." (2:32)
- "Something is going to happen to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. When it does, it will show you that what I am saying is true. They will both die on the same day." (2:34)

THE PLAN OF GOD FOR SAMUEL

Then the man of God said, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest. He will do what My heart and mind want him to do. I will make his family line of priests very secure. They will always serve as priests to My anointed king." (2:35)

God began the new line of priests and prophets through Samuel. Samuel later appointed and served the new kings of Israel beginning with Saul and then David.

The prophets, priests and kings of Israel served God for hundreds of years. They replaced the judges of Israel. Then our Lord Jesus Christ came as Judge, Prophet, Priest, King and Saviour of Israel. Therefore, through Samuel, God blessed Israel and through Jesus, God blessed the world.

The family line of Eli became beggars (2:36) and were removed from the priesthood (1 Kings 2:27).

Talk about this:

1. Describe how the prayer of Hannah shows her joy and love for God (2:1-2).
2. Describe how Hannah knew that God met her personal needs (2:3-5).
3. Describe how Hannah shows her knowledge of the books of Moses (2:6-9).
4. Describe the full meaning of the prophecy about the anointed king of God in the final verse of Hannah's prayer (2:10).
5. Was there really no salvation possible for the sons of Eli? Why? What was the chief cause? How did their father fail them?
6. Describe what the man of God said to Eli about sin (2:27-34).
7. What did he say about the future priests and God's anointed kings (2:35)?
8. What would happen to the family line of Eli? (2:36).

How God prepared the way for Ruth and the Messiah in Bethlehem

Ruth was a foreigner in Israel. We read in the Old Testament that God told the people of Israel to welcome foreigners. "Suppose a foreigner lives with you in your land. Then do not treat them badly. Treat them as if they were one of your own people. Love them as you love yourself. Remember that all of you were foreigners in Egypt." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

We also read in the New Testament that God wants all believers to welcome foreigners, both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 10:12-13). The Apostle Paul quoted from Joel, "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD God Almighty will be saved." (Joel 2:32) The apostle Peter said, "I now realise how true it is that God treats everyone the same. He accepts people from every nation. He accepts all who have respect for Him and do what is right." (Acts 10:34-35)

The plan of God for Ruth was fulfilled in this way:

- Naomi witnessed her faith in the One True and Almighty God of Israel whilst living with Ruth in Moab.
- Naomi prayed to God for His kindness, security and peace for Ruth (1:8-9).
- Ruth understood the choice she had to make. She chose to leave behind the gods of Moab.
- Ruth chose a new life and new faith in the LORD God Amighty with Naomi in Israel.
- It was the right time for Naomi to move back to Israel with Ruth. It was a time of peace and God's mercy with plenty of food for their personal needs which were many.
- Ruth moved with Naomi to the little town of Bethlehem. It was the right place prepared by God for her and her future family, especially her firstborn son.

Yes, it was also the right place for Ruth to meet Boaz in God's plan for the future of Israel. They had a son, and through the family line of Boaz, Israel's Messiah was later born to Mary, also in Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem, many people recognised Naomi. The whole town was excited. The women in the town asked each other, "Can this possibly be Naomi?" They saw that Ruth was a foreigner in Israel. However, they gladly welcomed her. The Jews were quick to bless both Naomi and Ruth.

Naomi struggled with her thoughts and feelings. "Do not call me Naomi", she told the women. The name of Naomi means joyful and pleasant. She said, "Call me Mara [which means bitter]. The Mighty One has made my life very bitter. I was full when I went away. The LORD God Almighty has brought me back empty. So why are you calling me Naomi? God has made me suffer. The Mighty One has brought trouble on me." (1:20-21)

Yes, Naomi felt very sad. We can see from the Bible, however, that God worked in the life of Naomi during her sadness. We can learn from this that we should not let our feelings weaken our faith. Nor should we weaken the faith of others. We must believe that God is at work in our lives at all times and in all circumstances.

Naomi's faith in God was tested. She needed to believe that God had not rejected her. She needed to believe that the people of God had not rejected her. She needed to believe that they would be kind to her and to Ruth.

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem with what they carried on their backs. What happened next is told in the Bible with very few words (1:22). We know that God was not against them. God was with them. Israel blessed Naomi and her foreign daughter-in-law. The people of Israel welcomed both Naomi and Ruth and helped them to stay and settle in Bethlehem.

They arrived when people were beginning to harvest the barley grain. It was also the start of the Feast of the Passover.

Talk about this:

1. What decision did Elimelech and Naomi make (1:1)? Why was it risky?
2. Describe what happened in Moab (1:3-5). How did Elimelech's decision to leave Israel affect his wife and family?
3. What blessings from God did Naomi ask for Ruth and Orpah (1:8-9)?
4. How do we know that Ruth converted to the faith of Naomi (1:16-17)?
5. How did Naomi help the faith of Ruth? How did Ruth help the faith of Naomi?
6. Was it true that God was against Naomi (1:13,21)?
7. Why was a foreign girl from Moab welcome in Israel? How should we welcome foreigners today?

Think about this: What risky decisions or mistakes have you made in the past? Thank God for His faithfulness and blessing in times of danger and need. Think of ways to grow in your faith and become a blessing to God and to others by seeking His purpose in life. Compare Elimelech's decision to leave Israel with Ruth's decision to move to Israel.

Bible reading: Ruth Chapter 2

RUTH MEETS BOAZ IN BETHLEHEM

Boaz lived in Bethlehem. He owned much land there. He was important and greatly respected in the town. He was a relative of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi who died in Moab (2:1).

Ruth spoke to Naomi. She said, "Let me go out to the fields. I will pick up the grain that has been left" (2:2). Ruth was now ready to trust in God to provide what they needed.

Eli asked God to give Hannah and Elkanah more children (2:20). There is no further mention of Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah. However, God blessed Hannah with three more sons and two daughters (2:21).

THE WICKED SONS OF ELI

Eli heard what his sons Hophni and Phinehas were doing with the offerings. He also knew they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the House of God (2:22).

Eventually, Eli said to his sons, "Why are you doing these things? All the people are telling me about the evil things you are doing. No, my sons. The report I hear is not good. And it is spreading among the people of God." (2:23-24)

Eli did not take their priestly robes from them. He did not discipline them and they did not obey him. Eli had left it too late to stop his two sons from doing wrong and causing Israel to accept sin. Yet when Eli spoke to his sons, he spoke to them clearly. "If a person sins against someone else, God can help that sinner. If anyone sins against the LORD God Almighty, who can help them?" (2:25) They did not listen to Eli and they would not repent. They were therefore closing their ears to the voice of God. God decided to punish their sins with an early death.

Under the Law of Moses, no man deliberately turned against God and lived. All sin offerings were for repentance and for unintended sin. No man openly rebelled against God and went unpunished. Those who disobeyed God were 'cut off' from among the people (Numbers 15:30-31). This is the punishment they deserved under the old covenant of God before He sent His promised Messiah.

Separation from God and His people and death are the punishments that we all deserve when we deliberately sin against God. Separation and death are the punishments that Jesus suffered in our place to save us from the results of sin. We are saved from the punishment and eternal death that we deserve through repentance and the sacrifice of Jesus.

If believers continue to disobey God and live in sin, they hurt those closest to themselves. They hurt the whole fellowship of believers. They also hurt themselves. Most of all, they hurt God. Unless they repent, they will not be saved. It is a good and blessed thing when believers acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.

GOD WARNS ELI AND HIS FAMILY

The boy Samuel grew up. 'He became more and more pleasing to God and to the people.' (2:26)

Now a man of God came to warn Eli. He made it clear what God expected from His special people of Israel (2:27-28). He said that God had a question to ask Eli. "Why do you honour your sons more than Me? Why do you fatten yourselves on the best parts of every offering that is made by My people Israel?" (2:29)

These sons wanted the offerings to God for themselves and ignored the meaning of them. They took them for themselves. The man of God repeated what

- She *prophesied* about a coming King even at a time when there were no kings in Israel. He would be the 'anointed one' of God (2:10).

When Hannah's son Samuel later became Israel's priest and prophet, he anointed Saul as the first king of Israel (10:1). He also anointed King David to replace Saul (16:13). King David became an ancestor of Mary the mother of Jesus, the King of Kings.

The song of Hannah and the song of Mary

The opening words of the song of Hannah are similar to the opening words of the song of Mary, mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46-55). Mary sang:

"My soul gives glory to the LORD. My spirit delights in God my Saviour. He has taken note of me even though I am not considered important. From now on all people will call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me. His name is holy. He shows his mercy to those who have respect for Him, from parent or child down through the years. He has done mighty things with His powerful arm. He has scattered those who are proud in their deepest thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones. But He has lifted up people who are not considered important. He has filled with good things those who are hungry. But He has sent away empty those who are rich. He has helped the people of Israel, who serve Him. He has always remembered to be kind to Abraham and his children down through the years. He has done it just as he promised to our people of long ago."

SAMUEL GROWS TO LOVE AND SERVE THE GOD OF ISRAEL

Elkanah and Hannah returned home but left the young Samuel with the priest Eli to serve God (1 Samuel 2:11). Samuel grew up and loved God. He served in the House of God at Shiloh. He helped Eli, the chief priest.

However, Eli's sons did not honour the LORD God Almighty (2:12). They took sacrificial meat from the people of Israel for themselves (2:13-16). 'This sin of the sons of Eli was very great in the sight of God. That is because they were not treating His offering with respect.' (2:17) Therefore, God did not accept their service.

The Bible does not hide sin or try to cover it up. We need to know about the sons of Eli who sinned. We need to know what happened to them over 3000 years ago. Their actions showed what was in their hearts. They broke the Law of Moses but Eli did not stop them. However, Samuel served God and Eli faithfully as a child. He wore the apron of a priest (2:18).

'Each year, his mother made him a new robe. She took it to him when she went up to Shiloh with her husband … to offer the yearly sacrifice.' (2:19)

The Jewish Blessing, then and now

Jews were taught to love God and to do good to others. When they obeyed god's commandments, they gave thanks for all that God provided. They learned from an early age to pray to God. They prayed often. They praised their loving Creator. They prayed for the growth of the Kingdom of God. They gave thanks to God for His people. They were quick to bless God, to bless others and to bless their possessions many times a day. This is why Naomi blessed Ruth. This is why the women of Bethlehem blessed Naomi and Ruth. This is why Boaz blessed them, and his farm workers.

The prayers of devout Jews included many blessings. They believed that God is interested in their lives. They gave thanks to God for all things at all times and in all places. They learned to praise God in good times and in bad times. The Bible teaches us to bless others as God blesses us (Genesis 12:2). Jesus also taught us to forgive others and we will be forgiven (Matthew 6:14). He said, "Give to others and good things will be given to you." (Luke 6:37-38)

It is a Jewish commandment today to give thanks and bless everyone many times a day. Loving each other should be part of our joyful daily worship of God for His love, salvation and provision, even under persecution or in difficult circumstances.

So Ruth went to pick up grain that other people left behind. Poor people were allowed to use what was left in the fields after the barley harvest. This was a law in Israel (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Ruth went to collect grain in the field owned by Boaz (Ruth 2:3). She did not know Boaz at that time. Boaz arrived and greeted his workmen. "May the LORD God Almighty be with you." (2:4) Boaz was a good master. He cared for each of his workers. He loved them and asked God to bless them. He shared the love of God with them.

"May the LORD God Almighty be with you" they all replied. It was the Jewish custom to ask God to bless each other.

Boaz noticed Ruth in his field. He spoke to the man in charge of his workers. "Who is that young woman?" (2:5)

The man told him what he knew about Ruth. "She is from Moab. She came back from there with Naomi." (2:6) He added, "She has kept working from morning till now. She took only one short rest in the shade." (2:7)

God was merciful to Ruth. Boaz remembered that he was related to Naomi through her marriage to Elimelech. Boaz said to Ruth, "Dear woman, listen to me. Do not go and pick up grain in another field… Stay here with the women who work for me. Keep your eye on the field where the men are cutting grain. Walk behind the women who are gathering it. Pick up the grain that is left. I have told the men not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." (2:8-9)

When Ruth heard what Boaz said, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, "Why are you being so kind to me? …I am from another country." (2:10)

Boaz replied, "I know all about you. I have heard about everything you did for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know that you left your father and mother. I know that you left your country. You came to live with people you did not know. May the LORD God Almighty reward you for what you have done. May the God of Israel, bless you richly. You have come to Him to find safety under His care." (2:10-12)

In this way, Boaz shared the love of God with Ruth.

"Sir, I hope you will continue to be kind to me," Ruth said. "You have comforted me. You have spoken kindly to me. I am not even as important as one of your servants" (2:13).

When it was time to eat, Boaz said to her, "Come over here. Have some bread." She ate all she wanted. She even had some left over (2:14).

Boaz gave orders to his men. He told them to help Ruth to collect more grain than normal (2:15-17).

Laws of Israel to protect widows through a family redeemer

Two laws in Israel protected the rights of a widow among her relatives:

- The right to redeem or take back the land that God gave their husband.
- The right to marry a family member and have children to continue the family line and the family name.

Property given up or sold could be redeemed or bought back by a family member (Leviticus 25:25). A family protector or redeemer was someone who had the right to buy back a property sold or taken from a family. It was also the custom of a close relative to look after the widow of their brother or nephew. If the brother or nephew died without leaving any children, the redeemer would arrange for their widows to marry a family member and have children in order to carry on the family name.

BOAZ BECAME A FAMILY PROTECTOR

Ruth took home to Naomi much grain and some food (2:18). God was good to them by encouraging Boaz to be kind. As a result, Boaz helped the two women whom God wanted to bless.

Ruth emptied out her grain and Naomi was surprised. She asked Ruth, "Where did you pick up grain today? Where did you work? May the man who noticed you be blessed." Naomi was quick to thank God and bless the man who was kind to Ruth. Ruth told Naomi, "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz." (2:19) As soon as Ruth mentioned the name of Boaz, Naomi knew where Ruth

Bible reading: 1 Samuel Chapter 2

HANNAH'S SONG OF PRAISE

Hannah's song of praise to God is also called a prayer. Many of the Psalms are prayers of praise. Three years before, Hannah had prayed without speaking words aloud. Now she wanted everyone to hear what God had done for her. Hannah's song of praise to God is now known to the whole world.

Hannah suffered shame and persecution through being childless. God lifted her up. She praised and worshipped God in bad times and in good times. She took God seriously.

Our own praise to God will enable everyone to know about Him. Remember to praise the name of God at all times and before all people.

God is judge of sinners, and the nations are in His hand. He allows good and evil to serve His purposes. It was not only a time of much disobedience by God's people but also much persecution by the Philistines, which God allowed. Those who do not obey His commands will come under His judgment. God will judge everyone fairly by what they have done (Romans 2:6).

The first ten verses of Chapter 2 tell us the words Hannah prayed to God at Shiloh. God opened her eyes to understand what had happened in her life. The Jews still use these verses for teaching and blessing the people of God today.

Hannah sang words of thanks and greater understanding, including words of prophecy. Her song also looked forward to Israel's 'Anointed One', Jesus the Christ, Israel's Messiah:

- Hannah *praised* and thanked God for His power over her enemies. She rejoiced in her salvation (2:1).
- She *worshipped* God for His great holiness. He was the rock in her life. There is no-one else like Him (2:2).
- She *declared* there was no place for pride. God knows all things and is judge of all we say and do (2:3).
- She *believed* that mighty people are brought down low by God. But innocent who stumble are lifted up by God with renewed strength (2:4).
- She *rejoiced* that those who are hungry are fed and those who are childless are finally blessed. She saw how ungrateful people who have plenty of food and children end up unhappy (2:5).
- She *claimed* that God gives life and He takes it away. He sends the wicked to Hell and believers to Heaven. He makes some poor and others rich. He humbles people and He lifts up whoever He chooses (2:6-8).
- She *trusted* in the Creator of the world, the LORD God Almighty (2:8).
- She *announced* that strong and wicked people will not finally win. God guards those who are godly (2:9).
- She further *declared* that the enemies of God would be destroyed since He is the great judge of all nations (2:10).

The Bible teaching on sacrifice and faith in God

Hannah understood true sacrifice to God. She was ready to give away her son to serve God. She was also ready to give up her life as a mother in order to serve God.

The apostle Paul thought of personal sacrifice and service when he wrote these words. "Christ loved the Church. He gave Himself up for her." (Ephesians 5:25) The sacrifice of Jesus was the greatest sacrifice of all. Jesus gave up His life to serve others. He did this to obey the will of His Father. It was the plan of God to offer to sacrifice His only Son to save the world from sin. Jesus loved and obeyed His Father God. He trusted in the salvation plan for Himself and for others. So should we.

This was the time to fulfil her promise to dedicate her baby to God. It began a great work of good for Israel and the world. It was the result of her faith, her love for God and her prayers. God allowed the shame of not having children. He gave her the faith to believe. He encouraged her love. He heard and answered her prayers. She was 'heard by God'. Samuel came into this world through the love and mercy of God for Hannah. This is called the grace of God. Through the giving up of her son Samuel, God changed the world.

Many hundreds of years later, God gave up His Son Jesus for the sins of the world. His name means Saviour or Salvation.

Eli, Elkanah and Hannah worshipped God together. They rejoiced that God would do great things in Israel. They gave glory to God.

Then Elkanah and Hannah left the House of God. The heart of Hannah sang with praises to God. The next chapter gives us the words of her song of praise.

We should always try to remember when and where God answered our prayers. Then tell others what He did for us to the glory of God.

Talk about this:

1. What was special about the town of Shiloh? Who went with Hannah to worship there (1:3-5)?
2. What things made Hannah sad? What step of faith did she take on her own (1:10)? What made her bold?
3. What promise did Hannah make to God (1:11)? Who else shared this promise with her?
4. How did Eli bless Hannah? How did Hannah bless Eli (1:17-18)?
5. Three years later, how and why did Hannah, Elkanah and Eli worship God (1:24-28)?

Think about this: How was Peninnah also part of God's plan for Elkanah, Hannah, Eli and the boy Samuel? How can persecution bring glory to God? What struggle has there been in your life to bring glory to God?

had been. Naomi was again quick to give thanks. She said, "May the LORD God Almighty bless him." (2:20)

Naomi saw how God provided much food. She also saw how God opened the way for the future needs of herself and Ruth. It was a very special moment for her. "The LORD God Almighty is still kind to those who are living and to those who are dead." Naomi was amazed how God had answered her prayers through Ruth and Boaz. Boaz was a relative of her dead husband. She believed that Boaz would provide for her and Ruth and protect them. She believed he was their family redeemer.

Naomi now spoke boldly in faith to tell Ruth what to do next. Naomi told Ruth "That man is a close relative of ours. He is one of our family protectors." (2:20) This meant that Boaz had a duty to help Naomi and her daughter-in-law. On that day, God led Ruth to the man who was a relative of Naomi. She found a relative who could be her family protector and redeemer.

Ruth said, "He told me more. He even told me to stay with my workers until they have finished bringing in all my grain." (2:21)

In this way, Boaz prepared the way for him to be a protector, provider and redeemer for Naomi and also for Ruth. Naomi told Ruth to continue to work in the field of Boaz. She said, "That will be good for you my daughter." (2:22)

So Ruth continued to stay close to the women who worked for Boaz until the end of the harvest (2:23). The other men and women in the field owned by Boaz kept her safe. They respected her.

Talk about this:

1. How did Ruth show her faith in God in her new life in Israel (2:2)?
2. How did Boaz show the love of God for Ruth and Naomi (2:8-17)?
3. How did Naomi show her thanks for the provision of God through Boaz (2:20)? Why did she say that God loves the living and the dead?
4. Why did Naomi believe that Boaz was her redeemer (2:20)?

Think about this: Do troubles make our faith in God weaker or stronger (James 1:2-4)? Have you seen at times the wonderful ways that God is at work in your life? Are you quick to praise God? Are you quick to ask Him to bless others (2:19-20)? How was Boaz behaving like Israel's Redeemer, our Saviour Jesus Christ?

Bible reading: Ruth Chapter 3

RUTH SECRETLY VISITS BOAZ

One day, Naomi spoke to Ruth and said, "My daughter, I must find a home for you. It should be a place where you will be provided for." (3:1)

The faith of Naomi was now very strong because of her faith in the provision of God through Boaz. She had great hope for the future. She looked beyond the

need for food. She looked to God to provide a Jewish husband and children for Ruth. And Naomi also trusted in God to meet her own needs.

Naomi acted in faith and spoke to Ruth again. "You have been working with the servants of Boaz. He is a relative of ours (3:2). Tonight, Boaz will be separating the straw from his barley on the threshing floor. So wash yourself. Put on some perfume and your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor. But do not let Boaz know you are there. Wait until he has finished eating and drinking. Notice where he lies down. Then go over and uncover his feet. Lie down there [at his feet]. He will tell you what to do." (3:2-4) Ruth must wait there and trust Boaz to supply her future needs.

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Ruth secretly lies down at the feet of Boaz, her family redeemer, near the pile of grain on the threshing floor.

Naomi remembered the law of Moses. She knew that if a man died and left no children, a near relative should marry the widow to keep the family line and name (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Boaz was a relative of Naomi's former husband. He was therefore a family protector and redeemer for both Naomi and Ruth.

Ruth showed she was ready to trust in God. She replied to Naomi, "I will do whatever you say." (3:5) Naomi's own faith in God was now strong. Ruth was happy to obey her. She did everything her mother-in-law told her to do (3:6-8).

Ruth changed her clothes. Her days of mourning were now over. She was ready to accept Naomi's family redeemer. That night, she washed, put on perfume and went to the harvest field. Boaz slept near the pile of grain. Ruth quietly lay down at his feet. She spread the edge of his cloak over her. In this way, without speaking a word, Ruth invited Boaz to protect her.

Our own heavenly Redeemer and Saviour is Jesus. If we humble ourselves at the feet of Jesus, we can accept Him as our Saviour. His name means Saviour or Salvation. He will redeem us. He will save us.

BOAZ AGREES TO HELP RUTH

Boaz woke up in the middle of the night. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am Ruth" she said. "You are my family protector. Take good care of me by making me your wife." (3:9)

Boaz praised Ruth for asking him for help instead of going after the younger men of Israel (3:10). He also praised her for her good reputation in the town (3:11).

Boaz wanted to marry Ruth. "Do not be afraid. I will do for you everything you ask." (3:11)

Elkanah loved God. He and his family rose early the next day. They did not return home until he gathered them again to worship at the tabernacle in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:19). Then they went back to their home in Ramah.

Elkanah agreed with the promise that Hannah made to God. He was thus part of God's plan for Israel to serve as a redeemer. Elkanah slept with his wife. God blessed them. 'After some time, Hannah became pregnant. She had a baby boy… She named him Samuel.' (1:20) The name of Samuel was a witness to everyone that God had heard her prayer. Samuel means 'heard by God'.

Hannah kept her promise and gave her precious gift back to God. She trusted in His plan for her son. The following year, Elkanah prepared to take his family to Shiloh. He was ready to offer their animal sacrifice to God (1:21). Hannah did not go with them. She said to her husband, "When the boy does not need me to breast-feed him any more, I will take him to the House of God. I will give him back to the LORD God Almighty… He will stay there for the rest of his life" (1:22).

- Hannah continued to believe that this was the will of God.
- Hannah never forgot the promise she made to God.
- Hannah remained strong in her faith that God gave her.

Hannah gave her baby Samuel to God from the day he was born. She dedicated her baby to God. However, he had to grow before she could leave him with Eli at Shiloh.

Elkanah told her, "Do what you think is best. Stay here at home until Samuel does not need you any more." (1:23) He wanted God's blessing from Eli to come true. Elkanah wanted to give Samuel back to God as Hannah had promised. He believed it was the will of God.

'So Hannah stayed at home. She fed her son until he did not need her milk any more' (1:23).

HANNAH GIVES HER SON BACK TO GOD

When Samuel was about three years old, Hannah and Elkanah took the boy to the House of God at Shiloh (1:24). They took with them the sacrifices and offerings commanded in the Law of Moses. They took a young bull and some flour and some wine.

'After the bull was sacrificed, Elkanah and Hannah brought the boy to Eli.' (1:25) They told him that they wanted Samuel to grow up serving God at Shiloh. He was a very special sacrifice and offering to God.

Hannah said to Eli, "I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD God Almighty." (1:26) Hannah gave Samuel to Eli and reminded him of her prayer for a son. She praised God for His goodness.

She told Eli, "I prayed for this child. The LORD God Almighty has given me what I asked Him for. So now I give him to God. As long as he lives he will be given to the LORD." (1:27-28)

- With faith that God would show His love and care for her.
- With faith that God would not forget or ignore her.
- With faith that God would do a miracle and give her a baby boy.
- With faith that God would take her son back as His own.

Jewish teachers today still use the prayer of Hannah for teaching and blessing the people of God. Hannah continued praying silently to God. She also promised that her son would never cut his hair. This was a sign of a holy man in those days.

Eli, the chief priest, saw her lips moving but he heard no words. She was praying in her heart. Eli was unkind to her. He thought she was drunk. He told her to stop drinking wine (1:12-14).

Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer. I was telling the LORD God Almighty all my troubles… I am praying here because I am very sad. My pain is so great." (1:15-16)

Eli, the priest, watches Hannah praying to God in distress, and thinks she has drunk too much wine.

Eli then gave her his blessing. "Go in peace. May the God of Israel give you what you ask for." (1:17)

Hannah replied, "May you be pleased with me." (1:18) His prayers and his blessing encouraged her. She gave thanks and blessings to God and to Eli. They blessed each other in the custom of the Jews.

Hannah left Eli and had something to eat. Her face was no longer sad. Her faith was strong.

- Hannah believed that God had heard her prayer.
- Hannah believed that God would answer her prayer.
- Hannah believed that her prayer was in the will of God.

God put faith in the heart of Hannah. Through the love and mercy of God, His answer would become part of His salvation plan for Israel and the world.

Faith is a gift of God. This is part of the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9).

ELKANAH AGREES TO GIVE HANNAH'S SON TO GOD

Married women of Israel were allowed to make a promise to God as part of their worship. However, the Old Testament scriptures say that the wife and the husband must agree (Numbers 30:10-11).

There was a problem, however. "It is true that I am a relative of yours. But there is a family protector more closely related to you than I am… If he wants to help you, good. Let him help you. But if he does not want to, then I will do it." (3:12-13)

Boaz then showed his own faith in God. "You can be sure that the LORD God Almighty lives. You can be just as sure that I will help you." (3:13) Her request was part of the plan of God and Boaz believed it was the will of God.

Boaz would first ask the other relative if he wished to buy back the property of Elimelech. He would also ask the man to marry Ruth to renew the family name and line of Elimelech. In this way, their family would continue in future years. These guidelines were given to Moses by God in the Old Testament Torah teachings of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

While it was still dark, Boaz sent Ruth home without anyone seeing her (3:14). But first he filled her shawl with barley grain. Then he went into the town of Bethlehem (3:15).

Ruth told Naomi what Boaz said to her. Naomi told Ruth to sit down and wait. She said, "The man will not rest until he settles the whole matter today." (3:18)

The Law of God gave a widow rights to the property of her dead husband. Naomi had a right to a share of the land and property that used to belong to Elimelech and to marry a family relative. This also applied to Ruth.

Talk about this:

1. What did Naomi say in faith to Ruth (3:1-4)?
2. What did Ruth say in faith to Boaz (3:9)?
3. What was the problem that might prevent Boaz from marrying Ruth (3:12)?
4. How did Boaz plan to overcome the problem fairly? How did he show his faith in God (3:13)?
5. What encouragement did Naomi give to Ruth while waiting for God's answer to her prayer (3:18)?

Think about this: How did the faith of Ruth grow through the love and faith of both Naomi and Boaz? How has your love and faith changed your life and the lives of strangers and friends and relatives around you? What can we learn about the purpose of God to provide a redeemer for everyone, including widows and orphans?

Bible reading: Ruth Chapter 4

BOAZ AGREES TO MARRY RUTH

Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there to wait and talk with his relative. Soon, the other protector or redeemer of Elimelech's family arrived. The two men sat down together at the gate (4:1).

Boaz called ten of the elders of Bethlehem to meet with him. They were trusted men who took care of the town. There, Boaz put his request before the

elders and before the nearest family redeemer of Naomi. Boaz reminded them that the closest relative of a widow could buy back or redeem the land previously owned by their dead husband.

Boaz said to his relative, "Naomi has come back from Moab. I suggest that you buy the land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. Buy it while the elders are looking on as witnesses. If you are willing to buy it back, do it. But if you are not willing, tell me. I am next in line [to buy it]." (4:3-4)

Boaz agrees to buy back the property of Elimelech for Naomi and marry Ruth.

The relative said, "I will buy it."

Then Boaz said, "When you buy the property from Naomi … you must marry Ruth… You must take her as your wife." (4:5) This would redeem the land that belonged to Elimelech. It would enable Naomi to start a new life. Then she could also start a new family for Elimelech through the children of Ruth. This custom is based on the laws given by God to Moses (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

The closest relative to Naomi did not want to do this. He asked Boaz to buy the land back (Ruth 4:6). The man took off his sandal to give to Boaz. This was the custom at that time. It showed that a business plan was agreed (4:7). The relative held his sandal high in the air for all to see. In this way, the people at the city gate witnessed what was said.

Boaz said, "Today you are witnesses… I have bought all the property that belonged to Elimelech and his sons Kilion and Mahlon. I have also taken Ruth, who is from Moab, to become my wife. She is the widow of Mahlon. I have decided to marry her so that the name of the dead man will stay with his property. Now his name will not disappear from his family line or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses." (4:9-10)

"We are witnesses," the elders answered. The other people at the gate of Bethlehem added their blessing to Boaz and Ruth. "May you be famous in Bethlehem", they said. They also spoke to him about Ruth. "We are witnesses that the woman is coming into your home. May the LORD God Almighty make her to be like Rachel and Leah [wives of Jacob]. Together they built up the nation of Israel." (4:10-11)

These words came true. They blessed Boaz and Ruth with a prayer asking God to give them many children.

Every year at Shiloh, Peninnah made the grief of Hannah get worse. Peninnah spoke cruel words to her. Hannah was upset. Peninnah had children but Hannah did not. Hannah, however, was special to God. She loved God. She knew how to worship Him and to pray to Him.

The place of worship at the time of Hannah

Before Israel entered the Promised Land, Moses showed them how to worship the One True and Living God Almighty. In the desert, Moses put up a special tent outside the camp. It was called the Meeting Tent. God Himself told Moses how to do it. God met Moses there and filled the tent with His glory (Exodus 40:34-35).

The Meeting Tent became the centre of worship for the people of Israel. They carried it with them through the desert. Moses told them that God would provide a place for them to worship Him when they arrived in the Promised Land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:13-14). The priests set up the Meeting Tent at Shiloh (Joshua 18:1). It became the first Jewish tabernacle. Three times a year the Jews went to Shiloh for the great feasts of Israel (Deut. 16:16). They came to Shiloh to worship God. It was 400 years before the Temple of God was built in Jerusalem. Shiloh was the only holy place that Jews worshipped God at the time of Hannah.

HANNAH PRAYS FOR A SON AT SHILOH

One year in Shiloh, Hannah went alone to the Meeting Tent. 'Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the House of God.' (1:9) Hannah was not allowed to go inside because she was a woman.

Hannah was very sad. She wept and wept. She stood there and prayed to the LORD God Almighty (1:10). Her struggle made her bold in her faith.

Then she asked God for a son. Hannah made a promise to God. If He gave her a son, she would give the boy back to God. He could then serve God all the days of his life.

She said, "LORD God Almighty, you rule over all. Please see how I am suffering! Show concern for me! Do not forget about me! Please give me a son! If you do, I will give him back to You." (1:11)

True prayer is not just the words we speak out loud. It is the spirit within us talking to God in fellowship with Him. Jesus once said to His followers, "Ask and it will be given to you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) Learn from Jesus and from Hannah how to ask, and to receive, for God is always listening to you.

She prayed with much faith (1 Samuel 1:11):

- With faith that God was in control of all things.
- With faith that God knew all about the reasons for her troubles.

THE STORY OF HANNAH

1 SAMUEL Chapters 1 to 3

INTRODUCTION

Jews at the Feast of Trumpets often read the Old Testament words from 1 Samuel 1:1 to 2:11. These words about Samuel are part of the history of Israel after the book of Ruth. It begins with the story of Hannah, a childless woman, who prayed to God for a son. God answered her prayer, so she gave her baby back to God to serve in the tabernacle at Shiloh. The name of the baby was Samuel.

This true story happened nearly 1200 years before the birth of Jesus. It was during the time of the last judges of Israel and before the time of the kings of Israel. Only a few people at that time obeyed the LORD God Almighty. So God allowed them to come under the control of the powerful Philistines who worshipped heathen gods.

The Ten Commandments of God were kept in the House of God at Shiloh. This was 30 km north of Jerusalem. There was no Temple of God in Jerusalem in those days. There was no public reading of the teachings from God written down by Moses in the Torah or holy laws of Israel.

Bible reading: 1 Samuel Chapter 1

ELKANAH AND FAMILY WORSHIP GOD AT SHILOH

Elkanah lived in Ramah (1:1). Ramah was 8 km north of Jerusalem and 22 km from Shiloh. He had two wives. It was a custom at that time for some men of Israel to have two wives. The people copied this custom from the neighbouring heathen tribes. This was not the plan of God at the beginning. The plan of God is for one man to marry one woman for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Hebrews 13:4). This plan of God has not changed.

The wives of Elkanah were called Peninnah and Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2). Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Peninnah caused Hannah much shame and grief (1:6). Hannah's problem, however, became part of a plan of God for Israel and the world.

Year after year Elkanah and his family went to Shiloh to give sacrifices to God (1:3). Eli was chief priest at Shiloh. His two sons Hophni and Phinehas also served as priests there.

Peninnah teased Hannah year after year. This happened each time Hannah went with her husband to the House of God at Shiloh. She did this until Hannah cried and did not want to eat (1:7).

Elkanah loved Hannah very much. He said to her, "Hannah, why are you crying? Why do you not eat? Why are you so unhappy? Do I not mean more to you than ten sons?" (1:8) But he could not comfort her.

RUTH AND BOAZ HAVE A SON

Boaz bought the land owned previously by Elimelech and also Mahlon. He became the family redeemer of both Naomi and Ruth. He redeemed the land by paying the price. He paid the price for them to begin a new life.

Boaz married Ruth and a son was born to them named (4:13).

The local women said to Naomi, "Give praise to the LORD God Almighty… May this child become famous all over Israel! He will make your life new again. He will look after you when you are old. He is the son of your very own daughter-in-law. She loves you. She is better to you than seven sons." (4:14-15)

'Better to you than seven sons' was a saying at that time which meant 'perfect'. A similar saying is also used in the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:8; 2:5).

Naomi took the child in her arms and took care of him (Ruth 4:16). The women of Bethlehem said, "Naomi has a son." They named him Obed (4:17). Obed means serving or servant.

The family line of Elimelech was saved through which Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah, was born 1300 years later. Obed became the grandfather of God's anointed king, David (4:17). King David became an ancestor of Joseph, and his wife Mary. Mary was the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, born in Bethlehem through the Holy Spirit while Mary was still a virgin (Matthew 1:16).

Jesus was the promised Christ or Messiah of Israel. He became the Saviour of the world. He became our Redeemer to pay the price for us to begin a new life. Joseph was told by an angel, "Mary will have a Son. You must give Him the name Jesus." This name means salvation or saviour in Hebrew. "This is because He will save the people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

Jesus is Saviour and Redeemer of Jews and non-Jews. "He accepts people from every nation" (Acts 10:34-35). Boaz was redeemer for Naomi and Ruth who were from Israel and Moab. Ruth trusted in Israel's God and in Boaz her redeemer whilst living in Bethlehem. The prayers of the elders of Bethlehem were answered (4:11).

Talk about this:

1. How did God's laws in Israel provide for the family property and name to continue after a death?
2. What does the word 'redeemer' mean in this Old Testament story?
3. What does 'redeemer' mean when the word is used in the New Testament scriptures?
4. How did Boaz show faith in God when someone else had the right to marry Ruth?
5. How did the story of Ruth prepare the way for the new covenant of God with Israel and the world through Jesus Christ?
6. How does the story of Ruth encourage us to tell people of all nations about the salvation plan of God?

Think about this: Think how the story of Ruth links the Old and New Testaments. Can you see the blessings and purpose of God at work in the lives of Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, Ruth, Boaz and baby Obed? Can you see God at work in your life and in those around you? Are you ready to share the Good News of Jesus with your family and friends and any foreigners you meet? How did the faith of Naomi change and grow before, during and after her stay in Moab?

CONCLUSION TO THE STORY OF RUTH

This true story began with Elimelech and Naomi from Bethlehem. They and their two sons left Israel, the Promised Land of God, to live in Moab. This was at a time when the sins in Israel brought God's judgement on His people through allowing a great famine. It then became the story of Ruth, a foreign woman who married a son of Elimelech and Naomi. At that time, Ruth was not a believer and God did not bless her first marriage. When her mother-in-law Naomi decided to return to Isarel, Ruth rejected the gods of Moab. She chose to put her trust in the One True and Living God of Israel. She loved God and her mother-in-law Naomi. She chose a life of faith in God to live in poverty in a strange land. The love and care of God for Ruth and Naomi was then fulfilled after they returned to Bethlehem.

It is also the story of the love of Boaz for them both. This was at a time when Israel obeyed God's commandments to Moses. He became their family protector and redeemer in the town of Bethlehem through God's provision in those commandments. God continued the family line of Elimelech through Ruth. It is the story of the faithful love of God to save and redeem believers when things go wrong in their lives. It is the same God today who remains faithful to believers in the redeeming work of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

It is therefore the amazing story of how God prepared the way for Israel's Messiah through the firstborn son of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz paid the price to become a redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. God provided Ruth with a husband and a son who prepared the way for Jesus, the Saviour of Israel and the world. The first son of Ruth was born in Bethlehem. The first Son of Mary, the mother of Jesus, was born in Bethlehem 1300 years later. He was Jesus the Son of God and the promised Christ or Messiah of Israel. He paid the price to redeem Israel and the world from sin through suffering and dying for us on a cross. The loving sacrifice of Jesus is the way God redeems and saves the world from sin for all who believe in His Son.

It is also the story of Naomi, who returned to Bethlehem with no home and no descendants. She returned to Bethlehem still trusting in God after many disappointments. In the 12 years she was away, Israel had changed from a sinful, disobedient nation under punishment from God, to a peaceful and obedient nation.

Ruth saw Naomi's faith in God and accepted Him as her own. We are all guilty, like Naomi, of making bad decisions that hinders God's provision for us. But Ruth understood and was accepted by God because Naomi risked poverty and shame in returning to where she belonged. Naomi's repentance brought her closer to God and in line with His will for Israel through Ruth. Amazing! We, too, can be used by God in preparing the way for others to be in God's will, with a big impact for His Kingdom, if we repent and seek God anew.

The first-born son of Ruth and Boaz prepared the way for the kings of Israel, and finally Israel's greatest King, our Saviour Jesus the Christ.

A Prayer: Dear God, help us, like Naomi, to turn back and do what is right and trust You to meet our needs. Help us to stay open to the guidance of Your Spirit when we are tired and sorrowful. Thank You that through Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth, Your Saviour was born 1300 years later, also in Bethlehem. We yield our lives fully to Your salvation in Him, to use us for Your glory and purposes. Amen