

# RUTH: AN ADVENTURE OF FAITH

SIMPLY TEACHING THE WORD SIMPLY—PASTOR CHUCK SMITH



This article was edited by permission and taken from the book *Faith* by the late Pastor Chuck Smith of CC Costa Mesa, CA.

**“Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”** RUTH 1:16b

The time of the judges was a time of moral decay, religious confusion, and outright anarchy. Since no king reigned over Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes—with disastrous results. But even in this bleak period, God was at work. He was preparing a most unlikely family through which the Messiah would one day come.

The story begins during a period of famine in Judah. A Hebrew man from Bethlehem took his wife and two sons to Moab to find food, but there the man died, leaving his wife, Naomi, a widow. Her two surviving sons married women from Moab, but after about ten years, both her sons also died. She decided to return home and hope for a better life there.

Broken, Naomi pleaded with her two daughters-in-law to remain in their homeland, saying in essence, “Look, you don’t need to feel responsible for me. I’m going to return to Bethlehem, and you girls should each go back to your own mother’s home. I pray that God will be gracious to you, even as you’ve been gracious to me and my sons.”

Both young women wept at Naomi’s words and refused to leave her. So Naomi told them again, “Listen, I’m old. There’s no sense in returning with me. I don’t plan to remarry or have any more children, and even if I did, you wouldn’t want to wait for them to grow up. So you go back home, find husbands, and be happy.”

All three women wept together, and eventually Orpah heeded her mother-in-law’s advice and returned to her own people. However, Ruth—a name that means *beauty*—insisted on staying with Naomi. And then we read one of the most touching speeches in all of Scripture:

**Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.”**

RUTH 1:16-17

Through this impassioned statement, Ruth—a pagan Moabitess by birth—declares her spiritual commitment. Somewhere along the line, no doubt through the witness of her deceased husband, she had come to believe

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and trust in the Lord. She had no interest in returning to the false gods of her own people. She wanted to be with Naomi.

## A SAD RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

When Naomi and Ruth finally made it back to Bethlehem, the whole village started buzzing about Naomi’s return. They asked, “Is this Naomi?”

Naomi had not returned with a glad heart, and she replied, “**Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me**” (Ruth 1:20b). The name Naomi means *pleasantness*. Mara means *bitter*. She didn’t yet know, but God had already been at work on behalf of the two women.

As we read the second chapter of Ruth, it introduces us to a wealthy man named Boaz, who happened to be a relative of Naomi’s

deceased husband. Ruth apparently knew something of the laws of Israel, for she asked Naomi for permission to go out to the fields and glean heads of grain. The law of Moses explicitly provided for such a practice:

**When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ... And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.** DEUTERONOMY 24:19, 22

God had created a welfare law. Instead of going back to pick up grain that had fallen on the ground or to retrieve a forgotten sheaf of grain, landowners were to let it remain for the poor to glean. So Ruth told Naomi, “I’m going to go out and glean. Maybe I’ll find grace in the eyes of one of the landowners, and he’ll let me glean in his field.”

The text says that she just *happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz* (Ruth 2:3b). Mere chance, however, played no part in it. God was guiding and directing Ruth’s footsteps—in ways so natural, she didn’t even recognize His hand. Somehow we have the idea that God’s guidance should be mysterious and mystical. We think that when we stumble upon His will, we should hear a set of rapidly intensifying beeps to assure us we’re still headed in the right direction. Not so. God has never guided me in that way. Rather, God tends to guide us in ways so natural that many times we’re not aware of His guidance until afterwards.

That was Ruth’s experience. From a human standpoint, she “just happened” to end up in the field of Boaz. But from the divine perspective, God led her to that specific field to continue His plan of redemption. ✨