

THE STORY OF RUTH

as presented by Reva Jane Hopkins, Grand Ruth

The second lesson of our Star is taken from the old Dispensation, and it gives a question of Light.

Many times the founder of this Order in his related story uses the trinity sign, the triangle, and we read in parable way how a Christian family can go into a Pagan country and abide in Peace and give Light to those who need and desire Light, yet, not without sorrow.

The scene is laid in Bethlehem of Judea. During the reign of the Judges, a grievous famine spread throughout Judea. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons emigrated into the country of Moab.

The two sons married daughters of Moab. The eldest son married Ruth and the youngest, Orpah. Both women appear to have been model wives. Within ten years Elimelech and his two sons died and were buried in the land of Moab. Naomi was left in destitute circumstances. Her heart and spirit were broken, and she felt that God had deserted her. Naomi yearned for her old home and the home friends, and resolved to return to Bethlehem again.

Naomi had learned that God had visited the people of Israel in giving the bread. She set out on her way to Judea with her two daughters-in-law as escorts. It was under the impulse of affection that they accompanied her. Naomi's home was on the east side of the mountains. Caravans of camels were the means of transportation. We can almost see them slowly winding their way up the narrow mountain path until the top is reached.

At length Naomi turned to Ruth and Orpah to express her appreciation of their faithfulness to her family and to herself. Then was enacted the most dramatic scene of the story. Naomi, addressing her two daughters-in-law, said "Go, return each to her mother's home; the Lord deal kindly with you as ye have dealt with the dead and me." She clasps them in a parting embrace, but they lift up their voices, weeping, "We will return with thee unto thy people".

A second time she bade them go. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave to her. Orpah retraces her footsteps, Ruth refuses to leave Naomi. Her resolve is one of the most unhesitating confessions of love in literature. "Entreat me not to leave thee and to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people; thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me."

Ruth now occupies the central figure of the story. Moab is left behind, the Jordan crossed, and arm in arm the two world-famous friends reached Bethlehem.

It was the beginning of the harvest time and necessary that Ruth seek employment. She suggested to Naomi that she become a gleaner after the reapers, gathering up fragments. This was a very lonely task, the humble place of a widow, the orphan and the very poor. In accordance with the Jewish law, the poor had a right to glean in anyone's fields. The owner of the field must not gather all of the wheat and barley. Ruth was too proud to beg, but not too proud to earn a livelihood by honest work. She came to the fields of Boaz, a man of wealth and influence.

When he came to the field to greet the reapers, he was attracted by the young woman and said "Whose damsel is this?" He was told she had come out of the land of Moab with Naomi. Boaz was perfectly aware of all that she had been to Naomi, as well as in her belief in the God of Israel, and he treated her with the utmost respect and courtesy. He had her remain at his field among his maidens and refresh herself at his feasts.

Ruth was astonished at the offer of these residences. He brought to her protective kindness and saw to it that his reapers left plenty of barley gleanings. How pleased was Naomi when Ruth continued to glean in the field of Boaz until the end of the harvest. Naomi was greatly pleased and impressed by the extraordinary favor shown Ruth by Boaz. She laid a plot to bring about their marriage, but there were seemingly obstacles to overcome.

A deep principle pervading the constitution of Israel was to care for the preservation of families. If a husband had died, the nearest brother-in-law might be called upon by the widow to perform for her all the duties of a husband. Where there was no brother-in-law available; then the nearest kin had this duty to perform.

After harvest season was over, a harvest festival was held. It was a joyous occasion. Each reveler would seem to have lain down nearby to sleep in the open air. Ruth did as Naomi directed. Through the darkness she went to the place of the festival and, after all was quiet, and Boaz had fallen asleep at the end of the meal of grain, she uncovered his feet and laid her down. He awoke and was startled and said "Who art thou?" "I am Ruth, thy handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman; spread thy skirt over thy handmaid."

Covering a woman with one's mantle meant he would be her protector; that is, he would marry her. This was a sort of proposal. Boaz said to her "Fear not I will do all thou sayest, for all the city of my people doth know thou art a worthy woman; and now it is true I am a near kinsman". Ruth related the whole conversation to Naomi, who was greatly pleased.

The following morning at the gate of Bethlehem, where a great deal of the business of the city was carried on and legal decisions were rendered by the Elders, Boaz arrived and waited for the nearest kinsman to arrive and, in the presence of ten Elders, made known his business. The two great problems unsolved were the inheritance of land of Elimelech and the acceptance of Ruth as the representative of the family of Elimelech. The nearest kin was willing to accept the inheritance. The kin drew off his shoe from his foot and handed it to Boaz, which was the accepted symbol of closing the bargain, and bade Boaz redeem the land.

Boaz married Ruth. We have every reason to believe the union was a happy one, although Boaz was twice her age. There was born to them a son, called Obed, and Ruth became the ancestress of the house of David. Naomi became the nurse and great joy prevailed in the household.

This story is the classic example of true and tried friendship.