

Chapter Seven

The Incomplete Victory: Judges, Ruth

The book of Judges relates the "history of Israel after the days of Joshua until the time of Samuel and the choosing of the first king over all of Israel. It is a record of alternating defeat and victory, corresponding to the experience of most Christians--especially in the early years of their Christian life when they alternate between succumbing to the energies of faith and, upon confession and repentance, being restored again to a place of overcoming.

The book takes its name from the series of judges God raised up to deliver the people when they had fallen into the hands of their enemies. The repeated theme of the book is stated first in Judges 2:18,19: "When the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But...when the judge died...they would turn 'back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways."

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

The first two chapters review again the situation in Israel at the death of Joshua. An account is again given of the conquest of Debir by Othniel. Though Judah and Simeon joined together to subdue the Canaanites within their territory, they only succeeded in part. Some areas, especially the Philistine cities of the coast, remained unsubdued. Benjamin, Manasseh, Zebulun and Dan also failed to claim for themselves the full inheritance promised them within their allotted borders.

So once again, as within the wilderness, the angel of the Lord appeared to warn the people of the inevitable consequences of their unbelief and incomplete obedience (chap. 2). As we saw in Exodus, this promised angel of the Presence is a manifestation of a divine being. Though the people of Israel wept and apparently repented, their repentance was not long lived. Soon they were back again in their idolatries, bowing before the idols of their neighboring nations. Remember that the worship of these idols involved depraved sexual practices and even at times the sacrifice of living children.

Parallel to this in the Christian's life is the continual temptation to adopt the goals and standards of the world around him, and especially to seek the favor and approval of men rather than the approval of God.

In chapter 3 we are told that God used these remaining Canaanite tribes to teach the new generations within Israel how to make war--that is, how God, rather than man, makes war. As Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 10:4, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

DAYS OF JUDGES

When the Israelites fell into sordid idolatry, Jehovah allowed the nations around them and living among them to conquer them. They first fell under the rule of a king from Syria, to the north; but upon the repentance of Israel, Othniel, Caleb's nephew, rose in the Spirit of the Lord and led the forces of Israel against Syria and drove them from the land. For 40 years he ruled as the first judge of Israel and the land had peace during that time.

Immediately upon his death, the people fell into sinful ways again and God allowed King Eglon of Moab to conquer a part of the country. For 18 years the Moabites held the people in bondage requiring heavy taxes from them annually. At last the people wearied of their bondage enough to turn again to the Lord and cry to Him, and in gracious response He raised up Ehud from the tribe of Benjamin, who was chosen to carry the tax money to the Moabite capital. There he tricked the king into receiving him in private, and when the two were alone Ehud drew from his belt a long dagger and thrust it into the fat king's belly (Judy. 3:15-23). Leaving King Eglon dead behind him, Ehud returned to Israel, blew the trumpet of assembly and mustered a large enough army to attack the Moabites, killing about 2,000 of their best warriors.

The land again enjoyed peace for about 40 years under Ehud, and apparently another 40 years under Shamgar, who is briefly mentioned (3:31), but who gained fame for killing 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. (It should be noted that the periods of relief under the judges are not to be taken consecutively, for some of them overlap, there being a judge in one part of the country and another ruling in another part.)

Deborah

In the north of Canaan, the Israelites fell under the hand of Jabin of the city of Hazor, who with 900 iron chariots made life unbearable for 20 years. The leader of faith in that part of Israel was a woman named Deborah, who judged Israel in the hill country of Ephraim (chap. 4,5). Through her God sent a command to one Barak in the tribe of Naphtali, who mobilized 10,000 men and led them against King Jabin.

Barak refused to go to battle with Jabin unless Deborah went with him. When she consented, 10,000 men assembled on the slopes of Mount Tabor and prepared to assault the armies of Jabin, led by his general Sisera.

When the Canaanite armies panicked before Israel, Sisera fled on foot and found what he thought to be a refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael. While Sisera slept in the tent, Jael took an iron tent peg and a hammer and drove the long spike through Sisera's head, ending his life and the power of the northern Canaanite tribes.

This use of two women, Deborah and Jael, again confirms the statement in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ "there is neither male nor female." Deborah seems truly to have fulfilled the office of prophet, while Jael is an instrument in the hand of the Lord to judge and remove the enemies of Israel.

The account is followed by the singing of a great song of triumph known as the "Song of Deborah," which recounts in poetic detail the story of the triumph of Deborah and Barak, giving credit to the God of Israel rather than the might of her armies.

Gideon

The 40 years of peace that followed was broken once again by the faithless idolatry of Israel. This time it was the people of Midian from the east of the Jordan who for seven years so harassed the Israelites that they were reduced to living in caves and dens of the mountains. The Midianites overran the land, claiming all the Israelites' sheep, oxen and donkeys for themselves and stripping the land of its fodder by enormous herds of camels.

Again Israel's deep trouble brought about their repentant cry for help, but this time they were warned by the prophet of God that what was happening to them was merely a fulfillment of what the Lord had predicted many years before through Moses. Nevertheless, in grace, God sent the angel of the Lord to appear to Gideon (chap. 6-8) who was threshing wheat in a winepress to hide himself from the Midianites. There, in an account similar to the call of Moses, Gideon pleads his low status in the nation and his inability to overthrow Midian.

As with Moses, God reassures him with, "I Will be with you," and Gideon quickly returns to his home to prepare a meal for his strange visitor whom he has not yet recognized as the angel of God. When he spread the meat and bread upon a rock the angel touched it with his staff and the fire of the Lord consumed the sacrifice. That night Gideon pulled down the family altar to Baal and cut the wooden sex symbol of Asherah to pieces with an ax. When his neighbors discovered what he had done, they threatened to kill him for insulting their

god Baal; but Joash, Gideon's father, defended his son by arguing that if the god Baal was truly a god he could defend himself. He thereby gained the nickname, *Jerubbaal*, which means, "Let Baal contend against him" (Judges 6:32).

Soon after, the armies of Midian and other neighboring nations came with a great horde against Israel. God graciously strengthened Gideon's faith by twice giving him a miraculous sign involving the fleece of a sheep (6:36-40). So Gideon gathered 32,000 men of the northern tribes and assembled them beside the spring of Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa. Across the valley, the Midianite hosts were encamped as numerous as a plague of locusts; but strangely, the Lord told Gideon that he had too many men. God wanted to be sure that Israel knew Who would defeat the Midianites.

When Gideon had sent home all the fainthearted, there were still 10,000 men of Israel left. Again, at the Lord's command, Gideon tested them at the brook and only 300 men remained. Putting torches within large earthen jars, and carrying trumpets along with their swords, the 300 divided themselves into three groups and surrounded the Midianite camp. There again Gideon's faith was strengthened when, waiting in the darkness, he heard a man of Midian recounting his dream from which he had just awakened. The other soldier interpreted it as an omen of the defeat of Midian, and when Gideon heard it he breathed a prayer of worship to God there on the spot.

Shortly after midnight, Gideon gave the signal and his men simultaneously broke the earthen jars causing the torches to flash out, and sounded the trumpets. Then they enjoyed the sight of watching the Midianite army destroy itself. In the subsequent confusion and panic the Midianites could not tell a friend from an enemy. The waiting troops of Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh then joined the fight, chasing the retreating Midianites to the Jordan River and capturing and killing their two generals, Oreb and Zeeb.

Gideon crossed the Jordan with his 300 men and fought all through the night. His men were weary and hungry and Gideon asked food both from the city of Succoth and the city of Penuel. He was rebuffed in both places and, vowing to remember their truculence, he pursued the Midianites until only 15,000 of their original 135,000 remained. On returning to Succoth and Penuel, he executed the promise of vengeance; then he took the two kings of Midian and put them to death because they had slain his brothers. Gideon refused the request of Israel to make him king, but foolishly he made a priest's garment for himself and decorated it with gold from the earrings of the Midianites. This soon became an object of idolatrous worship by Israel. But the land again had peace for 40 years while Gideon judged the nation.

Of the seventy sons Gideon fathered, one is especially marked out--Abimelech, the son of a concubine. Incredibly, as soon as Gideon was dead the Israelites began to worship again the idols of Baal. Evidently remembering that his father had almost become king of Israel, Abimelech sought the support of his Canaanite uncles in Shechem and with their help slew all 70 of his half brothers, except for the youngest, Jotham, who escaped (Judy. 9: 1-6).

When Abimelech was proclaimed king by the men of Shechem, Jotham stood on Mount Gerizim and, in Eastern fashion, recited to the men of Shechem the fable of the trees. The olive, the fig and the vine all refused to reign over the other trees. When they turned to the thornbush, it consented to be their king and warned them of a fiery destruction if they refused (9:7-20). By this Jotham indicated that Abimelech would destroy the leaders of Shechem and they in turn would destroy Abimelech. Subsequent events proved the accuracy of this prophecy.

When trouble arose between the men of Shechem and Abimelech, Abimelech led an army against the city, defeating and wounding many of the Shechemites. When he attacked also the suburb of Thebez, a woman on a rooftop threw a millstone which landed on Abimelech's head and in shame he bade his armor bearer to kill him, that it might not be said that a woman had slain Abimelech. Thus God punished both Abimelech and the men of Shechem, and Jotham's curse proved true (9:50-57).

Two judges next appear in brief account. One named Tola from the tribe of Issachar, who judged for 23 years. He was succeeded by Jair from Gilead who judged Israel for 22 years. As before, the people of Israel turned away from the Lord to worship pagan gods, and this time it is added that they ceased worshipping Jehovah at

all. Since it is true that "whatever a man sows that shall he also reap," it was not long before the Philistines and Ammonites were harassing and tormenting Israel again.

Jephthah

After 18 years, the Israelites pled for deliverance; but this time Jehovah sent them back to their new gods for help (10:14). In an amazing display of grace, when they had at last put away foreign gods, the heart of Jehovah grieved over their misery.

When the Ammonites on the east launched an attack against Israel, God laid hold of Jephthah (11:6-12:7), the son of a harlot (11:1). Jephthah's brothers had driven him away from their home that he might not share the inheritance with them. Under pressure of the Ammonite advance, the elders of Gilead, Jephthah's brothers, sent to him and asked him to lead the Israelites against Ammon. Jephthah attempted to negotiate with the Ammonites. In an interesting parallel to the present situation in the Middle East, where Arabs and Israelis argue over who properly possesses the land, Jephthah answers the Ammonite claim by reminding them that Moses had attempted to pass through their land peacefully, but when attacked he defeated their forces in battle and thereby won the right to inhabit the land.

Before the subsequent battle, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that he would offer in burnt sacrifice whatever or whoever came out of his house to greet him on his return (11:29-31). Thus after the rout of the Ammonites, Jephthah returned and his daughter, his only child, met him at the door. Jephthah refused to break his vow, and the account says he " did to her according to the vow which he had made" (11:39).

This strange story has been the subject of much debate among Bible scholars. Did he actually sacrifice her, or not?

Since we have seen in Exodus that a provision was made to redeem all firstborn sons, who also were vowed to the Lord, by the payment of redemption money, so it is possible that this was done in this case also. Her sorrow then would be that she was to remain unmarred for the rest of her life.

Chapter 12 recounts the civil war which broke out between Abraham and the men of Gilead over the anger of the Ephraimites in not being summoned to battle with the Ammonites, though Jephthah explained that he had summoned them but they did not respond. Nevertheless, the Ephraimites continued their attack and a great battle ensued in which 42,000 of Ephraim were slain. Those who attempted to escape could not disguise themselves as Gileadites because they could not pronounce the word *Shibboleth* correctly.

Samson

After the death of Jephthah, a series of three little-known judges arose in various parts of Israel, judging for varying periods of seven to ten years each.

The record then focuses on the life of Samson (chap. 13-16), who is remarkable for being set aside before conception to be a Nazirite unto God for all of his life. Again in a time of decline, the angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, and announced that her barrenness was to end and she would bear a son who would be devoted to the Lord from his birth. Manoah seems to be a man of small faith, for it is not until the angel of the Lord ascends before him in the smoke of his offering that Manoah recognized the Divine Presence.

So Samson was born, like Isaac, a child of promise. When he grew to manhood, he manifested the presence of the Spirit of the Lord upon him in great deeds of physical strength. His one moral weakness seemed to be an attraction to the daughters of the Philistines. On the way to negotiate a marriage, Samson with his bare hands slew a lion that attempted to attack him (14:5, 6). Later when he came to claim his wife he saw that the body of the lion had been inhabited by a swarm of bees and was filled with honey. While Samson waited, with 30 Philistine companions, for the negotiations to be completed, he put to them a riddle, promising each of them a new garment if they could solve it. The riddle was: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet," referring to the honey in the lion (14:10).

For seven days they tried in vain to solve the riddle and finally resorted to bribing Samson's new wife to extract the answer from him. When Samson told her, she repeated it to the Philistines. Samson paid his debt to them by killing 30 men of Ashkelon and giving their garments to his 30 Philistine companions. But angered at their deceit, he returned to his father's house and his wife was given instead to the best man (14:20).

When Samson went later to visit his wife, he learned that she had been given away. He caught 300 foxes, tied them together in pairs by the tails with torches between and set fire to the Philistines' fields of grain. When the Philistines in revenge, burned Samson's wife and her father, Samson retaliated by killing many of them, and then went down to the rock of Etam (15:1-8). The Philistines demanded his return, and 3,000 men of Judah went to Samson and convinced him to allow them to deliver him bound with ropes into the Philistines' hands. When the Philistines came to take him, Samson broke the ropes and, seizing the jawbone of a donkey, he slew a thousand of the Philistines (15:9-17).

Thirsty after his exertions and finding no water nearby, Samson prayed to the Lord and He opened a spring of water before him at that place (vv. 18-20).

Then Samson became involved with a Philistine harlot. The Philistine men heard he was in Gaza and laid in wait for him. He arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the city's gate and, pulling them up tear and all, he carried them on his shoulders to the top of the hill that is before Hebron (16:1-3).

The final incident of his life centered around a third Philistine woman named Delilah. The story of her attempt to discover the secret of Samson's strength has been told around the world. Three times he gave her false clues and three times the Philistines came upon him and he repulsed them. Despite her obvious disloyalty, he remained with her and when she nagged him unceasingly he finally told her the truth. Then, while he slept in her lap, she called a servant to shave off all of Samson's hair. When he awoke it is recorded that "he did not know that the Lord had departed from him" (16:20). Since he was unable to resist, the Philistines captured him, gouged out his eyes and put him in prison in Gaza, forcing him to grind at the prison mill. Thus God's mighty man, wretched and blinded, stands as a continuing reminder to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul (I Pet 2:11). Left unjudged, these lusts will bring the mightiest saint into bondage and darkness.

But even in prison God's grace did not forsake Samson, His chosen servant. As the sightless Samson ground at the prison mill, his hair began to grow, and when after several months the Philistine lords gathered for a great sacrifice to their god Dagon, they called Samson before them to make sport of him. Samson asked the lad who led him to put him between the two great pillars that supported the house, and praying with earnestness to the Lord, he bowed himself mightily, pushed the pillars apart and the house fell upon the princes, crushing about 3,000 men and women to death. Samson, too, perished in the ruins (Judg. 16:28-30). His life testifies that even those of great and marked spiritual ability can fall from their place of usefulness; and although God in His faithfulness will not desert them, their spiritual effectiveness is far from what it could have been.

"Doing What Was Right..."

The strange story of chapters 17 and 18 is apparently included that subsequent generations might have a picture of the ignorance and unbelief which was quickly manifest among the people of Israel when they turned from the living God. A man named Micah in the hill country of Ephraim apparently stole 1100 shekels of silver from his mother, but when he confessed and restored the money, she took 200 pieces of silver out of which she had made one engraved metal image and one of cast silver. Micah's religious faith had evidently deteriorated to the level of mere superstition, for he took the two images and set them up in a house of gods, along with a priestly ephod and seraph. The explanation is given that this was a result of the lack of central authority in the land, and so "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (7:6). But what they thought was right was very wrong indeed.

When a young Levite from Judah came by Micah's house, needing a place of his own, Micah urged him to join the family circle and become the family's official private priest. This he did, and became to Micah as one of his own sons.

At that time, the tribe of Dan had been given a small inheritance near Judah's land, but recognizing its inadequacy, they sent five of their men toward the north to find new territory which they could subjugate and claim for themselves. On the way they stopped by the house of Micah. Finding the young Levite there, they urged him to inquire of the Lord whether their journey would be successful. Upon receiving his encouragement, they traveled north to the city of Laish, which is located near the foot of Mount Hermon. There they found people from the coastal city of Sidon, so isolated from their brethren they would be unable to defend themselves successfully. When they reported this to the Danites in Judah, 600 armed men went out to take the new land. When these came to the house of Micah, they enticed the young Levite to steal the two silver images, the ephod and the seraph, and to go with them to their new country as their official priest. Though Micah followed them to protest, he was unable to recover his lost treasures, and the Danites went on to capture the city of Laish and renamed it Dan. There they set up their graven images, and the young Levite, who turns out to be the grandson of Moses, becomes the head of a line of priests who served the city of Dan until the time of the Assyrian captivity.

The account explains the deteriorating moral condition which later permitted Jeroboam, the son of Solomon, to set up in the city of Dan the worship of the golden calf.

The final story of the book of Judges is likewise a flashback to the earlier days of conquest when Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, is still priest within the nation. It is one of the most sordid accounts in Scripture, and illustrates the ease with which even the most vile and repulsive sin can take root in the hearts of those who turn away from daily fellowship with the living God.

It concerns another Levite in the hill country of Ephraim whose wife had returned to her father's home in Bethlehem. When the Levite went to bring her back, his father-in-law received him warmly, and despite his repeated attempts to return home, persuaded him to stay for six days of feasting and drinking.

On the sixth day, having gotten a late start they found themselves at eventide near the Benjamite city of Gibeah. There they sought lodging, but no one would take them in, until at last an old man, finding them abandoned in the city square, took them to his own home. The subsequent account is reminiscent of the story of Lot in the cities of Sodom, for that evening certain men of Benjamin who had given themselves over to homosexuality beat upon the door of the house and demanded that the stranger be brought out for their sexual indulgence. Again, like Lot, the master of the house offered them his own virgin daughter and the Levite's wife instead. When they refused this offer the Levite forced his wife out the door and the men of the city took her and abused her all night.

At daybreak when the Levite prepared to go on his way, he opened the door and found his wife lying dead on the threshold. He took her body to his home, and there with a knife he divided the body into 12 pieces and sent a piece to each of the tribes of Israel. This shocking deed so stunned the chiefs of the people that, in response, they gathered an army of 400,000 men and marched against Benjamin. They demanded that the guilty men within the tribe be given them for punishment, but the Benjaminites refused. Instead they mustered an army of 26,000 men from the cities of Benjamin. The two armies met for battle before the city of Gibeon.

At this time the Ark of the Covenant was located at the city of Bethel before being removed to Shiloh, and the Israelites went to inquire of the Lord which tribe should lead into battle. Judah was chosen and when the battle had ended, 22,000 men from the Israelites had fallen. Shaken by this defeat, the Israelites inquired again of the Lord as to whether to continue the battle and were given command to go up again.

On the second day another great defeat followed and 18,000 Israelites were slain, all of whom were swordsmen. The double defeat indicated that other tribes were also implicated in the guilt of Benjamin. The whole army went up to the house of God and fasted and wept before the Lord, offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. This time the Lord commanded them to go up, but promised to deliver the Benjaminites into their hands.

As in the battle of Ai, the Israelites resorted to ambush, and when they drew the men of Benjamin out of the city of Gibeon by feigning retreat, the men in ambush set the city afire. As the Benjaminites turned and fled the

men of Israel fell upon them and a total of 25,000 Benjaminites were slain. A remnant of 600 fled through the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon for refuge.

This terrible civil war had taken a dreadful toll, for now the Israelites recognized that they had virtually eliminated one of the 12 tribes. They had vowed before the Lord at Mizpah that they would not allow any of their daughters to marry Benjaminites; therefore it looked as though the tribe of Benjamin was doomed to extinction. Realizing what a breach this would make in their nation, they settled on a terrible remedy.

Learning that the city of Jabesh in Gilead had not sent any armed men to the conflict, they sent 12,000 of their men against that city and slew with the sword every male and every married woman in the city. They brought back with them 400 young virgins, and these they offered to the remaining 600 men of Benjamin for wives. To find additional wives for the remaining 200 men, they encouraged the men of Benjamin to lie in wait at the city of Shiloh and when the young women of the city came out to celebrate one of the annual festivals they were to fall upon them and take them for wives. By this bloody stratagem they preserved Benjamin as a tribe within the nation.

The book closes with the reminder that this was all the result of "every man doing what was right in his own eyes." The terrible record of Judges is one of vile idolatry, treachery, betrayals, civil war and ruthless human connivance. It should be read frequently as a reminder of the fatal weakness which can permit the blackest of sins to take root when the heart no longer daily fellowships with God.

RUTH

The book of Ruth is universally recognized as a beautiful literary gem. On one occasion, Benjamin Franklin, then ambassador from the United States to Paris, read the book without comment to a literary circle in France whose members were largely made up of humanists and rationalists. When he finished the reading they were universally loud in their praise of such a perfect gem. When they inquired where he had found it, they were chagrined to learn it came from the Bible they despised.

The scene is set for us in the opening paragraphs, recounting the story of a man named Elimelech ("my God is King") who with his wife Naomi ("pleasant") and their two sons left Bethlehem because of a famine and went to live in the country of Moab. The story takes place in the days of the judges, and it is instructive to note that in Bethlehem ("the House of Bread") there was no bread, but a famine. The book of Leviticus has already told us that famine indicates a low level of spiritual vitality within the chosen nation.

In Moab, Elimelech died and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. After 10 years, the two sons also died and Naomi was left with her two daughters-in-law.

On expressing her determination to return to Bethlehem, having learned that the famine was over, Naomi exhorted her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab and remarry there. Orpah is unwilling to leave her home for an uncertain life in Palestine, but Ruth refuses to stay in Moab, and in a plea of enduring-beauty, declares her determination to identify herself with Naomi's land and Naomi's people. The deepest cause of her determination is seen in her statement in 1:16: "Your God [shall be] my God." This clearly represents her willingness to leave the idols of Moab for the worship of the living God of Israel.

So the two arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest with a very uncertain future before them. The invisible hand of the Lord in caring for His own is apparent in the statement that Ruth went into the fields to glean, and "happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz" (2:3). This man, a close relative of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, appears in the story as a man of unusual character and sensitivity. He has heard the full story of Naomi and Ruth's return to Bethlehem. Upon meeting Ruth in his fields he commends her for her kindness to her mother-in-law, and especially for her faith in Jehovah the God of Israel, under whose gracious wings she has taken refuge.

Obviously attracted to the beautiful Moabite woman, and yet acting always with restraint and dignity, Boaz

instructs his workmen to deliberately leave grain in the field for Ruth to glean. When she returns to Naomi in the evening with an unexpected abundance, she learns for the first time from her mother-in-law that Boaz is a possible kinsman-redeemer. Thus, at Naomi's instruction she continues gleaning in Boaz's fields through the barley and wheat harvest for approximately three months.

At the end of the harvest, when the winnowing of the grain took place, Naomi seized the initiative provided by her relationship with Boaz and instructed Ruth on a stratagem that would combine both the law of redemption and the law of Levirate marriage. By coming to the sleeping Boaz and lying at his feet, Ruth is following a custom in Israel by which she is essentially asking Boaz to fulfill the responsibility of a kinsman to marry her and raise up heirs to the deceased Elimelech. She does this so modestly that Boaz commends her for her action, and having now clearly fallen in love with her, he eagerly consents to take on the requested responsibility. He has evidently hoped that such a situation would occur, for he immediately informs Ruth that a closer kinsman is involved and his claim must be settled first.

In the morning he generously sends her back to Naomi with a gift of six measures of barley and Naomi wisely tells her that the matter will surely be settled that day.

That same morning, Boaz took his seat at the gate of the city where the elders gathered for the settling of lawsuits and the judging of other matters brought before them. When the closer kinsman came by, Boaz requested an informal court, and when all were seated he presented his case to the other relative. He declared that Naomi wanted to sell a piece of land which belonged to Elimelech, but if she did the next of kin would be responsible to care for the family, since they now would have no property. Seeing the possibility of obtaining a choice piece of property, the first kinsman declared his willingness to assume this responsibility, but then Boaz played his trump card. He informed him that the land was also encumbered by a Levirate marriage, and that if he bought the property he would also have to marry the woman. This changed the picture for the first kinsman, since the land would then not belong to him but to whatever issue resulted from his union with Ruth. To symbolize his action, in the colorful custom of the East the man removed his right shoe and handed it to Boaz in the presence of the witnesses. The shoe symbolized his right as owner to set foot upon the land. This right now becomes Boaz's and the coast is clear for him to take Ruth as his wife.

The account closes with the birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth, who brings great joy to the heart of his grandmother, Naomi, and grows up to be the grandfather of David, Israel's mightiest king.

The beautiful little story of Ruth not only provides a link between the days of the judges and the subsequent reign of David, but symbolizes in the figure of Boaz how Christ our great Kinsman-Redeemer overcomes the obstacle of our birth in Adam, as strangers and foreigners to the promises of God, and takes us to Himself in a union that will produce the fruit of the Spirit to the honor and glory of God. It is highly significant that in the genealogy of Matthew, Ruth is included as the ancestress of Jesus the Messiah.

[Proceed to Chapter Eight](#)
[Back to Table of Contents](#)

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