

The Book of Ruth

By

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The Entered Apprentice degree is a terrible one. So many words, so little insight, so much time kneeling and blindfolded. Those were my initial thoughts when I stood on the sidelines during my first degree. I had no idea what was going on and was completely confused. I am pretty sure my mind had stopped absorbing anything well before I was even given my apron, so the finer points of the lecture were mostly lost on me. It was a January night, cold and windy, windy enough that I could feel a breeze as I stood in the preparation room in my ceremonial garb. The whole night I never quite warmed up and found it hard to concentrate on the words I was sure I would need to memorize.

It took attending a number of degrees before I finally started to get what was going on, and after getting a good handle on the floor work I became interested in the lecture. One of my mentors, Rt. Wor. Brian Block, does an excellent job with the Entered Apprentice lecture, so I paid special attention to that one for quite a while and became interested in the Book of Ruth as a result and how it related to Masonry, other than describing a particular element of how we become prepared to receive the degree.

Upon reading the Book of Ruth, I was excited to learn what it was about and how Masonic virtues, specifically charity, were exemplified in the story. The Book of Ruth tells the story of a young Moabite woman, Ruth, who finds herself a widow, with her mother-in-law, Naomi, who was also widowed. Naomi, who was far from home, in Moab, had not just lost her husband, but also both sons and she told her daughters-in-law to return home. Her one daughter-in-law, Orpah, was obedient and left, but Ruth, in her penniless condition, devoted herself to Naomi, becoming

the first convert to Judaism. In Ruth 1:16 she says to Naomi, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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, and thy God my God." This was more than just a simple plea asking for belonging; this was a promise to be a kind of a caretaker for her mother-in-law in her older years. This becomes even more interesting when we look at Ruth's descendants, who include King David and King Solomon, and a few generations later, Jesus of Nazareth. We think of these three men as great kings of the Jews, albeit in different contexts, but don't often think of them as descendants of a convert to the religion.

Ruth, the very model of filial piety, stays with Naomi, and together they travel to Naomi's homeland, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, where they make as much of a home as they can. Naomi has a relative on her husband's side, a fellow named Boaz, a name you have likely heard before. He was wealthy and owned a field, so Naomi and Ruth set up their camp near there. In those days, it was common for farmers to allow people who were less fortunate to glean from the fields, and that is what Ruth set about doing to gather food for herself and Naomi. She went to Boaz's field to collect scrap grain and corn, and he took special note of her, this young woman gleaning in his field, and she also took notice of him.

Naomi eventually cajoled Ruth to wait until Boaz was sleeping and slip into bed with him, which she did. She waited until he had eaten and drunk and was merry in his heart, and went to him, and laid down at his feet. Boaz awoke at night, startled to find this woman in his bed. She

