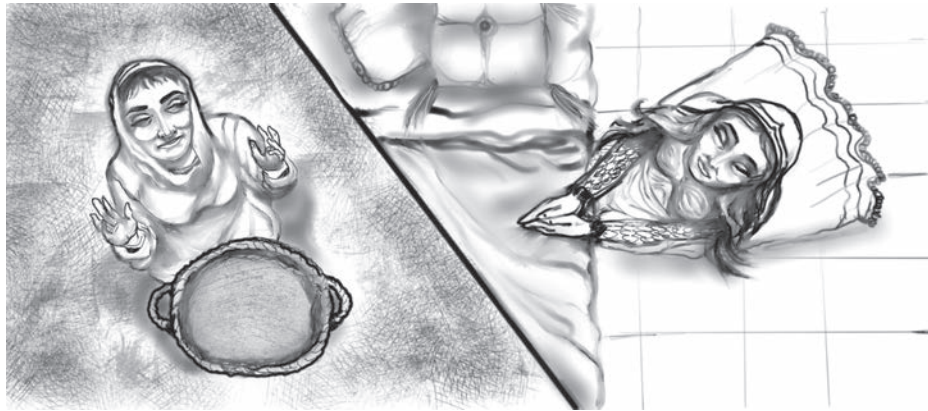


Ruth and Esther



SABBATH—JUNE 7

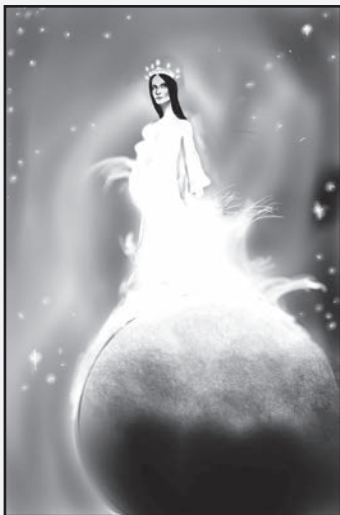
READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ruth 1:1–5; Ruth 2:5–20; Ruth 4:1–12; Job 1:6–11; Esther 3:1–14; Esther 4:13, 14.

MEMORY VERSE: “The king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard [private space in a house or palace with a wall around it]. When he saw her, he was very pleased. He held out to her the gold scepter [king’s rod] that was in his hand. So Esther went up to him and touched the end of the scepter” (Esther 5:2, ICB).

THIS WEEK, we continue to look at stories that help us to understand better the Bible’s special messages about the end times. God uses these stories about real people and their experiences to help us understand things from His view. God gave us these special messages to help our faith grow strong.

We shall study the stories about two important women: Esther and Ruth. Ruth is a widow who is filled with hope after meeting Boaz, who saves her. Their marriage is a favorite love story for many Christians. Boaz’s love for Ruth shows us Jesus’ love for us. Esther is a young girl who lives in a foreign land. She learns about a plan to destroy her people and helps to save them.

In the Bible’s special messages about the future, a woman is a powerful symbol for God’s church. Let’s look at the Bible stories about these two women. What lessons can we learn from their experiences?



In the Bible’s special messages about the future, a woman is a powerful symbol for God’s church.

NO FOOD IN “THE HOUSE OF BREAD” (Ruth 1:1–5)

Some people say that all the evil and sin in this life are proof that (1) there is no God. Or, (2) if there is a God, He is powerless to stop bad things from happening. Or, (3) He doesn't care about our suffering. Many Bible stories give us more than enough proof to show that none of these ideas is correct. Yes, God allows us to suffer when we fight against Him and break His law. At the same time, God is always there. He always works in human history to solve the problems of sin and suffering. The story of Ruth shows us an example of how God saves us.

Read Ruth 1:1–5. What hard times did Naomi and Ruth suffer? What caused these hard times? In what ways does this story show the hard times that everyone on earth now suffers?

The first sentence in Ruth's story is filled with irony. Irony is the use of words to say something different from what the words really mean. An example of irony is a big dog named Tiny. Or a tiny dog named Lion. In Ruth 1:1, we learn that there was a famine or food shortage in the town of Bethlehem. This verse is filled with irony because Bethlehem means “house of bread.” We would not expect a town named Bethlehem to have a food shortage, right? This verse also helps us remember the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve permission to eat food that grew on every tree in the garden (Genesis 2:16), except for one tree. So, God's command shows that He gave Adam and Eve everything they needed to live. But then our first parents exchanged their work as managers of everything God made for slavery to sin. Then God told Adam, “ ‘You will work hard for your food, until your face is covered with sweat. You will work hard until the day you die, and then you will become dust again’ ” (Genesis 3:19, ERV).

We are much the same as Naomi. We have lost the home God first planned for us to have. Our lives have become difficult. God gave Eden to us as a gift. But humans were free to sin. God meant for us to manage the whole earth before sin. But now we must manage a planet filled with sin and suffering. The earth continues to give us blessings. These blessings show us God's love. But often we suffer more than we feel joy. We can be thankful for God's promise that this suffering will end someday.



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RUTH AND BOAZ (Ruth 2:5–20)

Naomi asked that her name be changed to “Mara.” Mara means “bitter tasting” or “hard to carry.” Naomi’s life became very hard and painful (read Ruth 1:20). Sin hurt our relationship with God. We are the same as poor people who own nothing. Our future seems hopeless. We spend our lives working the same as Ruth on the edges of the field. But everything changes when we make an important discovery: God remembers us, His children, even during our hard times.

Read Ruth 2:5–20. Why are these verses so important in the story? Naomi discovers who Boaz is and his relationship to her. Why do you think Naomi’s discovery was wonderful news for her and Ruth?



God notices us the same as Boaz noticed Ruth. Yes, we are poor and have no spiritual riches of our own. But God wants us to be His bride anyway.

Naomi couldn’t take control of the land of her dead husband Elimelech without help from her husband’s family. God made a way for people in Israel to get back their land in the Promised Land. Naomi needed a close family member to save Elimelech’s land for her. Naomi hopes that Ruth can marry a close family member from Elimelech’s family and then have a baby to carry on Elimelech’s family name. Boaz wasn’t just a nice farmer. He was Elimelech’s family member.

When Naomi found out that Boaz was a kind man and also a close family member, this discovery was the best news. Boaz could help Naomi and Ruth. They no longer would be poor.

Christians understand Boaz as a symbol for Jesus. Jesus is not only the God who made us. Jesus became our family member, too, when He joined the human race group and became a real human being. That’s why, again and again, Jesus said He was the Son of man (Matthew 12:8; Mark 8:31; Luke 22:22; John 3:14).

Too many people think that God is mean and nasty. They think that He will let us into heaven if we do all the right things. But He will only let us in because He has to, not because He really wants to. This picture of God is false. The picture of God that Boaz shows us is that God loves us very deeply. God notices us the same as Boaz noticed Ruth. Yes, we are poor and have no spiritual riches of our own. But God wants us to be His bride anyway.

BOAZ: A SYMBOL OF THE SAVIOR
(Ruth 4:1–12; Job 1:6–11)

Boaz falls in love with Ruth and wants to marry her. But Boaz has a problem: there is another family member who also can marry Ruth and save Elimelech's land. If Boaz is a symbol of the Savior, this problem helps us understand an important part of the worldwide war between God and Satan. Jesus loves us. But someone else says we belong to him.

Why does Satan say we are under his control? Read Job 1:6–11; Matthew 4:8, 9; and Jude 1:9 for the answer.

Satan visited the meeting in heaven. When God asked Satan where he came from, Satan answered, "From traveling all around the earth. I've been going from one end of it to the other [end]" (Job 1:7, NIV). Then God asked Satan if he saw Job. Satan said Job was under his control. What Satan was really saying was that Job's heart didn't belong to God. In other words, Satan said, "Job follows You only because You are good to him. Stop being good to him and see who really has Job's heart."

The Bible says that God buried Moses after he died (Deuteronomy 34:6). Later, Moses woke up from the dead. The book of Jude says that Satan and God argued about who should get the body of Moses. Satan said that Moses belonged to him.

In Ruth 4:1–12, Boaz travels to the gate of Bethlehem. (Later, Jesus will be born in this same town. He comes to this earth as our close family member.) The town leaders in Bethlehem meet with Boaz and Naomi's other close family member. "In earlier times in Israel, there was a certain practice [the usual way of doing something]. It [this practice] was used when family land was bought back and changed owners. The practice made the sale final. One person would take his sandal off and give it to the other [person]. That was how people in Israel showed that a deal had been settled [finished]. So the family protector [member who took care of other family members] said to Boaz, 'Buy it yourself.' And he took his sandal off" (Ruth 4:7, 8, NIV). The man gave the sandal to Boaz.

This story happens near the town gate. The town leaders judged problems near the gate. So, this scene is a symbol of God's work as Judge in Daniel 7:13, 14, 22, 26, 27). God judges in our favor. But that's because Jesus paid the price for us, just as Boaz did for his bride.



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HAMAN AND SATAN (Esther 3:1–14)

In the story about Esther, we meet Haman. Haman wants to be an important person with lots of power. The king of Persia gives Haman important work to do. The king favors Haman above all the other princes (Esther 3:1).

If we read about Lucifer in Ezekiel 28:11–15 and Isaiah 14:12–15, we see that Lucifer and Haman are alike. Haman uses his power to hurt God’s people. Haman also refuses to accept God’s control over everything. Satan shows his evil plan against Jesus when he tries to get Jesus to sin (Matthew 4:8–11). Jesus came to this earth to save it and end Satan’s control. Jesus came as one of us. He is our family member and our Savior. Of course, He paid an expensive price to save us.

In the book of Revelation, we see how Satan’s evil wish for control and worship causes the end of this earth’s history. Satan’s lies convince almost everyone on earth to worship the beast power (Revelation 13:3, 4). There is a small group who refuses to worship him. So, Satan tries to force them to bow down and obey.

Haman notices that Mordecai won’t bow down and worship him. Then Haman gets angry (Esther 3:5, 6). He tries to destroy all of Mordecai’s people, the Jews, on the earth.



Haman notices that Mordecai won’t bow down and worship him.

Read Esther 3:1–14; Revelation 12:14–17; and Revelation 13:15. What is the same in all these verses? What does John say about God’s end-time people? How are John’s words much the same as Haman’s words?

The devil says that this earth and its people belong to him. But a group of people on this earth stay loyal to God. This group keeps God’s commandments. Their obedience shows that Satan’s announcement that the earth and its people are his is a lie. “Someday the Sabbath will be the most important test in the worldwide war between God and Satan. When that happens, a small group of people will refuse to follow the popular decision to worship on Sunday. Their decision will cause everyone else on earth to hate them.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 22, 1910.

Think about the “small” things that test your faith now. If you fail these small tests, how will you do when the big test (the Sabbath) comes?

WE ARE HERE FOR THIS TIME (Esther 4:13, 14)

Sad to say, some Christians talk only about the hard things that will happen at the end times. For sure, terrible times will happen in the future. But we must be careful not to allow our fear to cause us to think only about the hard times and suffering in the future. We must remember how this wonderful story ends.

God shows us the truth about the mess we made when we chose to sin against Him. At the same time, the Lord always gives us hope. Some people are afraid of the “time of Jacob’s trouble” that the Bible talks about. For sure, the final moments of earth’s history won’t be easy for God’s people. But if we can trust that the hard times are coming, we can trust in the promise that God will save us.

In Revelation 12, the devil hunts the woman, the true church of God. The devil hates the church and hurts her. But God saves her. The story of Esther helps us understand how God will save His end-time people. Esther is a beautiful queen. God uses her, the same as He will use His end-time church, to save His people on earth.

Read Esther 4:13, 14; Esther 5:1–3; and Esther 9:20–28. What lessons can we learn from these verses about our own experience of suffering during the final moments of earth’s history?

God started His end-time church for a special moment in history. As the 1,260 days of the Dark Ages ended, God brought His true church out of hiding (compare with Revelation 12:14). God gave His end-time church His final message of mercy to give to everyone on earth: the Three Angels’ Messages. We are here, as Esther was in her day, for this time (Esther 4:14).

Esther learned she wasn’t alone in her fight against Haman’s evil. The king gave her his favor. He helped save her people. We aren’t alone as we enter the final moments of earth’s history: the King of kings is on our side. He will save His people from evil, too.

Things worked out well for God’s people, at least in this story. But things don’t always happen this way, do they? Why must we always keep the big picture of the end times in mind and how things will end? How will doing so help our hope and faith in Jesus stay strong?



God uses Esther, the same as He will use His end-time church, to save His people on earth.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” pages 605, 606, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Satan will cause people to get angry with the small group of people who refuses to accept popular teachings and beliefs. Powerful, famous people will join with the most terrible sinners and lawbreakers. They will decide how to punish God’s people. These powerful and famous people will use their money, knowledge, and education to destroy the good name of God’s people. Leaders, pastors, and church members will work together to hurt them. The powerful and famous will say awful things about God’s people. These evil people will make fun of God’s people and try to destroy their faith. The evil people will lie about God’s people. Their lies will make everyone very angry at God’s people. The evil people don’t have any proof from the Bible to show that God’s people are wrong for honoring the Sabbath. So, the evil people will make laws to punish God’s loyal people. Government leaders will make Sunday laws legal because they want the people to vote for them. But God’s people honor Him. They can’t accept a man-made law that breaks God’s Ten Commandments. The final fight in the worldwide war between God and Satan will be about the Sabbath. God makes sure that everyone on earth understands what the final fight is all about. Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will save His people. The Lord will show that the Sabbath is Bible truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 605, 606, adapted.



“The Lord will show that the Sabbath is Bible truth.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why do you think God allows us to suffer hard times? How does God use difficult experiences to help us?
- ② How can we, as Christians, get ready for any hard times that may come because we are loyal to Jesus? Where do you find hope during hard times?
- ③ Why do we think all about the hard times ahead and not about the big picture that Jesus saves us?
- ④ A friend tells you that she feels afraid about the future after reading the book of Revelation. How would you help her understand the book and be at peace?

“WE NEED YOU!”: PART 7

Loren and Diana Fish had their dream jobs. Diana worked as a business manager for growth at the Seventh-day Adventist hospital in Orlando, Florida. Loren had a job helping people. He listened to people talk about their problems and gave them advice. Both Loren and Diana loved their jobs, but something was missing. They prayed for God to lead them.

Then Diana went to a meeting for Seventh-day Adventist women. In the meeting hall, Diana stopped at the stand for Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Diana looked at the pottery the students made. When a woman at the stand learned that Diana worked as a business manager for growth, she got excited. The woman told Diana that Holbrook School was looking for a business manager for growth. But Diana didn't think God was asking her to move to Arizona.

Six months later, Loren decided to go at the last minute to the 2015 General Conference meeting in San Antonio, Texas. While he was there, he visited the Holbrook School information stand. When a woman at the stand learned what he did for a living, she said, “We need you!” The woman asked Loren about his wife's job. When Loren told the woman that his wife was a business growth manager, the woman said, “We need her, too!”

Later, Loren told Diana what happened.

Weeks later, Loren and Diana decided to visit Holbrook School. Loren and Diana spent nine hours talking with teachers and the school manager. The teachers wanted the school to be a safe place for Indian children to learn and grow. The teachers also wanted to have a Christian worker who could give advice and help to the students and be there for them whenever they needed his help. Diana slept that night in the school guestroom. In the morning, Diana saw two copies of the same book on a shelf. She saw this book before. Diana reached into her backpack and pulled out the same book, which Loren got at the General Conference meetings. The book was named *Follow: Anytime, Anywhere, at Any Cost*, by Don MacLafferty. Right away, Diana knew God wanted her and Loren to come to Holbrook. She prayed, “Lord, You'll need to convince Loren, too.”

Many days later, back in Florida, Loren told Diana that he had prayed and believed God wanted them to go to Holbrook. That evening they told the manager of Holbrook School that they were interested in working there. Two weeks later, the school offered them jobs. Loren and Diana have worked at the school for the past 10 years. Diana says, “God is so wonderful! He showed me every step of the way that He is working in my life. Before I knew Him, He knew me and had a plan.”

Read more about Holbrook SDA Indian School next week.

INSIDE
Story
by DIANA FISH



Diana reached into her backpack and pulled out the same book.