

Lessons from the Book of Ruth

I. Background to the Book of Ruth

- a. During the time of judges.
 - i. After Joshua's leading Israel into the Promised Land; great devotion to God and tremendous victories and display of God's power.
 1. (For example: Jericho, where the people marched around the walls of this great city for 7 days, blew their trumpets, and the walls fell in and they took the entire city.)
 - ii. Before the time of the kings (including King David), and the eventual divided kingdom, when Israel turns away from God and God gives them over to their enemies and into captivity.
- b. Read **Judges 2:6-10**
- c. Israel served the Lord as long as Joshua and the elders who served with him were alive. But when this generation died, they forgot the Lord, and this led to their decline and rebellion.
- d. It was during this time, we find the story of Ruth!
 - i. The book of Ruth was properly named: for this tremendous woman of faith and character.
 - ii. But, the book has a strong supporting cast: Naomi and Boaz!
 - iii. We are going to read the book of Ruth today, then focus on each of these tremendous heroes of faith, each with personally inspire and convict me.

II. Read Ruth 1:1-2:23. Summarize passage:

- a. Famine in Judah, Naomi's husband Elimelech leaves Bethlehem in Judah, taking his wife Naomi and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to Moab., a land of foreigners east of Judah.
- b. In Moab, Elimelech dies. Then, both sons marry Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah.
- c. Then Naomi's two sons die. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, are now widows and destitute, going hungry in Moab.
- d. After 10 years (of tragedy) in Moab, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, as she learns that God is providing food for His people there.

- e. Naomi's two daughters-in-law escort Naomi back most of the way to Bethlehem. She thanks them, and tells them to return to their gods and families in Moab.
- f. The daughters-in-law and Naomi are clearly very close and they tell Naomi they want to go with her to Judah. Naomi says no way; that she is too old to have more children who could be their husbands, and even if she could, they would not want to wait for a newborn to grow up to marry! Tells them to return to their families.
- g. Tearful parting. Orpah kisses her mother-in-law goodbye and goes back to Moab. Ruth, however, says I'm staying with you!
 - i. "Do not ask me to leave you or turn back from following 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. And wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord cause this to happen to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.' When Naomi saw that [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she ended her conversation with her." (**Ruth 1:16-18**)
- h. Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, which seems to cause a bit of a stir. (Naomi has been gone 10 years, is now a widow, and is bringing back a Moabite daughter-in-law!)
- i. They return to Bethlehem and immediately Ruth starts looking for work. She finds a wealthy and righteous relative of her deceased father-in-law Elimelech, a man named Boaz, and goes to his field to glean.
 - i. Gleaning is where you gather the left-over grain or fruit that was left behind by the harvesters. (Not worth the time of the harvesters to pick everything.)
- j. Ruth works all day without a break, and she catches Boaz' attention.
- k. Boaz asks about her and is told her story. Boaz offers Ruth protection, that she should stay in his fields with his young women gleaners and that his young men would not harm her.
- l. In gratitude and reverence, Ruth bows before him, her face to the ground in humility, tells Boaz she will be like one of his bond-servants (slaves).
- m. Boaz invites Ruth to share a meal with him.
- n. Boaz makes sure Ruth's work is rewarded – that she has plenty of food for herself and her mother-in-law.
- o. Ruth returns to Naomi at the end of a very long work-day, with a significant amount of grain. Naomi is overwhelmed with joy and gratitude to God and

tells Ruth to stay close to the young women and to Boaz.

III. Lessons from Naomi

- a. Try to view the story without the benefit of knowing the end! Let's go back to the beginning of the story when things are not going too well. **Question: Why would Elimelech take his wife and two sons to Moab?**
 - i. Not clear this was a good choice! Moab was an enemy of Israel.
 1. "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord... because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor... to curse you." **Deuteronomy 23:3-4**
 2. King of Moab (Balak) hired Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam seduced Israel with the Moabite woman, who led them into immorality and to follow their false god Baal of Peor. **(Numbers 22-25)**
 3. In **Deut. 7:1-4** there is a prohibition against taking foreign wives from 7 different nations (Canaanites), Moab was not on the list. But, Israel was wary of Moab and the dangers of their gods leading Israel astray.
 - ii. Perhaps Elimelech was desperate for food, survival.
 1. But what about the great deliverance out of Egypt?
 2. God's provision in the desert for 40 years?
 3. What about the great victories entering the Promised Land (such as Jericho and so many others)?
 4. Going to Moab does not seem like the right choice!
 5. In our desperation we are to go to our Lord, not leave God's people and go to a place where they worship false Gods. God has never forsaken his people.
 6. Where do we turn when we are desperate? Let's not forget and turn away from the very one who can save us!
 - iii. Things didn't work out too well for Elimelech. He dies, and his two sons die in Moab.

b. **Naomi response to an even more desperate situation: honesty with great faith and trust in God.**

i. Naomi is honest about her situation

1. Her husband Elimelech and both sons have died. No one to care for her, provide for her. Her entire retirement plan is gone. She is financially destitute. Her family line is over. No children. Owns nothing. It appears she is hungry. Been away for 10 years. Things are bad and the future bleak.
2. “Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And the whole city shouted because of them, and said, ‘Is this Naomi’ [which means “my joy,” “my bliss,” or “pleasantness of Jehovah”]? But she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Bitter [Mora], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has humbled me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?’” (**Ruth 1:19-21**)
3. Naomi had a pleasant life (a husband and 2 sons); now it is bleak, she is afflicted, humbled, the Almighty has dealt bitterly with her.
4. Naomi does not sugar-coat her situation; calls it what it is.

ii. Yet Naomi has great faith and trust in God.

1. Naomi heard the Lord was providing for His people, so she knew it was time to return. She put her hope in God, the same God that had allowed the death of her husband and sons.
 - a. “Then she arose with her two daughters-in-law and returned from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord was watching over His people by giving them bread. Therefore she and her two daughters-in-law left the place where she was and returned to the land of Judah.” (**Ruth 1:6-7**)
2. Her response to her daughters-in-law who say they want to stay with her.
 - a. “No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out from within me!” (**Ruth 1:13**)
 - b. Where is the self-pity? Come on girls, great idea: you should come with me and provide for me! That would be a good thing to do!

- c. No. Instead, she tells her beloved daughters-in-law (the only earthly blessings she has left, and the ones who could provide and care for her) to go home and find comfort in their own families and find new husbands.
 - d. Ruth's heart is for her daughters-in-law's futures and provision, their best interests, not her own. This is incredibly self-less.
 - e. Naomi places her trust in the God who has afflicted her.
3. Naomi's response when Ruth returns from Boaz' field with food and grain and she hears how Boaz, a close relative to her deceased husband, has committed to protecting Ruth. (Read **Ruth 2:18-20**)
- a. "Blessed is he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" (**Ruth 2:20**)
 - b. Naomi blesses Boaz, recognizing the Lord has not forgotten her and Ruth (the living), nor her deceased husband (the dead), as Boaz has offered to provide for her and Ruth.
 - c. Naomi's faithfulness is rewarded. God has been faithful and blesses Naomi with Ruth, and food to eat.
4. Naomi could have become bitter toward God. But she does not.
5. In desperation, it appears Elimelech turned to Moab, away from God's people to a foreign land. Yet, in her desperation, Naomi turned to God and returned to God's people in Judah. Remarkable and a wonderful example for us to trust God in extremely challenging situations.
6. Recent lesson: *Does God Play Favorites?* Yes, he does, provides protection, comfort and blessing. But it comes with affliction and humbling. Here is yet one more example in Naomi.

IV. Read Ruth 3:1-4:20. Summarize the story:

- a. Naomi realizes there is more to be done here. Tells Ruth to wash, anoint herself, put on her best clothes, and go in secret and lay down at Boaz' feet and tells Ruth, "he will tell you what you should do."
- b. Ruth does exactly what Naomi tells her.
- c. Boaz has a nice meal, his heart becomes cheerful (with wine?). He makes his bed in a heap of grain, waking up in the middle of the night "startled and

disturbed; for there was a woman lying at his feet.” (**Ruth 3:8**)

- d. “Who are you?” he asks. Ruth’s answer: “Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative.” (She essentially asks that he might marry her!)
- e. Boaz recognizes Ruth’s righteous character.
 - i. She has provided for her mother-in-law.
 - ii. She has not chased the younger men, whether rich or poor.
 - iii. She has offered herself to him, an older man, so that he might rescue her and her mother-in-law from poverty, be brought into his family, and continue the family line of Elimelech.
- f. Despite his joy, Boaz realizes there is a problem: there is a closer relative than he who stands in line before him to marry Ruth. Boaz will give this relative the opportunity. If he does not take it, Boaz will marry Ruth.
- g. Boaz sends Ruth home with lots of grain to Naomi, apparently a sign that he will not rest until he settles the matter.
- h. Boaz calls in the elders as witnesses and tracks down the first-in-line redeemer, who is quite pleased about the opportunity to redeem Elimelech’s land. However, once he learns he gets a Moabite woman with the land, he rejects the opportunity! Takes off his sandal and seals the deal: gives Boaz the right to redeem the land and marry Ruth.
- i. The elders bless Boaz: “May the Lord make the woman who is coming to your [Ruth’s] house like Rachel and Leah, who together built the house of Israel... She will have a name in Bethlehem. And out of the seed which the Lord will give you from this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” (**Ruth4:11-12**)
- j. Boaz takes Ruth as his wife and she gives birth to a son, who is named Obed, the grandfather of King David, from whose line Jesus would come.

V. Boaz’ Character and Righteousness

- a. Kindness to a foreigner, widow and the poor
 - i. Read **Deuteronomy 24:19-22**
 1. Forget a sheaf? Leave it for the poor, the resident alien (foreigner living among you), the fatherless and the widow.
 - a. Why? That the Lord your God may bless you in all the works of your hands.

2. If you pick olives or gather grapes... you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the resident alien, the fatherless, the widow.
 3. "So remember, you were a servant in the land of Egypt, therefore, I command you to do this thing." God's heart for those in need.
- ii. Boaz let's Ruth (and other young women) glean. Ruth is poor, a widow, a foreigner, and a Moabite!
 - iii. Lesson: love in action. Our faith is not just in our beliefs, it is what we do. How we care for those around us.
 1. Something wonderful about gleaning. Awkward. (Older man who comes by to collect bottles from our recycling.) Very human/intimate. That could be me. He could be my friend or uncle, or father. He is working hard. Not looking for a handout. Humility.
- b. Boaz is a great boss!
- i. To his workers: "The Lord be with you!" Their response: "The Lord bless you!"
 - ii. Boaz was a blessing to his workers. They wanted to bless him back. Wonderful example for us as employees (or serving clients) as well as supervising others at work.
- c. Integrity
- i. Purity and personal righteousness.
 1. This young woman shows up at the foot of his bed at night, clean, anointed with oil, in her best clothes, and no one is aware. Great power imbalance. Yet Boaz treats her with complete purity, as a daughter.
 2. Lesson for us: What we do when no one is looking?
 - ii. Does not take short cuts.
 1. There is a proper process to redeeming. Must go through it.
 2. Boaz indicates clearly that he is ready to take Ruth as his wife. But, he realizes he may not get what he wants. There is another closer relative that has the right to marry Ruth.
 - a. "Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. Stay here for the night, in the

morning, if he performs the duty of a kinsman for you, we will let him do it. But if he does not wish to perform the duty for you, then as the Lord lives, I will perform the duty for you.” **(Ruth 3:12-13)**

- b. Goes through the process, at risk of losing what he wants, but in the long run, the deal is done – before elders and with the stamp of the shoe!
3. Boaz was not going to take a short cut on this one. Worth doing it right. Showed tremendous patience and let God play things out the way God would play them out.
- d. Boaz, the redeemer.
 - i. Two things going on here.
 1. Redemption of land. Purchase back land for your close relative who lost it. **(Leviticus 25)**
 2. Marry your brother’s wife, if your brother did not leave children – to provide an heir for your dead brother and continue his family line. **(Deuteronomy 25:5-6, Matthew 22:24)**
 - a. Neither of these is required. A person had to be willing.
 - b. The other relative, closer in relationship than Boaz, did not want to make the financial sacrifice of taking a Moabite wife.
 - ii. Heart of God is to redeem his people
 1. “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God chose you to be a people for Himself, special above all the nations of the earth. The Lord did not prefer nor choose you because you were more in number than all the nations, for you are the least of all the nations; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath He swore to your fathers, the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt. Therefore know, the Lord your God, this God, is a faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them.” **(Deut. 7:6-10)**
 2. Boaz understood the heart of God: God redeemed his people from slavery, from the power of Pharaoh. God loves those who

love him and keep his commandments.

- a. “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know yesterday or the day before. May the Lord repay your work, and may a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (**Ruth 2:11-12**)
 - b. Boaz saw that Ruth left her home, her family, to care for Naomi, and ultimately to seek refuge under the wings of the Lord.
 - c. Boaz became those wings of protection! He had to step in and rescue Naomi and Ruth, and in a way, the deceased Elimelech. Boaz understood and had the heart of God.
- e. Where did Boaz get this great character? Read **Matthew 1:1-6**.
- i. Rahab was Boaz’ mother!
 - ii. Rahab had been a prostitute in Jericho; the one who hid the spies. Rahab feared the God of Israel more than fearing men and risked her life for God’s people. She saw God’s great hand and power to destroy the city, as well as his mercy to save her and her family.
 - iii. This is the same Rahab held up as an example of faith for Christians in **Hebrews 11**.
 - iv. Imagine being raised by Rahab; the stories around the dinner table!
 1. The fear of the God of Israel – produces integrity.
 2. God saved Rahab, a former prostitute. Do you think Boaz had a problem taking a Moabite foreigner as a wife? (No way.)
 3. God desires to save all people, no matter their background, even his enemies, if they humble themselves and turn to Him.

VI. Lessons from Ruth, the Moabite

- a. So much to say about Ruth. Here are just a few things that I admire:
 - i. Care, concern, and love for her mother-in-law.
 1. Refused to leave her; determined to provide for her.

2. “Honor your mother and father that it may be well with you, and your days may be long upon the good land the Lord your God is giving you.” (**Exodus 20:12**)
 - a. “The first command with a promise.” (**Ephesians 6:2**)
 - b. Ruth took this further: honored her mother-in-law!
- ii. Hard worker
 1. Worked all day in the field without a break. Provided for Naomi day after day.
 2. “When Naomi saw that [Ruth] was determined to go with her, she ended her conversation with her.” Ruth was extremely determined, used her strength of character for God and others.
- iii. Humility
 1. Humility with Naomi, took instruction and obeyed.
 2. Humility with Boaz, fell to her face: “I will be like one of your bondswoman [slaves].”
- iv. Courage
 1. Ruth left her homeland, family, the familiar, to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God. Naomi was destitute and alone. Ruth had great courage (and faith) to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God.
 2. Courage to go to Boaz at night and lay herself at his feet. And then, essentially ask him to consider marrying her and father an heir for her.

VII. Conclusion: What Did God Do with These Three?

- a. In this little community in Bethlehem, God brought together the son of a former prostitute and two poor widows, one who was a Moabite foreigner, to produce the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.
- b. These two would produce a son named Obed, whose grandson would be King David, from whose line Jesus, the Son of God, would descend.
- c. This all happened during a time when much of Israel was turning away from God. But these three and their community were a bright light!
- d. At the end of the story, the women bless Naomi when her son Obed is born:
 - i. “Blessed be the Lord, who has not suffered a redeemer [Obed] to fail you this day, even to make your name famous in Israel! And he will be

to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." (**Ruth 4:12-15**)

1. May what was said of Obed be said about us!
 - a. That as men we can be a restorer of life and nourisher of our parents in their old age.
 - b. As daughter-in-laws, that we are better than seven sons!
- ii. May we be inspired by the faith, character and love of Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth. Through their line would come the Restorer and Nourisher of Life, the Great Redeemer Jesus.
- iii. May we too follow God with such faithfulness and also make ourselves useful for His purposes.