

Ruth The Moabite

The story of Ruth is one of love and devotion. It is focused on the life of Ruth, a young Moabite woman who returned to Judah with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Due to great famine in Judah, Elimelech had come from Bethlehem to live in the pagan land of Moab along with his wife, Naomi and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. This had been during a time of great instability in Israel, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25). Both sons married young Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.



Not knowing, Ruth went to glean in the fields of the wealthy land-owner, Boaz. Boaz happened to be related to Naomi, from her husband's side. Ruth went there every day during harvest time. While Ruth was working, Boaz noticed her. He had heard of all Ruth had done for her mother-in-law from one of his servants, how she had left her own land to return with Naomi.

Ruth found favour with Boaz. Boaz showed exceptional kindness towards her as he was aware of her situation.

"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 before. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:11-12).

Boaz offered Ruth food along with his other workers, he encouraged her to stay and work in his field, close to the women where it would be safe. He instructed the men not to touch her, but to leave behind them grain for her to pick up. Ruth went home and informed Naomi of all that had taken place. Naomi, realising that Boaz was a possible kinsman redeemer, devised a plan for Ruth to approach Boaz for possible marriage, to secure a better future for Ruth.

"Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." (Ruth 3:3-4)

Naomi knew Boaz was a close relative on her husband's side and therefore would have a legal right to wed Ruth. Naomi encouraged Ruth to go down to Boaz during the night and present herself as willing to accept a marriage proposal from him. Ruth humbly submitted to Naomi's plans. Boaz was asleep on the threshing floor, so Ruth lay down at his feet. When awakened, Boaz understood that Ruth was asking him to take her as his wife.

"Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative" (Ruth 3:9).

Elimelech died and sometime later so had both his sons. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law were left widows. Naomi had heard that the famine had come to an end in Judah and so decided to return home to Bethlehem. She urged both her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab to find husbands from among their own people. Orpah decided to remain, but Ruth was determined to go with Naomi, even though Naomi had tried to persuade her otherwise.

"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after 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. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

While living in Moab, Naomi was an influence on Ruth. Ruth had chosen to serve the God of Israel, and she was determined to go with Naomi even with the uncertainty of how things would turn out. Ruth moving to Judah was a big step in that culture. She was leaving her homeland, her people, and the gods of Moab for a new life where she would be a foreigner. Ruth loved Naomi, and she was not going to forsake her. The custom in Israel then was that a man had to take his deceased brother's wife to continue the family line. Since Ruth's husband's only brother also died, she and Naomi would have to support themselves. Ruth was not thinking of herself, as she was also considering the future of her mother-in-law. Ruth showed commitment, love and humility

"When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her" (Ruth 1:18).

On return to Bethlehem, Naomi asked the people to call her Mara, meaning 'bitterness' after the ordeal she had been through. The two women arrived in time for the beginning of the barley harvest. Naomi and Ruth were both poor widows returning in humbles circumstances and were without a male provider. Ruth went to glean in the fields to support both her and her mother-in-law.

It was the custom in Israel in that day for a close relative to marry a widow, so the family name could be carried on. Boaz was much older in years than Ruth, he referred to her as daughter. Boaz was overwhelmed, he blessed her and was thankful she had pursued him rather than one of the younger men.

Ruth laying down at Boaz's feet during the night seems forward. In that culture, Ruth was simply showing her desire to continue the inheritance of her husband. Boaz told Ruth that he would deal with matters the next day, which indicates it was not a sexual advance.

“Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:10-11).

However, there was still a relative before Boaz who was a possible Kinsman redeemer closer to Naomi who had first right to wed Ruth. If he was not willing, only then Boaz would be able to marry Ruth.

“Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day” (Ruth 3:18).

Boaz had to sort out the issue of the other kin before he was able to redeem Ruth. The next day, Boaz met with the other relative, who was not prepared to marry Ruth, as this would have hindered his plans of inheritance. In the presence of the elders, Boaz purchased Elimelech's property which gave him the legal right to marry Ruth.

“Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he 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 4:14-15).

Boaz and Ruth were both wed, and God blessed them with a son, Obed. Naomi's misfortune had turned to joy, she was able to help nurse and raise Obed. Obed was the grandfather of King David and from King David came Jesus.

“Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.” (Matthew 1:5-6)

Lessons from Ruth For Today

Ruth's decision to leave Moab had changed her destiny. Ruth was a widow, a foreigner in Judah and had chosen to help support Naomi instead of herself, which brought God's blessings upon her life. Commitment to God leads to His favour on your life.

Divine appointments - The right place at the right time!

God worked out an amazing plan for Ruth as it was not coincidence she went to work in the fields of Boaz, who happened to be related to Naomi's husband. This had been orchestrated by God.

It was divinely appointed circumstances! This reassures us God is in control even if we don't see it or understand our current situation.

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

Elimelech and his family may have escaped famine, but their move to the pagan land of Moab had led to further disaster. God often works through tragic circumstances. God worked out circumstances in an amazing way.

The story of Ruth gives insight into God's blessings and direction during difficult times. Ruth was committed to helping Naomi and blessed by God for her faithfulness. Ruth and Naomi were both poor widows without a male provider. But the Lord God of Israel was their protector and their provider.

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (Psalm 68:5)

Ruth is symbolic of a Christian or the Church today, Boaz is a picture of Jesus Christ as our redeemer. In the New Testament, Jesus is our redeemer. God is concerned for those of all different nationalities, race and status. Ruth, a foreigner in the land became an ancestor of Jesus.

Redemption and restoration is possible in our own life. Ruth's story was a long and difficult journey. No matter where you have come from or what you have endured, God has a great plan for your life. No matter the season you are in at present, God is working matters out for the best. When reading Ruth, we can be reassured that God works for the good of His people. You might not be able to see it, but God is working things out on your behalf.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:2)

Don't let the past hold you back. Ruth is an example of how God changes someone's life and gives it a different direction. Naomi's misfortune had turned to joy. God is still a God of recovery and restoration today.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3)