

Ruth: The Woman Who Rose From Obscurity To Riches

A faint heart never won a fair husband. (5)

Holiness is doing God's will with a smile. ~Mother Teresa

Her names	Her name means "friendship"
Key Scriptures	Ruth 2-4, Matthew 1:5
Promises In Scripture	Ruth 1:16; Proverbs 11:25, Matthew 5:7-8; I Timothy 6:17-19

Her Background, Life and Times

Gleaning: The law of Moses directed landowners to leave some of the harvest behind for the "poor and aliens". As a Moabite with no one to support her, Ruth fit both categories. Harvesters were not to reap to the very edges of the field, nor were they to go over a field a second time to pick up what was missed the first time. This grain was to be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). This "welfare system," set up by Moses, took care of the needy by encouraging the richer landowners to share their bounty with those less fortunate. But it wasn't a handout. The poor still had to work for their food, following along behind the harvesters and picking up what was left by them. Depending on the efficiency of the field hands and the number of fellow gleaners reaping the grain, it could be difficult to do much more than survive. When Boaz ordered his reapers to purposely leave behind stalks of grain for Ruth to pick up, he went beyond the letter of the law. (1)

Night Threshing: (3:2) Grain was threshed by tossing the crushed stalks into the air for the wind to separate from the kernels of grain. Boaz did this *ballayiah*, in "the evening", not night. One commentator says the wind blows during this season from about four until shortly after dark. (8)

Kinsman Redeemer: Levirate Law stated that where a husband died without issue, the nearest brother-in-law (levir) might be called upon by the widow to perform for her all the duties of a husband, and raise up seed for the deceased. In the case of Ruth, however, no brother-in-law was available seeing the only sons Elimelech had were dead. Consequently, the nearest of kin could be called upon to act as "redeemer" (goel) for the unfortunate, relieving them thereby of their distress. The nearest relative to Ruth by marriage was unable to function as her goel, and being the next relative, Boaz did not shirk his responsibility toward the lovely woman who had won his heart. Before the council of ten men at the city gate he announced before witnesses his decision to buy Ruth's inheritance and marry her. Although bachelor Boaz was advanced in years, he was determined to play his part and as Naomi said, "The man will not rest, until he has finished the thing this day" - and finish it he did! (2)

Kinsman-redeemer: The Hebrew is *go'el*. Like other words from the root *g'*, it indicates fulfilling one's responsibilities as a kinsman. O.T. family law gave the kinsman the right to redeem a relation from slavery, or buy back his fields (Lev. 25). Here another duty of the kinsman is in view: the obligation of the next of kin to marry a childless widow and have a child, which would be considered the offspring of the dead husband. In this way the dead husband's line would be carried on, and his property preserved. This "family law" with its implied responsibility to aid a near relative, prefigures the ministry of Jesus. In taking on human nature He became our near kinsman, and accepted the obligation to redeem us despite the terrible cost. (8)

Kinsman Redeemer: a male relative; a man sharing the same racial, cultural, or national background as another. Since an Israelite could sell himself, his family, or his land (Leviticus 25:39-43) in cases of poverty, the kinsman-redeemer (Leviticus 25:25) was provided to protect the clan. This person, a near

relative, had the first option by law to buy any land being sold, thus allowing it to be kept within the clan. (15)

Was it unlawful to marry Moabite wives? The law against intermarriage is directed against the Canaanites (Deut 7:3). Moabites were not Canaanites, though there was a prohibition against too quickly admitting offspring of such a marriage to the congregation (23:3). The Jewish Midrash implies that even this prohibition related only to women who wed Moabite males. (8)

The town gate: In O.T. times the town gate was an open space where people tended to gather. The local elders met there to judge civil and criminal cases brought to them. And business transactions were completed there, in the open and before witnesses. While written records were kept in ancient times, there was also great dependence on eyewitnesses, who would be able to attest to any agreement during the participant's lifetime. Thus we see Boaz approaching the other kinsman at the gate, holding his discussion with him in the open, and calling on bystanders to witness the other's repudiation of his right to serve as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. (8)

Her Character

Capable: Generous, loyal, and loving, she is strong and serene, able to take unusual risks, dealing actively with the consequences (1)

Poised and Serene: Bereft of her husband, Ruth, as well as Orpah, would be left without material resources of support, and would face the hard and bitter lot of a biting poverty, as many widows do when the breadwinner is taken. But if Ruth shed any tears over her sorry plight as she faced a gloomy future without her husband, there is no record of them. She did not seek for self-pity neither did she manifest the bitterness that had gripped the heart of Naomi because of her sad lot. Amid the shadows, Ruth maintained a poise and a serenity which even her mother-in-law must have coveted. (2)

Faithful daughter-in-law: Deeply attached to their mother-in-law, who had become a second mother to them, and to whom they clung as their friend and counselor, they decided to accompany the pilgrim on her way. Naomi used no persuasion, but left the two young widows to make their own choice. Therefore all three left Moab together, but on the way they stopped and Naomi urged them to return to their own country, marry again, and settle down. Ruth loved Naomi and was willing to leave her own land and share the unknown future with the aging woman in whom her life was bound up. In her happier days with Mahlon, and then in her desolation and bereavement, Ruth found in Naomi a home for her heart. (2)

Hard Worker: Ruth was not ashamed of the low order of her work as she took her place as a gleaner with the poor and outcast. Under Jewish law Ruth had the right to glean in any harvest field. (2)

Loyalty: Ruth's declaration of love and loyalty for Naomi marks it out as being the purest and most unselfish form of devotion, especially when we remember that Naomi was more than twice the age of Ruth, and that proverbially, it is not easy to live with a mother-in-law. (2)

Loyal and Devoted: The world would not consider Ruth spectacular or heroic. She is unusual only in her own sense of loyalty and devotion to her mother-in-law and to her adopted people. (3)

A Woman of Decision: Though Naomi had said that she could offer her nothing a woman needs, in Judah, Ruth firmly closed the door to her way of life, her family and her gods, and bravely faced a bleak and uncertain future by the side of her destitute mother-in-law. (3)

Her Sorrow

Death: To have lost her husband, homeland, and family. (1)

Her Idolatrous Nature: How far they had been influenced Godward by their marriage into a Hebrew family, with its recognition of God, and not their idols, as the only true object of worship, we are not

told. As Ruth's husband, Mahlon, was the first-born of Elimelech and Naomi, we can imagine how he would strive through their years together to draw her from her heathen ways. With all we know of Ruth's honest nature, it is quite possible that she warmly received all her husband told her of the mighty Jehovah. (2)

Widow: Mahlon, Ruth and Elimelech's son, married Ruth.

Her Joy

The nature of God: To discover firsthand the generous, loyal, and loving nature of God, as he provided her with a husband, a son, and a home to call her own. (1)

Convert to God: In spite of her heathen background and association with the degenerated tribe of Moab, Ruth became a devout worshiper of the true God. She must have seen that Naomi's God was totally different from the lifeless deity she worshipped. The firm decision of Ruth to follow Jehovah, and to completely identify herself with His people, brought her a rich reward when she became the ancestress of the Savior who came into the world to save idolaters and sinners of every race. (2)

Boaz: The name of Boaz became immortalized because of his lovingkindness toward Ruth, the poor Moabitess. (2)

Obed: God smiled upon the marriage of honorable Boaz and virtuous Ruth, and blessed them with a son whom they named Obed which means "a servant who worships." As Ruth was the servant who came to worship Jehovah, we can imagine her son's name as being expressive of her own conversion from idolatry. (2)

Her Promises, Her Lessons, Her Legacy

Ruth's Promise: All that Ruth did was done for love of her mother-in-law, and for love of Naomi's God. She made a promise on the road to Bethlehem that she was determined to keep. Though it was a promise made by one woman to another, it is often quoted in wedding ceremonies as an eloquent expression of love and loyalty between spouses. Ruth had no way of knowing that her way of blessing Naomi would eventually become a blessing in her own life. That's just the divine irony of our God, who delights so much in seeing us love and bless others that he turns that love and blessing back on us in double measure. (1)

Divine Will: When happy homes are ravaged by death, it requires grace to say, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Naomi's self-confessed bitterness over the loss of husband and sons spoke of her lack of faith in God's good providence. But Ruth, heathen though she may have been, seems to have calmly acquiesced in the divine will. . It was no mere chance, then, that brought Boaz and Ruth together, for even the steps of God's children are directed by Him.(2)

Loyalty: In an age like ours with its ever growing number of strained relationships, broken homes and loveless lives it is most refreshing to go back to the charming picture of loyalty found in a short yet sublime book in which every prospect pleases. (2)

Ancestress of Christ: Through the birth of Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who, in turn was the father of King David, Ruth found herself numbered among the elect, and God wove the thread of her life most intricately into the web of the history of His people, both before and after Christ. A Gentile by birth, Ruth yet became the chosen line through which later the Savior of the world appeared. As He came to redeem both Jew and Gentile alike, it was fitting that the blood of both should mingle in His veins. (2)

Ruth's Outstanding Qualities: From Ruth's outstanding qualities of unselfishness and loyalty we learn that such virtues are the only foundations upon which true happiness can be built. Without them, abiding friendship is impossible, home ties are loose, and the social structure weak. Ruth also teaches

us that attractive graciousness is worth cultivating; and that racial hatred and religious bigotry can be solved by a right relationship to Him who made of us one blood all nations. (2)

Boaz's Outstanding Qualities: From the Book of Ruth our industrial and labor problems can be solved. Boaz was a wealthy farmer, yet he maintained a delightful relation to those who worked for him in a dark, chaotic period of Israelitish history. As he walked through his fields, meeting his servants he would say, "The Lord be with thee," and such was the harmony that prevailed that they would reply, "The Lord bless thee." In our time, the strained relationship between masters and employees would be quickly solved by the application of the good will manifested in those ancient days. Combining as it does all the traits of human life and character, Ruth is a book all can read with both pleasure and profit. (2)

Something Worth Fighting For: Ruth had a gentle spirit. She shines through the pages of Scripture as a woman of meekness and humility. So where did this spark of spunk come from? What was it about this one decision that brought her out of character, driving her to near defiance of the woman she loved more than any other? It's because Ruth had apparently defined her core beliefs. Years of living in this Hebrew family had stirred in her a passion for their customs, their way of life, their God. We all need something we'll go down fighting for. (4)

God's Providence in our Lives: Ruth's story seems like one long string of coincidences. She just happened to be going out to glean one day, and just happened to find herself on Boaz's land, who just happened to have heard of Ruth's troubles and of her kindness to Naomi - and who just happened to be a rich relative with the power to change Ruth's whole lot in life. If you were to ask her why she chose Boaz's grain field, she'd just say that she liked the look of it. But something tells you that God was in the coincidence. (4)

God's Providence in our Lives: Every one of the characters of the Book of Ruth reverently owns the presence of God in life and human affairs: Naomi who saw the hand of God in her sorrow and adversity; Boaz who recognized the hand of God in the good fortune that gave him Ruth for a wife; and Ruth herself who, as Boaz expressed it, put her trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. (5)

God's Providence In Our Lives: God has a way of weaving all your past experiences, relationships, and connections into a life plan you never would have figured out on your own. (14)

Simple and honest: Qualities such as availability, simplicity, and unaffectedness are difficult to come by. Fear makes us pretend, masquerade, play our people games, or flirt with insincerity. But God seeks honest hearts. He longs to deliver us from anything less than genuine or anything flavored by the cynical. This prideful attitude hamstrings our ability to move into the fresh and the new ... and grieves the Spirit of God. *Who says* you know what's next for your life? *Who says* God can't use you in a dramatic, wholly unexpected ways? *Who says* he can't lead you into a season of life and ministry beyond anything you've ever experienced - or even dreamed? Just who is the limiting factor here? Is it God? Or are we capable of closing our hearts to what He wants to do in and through our lives? Ruth is as simple and honest as a field lily, as open-hearted as a child. It is a spiritual beauty we can all learn from. No wonder Boaz lost his heart in the barley field that spring morning! Ruth had prepared herself to step out in faith and see what this God of Israel had to offer. (4)

The Power of Choice and Decision: Ruth chose definitely and forever the people of God. Decision, choice, that is the first step in the Christian life. Have you taken that step? Have you made that decision? Have you chosen Jesus Christ and Eternal Life? Great things hung that day on Ruth's choice, and no less great - even the destiny of an immortal soul - hang upon your decision. (5)

Trusting God: Do you trust in God and God alone? Do you depend totally on the One who protects and provides for His own? And are you resting under His wings of love? God, your heavenly Father, is responsible for protecting you. Your responsibility is to trust in Him and to rest under the shadow of His wings. (7)

<p>Trusting God: Today is mine. Tomorrow is none of my business. If I peer anxiously into the fog of the future, I will strain my spiritual eyes so that I will not see clearly what is required of me now. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" - and the work thereof. The evil is not a part of the yoke Jesus asks us to take. Our work is, and He takes that yoke with us. I will overextend myself if I assume anything more. ~Elizabeth Elliot (14)</p> <p>Trust God: Do what you ought to do each day, and trust God for the right results. (14)</p>
<p>Faith: Faith will recognize God's hand not only in the obviously pleasant things of life, such as the bringing together of Ruth and Boaz, but also in what are termed the hard things of life. (5)</p>
<p>Sovereign God: If you believe in a sovereign God, if you believe in His loving providence, choose to consider all that touches your life as Him at work once again. Learn to: <i>Look</i> for the hand of God. <i>Believe</i> that God works in your life, in all that you encounter and all that you experience. <i>Trust</i> that God works <i>all things</i> together for your ultimate good (Romans 8:28). (7)</p>
<p>Obedience: Ordinary obedience is the only real path to finding God's will. (14)</p>
<p>The Future: If you can already see how you're going to get everything done, you're probably doing something too small. (14)</p>

Scholars debate whether anything improper took place between Ruth and

Boaz; I appreciate the following observation:

"Those who interpret a sexual relation in the events reflect their twentieth-century cultural conditioning of sexual permissiveness. They fail to appreciate the element of Ruth's trust that Boaz would not dishonor her whom he wanted for his wife. They fail to appreciate the cultural taboos of Ruth's time that would have prevented a man of Boaz's position from taking advantage of Ruth, thereby destroying her reputation and perhaps endangering his own. Biblical writers were not squeamish about describing sexual encounters, but the writer of Ruth has deliberately refrained from saying there was a liaison between Ruth and Boaz. If read carefully and with sensitivity, it becomes clear that he was saying just the opposite. Both Ruth and Boaz acted virtuously in a situation they knew could have turned out otherwise. Chastity was not an unknown virtue in the ancient world." - F. B. Huey, Jr. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/ruth/ruth_03.htm

from "A 'feminist' commentary to the torah?," by Imtraud Fischer, in RUTH AND ESTHER, A FEMINIST COMPANION TO THE BIBLE (p.30), ed. by A. Brenner, 1999 --

Ruth listens to her mother-in-law's advice.

- She goes to the threshing floor, waits until the man has fallen asleep and then follows Naomi's instructions.
- When Boaz awakes at midnight, trembling, he finds a woman lying at his legs (3:8).
- But Ruth does not wait for Boaz to tell her what she has to do; instead she tells him.
- She asks for marriage and for 'redemption,' that is, fulfilling the duty of solidarity for relatives in poverty.
- With her request Ruth fulfills the promise she had given Naomi, namely to be faithful. She creates a plan in which Naomi could be a part of the new husband's home.
- Instead of seducing Boaz, Ruth made an appeal to the man's ethics.

http://www.womensearlyart.net/ruth/306_comment.html

"Ruth your maid" Note that Ruth did not call herself "*Ruth the Moabitess*" but "*your handmaid*" which certainly suggests as some have surmised that Ruth was making a new beginning. Ruth is mentioned **twelve times**, five references as the *Moabitess* ([Click here for 1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5, 10](#)).

SO SPREAD YOUR COVERING OVER YOUR MAID: (Dt 22:30, Eze16:8)

"Make me your wife according to God's law, for you are my close relative" (TLB),

"Because you are a close relative, you are responsible for taking care of me. So please marry me" (TEV),

Ruth

"Spread your cover over me, because you are a relative who is supposed to take care of me" (NCV),
 "I am Ruth, your servant. Marry your servant, for you are a guardian of the family interests" (NET),
 "Spread your wing [of protection] over your maidservant, for you are a next of kin" (AMP),
 "Spread the skirt of your cloak over your servant for you have the right of redemption over me" (NJB),
 "I am your servant Ruth: take your servant as wife, for you are a near relation" (BBE),
 "I am Ruth, your maiden; take me under your protecting wing. You're my close relative, you know, in the circle of covenant redeemers—you do have the right to marry me." (Message)

- Ruth reminded Boaz of his own words, and requested him to become the fulfiller of his own prayer. The word for corner is the same as that for 'wing' in 2:12 Ruth reminded Boaz of his own words, and requested him to become the fulfiller of his own prayer.
- This phrase "*Spread your covering*" vividly pictures the provision of protection, warmth and fellowship and in context speaks beautifully of marriage. Would it be true that all husbands covered their dearly beloved the way God does and the way Boaz did in this love story. There appears to be no hesitation in the response of Boaz. Ruth could let go of any fear she may have had, for there was no rebuke from this godly man. To the contrary, he gives her a blessing and acceptance as a 'my daughter' in the family. No longer was she a stranger or foreigner for Ruth had come under the wings of Jehovah God (Ru 2:12); and now she would be under the wings of her kinsman-redeemer, Boaz!
- [JFB](http://www.preceptaustin.org/ruth_38-18.htm) adds that Ruth "*had already drawn part of the mantle over her; and she asked him now to do it, that the act might become his own. To spread a skirt over one is, in the East, a symbolical action denoting protection. To this day in many parts of the East, to say of anyone that he put his skirt over a woman, is synonymous with saying that he married her; and at all the marriages of the modern Jews and Hindus, one part of the ceremony is for the bridegroom to put a silken or cotton cloak around his bride.*"
http://www.preceptaustin.org/ruth_38-18.htm

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