

Ruth, Naomi, and Their Men

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#1 The time (1:1)

#2 The time of the "Judges"

Long ago when the judges ruled Israel, there was a shortage of food in the land...

This was early in Israel's history, after Moses and Joshua, and before Israel had a king. This history is reported in the Old Testament book of *Judges*. The theme of this history is summarized in Judges 2:10-23.

¹⁰ After those people [who had followed Moses & Joshua] had died, their children grew up and did not know the LORD or what he had done for Israel. ¹¹ So they did what the LORD said was wrong, and they worshiped the Baal idols... ¹⁴ The LORD was angry with the people of Israel, so he handed them over to robbers who took their possessions. He let their enemies who lived around them defeat them; they could not protect themselves. ¹⁵ When the Israelites went out to fight, they always lost, because the LORD was not with them...

¹⁸ When their enemies hurt them, the Israelites cried for help. So the LORD felt sorry for them and sent judges to save them from their enemies. The LORD was with those judges all their lives. ¹⁹ But when the judges died, the Israelites again sinned and worshiped other gods. They became worse than their ancestors. The Israelites were very stubborn and refused to change their evil ways. (Judges 2:10-23)

Israel went through that repeating cycle again and again. We can summarize that cycle in four words that each begin with "S" :

Sin [worship idols]

Suffer [enemy nations defeat Israel]

Sorry [Israel cried out to God for help]

Saved [God called an Israelite to lead Israel to victory]

After the judge and his (or her) generation died, the next generation forgot the lessons their parents learned, so they start the cycle all over again.

The last verse in the book of *Judges* says this way:

***In those days Israel didn't have a king. The people did anything they thought was right.** (Judges 21:25 NIV)*

Notice that the people didn't care what God said was right or wrong. They wanted to *decide that for themselves*. We see this same attitude in to different times and places. We see it first in the Garden of Eden -- Genesis 3, where Satan tempts Eve to "know" (i.e. decide) for herself "what is good and what is evil." Satan correctly hints that we make that decision on our own, we are acting as our own god, without any sense of need to obey God. The second place where we see this same attitude is in today's culture. Today

culture says, "Anything is right and nothing is wrong. The only thing that's wrong is to call something, or someone else, wrong. You can decide for yourself."

The Book of Ruth tells us that was a famine in Israel. We can guess the *reason* for that famine from reading the history of that time in the Book of Judges.

Some of the famous judges of Israel were Deborah (*Judges 4-5*), Gideon (*Judges 6-8*), and Samson (*Judges 13-16*).

#3 **The places (1:1)** [see map with student sheet]

¹ *There wasn't enough food in the land of Judah. So a man went to live in the country of Moab for a while. He was from Bethlehem in Judah. His wife and two sons went with him. (Ruth 1:1 NIRV)*

#4 The country of Israel was divided into 12 Tribes, similar to our States or Provinces. The 12 Tribes were named after their ancestors: 10 of the 12 sons of Jacob, plus the two sons of Joseph. The southern tribe was Judah. Bethlehem was a small town in the Tribe of Judah in Israel.

#5,6 Moab was an enemy country near Israel. Moab was named after one of the sons of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Moab was conceived in drunken incest. That sad story is reported in **Genesis 19:30-38**.

#7 When Israel tried to pass peacefully through the land of Moab on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land (Canaan), the kings of Moab tried to block Israel's way with their armies. (See *Numbers 21*.) When that failed, the kings of Moab hired a prophet named Balaam to curse Israel. God did not permit Balaam to curse Israel, only to bless them. (See *Numbers 22-24*.) So Balaam advised the Moabites to corrupt Israel by tempting them to worship idols through inter-marriage. (See **Numbers 25** and *Revelation 2:14*.)

From that time on, Moab and Israel were bitter enemies, and God told Israel not to have any dealings with Moabites (**Deuteronomy 23:3-8**).

#8 **The people (1:2-5)**

#9 ² *The man's name was Elimelech.*

#10 *His wife's name was Naomi.*

#11 *The names of his two sons were Mahlon*

#12 *and Kilion [or Chilion]. (Ruth 1:2 NIRV)*

Elimelech's name means "My God is King."

Naomi's name means "Pleasant."

However, their attitudes did not match the meanings of their names. We see that in the way they named their two sons:

Mahlon's name means "sick."

Kilion's name means "lonely."

³ *Then Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she was left with her two sons.*

⁴ *These sons married women from Moab. One was named Orpah, and the other was named Ruth.*

#14 Mahlon married Ruth.

#15 Kilion married Orpah.

Naomi and her sons had lived in Moab about ten years⁵ when Mahlon and Kilion also died. So Naomi was left alone without her husband or her two sons. (Ruth 1:3-5 NCV)

So now have a house with three widows: two Moabite women and their Jewish mother-in-law.

⁶ *While Naomi was in Moab, she heard that the LORD had come to help his people and had given them food again. So she and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab and return home.* ⁷ *Naomi and her daughters-in-law left the place where they had lived and started back to the land of Judah.* ⁸ *But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back home, each of you to your own mother's house. May the LORD be as kind to you as you have been to me and my sons who are now dead.* ⁹ *May the LORD give you another happy home and a new husband."*

#24 **Ancient Customs: Heirs for a widow (1:11-13)**

According to ancient customs, a widow who had no children could marry her husband's brother. Her children from the 2nd marriage would inherit her first husband's estate. (We saw this custom in Tamar's story.) However, the young widows of this story - Ruth and Orpah - had no brothers-in-law to insure the dead men would have heirs.

[Naomi said to Orpah and Ruth,] ¹¹ I cannot give birth to more sons to give you new husbands; ¹² go back, my daughters, to your own homes. I am too old to have another husband. Even if I told myself, 'I still have hope' and had another husband tonight, and even if I had more sons, ¹³ should you wait until they were grown into men?

#16 **Naomi's discouragement (1:13)**

¹³ *[Naomi told Orpah and Ruth,] "My life is much too sad for you to share, because the LORD has been against me!"*

Orpah accepted Naomi's advice and return to her parents' home. But Ruth refused.

¹⁴ *The women cried together out loud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law Naomi good-bye, but Ruth held on to her tightly.*

#17 **Ruth's loyalty (1:16-17)**

¹⁵ Naomi said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her own people and her own gods. Go back with her."

¹⁶ But Ruth said,

#18

"Don't beg me to leave you or to stop following you.

Where you go, I will go.

Where you live, I will live.

Your people will be my people,

#19

and your God will be my God.

¹⁷ And where you die, I will die,

and there I will be buried.

I ask the LORD to punish me terribly if I do not keep this promise:

Not even death will separate us."

Note: This NCV translation of the last line is unusual. A better translation is:

"I won't let anything except death separate you from me." (NIrV)

This is a very famous text of Scripture. Even though Ruth says this to her mother-in-law, many people use this text for weddings.

[More] Naomi's discouragement (1:20,21)

¹⁹ So Naomi and Ruth went on until they came to the town of Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, all the people became very excited. The women of the town said, "Is this really Naomi?"

²⁰ Naomi answered the people, "Don't call me Naomi ["pleasant"]. Call me Mara ["bitter"], because the Almighty has made my life very sad. ²¹ When I left, I had all I wanted, but now, the LORD has brought me home with nothing. Why should you call me Naomi when the LORD has spoken against me and the Almighty has given me so much trouble?"

#25 **[More] Ancient Customs: Food for the poor -- Gleaning (2:2)**

² One day Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, "I am going to the fields. Maybe someone will be kind enough to let me gather the grain he leaves behind."

What Ruth wanted to do was **glean**.

God had two special rules for Israel's farmers.

⁹ "When you harvest your crops on your land,
[RULE #1] do not harvest all the way to the corners of your fields.
[RULE #2] If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up. ¹⁰ Don't pick all the grapes in your vineyards, and don't pick up the grapes that fall to the ground.
[REASON FOR THESE RULES] You must leave those things for poor people and for people traveling through your country. (Leviticus 19:9,10; see also Leviticus 23:22)

¹⁹ When you are gathering your harvest in the field and leave behind a bundle of grain, don't go back and get it. Leave it there for foreigners, orphans, and widows so that the LORD your God can bless everything you do. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees to knock the olives off, don't beat the trees a second time. Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²¹ When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, don't pick the vines a second time. Leave what is left for foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²² Remember that you were slaves in Egypt; that is why I am commanding you to do this. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

This was God's "welfare system" for poor people. God promised to bless the farmers by giving him good crops, but God expected the farmers to share these blessings. Both Ruth and Naomi were widows, and Ruth was a foreigner.

³ So Ruth went to the fields and gathered the grain that the workers cutting the grain had left behind. It just so happened that the field belonged to Boaz, from Elimelech's family. (Ruth 3:3)

Remember who Elimelech was. He was Naomi's husband, Ruth's father-in-law. The fact that Boaz was kin to Ruth's dead husband becomes very important later in the story.

We learn from verse 1 that Boaz was rich.

#20 **Boaz's character (2:4-16)**

#21(a) **respect**

Boaz cared for his hired workers, and they respected him. Notice how the boss and his employees greet each other:

*⁴ Soon Boaz came from Bethlehem and greeted his workers, "The LORD be with you!"
And the workers answered, "May the LORD bless you!"*

#21(b) **compassion**

Boaz also cared for the poor people who gleaned in his fields.

*⁵ Then Boaz asked his servant in charge of the workers, "Whose girl is that?"
⁶ The servant answered, "She [Ruth] is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷ She said, 'Please let me follow the workers cutting grain and gather what they leave behind.' She came and has remained here, from morning until just now. She has stopped only a few moments to rest in the shelter."*

Boaz knows that he is related to Ruth by the marriage (see Ruth 3:3). But Ruth does not know that... yet. Even though Ruth was a foreigner - from Israel's enemy, Moab - Boaz understood his special responsibility to care for Ruth, because she was [1] a widow, [2] a

foreigner, and [3] his relative. He also has heard that Ruth is helping to care for Naomi (see Ruth 2:11)

#21(c) **protection**

⁸ *Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go to gather grain for yourself in another field. Don't even leave this field at all, but continue following closely behind my women workers. ⁹ Watch to see into which fields they go to cut grain and follow them. I have warned the young men not to bother you. When you are thirsty, you may go and drink from the water jugs that the young men have filled."*

¹⁴ *At mealtime Boaz told Ruth, "Come here. Eat some of our bread and dip it in our sauce."*

So Ruth sat down beside the workers. Boaz handed her some roasted grain, and she ate until she was full; she even had some food left over. ¹⁵ When Ruth rose and went back to work, Boaz commanded his workers, "Let her gather even around the piles of cut grain. Don't tell her to go away. ¹⁶ In fact, drop some full heads of grain for her from what you have in your hands, and let her gather them. Don't tell her to stop."

That night Ruth came home to Naomi with a very large load of grain.

¹⁹ *Naomi asked her, "Where did you gather all this grain today? Where did you work? Blessed be whoever noticed you!"*

Ruth told her..., "The man I worked with today is named Boaz."

Naomi was really happy to hear this, because she knew that Boaz was a relative. Naomi called him a *kinsman-redeemer*. The NCV translates this phrase as "*one who should take care of us.*" The NIrV translates it as "*family protector.*"

#26 **[More] Ancient Customs: Kinsman-Redeemer (2:20)**

As we note above ("heirs for widows"), that if a married man died without having any children, his brother was suppose to marry his brother's widow so she would have children in her dead husband's name, and the dead man's inheritance to could be passed on to those children.

But Ruth did not have any brother-in-law who could fulfill that responsibility? What happens in her situation? Other male relatives of her dead husband move into that role.

The *kinsman-redeemer* not only has responsibility to provide children for his dead brother (if necessary), but the kinsman-redeemer also is responsible for buying freedom for any relative who has been sold into slavery because of large debt. The NIrV translation, "*family protector,*" is a good one.

Boaz had legal responsibility to care for Naomi and Ruth, because they were poor widows whose dead husbands were relatives of Boaz. But there was also a problem, as we see in chapter 3.

#22 **A love story (Ruth 3)**

3:1-8 When Naomi learned that Ruth was gleaning in the field of her *kinsman-redeemer*, and that Boaz had given special attention to Ruth, Naomi gave Ruth some advice on how she should flirt with him, and to ask him to fulfill his responsibility as their "family protector."

⁷ After his evening meal, Boaz felt good and went to sleep lying beside the pile of grain. Ruth went to him quietly and lifted the cover from his feet and lay down.

⁸ About midnight Boaz was startled and rolled over. There was a woman lying near his feet!⁹ Boaz asked, "Who are you?"

She said, "I am Ruth, your servant girl. Spread your cover over me, because you are a relative who is supposed to take care of me [kinsman-redeemer]."

What does "spread your cover over me" mean? The NIV offers this interpretation:

"You are my family protector. So take good care of me by making me your wife."

Question: Boaz already knew who Ruth was, and he highly respected her for her loyalty to Naomi. And he already knew about his responsibility as Ruth's kinsman-redeemer. So why didn't Boaz already marry Ruth? Two reasons:

[1] Boaz was older than Ruth - perhaps much older - and Boaz expected that she would want to marry someone her own age. He didn't think it would be fair to have Ruth stuck, married to an old man. (See Ruth 3:10)

[2] Boaz was not first in line to marry Ruth as her kinsman-redeemer.

¹² [Boaz said,] "It is true that I am a relative who is to take care of you, but you have a closer relative than I."

Boaz sent Ruth home with a load of grain and this promise:

¹³ "...in the morning we will see if he [the other kinsman-redeemer] will take care of you. If he decides to take care of you, that is fine. But if he refuses, I will take care of you myself."

#21(d) Here we see Boaz's **INTEGRITY**. We can guess that he feels affection for Ruth, but he will allow another man marry her. We never find out what is the name of that other relative, but we do witness the discussion - the negotiation - between him and Boaz.

#27 **[More] Ancient Customs: Legal Negotiation (4:1-6)**

¹ Boaz went to the city gate and sat there...

Why the city gate? Many cities had protective walls around them. The gate was the place where people did their official government business. Today we call that place "City Hall." The city officials and respected elders met at the city gates.

¹ Boaz went to the city gate and sat there until the close relative he had mentioned passed by. Boaz called to him, "Come here, friend, and sit down." So the man came over and sat down. ² Boaz gathered ten of the older leaders of the city and told them, "Sit down here!" So they sat down.

This was official business, and Boaz needed the 10 elders to witness the negotiation and verify the contract.

In a typical Middle-Eastern style, Boaz laid out attractive "bate" to his relative. He didn't tell the relative about Ruth. Boaz only told him about Naomi's property.

*³ Then Boaz said to the close relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, wants to sell the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I decided to tell you about it: If you want to buy back the land, then buy it in front of the people who are sitting here and in front of the older leaders of my people. But if you don't want to buy it, tell me, because you are the only one who can buy it, and I am next after you."
The close relative answered, "I will buy back the land."*

Of course the relative would buy Naomi's land. This would increase his own wealth.

Now that the relative took the bate, Boaz snags him with the hook. "Oh, by the way..."

⁵ Then Boaz explained, "When you buy the land from Naomi, you must also marry Ruth, the Moabite, the dead man's wife. That way, the land will stay in the dead man's name."

Oh, no! Whoever married Ruth and got Naomi's land would have to pass that land onto Ruth's children. That's not what the relative wanted! He didn't want to get his inheritance mixed up in Elimelech's inheritance.

⁶ The close relative answered, "I can't buy back the land. If I did, I might harm what I can pass on to my own sons. I cannot buy the land back, so buy it yourself."

The way that Boaz had set up this official meeting, the relative understood Boaz's purpose. The relative released his legal claim to Elimelech's property, so that Boaz could release the relative from his legal responsibility to marry Ruth.

#27 **[More] Ancient Customs: Signing the contract (4:7-13)**

⁷ *Long ago in Israel when people traded or bought back something, one person took off his sandal and gave it to the other person. This was the proof of ownership in Israel.*

⁸ *So the close relative said to Boaz, “Buy the land yourself,” and he took off his sandal.*

⁹ *Then Boaz said to the older leaders and to all the people, “You are witnesses today. I am buying from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I am also taking Ruth, the Moabite who was the wife of Mahlon, as my wife. I am doing this so her dead husband’s property will stay in his name and his name will not be separated from his family and his hometown. You are witnesses today.”*

The elders affirm the contract with a blessing. The elders invoke the names of Boaz's ancestral mothers (all of whom are part of our series of studies about women of the Bible).

¹¹ *So all the people and older leaders who were at the city gate said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make this woman, who is coming into your home, like Rachel and Leah [two sisters, both wives of Jacob], who had many children and built up the people of Israel. May you become powerful in the district of Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem. ¹² As Tamar gave birth to Judah’s son Perez, may the LORD give you many children through Ruth. May your family be great like his.”*

#28 **Jesus' Family Tree**

Ruth 4:

¹³ *So Boaz took Ruth home as his wife and had sexual relations with her. The LORD let her become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son... ¹⁷ They named him Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.*

Matthew 1:

⁵ *Salmon was the father of Boaz.*

(Boaz’s mother was Rahab.) [...Yes! Rahab, prostitute from Jericho!]

Boaz was the father of Obed.

(Obed’s mother was Ruth.)

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶ *Jesse was the father of King David.*

Lessons for us

- (1) Ruth is an example of faith in God, and loyalty to people who love Him. She left her family, to live as a foreigner, out of her love for her husband's mother, and her love of the God of Israel.

- (2) Boaz is an example of integrity, respect, and compassion.
 - We see it in his treatment of his workers and their obvious respect for him.
 - We see it in his care for Ruth and Naomi.
 - We see it in his negotiation with a relative who had rights to claim the family property.

- (3) God extends His covenant of grace to Gentiles... again. Since the days of the patriarchs, Ruth is the second Gentile woman to become part of Christ's family tree.