

Bible Stories

RUTH

Ruth 1:1

October 22, 2022

Ruth 1:1 - In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a man from Bethlehem in Judah left the country because of a severe famine. He took his wife and two sons and went to live in the country of Moab.

Famine drove **Elimelech**, his wife **Naomi** and their two frail sons, **Mahlon** and **Chilion** from Judah into Moab, which was an interesting choice since Moab and Israel were enemies.

- **Judges 3:12-14** Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

For 10 years the family lived in Moab – during that time:

- Elimelech died.
- Mahlon married **Ruth**.
- Chilion married **Orpah**.
- Eventually, Mahlon and Chilion also died, leaving all three ladies widows – a bad position to be in in a society where widows had no social standing or economic means to survive.

Naomi had had enough and decided to go home – back to Israel – back to Judah – back to Bethlehem. Why? Because God had made provisions for the care and treatment of widows within Israel's societal structure:

- **Exodus 22:22** - Do not exploit widows or orphans.
- **Leviticus 19:9-10** - When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.
- **Deuteronomy 10:18** - He gives justice to orphans and widows. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing.
- **Deuteronomy 14:28-29** - At the end of every third year bring the tithe of all your crops and store it in the nearest town. Give it to the Levites, who have no inheritance among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all your work.
- **Deuteronomy 24:19-21** - When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do. When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don't go over the boughs twice. Leave some of the olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. This also applies to the grapes in your vineyard. Do not glean the vines after they are picked, but leave any remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows.

Fending for herself was one thing, but fending for 3 was an entirely different matter. Naomi tried to persuade Ruth and Orpah that remaining with their own families in Moab would be better for them. Initially, they both insisted on going with her, but eventually Orpah decided to return home. Ruth, however, chose to stay with Naomi, sealing her decision with an oath.

- **Ruth 1:16-17**Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Perfect timing for two widows in need of food. Into the fields Ruth went – more specifically, into Boaz's fields she went.

- **Ruth 2:3-9** - So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech. While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The LORD be with you!" he said. "The LORD bless you!" the harvesters replied. Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that girl over there?" And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest over there in the shelter." Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the women working in my field. See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to bother you. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."

No doubt taken aback, Ruth asked Boaz why he was showing her – a foreigner – such kindness.

He told her that he knew of the love and kindness she had shown Naomi and that she had chosen to leave her family and attach herself to Naomi and her people. Then he prayed a blessing over her:

- **Ruth 2:12** - May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth continued to glean in Boaz's fields until the end of Barley harvest and through the Wheat harvest.

Boaz had been kind to Ruth, but now the possibilities became more interesting when Naomi remembered that Boaz was a close relative.

She explained to Ruth that as a member of the Ephrathite clan and a relative of Elimelech, Boaz was qualified to be their *go'el* – their **kinsman-redeemer**.

After the Conquest, every family had been given land and that land was to pass from generation to generation. This was a vital piece of God's design for Israelite Society. It meant each family was independent – free. No one was under the thumb of a single wealthy landowner. Each man was in charge of his own livelihood – his own destiny.

Sometimes, however, folks fell on hard times and had to sell their property, so, in addition to providing care for the least in society, God also provided a way for the "**redemption**" of property that was sold under duress.

- **Leviticus 25:25** - If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.

For a next of kin to step into the role of *go'el* three conditions must be met:

1. He had to be **qualified** (a blood relative).
2. He had to be **able** (have the means to buy back the land).
3. He had to be **willing** (the role of *go'el* was completely voluntary).

Naomi came up with a plan.

Naomi: *Tonight, he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Now do as I tell you -- take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don't let Boaz see you until he has finished his meal. Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do.*

This secret rendezvous involved great risk for Ruth should she be discovered, yet she obeyed.

She approached Boaz while he was sleeping and requested that he spread his blanket over her. This request must be understood as a marriage request – Ruth was asking Boaz to put the **authority** of his house over her **AND** be *go'el* for both the land of Elimelech and for herself as the widow of Mahlon.

Ruth was combining the provision for a kinsmen/redeemer with levirate marriage laws:

- **Deuteronomy 25:5-6** - If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

How did Boaz respond?

Boaz: *Don't worry about a thing. I'll make all the necessary arrangements. There is a problem however. While I am a close relative, there is another man who is more closely related. Stay here tonight, and tomorrow morning I'll talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, fine, but if he is not willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will marry you!*

In the morning Boaz went to the city gate, where all business transactions were conducted, and called 10 leaders from the town to witness the upcoming negotiations.

When the other family member came by, Boaz invited him over for a chat.

Boaz: *You know that Naomi has returned from Moab. She is selling the land that belonged to Elimelech. I'm bringing it to your attention so that you can redeem it if you wish. If you want the land now, the witnesses are here, but if you don't want it, let me know right away, because I am next in line after you.*

Male Relative: *I'll redeem the land.*

Boaz: *Great.... Of course, you realize the purchase of Naomi's land also requires that you marry Ruth, the Moabite widow. That way, she can have children who will carry on her husband's name and keep the land in the family.*

Male Relative: *Then I can't redeem land, because doing so might endanger my own estate. You redeem the land; I cannot.*

Boaz was all too willing to be **go'el** for both and so, in the presence of the witnesses, the transaction was sealed when the Male Relative handed Boaz his sandal **{It was the custom in Israel for anyone transferring a right of purchase to remove his sandal and hand it to the other party. This publicly validated the transaction}.**

Boaz: *You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property belonging to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth, Mahlon's widow, to be my wife so that the family name will carry on through her son who will inherit the family property here in Bethlehem.*

Witnesses: *We are witnesses! May the LORD make the woman who is now coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you be great in Ephrathah and famous is Bethlehem.*

Ruth bore a son and named him Obed.

Obed became the father of Jesse and Jesse became the father of David.....

What do we do with this story?

The story of Ruth and Boaz is a love story and if we were to leave it – as a purely human story – we would have a powerful example of how devotion, loyalty, kindness, faithfulness, love and redemption {actions that are in short supply these days} play out in lives of ordinary people.

- Ruth chose to stay with Naomi when it would have been easier to return home. She chose to extend loyalty, devotion, faithfulness and love to Naomi and in a real sense Ruth redeemed Naomi – going above and beyond the expected – to restore her life.
 - **Ruth 4:16-17** - Naomi took care of the baby and cared for him as if he were her own. The neighbor women said, "Now at last Naomi has a son again!"
- Boaz was a man of integrity. He made sure the poor were cared for. He was greatly respected for his kind treatment of his employees and even though Ruth was a foreigner he chose to extend kindness and favor to her when he welcomed her to glean in his fields. He, too, went above and beyond when he chose to become **go'el** – redeeming both the land and the family name – the 2 things that mattered most in Israelite society.

That choice, to go above and beyond, literally impacted Biblical history.

However, this is more than a simple human love story. It paints for us a picture of God's **HESED** – his going above and beyond on our behalf.

- **Exodus 34:6** - He passed in front of Moses and said, "I am the LORD, I am the LORD, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness.
- **Philippians 2:5-8** - Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross!

And His willingness to become our **Go'el** – our **REDEEMER**.

- **Isaiah 43:1** - But now, this is what the LORD says -- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
- **Luke 1:68-69** - Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David
- **Titus 2:13-14** - while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.