

10- RUTH

Ruth 1:1-6 ^{NAU} Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. ³ Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They took for themselves Moabite women *as* wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. ⁵ Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. ⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food.

In this portion of God's word we have the introduction of ordinary people doing ordinary things. They were simply trying to live, and in this case survive, as they make plans after the husband and sons die, to return from the land of Moab because they hear, while in Moab, that there was food being provided by God for His people.

And so, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah are planning to return to Judah. But because both Ruth and Orpah were not Jews but were women who married into the Jews, Naomi encourages them both to return to their native families.

Ruth 1:12-16 ¹² "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." ¹⁴ And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.

So, of the two daughters-in-law, only Ruth has no intention of leaving Naomi, and in fact she makes it clear that she understood

that to follow Naomi back to Judah was not simply to accept her fate in Judah, but she acknowledges something else about what she would accept in following Naomi.

Do you see what that is in verse 16?

Now as we saw earlier we know that Naomi was going to return to the land of Judah, but at the end of chapter one we see specifically where in Judah Naomi was going to go.

Ruth 1:21-22 ²¹ "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" ²² So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

There's a couple of things to notice here. When Naomi gets back to Bethlehem she makes an interesting observation about her life in general.

What is that observation?

That God is against her and has in fact afflicted her.

Why do you suppose she comes to that conclusion?

Because her life has fallen apart. She has lost everything in her life: her husband, her two sons, one of her daughters-in-law and all her property and any chance of having offspring to carry on her husband's name.

But as we move through this book we are going to see that her observations were completely wrong.

The last thing we see in verse 22 is that they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. This is going to be significant in the lives of both Naomi and Ruth, as we'll see.

Ruth 2:1-2 ^{NAU} Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

Keep in mind that Naomi returned from Moab to Bethlehem for a specific reason. When you and I ever find ourselves in any sort of trouble, be it financial or whatever, where is one of the first places we usually go to get help?

Family. And in this case Naomi's husband's family lived in the area of Bethlehem. Elimelech was her husband's name and a kinsman of his was a man by the name of Boaz. Now, we're not told what type of kinsman he was but we do know that he was an older man, probably around the same age as Elimelech. And so, it could possibly have been a cousin.

One of the first things that Ruth does when she gets to Bethlehem is to go and look for food for both her and Naomi. And notice what she says.

Ruth 2:2 ² And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

If Naomi didn't own land then where is Ruth going to glean the ears of grain to feed them both?

Any Jew who had land and was in the process of harvesting. This tradition was built into the law by God Himself.

^{NAU} **Leviticus 19:9-10** 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. **10** 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.

^{NAU} **Deuteronomy 24:19** "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

This was God's way of providing for those in need.

Ruth 2:3-11 ³ So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴ Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the

LORD bless you." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." ⁷ "And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while." ⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids." ⁹ "Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw." ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹ Boaz replied to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know.

In this case because Boaz has found out that Ruth is a relative of the family he is going to give her special privileges that the regular person in need might not get. You'll notice that he didn't have a problem with this Moabite woman gleaning in his field.

According to the law it didn't make any difference who the person in need was, only that they were in need. And so, it could have been an orphan, a widow or even an alien, meaning a non-Jew.

But this is where God sets the stage to accomplish for you and me an amazing thing regarding our salvation. Keep in mind that Naomi, Ruth and Boaz are just regular people. But God in His grace and mercy is going to bring these people together to accomplish His will to His glory.

Naomi could have gone anywhere after the death of her family, but she ends up back in Bethlehem. Aside from the obvious, that her family came from there, why did she end up back in Bethlehem?

Because God directed her back there. So, she had no choice? We could certainly say she had a choice, after all she doesn't seem to be coerced to go back to Bethlehem, but in the final analysis it was God who made sure she went back to Bethlehem, as we'll see later on.

Acts 17:26-27 ²⁶ and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

In God's grand scheme of our redemption Bethlehem is going to play a very important role in more than one way as our Lord sets the stage for our coming Savior, who, interestingly enough, was also to be born in Bethlehem.

But notice how God does this. He moves people from far away places and puts them in such a proximity that they now have the ability to accomplish God's plan in a way that only God could accomplish.

Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz. Boaz takes note of Ruth. Both Boaz and Naomi have already talked about this whole situation before Ruth goes to glean and for all we know Naomi may have made arrangements for Ruth to be directed specifically to the area of Boaz's fields, which would make all the sense in the world from a pragmatic standpoint.

Remember, Naomi went back home to Bethlehem. She knew Boaz and she knew that if push came to shove Boaz would have provided for all her needs because she was family. But instead of allowing Boaz to simply provide for her and Ruth, Naomi makes arrangements for Ruth to go to work for Boaz.

Why do you think she did this?

To give Ruth the opportunity to marry into the family and carry on the name of Naomi's husband.

Ruth 3:1-5 ^{NAU} Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? ² "Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. ³ "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your *best* clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ "It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." ⁵ She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

It turns out that in the middle of the night Boaz wakes up to find Ruth at his feet and is so impressed with her loyalty to him that it takes him by surprise that she would choose him to other younger men in the village.

Ruth 3:10 ¹⁰ Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

At this point Boaz knows that Ruth is willing to be redeemed by him and so he begins to make legal arrangements. But before he does this he decides to take the matter to another relative who is probably younger and give him the opportunity to redeem the land of Naomi's husband.

Ruth 4:1-4 ^{NAU} Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ² He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. ⁴ "So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy *it* before those who are sitting *here*, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem *it*, redeem *it*; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem *it*, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem *it*."

This relative knows he's probably getting a pretty good deal in buying the land that belonged to Naomi's husband. But there's another part of the deal that Boaz doesn't tell this other relative until he agrees to buy the land.

Ruth 4:5-8 ⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." ⁶ The closest relative said, "I cannot redeem *it* for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem *it* for yourself; you *may have* my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem *it*." ⁷ Now this was *the custom* in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange *of land* to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the *manner of attestation* in Israel. ⁸ So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy *it* for yourself." And he removed his sandal.

We're not told why redeeming the property and gaining Ruth in the process would jeopardize his inheritance, but it seems clear that he didn't want the responsibility of taking care of an alien named Ruth, even if it meant getting a good deal on the land.

But again, we must ask the question, was it ever God's intention to have anyone other than Boaz marry Ruth?

So, all of the plans of man, including Boaz's willingness to allow another relative first shot at redeeming Naomi's husband's land, would not happen unless God desired for such a thing to happen.

Ruth 4:9-11 ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ "Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his *birth* place; you are witnesses today." ¹¹ All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "*We are* witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.

Well, he would become famous in Bethlehem, but not as famous as the woman whose name graces the pages of this book, and after whom her offspring would be the progenitor of our very Savior.

Ruth 4:13 ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

Ruth 4:16 - 22 ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. ¹⁷ The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, ¹⁹ and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, ²⁰ and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, ²¹ and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, ²² and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

Naomi became a proud grandma, so much so that she is designated his nurse, which simply means that she was a support for the family and this child and was probably living in the home of Boaz and Ruth, never to be in need for the rest of her life and in the direct line of our Lord and Savior.

This by the way reminds me to go back to a statement that she made earlier in this book. Remember what she said?

Ruth 1:19-21 ¹⁹ So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

How often we look at our immediate situation and because it doesn't meet with what we deem a blessing of the Lord, we presume it is His displeasure of us.

But is there any indication that God was displeased with Naomi?

What she thought was evil happening in her life was a blessing from God that she could never have comprehended in the middle of her storm.

For whatever reason the line of the Savior would not come through Ruth and Chilion, but through Ruth and Boaz. And how would God bless Naomi and Ruth in this way? By making sure Naomi would return to Bethlehem. And how would God get Naomi back to Bethlehem? By causing a famine and by forcing Naomi back to Bethlehem by taking the lives of her husband and sons over a 10 year period.

How many hundreds or thousands of lives would be affected by a famine? How many lives were immediately affected through the loss of Elimelech? We had the wife, Naomi, affected. The lives of the two daughters-in-law, the lives of the people of Bethlehem and the lives of Boaz and his entire household.

And then you've got the lives of Obed and his household who would one day produce the Savior who has affected your life and mine. God's ways are beyond our ways, but God's ways always

prevail to His honor and glory. And he will use ordinary people like you and me to accomplish His eternal will.