

# Ruth and Naomi

**In an age when individuals and personal rights is first and foremost in human life, it is helpful to read of good relationships where personal desires take second place to the bonding of two lives.**

**Ruth and Naomi are a beautiful example of this blending of two lives.**

**Their cultures, family backgrounds and ages were very different.**

**As mother-in-law and daughter-in-law they probably had many opportunities for tension, yet they were bound to each other.**

**Ruth was a Moabitess married to Mahlon [Ruth 4:10], the elder son of Elimelech and Naomi, Israelites from Bethlehem-Judah who came to Moab during a famine, [Ruth 1:1-2].**

**Ruth 1:3-13** [New King James] *“Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each to her mother’s house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, ‘Surely we will return with you to your people.’ But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!’”*

**Tragic events hit the family and Naomi advised her two daughters to seek new husbands from among their own people.**

**Orpah took this advice but Ruth’s relationship with her mother-in-law was so strong she did not want to leave her, [Ruth 1:14-15].**

**Ruth 1:15-17** [New King James] *“And she said, ‘Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said: ‘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.’”*

**These few words sum up the depth of this wonderful relationship, symbolic of the relationship that the Creator God wishes we have with Him.**

**Ruth was giving up her country, her family, the gods she had worshipped and made a commitment to Naomi’s God, the true Creator God.**

As much as they depended on each other, they also gave each other freedom in their commitment to one another.

Naomi was willing to let Ruth return with her to her family.

Ruth was willing to leave her homeland and go to Israel.

**They arrived at Naomi's family hometown, Bethlehem, at the time of the barley harvest, [Ruth 1:22].**

Ruth was **not** lazy but went into the barley fields to glean the spilt grain to enable them to have food to eat, [Ruth 2:2-3].

**By chance, Ruth found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.**

**Ruth 2:4-9** [New King James] *“Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, ‘The LORD be with you!’ And they answered him, ‘The LORD bless you!’ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, ‘Whose young woman is this?’ So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, ‘It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, “Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.” So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.’ Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.’”*

**Boaz was at once attracted to the hardworking Ruth and encouraged her to stay in his fields and arranged protection for her.**

**Ruth 2:10-20** [New King James] *“So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, ‘Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?’ And Boaz answered and said to her, ‘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.’ Then she said, ‘Let me find favour in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.’ Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, ‘Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.’ So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.’ So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, ‘Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, ‘The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.’ Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!’ And Naomi said to her, ‘This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives.’”*

**News of the sacrifice that Ruth had made because of her relationship with her mother-in-law Naomi had spread through the community, and the relationship between Ruth and Boaz began to be strengthened.**

**Ruth 2:21-23** [New King James] *“Ruth the Moabitess said, ‘He also said to me, “You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.”’ And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field.’ So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.”*

**Though Ruth may not have always recognised God’s guidance, He had been there every step of the way. She went to glean and “just happened” to end up in the field owned by Boaz who “just happened” to be a close relative. This was more than mere coincidence.**

**As we go about our daily tasks, the Creator God is working in our lives in ways we may not even notice.**

**We must not close the door on what God can do in our lives, but have faith that He is directing our lives for His purpose.**

**Ruth 3:1-9** [New King James] *“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? Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.’ And she said to her, ‘All that you say to me I will do.’ So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, ‘Who are you?’ So she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative.’”*

**A kinsman-redeemer was a relative who volunteered to take responsibility for the extended family.**

**When a woman’s husband died, the law [Deuteronomy 25:5-10] provided that she could marry a brother of her dead husband. But Naomi had no more sons. In such a case, the nearest relative of the deceased husband could become a kinsman-redeemer and marry the widow.**

The nearest relative did not have to marry the widow. If he chose not to, the next nearest relative could take his place. If no-one chose to help the widow, she would probably live in poverty for the rest of her life, because in Israelite law and culture the inheritance was passed on to the son or nearest male relative, not the wife.

To take the harshness out of these inheritance laws, there was the laws of gleaning and kinsman-redeemer.

**Lift this to a spiritual level we have a kinsman-redeemer in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who though He was God came to the earth as a physical human man in order to save us. By His death on the cross Jesus Christ redeemed us from the penalty of sin and hopelessness and thereby purchased us to be His own possession, [1 Peter 1:18-19].**

This guarantees our eternal inheritance.

**Naomi’s advice to Ruth may seem strange, but she is not suggesting a seductive act. In reality, Naomi was telling Ruth to act in accordance with Israelite custom and law.**

**It was common for a servant to lie at the feet of his master and even share part of his covering.**

**By observing this custom, Ruth would be informing Boaz that he could be her kinsman-redeemer. This was family business, nothing romantic.**

As a foreigner, Ruth may have thought that Naomi’s advice was odd, but Ruth followed the advice because she knew that Naomi was kind, trustworthy and filled with moral integrity.

**Ruth 3:10-18** [New King James] *“Then he said, ‘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. Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you, good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning.’ So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognise another. Then he said, ‘Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.’ Also he said, ‘Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.’ And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, ‘Is that you, my daughter?’ Then she told her all that the man had done for her. And she said, ‘These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me, “Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.”’ Then she said, ‘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 and Naomi must have assumed that Boaz was their closest relative. Boaz, too, must have already considered marrying Ruth because of his answer. But one man in the city had the first right to take Ruth to be his wife, if he chose not to, then Boaz could marry Ruth.**

**Ruth 4:1-13** [New King James] *“Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, ‘Come aside, friend, sit down here.’ So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down. Then he said to the close relative, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. And I thought to inform you, saying, “Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.”’ And he said, ‘I will redeem it.’ Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance.’ And the close relative said, ‘I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.’ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was a confirmation in Israel. Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, ‘Buy it for yourself.’ So he took off his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s, from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day.’ And all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman.’ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son.”*

God brought great blessings out of Naomi’s tragedy, even greater than “seven sons” or an abundance of heirs.

Throughout her tough times, Naomi continued to trust God and God in His own time blessed her greatly.

Even in our sorrow and calamity, God can bring great blessings.

As I write this article it is the anniversary of my first grandchild who was greatly handicapped and died at a young age. Yet memory of her continues to make me long to see her and her “bubbly” personality in a resurrection when Jesus Christ will return to set up a new world where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain, [**Revelation 21:3-4**].

**To some the book of Ruth may be just a nice story about a girl who was fortunate. But in reality, the events recorded in the book of Ruth were part of God's preparations for the birth of King David and Jesus Christ the promised Messiah.**

**Just as Ruth was unaware of this larger purpose of her life, we will not know the full purpose of our lives until we are able to look back on them from the perspective of eternity.**

Ruth came to know the true Creator God through Naomi, as she saw the joy and anguish that her relationship with God brought.

**Sharing our relationship with God can bring depth and intimacy to our own relationship with others as they see the joy that our worship of the true Creator God brings to our life.**