

**READ:** Selections from Ruth 1-4 (ESV)

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 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. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May 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 of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

ENTER THE STORY:

Bethlehem, the town whose name means, "house of bread," had no bread to offer, so a man named Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons left the promised land – a place that was supposed to flow with milk and honey, but was barren and desolate. They found themselves in Moab, the land of their enemies... outside the Promised Land, and settled down. Naomi's two sons married two Moabite women, something they were also forbidden to do, and for a while, all seemed well, but in a sad turn of events, Naomi's husband and both of her sons died. She was left alone.

It was not easy for women to make money in those days, and Naomi knew she could not provide for her two new daughters-in-law, so she sent them back to their families. But Ruth clung to her, because her mind was made up.

She wanted Naomi and the Israelites to be her family, and she wanted Naomi's God, Yahweh, to be her God.

Does this sound familiar? It should, because yesterday, we read something similar in Rahab's story, another woman who was not an Israelite, but who desperately wanted to make Yahweh her God, and the people of Israel, her people and her family.

And so Naomi and Ruth traveled back home to Bethlehem in search of family that would help them survive.

In many places around the world throughout the history of time, women have not been not treated well. But Israel at that time was different. God wanted his people to take care of women and treat them with the respect, honor, and value he instilled in them, so he put laws in place that would protect them...especially women who had lost their husband.

One of the rules involved gathering food. The men who owned the fields were supposed to leave some of the grain around the edges of the field so the women could collect it. We saw Ruth doing this very thing, and it just so happened to be in the fields of a family member named Boaz.

But there was another rule...and this one was specifically for widows. If the woman's husband died before they had children, the next closest family member was supposed to marry the widow and help her have a son to carry on her husband's name.

This brother was called a "kinsman redeemer."

This was a critical job, because the "kinsman redeemer" is a rescuer! To redeem something is to purchase something back, or to pay the ransom for it. What a beautiful picture. In this story, Boaz is the kinsman redeemer for Ruth and Naomi, but the picture we are seeing in this story points to a much GREATER kinsman redeemer. A very special someone who will come to rescue his people from something much worse than hunger. He will ransom his people with his own life. It's us...*WE* are his people, and whether we know it or not, we are all just as helpless as Ruth and Naomi.

Like Boaz, this Kinsman Redeemer will step up to marry us...join his life with ours and rescue us.

But let's talk about the picture God is showing us through Ruth. Maybe the famine that sent Elimilech and his family to Moab was part of God's plan. Maybe God had his sights set on a young woman living there. Wouldn't it be just like God not only to rescue her, but also to give her a place of honor in his own Son's lineage? Before Ruth even meets her future husband, we already have a beautiful love story because God found the one he was looking for...the one whose heart was set on him.

And how does the story end? Well, Ruth has a baby boy named Obed, and Obed grows up to be the father of Jesse...who grows up to be the father of David. And once again, we find ourselves back at the stump of Jesse! But this time, we *KNOW* who the shoot is, and we can't wait for him to arrive because when he gets here he will be a great blessing and we will finally be at peace.

And remember Rahab...the mother of Boaz? Imagine the stories Boaz heard as he grew up. Imagine how the impact of having a mother who had been a foreigner and a prostitute, yet was grafted into the olive tree of Israel by the grace of God, affected the way Boaz viewed Ruth that day he saw her gleaning in his field. Other men might have simply seen an outsider scrounging for food, but Boaz saw something else...a woman who had left everything to embrace these people as her true family.

God found exactly what he was looking for in Moab and in Jericho...because sometimes God's light shines the brightest in the most unlikely places.

PRAY: *Jesus, thank you for the story of Ruth, that shows us the beauty of a Kinsman Redeemer. Thank you for rescuing and redeeming us from our sin and grafting us into your family tree, just like you did for Ruth and Rahab! Amen.*