

# Route 66

## *Ruth: Faithful and Redeemed*

Part 8 – May 31, 2009

Ruth was a Moabite, a pagan from an accursed nation, *and* the only Gentile (man *or* woman) with a book named after her in Jewish scripture (i.e. the Old Testament). That's no small feat! So, how did she *do* it? By personifying faithfulness and redemption.

The last book we studied was "Judges" (referring to Israel's leaders after Joshua died). Judges chronicles a roughly 350 year cycle of moral decay-disobedience-discipline-deliverance. The story of Ruth unfolds about the time that Samson (the 12th judge) is rising to power (judging by the genealogy in Ruth); and it begins while God is disciplining Israel with a famine.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife [Naomi] and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of **Moab**. - *Ruth 1:1 NIV*



The Moabites are the ones who hired the sorcerer Balaam to *curse* Israel (on their way to the Promised Land); and when God caused Balaam to *bless* Israel, they seduced the men into sexual sin. Bethlehem is 15 miles inland from the West side of the Dead Sea; and Moab ran along the Dead Sea's east side (modern-day Jordan). The journey was about 90 miles and took about a week.

Remember the left-handed judge who delivered Israel from a pagan king by smuggling an 18" sword under his clothes – and saying: "I have a secret message for you, O king"? (*Judges 3:14-19*) That was the king of *Moab*! He had oppressed Israel for 18 years.

Now, about ten judges later, the Israelites are apparently ignoring the command *not* to marry the idol-worshipping Moabites.

Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah [AWR-puh] and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both [sons] also died ... - *Ruth 1:3-5a NIV*

Having tried to escape God's discipline in Bethlehem, Naomi is now an aging, widowed foreigner in a semi-hostile land. And her only sources of income would be begging or prostitution. So, when she hears that the famine is over in Bethlehem she sets out (with Orpah and Ruth) to go back home to her family.

On the way, Naomi realizes that two widowed Moabites in Bethlehem are just as bad as a widowed Israelite in Moab.



Ancient Road to Bethlehem

So, she tells Ruth and Orpah to go back to their families in Moab and find new husbands.

Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. - *Ruth 1:14b NIV*

Orpah was all too eager to turn her back on the “foreign” God of Israel and to run home to the pagan idols of the Moabites. But Ruth has experienced something in Naomi’s household over the years, and it made a deep, deep impression upon her, and now causes Ruth to express her now-famous short speech to Naomi:

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. - *Ruth 1:16-17a NIV*

This is the kind of *unqualified commitment* God greatly admires! Though she’s just lost her *own* husband, Ruth appreciates that Naomi has lost even *more*! And in the midst of her own grief she further risks her future to serve her mother-in-law.

In order to remain loyal and faithful Ruth surrenders her idols, her people, and her culture. This is why Ruth got her own book: At a time when Israel (as a nation) was routinely turning from God to idols, this Gentile woman turns from her idols to serve the living, true God!

They arrive in Bethlehem around April during the barley harvest. Naomi tells her family not to call her Naomi (i.e. *pleasant*) but to call her Mara (i.e. *bitter*; not bitter as in “resentful” but bitter as in “unpleasant” – like, “bitter cold”).



By Mosaic Law harvesters were supposed to only make one pass when harvesting so that the poor could glean the leftovers.

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. - *Leviticus 19:10 NIV*

God *mandated* charity in order to provide for the most vulnerable. It also preserved their dignity, because instead of a handout, it was doubly-difficult to gather the provisions they needed.

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain” ... As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of **Elimelech**. - *Ruth 2:2-3 NIV condensed*

Elimelech was Naomi's deceased husband.

Boaz shows up, asks about this foreign woman gleaning in his field, and he's told that it's the Moabite the entire town is talking about – the woman who left her homeland to serve a Jew.

So Boaz tells his men to protect her, and he tells Ruth to always glean in his fields and to drink from his water jars. And, greatly admiring Ruth, Boaz says to her:

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

She was invited to eat with the harvesters. And secretly Boaz told them to leave a little extra for Ruth to find. So, after threshing, Ruth hurries home to Naomi with a month's supply (about 40 lbs) of barley, as well as leftovers from lunch. And this goes on for several weeks.

Now, being from the clan of Naomi's husband, Boaz is eligible to be a kinsman-redeemer, a Jewish man who marries a widow to father a child to carry on her deceased husband's name. (*Deut. 25:5-10*) A kinsman-redeemer also purchases land to keep it in the family.

So, Naomi coaches Ruth (who knows nothing about this custom) to wash up, dress up, and perfume up, and go to Boaz who's sleeping on the threshing floor to guard his harvest from thieves.



In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." - *Ruth 3:7-9 NIV*

[Ancient threshing floor]

This isn't as nasty as it sounds! It's all according to custom. She lies at his *feet* as a sign of submission, and she asks him to cover her as a sign of protection. This was *her* role; the kinsman-redeemer was not allowed to act *until* he was invited.

She even uses a cute play on his own words; the Hebrew word for "garment" is the same as the word for "wing". Boaz had said:

May you be richly rewarded by the Lord ... under whose wings you have come to take refuge. - *Ruth 2:12b NIV*

She's saying, "Become the wing of God that you spoke of."

Now, there's a wrinkle in this story: There's *another* kinsman who has seniority over Boaz. So, Boaz goes to him and tells him about Naomi's husband's land, and the man *wants* to redeem it. But when he hears that it comes with a Moabite woman that he must marry and father a son in another's name, and then that son must eventually inherit that land ... he quickly changes his mind!

His offer was *self-serving*, whereas Boaz is willing to sacrifice in order to redeem the poor pagan who has turned to the Lord.

Boaz was *predisposed* to accept a Moabite; do you know why? Remember Rahab the harlot from Jericho? That was Boaz's mother! She became a Jew and raised a faithful, kind-hearted son who obeyed the Mosaic laws of charity in his fields - a man of refused to take advantage when a woman snuck into his bed!



And now is the moment this story finds its purpose:

- A. Ruth represents all of those outside the kingdom.
- B. Boaz is a parallel to *mankind's* Kinsman Redeemer.

The kinsman-redeemer must be related (by blood). Jesus took on flesh and blood in order to be a kinsman to the human family. The kinsman-redeemer must be capable of redeeming. Jesus is able because He paid the price for our redemption with His very life. The kinsman-redeemer must be willing. He stands at the door and knocks; and He longs to be invited in.

Forms of the word *redemption* occur 23 times in this short story! And there are two more redemptive surprises left: Ruth and Boaz have a baby boy. Redemption brings new life! And Naomi is so renewed, and cares for that baby so much, that ...



Tower of David

The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. - *Ruth 4:17*  
NIV

That's the 2nd surprise: That "David" is *King David*!

Orpah turned back to her gods, her people, and her culture. But Ruth persevered through her pain to serve the Lord, and God blessed her with the greatest family line in Israel's history! Though it's difficult to understand in the moment: Our present pain plays a role in God's eternal purpose.

Boaz, a half-Canaanite, and Ruth, a full-on Moabite produced the line of King David which ultimately produced the Messiah. David's grandfather, Obed was 1/2 Moabite, 1/4 Canaanite, and *only* 1/4 Israelite. God is making an incredible statement: His Kingdom *will be* comprised of prostitutes, pagans, and people of *all* nations.

Redemption is open to everyone!