

Commentary on the Book of Ruth

Ruth 1

1Now 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.

2The 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.

During the time period where Israel was ruled by judges (just after Joshua and before the period of the kings), there was a great famine. This led Elimelech of Bethlehem to travel with his wife and two sons to the land of Moab in hope that they could find food and stay alive. His wife's name was Naomi, and his sons' names were Mahlon and Chilion.

3Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.

4They 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.

5Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

The family stayed in Moab, and eventually Elimelech died. Naomi's sons took Moabite women as their wives, Orpah and Ruth, and they lived there for ten more years. Then the husbands of both Ruth and Orpah died, and Naomi had now lost her husband and two sons. This had to be extremely difficult and devastating to lose her entire family within this period of her life, particularly in a place not her homeland.

6Then 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.

7So she departed 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.

Word traveled to Moab that God had been good to Judah, providing food and thereby ending the famine. So she arose with Ruth and Orpah to go back to Judah.

8And 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.

9"May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

10And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."

As they were returning, Naomi said that her two daughters-in-law could return to their own families in Moab, for such was their homeland, not Judah. She acknowledged their

kindness toward her, and she wished them well in their own lives in their own land as they would seek husbands there. She kissed them, and they wept. They did not want to leave her, for they cared for her and loved her deeply. It seems that she had become more of family to them than any that they had back in Moab. They wanted to go with her and return with her to her people in Judah.

11But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

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,

13would 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."

Naomi continued to encourage them to return to Moab, for it is not that she had anything to offer them in Judah. It is not that she was pregnant and could offer her sons to them once they were grown, as if that made much sense anyway. Even if she got married immediately and conceived immediately, her sons would always be too young for Ruth and Orpah to marry. Thus, Naomi wanted them to go where they could marry and bear children. Given that marrying and having children was a large part of security and dignity for women in this time, to risk not finding husbands was a serious issue and concern, and Naomi feared that this is exactly what would happen to her beloved daughters-in-law if they came with her to Judah, given that they were Moabitesses. Naomi, being much older, would have a far more difficult time of getting by, let alone being remarried. She acknowledged that God had, for whatever reason, allowed difficulties to come her way. She did not want Ruth and Orpah to suffer as a result of her suffering.

14And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

16But 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.

17"Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

18When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

At this point, both Orpah and Ruth cry, but only Ruth clung to Naomi. Orpah decided to kiss Naomi good-bye and take her up on her advice to return to Moab. But Ruth refused to leave Naomi. She had great concern for her mother-in-law and would not accompany her sister-in-law back to Moab. Naomi was in great duress, and she didn't feel that she could abandon her in her time of need. Ruth emphasized her commitment to Naomi. Though not a Jew, she would adopt Jewish customs and follow the God of the Jews. She would live with her, travel with her, and eventually die with her and be buried with her.

Before the God of the Jews, she committed herself to stick with Naomi until death. Naomi, upon seeing this, didn't encourage Ruth to leave her, but she kept quiet.

19So 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?"

20She 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?"

22So 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.

Ruth and Naomi traveled to Bethlehem, and their arrival stirred the city. Many remembered Naomi from years ago, and it was remarkable to see her so many years later. She refers to herself as "bitter," for God had allowed much difficulty to come her way. She had left for Moab with a husband and sons, and she returned with none. She understood that God was ultimately in control of these events, and that God does allow and appoint trials and afflictions for His people for our refinement and ultimate good (James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12, Psalm 119:71). If God does cause us grief, then He will also have compassion (Lamentations 3:32-33). He doesn't "enjoy" watching us suffer, for He suffers with us (Colossians 1:24). In the life to come, He will see to it that there is no pain or grief (Revelation 21:4).

Ruth 2

1Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

2And 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."

3So 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.

4Now 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."

Leviticus 19:9-10 explained that the harvest should not be reaped to the corners of the land and that the gleanings (the leftover grain from the first reaping) should be left behind for the needy to gather, particularly the foreigners, orphans, and widows (Leviticus 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-21). Ruth decided one day with Naomi's permission that she would go and join the other reapers who were seeking such fields. She happened upon a field that belonged to a relative of Naomi's deceased husband whose name was Boaz, a man of

great wealth. Boaz came and saw the reapers, of which Ruth was one, and he generously blessed them and encouraged them to reap from his field.

5Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

6The 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."

8Then 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."

Boaz asked about Ruth, and his servant explained that she was a Moabitess and the daughter-in-law of Naomi. Boaz would have recognized Naomi's name, since he was related to Elimelech. Thus he spoke to Ruth in great kindness, telling her to only glean from his field so that she could be assured of food and safety. He had commanded his servants not to touch her but to let her glean and drink from their water source.

10Then 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?"

11Boaz 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.

12"May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge."

Ruth was amazed at the kindness which Boaz showed her, and she asked him why he would treat her like this, being a foreigner. Boaz explained that he had heard of all the kindness that Ruth had showed Naomi since all of the difficulty had befallen her. He complimented her for being willing to leave her own people and come to Judah. He prayed that God would reward her for her kindness and her labor, giving her all that she needed. She had sought shelter under the wings of God (c.f. Psalm 91:1), and he believed that God would honor her for honoring Him (c.f. 1 Samuel 2:30).

13Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

14At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left.

Ruth replied to Boaz that she had found favor in his sight because of his kindness toward her, since he treated her as he would one of his female servants even though she was not one of them. Then at mealtime, Boaz asked Ruth to come and eat with the other reapers, eating of the bread and dipping it in the vinegar. Boaz made sure that the law was upheld and that there was no discrimination against Ruth. In addition, Boaz himself served her, giving her roasted grain that she ate until she was satisfied. She even had some left.

15When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her.

16"Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."

17So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

After mealtime, she got back up to glean more, and Boaz commanded his servants to let her glean even among the sheaves (as she had requested in 2:7) and to not insult her. The law did not require Boaz to let anyone glean from the sheaves, for much time, money, and labor had been spent to put the grain into sheaves. Yet Boaz allowed Ruth this special privilege, saving her time and energy. Boaz also told his servants to intentionally leave some grain from the bundles behind for her to glean. This was essentially giving her free food and not even having to work for it, other than to beat it out. She gleaned until evening, and had about an ephah of barley, which is equivalent to over half of a bushel.

18She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied.

Ruth returned with the barley to the city, and gave Naomi what she had left after she ate and was satisfied. There was more than enough to go around.

19Her mother-in-law then said to her, "Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

20Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives."

Naomi realized that Ruth had gleaned a substantial amount of barley for one day, and she asked where she had gleaned. She wanted whoever had shown her such kindness to be blessed. Ruth explained that she worked with Boaz. Naomi blessed Boaz in the name of the Lord, and she praised God for not withdrawing his kindness to the living (her and Ruth) and the dead (for Boaz's kindness honored her husband's name). Naomi explained that Boaz was one of their closest relatives, being of Elimelech's family.

21Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'"

22Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field."

23So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Boaz told Ruth to stay close to his servants until they finished the harvest, and Naomi affirmed that she should indeed stay with his maidservants, lest she risk putting herself in harm's way. So Ruth did this until the end of the barley harvest and wheat harvest. She continued to keep her word of living with and caring for Naomi.

Ruth 3

1Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?"

One of the laws of Israel was that the closest male relative (typically a brother but could be farther removed) of a deceased husband would go into the widow such that her name would be continued on in Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Genesis 38:8). The man who did this was called the kinsman redeemer. Naomi was thinking that Boaz, being a close relative, might be the one whose duty it would be to give Ruth a child. This indicates that she was thinking of Ruth's welfare and future.

2"Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

Verse 21 of the previous chapter emphasized Ruth's foreign birth, calling her Ruth the Moabitess. Yet, Naomi in verse two of this chapter refers to Boaz as being both her kinsman and Ruth's. He obviously was not her relative by descent, but Elimelech's heir, Mahlon, was Ruth's husband. The line of Elimelech can be thus continued through Ruth, even though she was foreign born. She informs Ruth that he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor that same night.

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."

5She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

Naomi instructs Ruth to do her part of explaining her desire and need for Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer. Following the custom of the day to ask Boaz to marry her, she was to wash herself, anoint herself (probably with some fragrant oils), and put on her best clothes. She was to go to Boaz's threshing floor, but she was not to let him see her until

after he was finished eating and drinking. When he laid down, she was to go and uncover his feet and lie down. This would clearly communicate to Boaz Ruth's desire that he redeem her, and he would tell her what she would need to do at that point in time. It was his choice to accept or reject this command of God. Ruth agreed to do what Naomi had said.

6So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her.

7When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.

8It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

So Ruth went to the threshing floor and waited for Boaz to finishing eating. He laid down, his heart being delighted and satisfied, perhaps after a hard day's work and plentiful harvest, the famine being ended. She came secretly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. He was sleeping through all of this, and it was only in the middle of the night that something startled him such that he awoke to see a woman at his feet with his feet uncovered.

9He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."

10Then 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.

11"Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.

12"Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.

13"Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning."

Ruth identifies herself and explains that he is a close relative. Boaz understands what is going on and what she is asking, and he blesses her. She did not go after some other young men for her own sake, but she considered Naomi's family line, an act of extreme kindness. She chose to ask Boaz to help her bear a child rather than trying to be married and failing to continue Naomi's line. This is utterly selfless, and Boaz says that he will do whatever she asks. He explains that he is sure that she is a woman of excellence and that she has come with God-honoring motives. But he cannot fulfill Ruth's request for marriage immediately because he is not the closest relative, though he is close. He tells Ruth to lie down until morning. In the morning, he will go and find the other relative and see if he will redeem her. If he does, all will be well, but if he does not, Boaz says that he will do it. Ruth has put herself in a very humble and vulnerable position, and Boaz very tenderly and gently treats her honorably and with great respect, leaving her great

assurances and comfort. (It is likely that Boaz was quite a bit older than Ruth, so this is probably why he didn't feel comfortable approaching her as her redeemer.)

14So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."

15Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.

Ruth lay at Boaz's feet for the remainder of the night as they slept. She arose before it was light enough to see one another's faces, and he told his servants not to tell anyone that she came to the threshing floor, lest false rumors be spread about her intentions. He sent Ruth on her way with six measures of barley.

16When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did it go, my daughter?" And she told her all that the man had done for her.

17She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"

18Then she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today."

She went back to the city and came to her mother-in-law. Naomi wondered how things went, and Ruth told her all that Boaz had done for her. He explained that he wanted her to have food for Naomi, thus he sent her with the six measures of barley. Naomi counseled Ruth to wait patiently because she was confident that Boaz would sort things out before the day was over.

Ruth 4

1Now 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.

2He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.

Boaz went up to the city gate where the leaders of the city gathered, and he found the closer relative and pulled him aside. He also took ten elders of the city to witness what he was about to share with them.

3Then 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."

5Then 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."

Boaz explained that Naomi has to sell the piece of land which belonged to Elimelech. He informed the closer relative that he could buy it now, thus redeeming the land and keeping it in the family. If he chose to redeem the land, he would also have to acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Elimelech's son in order to keep the family name going. Boaz was looking out for the welfare of Ruth and Naomi, wanting to be sure that there was an inheritance for Ruth's descendants.

6The 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."

The closest relative explained that he could not redeem it for himself because it would jeopardize his own inheritance; in other words, he couldn't afford to pay the amount required. Thus, he passed on his right of redemption to Boaz.

7Now 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.

The custom in Israel at this time concerning the redemption or exchange of land was for a man to remove his sandal and give it to another. This meant that the matter was attested to, and the ten elders witnessed the transaction.

8So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal.

9Then 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."

The closest relative tells Boaz to buy the land for himself, so he removes his sandal to seal the deal. Boaz proclaims to all witnessing the event that he did indeed acquire the land which belonged to Elimelech and his sons, Chilion and Mahlon. In addition, he proclaims that he will be taking Ruth as his wife to continue on the family lineage through Mahlon.

11All 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.

12"Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman."

The witnesses blessed Boaz and Ruth, wishing them many children and much prosperity. Rachel and Leah were the wives of Jacob and thus bore the 12 sons which became the twelve tribes of Israel. Perez was the firstborn of twins by Tamar from which the Ephrathites and Bethlehemites descended, of which Elimelech was a part (1:2).

13So 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.

14Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.

15"May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."

Boaz took Ruth as his wife and went in to her. God in great compassion and grace, in keeping with His very nature, allowed her to conceive and give birth to a son. The women of the city told Naomi that she was blessed, for God did not leave her without one to continue on the family lineage. They wished that her name would become famous in Israel, and did that ever come true.

16Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse.

17The 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.

Naomi became the child's nurse (caring for him and helping raise him), and the neighbor women named him Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, the most prominent king of Israel and a man after God's own heart. Indeed, this family was blessed of God, and his name certainly became famous, particularly given that Jesus Christ Himself was born of the line of Judah and was of the house of David.

18Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron,

19and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab,

20and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon,

21and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed,

22and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

This genealogy to close the book emphasizes the loving, compassionate, sustaining, and merciful hand of God. Despite great tragedy in the life of Naomi, God honored her and blessed her greatly, for she never stopped serving God but accepted the circumstances which He had allowed her to experience. Furthermore, a foreigner, Ruth, committed to Naomi and God, and God honored her for her love and faithfulness to Naomi and Himself. Ruth, though not a Jew by birth, became part of the line of David and

eventually Christ (Matthew 1:5), a foreshadowing that Christ desires none to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). What is even more interesting is that Boaz was a descendant of Salmon and Rahab, the harlot (Joshua 6:25, James 2:25). God does work through difficult and extraordinary circumstances to bring about mercy for those who trust in Him and honor His name. There is nothing that God cannot redeem, and it is into this line that Jesus, the Redeemer, was born.

By Brent Barnett of www.relevantbibleteaching.com