

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 2: Conquest and Chaos**  
**Joshua – Judges – Ruth**

**Message 11 – Ruth: A Story of Hope**  
**Ruth 1-2**

**Introduction**

The book of Ruth is the story of one family that lived during the period of the Judges. This story serves several important purposes in the biblical narrative. First, it bridges the period of the Judges into the period of the Kings by introducing us to the lineage of King David, through Ruth and Boaz (4:18-22). This seems to be the major purpose of the book, given the way the narrative ends with David's genealogy. Second, the events of Ruth show us that there were at least *some* faithful, God-loving, covenant-keeping Jews during the dark period of the Judges. Boaz was a righteous man who, in many ways, reflected the character of God to his world, even while Israel was repeatedly tumbling deeper and deeper into sin and degradation. Ruth was a Moabite woman who turned in faith to Yahweh, the God of Israel (the true mission of God's nation was to point all people to Him for redemption). Third, and most importantly, the story of Ruth shows that the scarlet thread of God's promise was still very much alive, being woven even through the dark period of the Judges. Though Israel as a nation was being unfaithful to the covenant with Yahweh, He still was determined to bring a great blessing to the entire world, as He had promised (Genesis 12:3). That blessing would ultimately come through Messiah, who would be God in person. The thread of the Messianic promise is carried on through the descendants of Ruth and Boaz, ancestors of the great King David (see Matt.1:5).

**Naomi's losses in the land of Moab: 1:1-5**

The narrative opens with a story of tremendous loss for Naomi.

*“In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there” (1:1,2).*

God's hand of discipline was on Israel, repeatedly, during the period of the Judges. This famine indicates that the nation was in one of those periods of discipline. Elimelek chose to run from the situation, rather than to remain under the hand of God in repentance and faith. He packed up his family and moved to Moab, a nation that had constantly been a snare to Israel.

Instead of finding life and security in Moab, Elimelek met only disaster. First, Elimelek died. Then Naomi continued the pattern of making choices contrary to God's will, as she remained in Moab for ten years, allowing her sons to marry Moabite women. But then, both sons also died, leaving 3 widows in a destitute situation.

***“Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. 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. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband” (1:3-5).***

The Moabites (and particularly Moabite women) had been a constant snare to Israel since the time they came out of Egypt (Numbers 25). God specifically forbade Israel to take wives from among the surrounding nations, including Moab (Deut. 7:3). Moabites were forbidden to worship at the Tabernacle because they had not allowed Moses and the Israelites to pass through their land on the way to Canaan. Further, it was the Moabites who hired the false prophet Balaam to try to curse Israel (Deut. 23:3-6). Now, Naomi has not only settled in Moab; but she is mingling her family line with Moab, seeking blessing in the shelter of Moab.

*Elimelek's name means, "God is King." Yet, Elimelek did not live as if God was King in his life. He made choices that were based on expediency and self-protection, rather than on God's rule in his life. He took his family to Moab to avoid the famine in Israel. The result was great chaos and loss for his family. Naomi could have returned to Israel after the death of Elimelek. Instead, she put down roots in Moab and allowed her sons to intermarry with Moabite women. We often act "ruler" over our own lives, making choices that seem "right in our own eyes." When we act in these self-directed ways, we end up in places that God never intended as part of our journey. "There is a way that seems right to a man; but its end is the way is death" (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25).*

## Naomi's return to the land of Israel: 1:6-13

After the death of her sons, Naomi determined to return to Israel, having heard that God had lifted the famine and given Israel food.

***“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” (1:6).***

Orpah and Ruth both declared that they would leave their homeland and go with Naomi to Israel. Yet, Naomi insisted that they remain in Moab, because she could offer them no hope for a future with her.

***But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 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, 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” (1:11-13).***

In Naomi's eyes, the two women would be foolish to wait for her to raise up two more sons whom they could marry. Moreover, she declared, *“the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.”* Why stay with a person whom God was *“against?”*

Naomi's life had fallen apart in Moab. She had lost hope for the future, believing that the hand of God was against her. When everything in life falls apart, it can seem as if life is no longer worth living; that God will never again fight for us. It can feel like there is no future, no good that can come out of so much hardship and heartache. Yet, there is light on the other side of darkness, IF we keep our hope fixed on God. Naomi could not see that she had hope and a bright future because of the grace and mercy of God. He delights in taking prodigal sons and daughters and giving them a great blessing. Naomi's story begins with mourning; but it ends with rejoicing . . . because with God there is always hope.

## Ruth's vow to go with Naomi: 1:14-18

The turning point in this story comes with Ruth's vow to remain with Naomi *until death*.

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

***“Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 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. 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.” When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her (1:14-18).***

Ruth made a commitment not only to Naomi, but also to Naomi’s God, her people and her land. She vowed to live *and* die with Naomi, and to allow her body to be buried in Israel. Ruth “*clung to*” Naomi. This same verb was used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the bond between husband and wife. Truly, Ruth committed her life to Naomi, “*until death do us part.*” Finally, she sealed her words by invoking a curse upon herself if she ever did anything to break her vow of allegiance.

Naomi’s silence after such a passionate vow is revealing. She was consumed by her own losses and self-pity. Sadly, she was blind to God’s beautiful provision of love and comfort, in Ruth.

*It is difficult to perceive how Ruth saw anything compelling enough to move her to commit her entire life to be with Naomi. Ruth had seen and experienced the heavy losses of husbands and hope. She had seen Naomi’s despair that God was “against her.” She had heard Naomi’s words pleading for her to return to the land of Moab to seek a better future there. Yet, in spite of Naomi’s less than compelling witness, Ruth was moved to go with her, seeking a share in Naomi’s future in Israel, rather than in Moab. We can only conclude that somewhere, somehow Ruth had come to a personal faith in Yahweh as her own God. Ruth’s hope for a future was not tied to Naomi, rather, to Yahweh, whom she called by His personal name, “Lord,” in her vow. As the story will continue to unfold, we will find the faith of Ruth shining brighter and brighter with each new day, as she trusts the Lord to guide her life and shape her future. Let us remember NOT to place our trust in another person for our future; rather, to keep our eyes and our hope fixed on the Lord. He alone is worthy of our utmost trust.*

### **The arrival in Bethlehem: 1:19-22**

***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?” She said to them, “Do not***

***call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 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?” (1:19-21).***

The entire city of Bethlehem was in shock at the sight Naomi. She had departed a decade earlier with a husband and two sons. Now, she was returning a devastated and lonely woman, with only a Moabite daughter-in-law for a companion. *“Is this Naomi,”* they asked in disbelief? In turn, Naomi asked that they change her name to *“Mara,”* which means *“bitterness,”* stating that the Lord had dealt very bitterly with her.

*Mara – “bitterness.” Naomi blamed the Almighty for making her life very bitter. She failed to consider that her journey was a reflection of choices that she made to walk away from God. Her decade of death in Moab was not in God’s original script for her life. It was a path that she and Elimelek had chosen, and these were the sad consequences of their self-directed decisions.*

*Yet, even in our rebellion and wandering, the grace of God is still at work. As the prodigal Naomi entered back into Israel, renaming herself “Mara” (bitterness), her tear-filled eyes could not see that the goodness of God was standing right next to her in the person of Ruth. This young Moabite woman was a gift of God to Naomi in her time of need. In fact, Naomi’s entire future blessing would spring from the womb of this Moabite outsider. The odd couple – Naomi and Ruth – returning to Israel in complete disgrace, would quickly rise, by the grace of God, to the place of highest honor in the biblical narrative: conveyors of the Messianic hope! Yes, our bad choices have consequences; but our gracious God is able to bring life out of death: “He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair” (Isaiah 61:3).*

### **Ruth gleanes in Boaz’s field: 2:1-7**

***One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it.” Naomi replied, “All right, my daughter, go ahead.” So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters (2:2,3).***

Naomi and Ruth had no means to support themselves. Ruth took the initiative to go out gleaning to find food for their sustenance.

The gleaning laws in Israel were like a welfare program for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deut.24:19). God always has compassion for the poor, the outcast and the needy, and makes a way to provide for them.

***“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 Elimelek” (2:3).***

Ruth just “happened” to land in Boaz’s field (literally, “her chance chanced upon the field of Boaz). Actually, there are no “coincidences” with God. It was the Lord who was looking after His precious daughters, Naomi and Ruth, and carefully overseeing their ways.

*When we desire to walk with God, He is pleased to direct our steps. “The mind of man plans his ways; but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). The key is that we must desire the Lord’s direction. Living in the will of God is not so much a matter of “finding” His will, as it is maintaining a yielded heart to God and asking for his guidance. Don’t sit idly waiting for some special sign from God to point the way. As Ruth did, use your mind, your initiative, your hard work . . . all the while maintaining a heart that desires HIS best plan for your life. When we are surrendered to His lordship over our lives, He will lead us in steps that He desires us to take. Our “chance WILL chance upon the field” God has for us at that particular point in our journey.*

Boaz was a righteous man, as can be seen from his greeting to his reapers:

***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” (2:4).***

Boaz noticed Ruth gleaning in his field and asked his reapers who she was. He was informed that she was the Moabite woman who had returned to Bethlehem with Naomi, his relative.

### **Boaz blesses Ruth: 2:8-16**

Boaz came to Ruth, telling her to continue gleaning in his field throughout the remainder of the harvest season. He promised her protection and provision under his care. When she asked why she was being so favorably treated, he commented on her faithfulness to Naomi and her commitment to become part of Israel:

***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. 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” (2:11-12).***

Ruth’s reputation had spread all over the town (2:11 and 3:11). She was a woman of excellent character who had taken a big risk in leaving her familiar country to come to a people she did not know. Boaz rightly pointed out that although Ruth had come under *his* protection, it was “*the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings*” Ruth had actually found refuge.

God uses people to bless other people. Ruth found refuge in Boaz. Yet, it was the Lord, ultimately, Who was using Boaz to provide this place of refuge for Ruth. Perhaps God wants to use YOU as His means of blessing someone else in some unique way. Ask God IF He wants to use you as His “wings of refuge” for someone else. Then, keep your eyes open for that person who “just happens” to be gleaning in your field. You are most like God when you are exercising grace and compassion toward those in need.

Boaz further blessed Ruth by serving her the midday meal along with his reapers. Typically, gleaners would not be seated with reapers at such a meal, since reapers were actually working for the landowner. Yet, Ruth ate with the reapers and was served *by Boaz!*

***At 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. When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. 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” (2:14-16).***

### **Ruth reports to Naomi: 2:17-23**

At the end of this very eventful day, Ruth returned home and told Naomi what had happened. Naomi was delighted to learn that Ruth had spent the day in Boaz’s field, since he was “*one of their closest relatives*” (2:20). Naomi recognized the *kindness of God* in the events of that day. This was the first time in this story that Naomi suspected that God *might* be working in her favor.

There is much emphasis on KINDNESS in the book of Ruth. Naomi asked God to deal kindly with her daughters-in-law (1:8). Boaz spoke kindly to Ruth the gleaner (2:13). Naomi acknowledged God's kindness in leading Ruth to Boaz (2:20). Boaz praised Ruth for her dual acts of kindness, first toward Naomi, then toward him (3:10). Kindness is a fruit that God's Spirit wants to produce in you (Galatians 5:22). Ultimately, kindness is an attribute of God, demonstrated to us supremely in the coming of Jesus into our world as our Savior (Titus 3:4,5). Ask God to release more of His Spirit's kindness through you (to increase your K.Q. – your Kindness Quotient). It will make a huge difference in your interactions with other people. Who knows . . . God may even use your kindness to further His story in someone else's life.

Ruth went on to explain how Boaz had invited her to continue gleaning in his field until the end of harvest season. Naomi encouraged her to do this, since she would be safe under his care.

***“So 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” (2:23).***

The stage has been set for the blossoming of a love-relationship between Boaz and Ruth, the subject of the remaining two chapters.

**\*Addendum: “Between the lines” insight on Boaz . . .**

Why was Boaz moved to show such favor to an outsider like Ruth, a Moabite woman who, technically, had an unfavorable status in Israel? Why did he spontaneously show her *kindness and respect*?

Perhaps, because the story of *Boaz's mother* paralleled the story of Ruth. Boaz's mother was Rahab, the former prostitute from Jericho, who had become a believer in Yahweh, left her familiar people, and entered into the community of Israel when Jericho fell (Joshua chs.2&6). Rahab, had shown *kindness* to the spies, and asked for *kindness* in return (Joshua 2:12). Boaz's father, Salmon, returned her *kindness*, choosing to love and respect Rahab, in spite of her past and people's opinions of her. Boaz learned from *both* of his parents about the love of God for outsiders, and particularly about *kindness*. It was, therefore, most natural for Boaz to see Ruth through grace-filled lenses. Boaz was adding another chapter to a unique family story of grace and *kindness* toward outsiders.

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