

WOMEN'S SUMMER BOOST WEEK 3

1.1. Ruth

The story of Ruth starts with Naomi and her husband Elimelech moving out from Israel to Moab to bridge a famine. They have two sons, who both marry Moabite women. Both of these families remain childless. The family tree looks like this:

Elimelech & Naomi	
Mahlon & Ruth	Kiljon & Orpa
-	-

However, the story quickly turns sour as the men die early. When the famine is over in Israel, our family tree moving back to Israel, looks like this:

Naomi	
Ruth	(O)*
-	-

*Orpa is alive, but goes back to her Moabite family.

Though Naomi plays an important role, the book is named after Ruth, a woman who is praised and a role model for us today.

Though Naomi loves these women, she is aware of her own religion and her position now. In a patriarchal culture, the men inherited the land. The women joined the Beth-Ab (family clan centered around the patriarch) of the man in marriage. They left everything behind to now fall under the protection of the husband's household. Children ensured that she was cared for in her old age, a husband ensured there was property. Naomi is widowed and stripped off of her children, so she is the widow God is so passionately protective over.

But she rightfully understands she can not save Ruth, or give her a future. She urges her to go back to her people, with this reasoning:

Ruth 1:11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?"¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

What does she mean here? She knows that God had a system in place to protect women from starvation and poverty when they fell out of the Beth-Ab. The first step was to preserve the land the husband owned. To do this, levirate marriage was instilled. The kinsman-redeemer, the brother of the deceased man, had to marry the

widow. The first male born child would count as the child of the deceased brother, and be the heir to his property and carry on his name. That way, the woman was protected in a Beth-Ab again, and she was cared for in her old age. The patriarch would see to it that everyone who belonged to his Beth-Ab was safe.

Deuteronomy 25:5 If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. ⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

⁷ However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." ⁸ Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," ⁹ his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line."

For Ruth and Orpa this means that they could marry the brothers of Machlon and Kiljon, but there weren't any. Naomi herself couldn't marry anymore, since her age prevented her from being chosen. Marriage was for survival and preservation (children) much more than for romance. She understands that she can not expect her daughters in law to wait for the unlikely kinsman-redeemer in this absurd situation. So the most loving thing she can think of, is to send them back, and hope to find enough grace in Israel to be able to survive as an older widow.

On top of that, Naomi is carrying more than she can handle. Not only has she lost both of her sons and her husband, but she has also started believing that God himself had turned against her. In that case, what did she have left to offer her daughters-in-law?

However, Ruth is not having any of it. She has found God under the roof of Naomi. She knows that going back to her people is going back to their gods. She makes a radical choice, the most important one in the whole story. All her other choices flow forth from that choice. Are you ready? Fasten your seatbelt, this woman is about to drop a truth bomb:

Ruth 1:15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people **and her gods**. Go back with her."

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "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**. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, **if even death separates you and me.**" ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth has just been explained everything about kinsmen-redeemers: she knows with the facts laid out, she doesn't stand a chance. Her choice to place her trust in God as her kinsman-redeemer is a statement of faith. Her declaration "may God deal with me, be it ever so severely" if I do something that would separate us in the eternity that awaits us, shows that she puts her full trust in Him. People of the household can expect loving yet stern discipline from their parents, as parents walk them to what is best for them. They can expect provision. They can expect protection, even as adults, from the father of the tribe. She values being "His people" more than anything else. Literally *anything*.

Now she takes her first steps in a life with nothing but God and her mother-in-law. A life of extreme poverty and danger.

Ruth knows that they need food to survive, and she was the one taking the initiative to go and get food.

*Ruth 2:2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."
Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."*

She sets out to glean in the fields as the barley harvest is taking place, a right she has learned she has. Harvesters were commanded by God to harvest with the poor in mind:

Leviticus 23:22 "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God."

Back to Ruth's life of poverty and, well, **danger**. As we can see through the following passages: gleaning in the fields as a woman alone, was extremely dangerous:

*Ruth 2:8 So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. **I have told the men not to lay a hand on you.***

*Ruth 2:22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, **because in someone else's field you might be harmed.**"*

That leaves no room for misinterpretation.

Her first encounter with the land owner, shows her that the God under whose wings she sought refuge, looks with kindness upon her. Through Boaz, this amazing woman receives the first praise of many more to come:

Ruth 3:11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Now the ball gets rolling, and Naomi finds **hope**, applying the kinsman-redeemer principle to Boaz, who is a relative. But more than that: she is freed from her pain that she believes God has turned against her, and proclaims:

Ruth 2:20 "The Lord bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers."

Now Ruth will do one of the most courageous things she can do. She is going to the threshing floor basically proposing to Boaz. But not a regular proposing.

She means:

Marry me, I bring nothing in to the marriage.

Buy back the land my father-in-law sold, and oh, yes,

our first child will be the heir in the name of my ex-husband Machlon, your cousin.

And the way in which she is to ask, is by going at night to the threshing floor and laying down at his feet.

Ruth 3:1 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home^[a] for you, where you will be well provided for. ² Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." ⁵ "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered.

If he covers her with his mantle, he accepts responsibility. However, it is dark and man's territory there, so it is all but safe for a woman to be there at night. It is the ultimate test for Boaz to show integrity. It is the ultimate risk for Ruth. Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night to a strange situation, with someone sleeping at his feet:

Ruth 3:9 "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."

This is when the circle is complete. She has completely trusted God and done all she knew to do. Boaz isn't the first in line, but he seems eager to get things in order for this woman, whom he once again showers with praise:

Ruth 3:10 **"The Lord bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.**

Boaz is not the first in line to redeem Ruth. A bit of legal delay awaits them, but Naomi reassures Ruth:

Ruth 3:18 "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

The one who is first in line, is happy to pass; and so Boaz does what is required, just as happily.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David. We'll never know if she still saw him. But what a timeless and beautiful way for God to show approval of this couple to place them in this lineage right at the end of the book.

Word of encouragement:

Although Ruth is the heroine of the story, she really does not have much to bring to the table. No riches (they could not buy back the land themselves), no standing of virgin, which would have allowed a fresh start with just anyone, no natural part of God's people...

All she has, is a noble character, courage and mostly: all her trust and believing loyalty in God.

Everything else comes from Boaz, who is deeply moved by these things. He does have wealth, and a lot to bring into the marriage.

Our Redeemer is not looking for all the things we have. In fact, we only have what He gave to us. But He is still moved by our believing loyalty and trust, and our noble character that reveals our heart's choice with what we can.

He still rejoices over the things we have left behind to be His. He still praises those women who seek refuge under His wings, and step out boldly in His ways. He still desires to come through, not resting until the matter is settled. And against all expectations, He is still the God who enables us to bear fruit.

Prayer pause

What do you want to retain from this passage on Ruth?

What caught your attention to chew on more? Take time to do so.

Pray about what spoke to you.