*Ruth’s Acts Evidence a New Heart Formed*

IBT 010

*by God’s Special Grace in Covenant Adoption*

Ruth, the Moabitess, is a heroine of faith on the same level as Rahab. It is no wonder then that she also comes to be a part of the genealogical line leading to Israel’s greatest Kings, David and his greater son, Jesus Christ. Her faith, which was demonstrated in her acts of faith, was deep and persevering, thus showing that her faith was based on much more than sentimental attachment to her mother-in-law. Her acts showed a deep work in her heart by the God of salvation, the God who promised that those “shalt find him, if [they] seek him with all [their] heart and with all [their] soul.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Her background is important for understanding the significance of her actions. The Book of Ruth does not relate how long Elimelech, the father, and his wife Naomi were in Moab before their sons took wives, but it does tell us “they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.”[[2]](#footnote-2) We don’t know how long after the marriages that Elimelech died. We also don’t know how long Naomi remained in Moab after her two sons died, but it was apparently a period of time because Ruth 1:6 tells us that “she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.” Therefore, estimating that there would be some period of engagement for Naomi’s sons to marry, at least a year, and that there was some time after their deaths for Naomi to hear the famine was over and decide to leave Moab, no more than a year, we can estimate that Naomi’s sojourn in Moab was at least twelve years long. Assuming the typical marriage-eligible age of a woman of that time was 14 to 16 years, Ruth could have easily been in her mid-twenties when she and Naomi left Moab and returned to Israel.

From all appearances, Naomi and Elimelech had decided to settle down in Moab, allowing their sons to marry non-Israelite wives and Naomi deciding to return only under the direst of circumstances – the deaths of all the men in her family. Although the law of Moses had no specific law forbidding marriage to Moabites, there were other problems with such marriages. The Moabites had opposed the entrance of Israel into Canaan after they were delivered from Egypt, and God cursed them.

An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: . . . Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Gary North comments on Elimelech’s decisions and his sons’ acts.

To go to Moab for deliverance meant trusting in the gods of Moab. God told the Israelites not to seek the Moabites’ peace and prosperity. Yet here was a family leaving Israel for residence in Moab in search of prosperity. This family had no faith in God.

The father died. The two sons stayed for 10 years. They married Moabite women. Then they both died intestate. They never thought to return home. They looked to their future in Moab as the way to prosperity. Their inheritance would be in Moab. They were wrong.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In other words, Elimelech and Naomi were not the most faithful, obedient Israelites one could find. Naomi’s urging that her daughters-in-law remain in the idolatrous country of Moab indicates that she had not attempted to convert them to the true faith, making Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi all the more remarkable.

Analyzing Ruth’s first act of faith, the decision to remain with Naomi stating “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God,”[[5]](#footnote-5) indicates she did not follow Naomi out of any personal, fleshly advantage. Naomi herself attempted to dissuade her, explaining how unlikely it was that Ruth could find any type of advantageous marriage prospects in Israel. Ruth understood her covenant position better than the Israelite, Naomi.

[Naomi] regarded their [Ruth and Orpah’s] covenants with God as broken with the death of her sons. . . . Ruth understood the marriage covenant. She had been adopted by marriage into the household of a covenant-keeper. Her sister-in-law did not understand this. Her sister-in-law was as theologically ignorant as her mother-in-law was.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The physical circumstances did not argue in favor of Ruth’s decision.[[7]](#footnote-7) Ruth was accompanying a widow, a person of that day with the least possibility of building up any type of prosperity. Ruth being in her mid-twenties was not at the ideal age for finding a husband. Ruth would also be entering Israel as a foreigner of a cursed, idolatrous nation, another strike against her. Even Naomi was no encouragement in the faith.

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?[[8]](#footnote-8)

Naomi

had no faith in the future because she was too old to have children. She had told the two women, “Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband” (Ruth 1:12a). She had failed to understand the central fact of the covenant after the Fall of man: redemption by adoption. Ruth had been redeemed by adoption – by God’s special grace and by her marriage vow. . . . We are not told how Ruth learned this – surely not from her husband or mother-in-law.[[9]](#footnote-9)

See Ruth's resolution, and her good affection to Naomi. Orpah was loth to part from her; yet she did not love her well enough to leave Moab for her sake. Thus, many have a value and affection for Christ, yet come short of salvation by him, because they will not forsake other things for him. They love him, yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better. Ruth is an example of the grace of God, inclining the soul to choose the better part.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Three strikes were against Ruth – her age, her attachment to a widow, and her foreign status as a citizen of a cursed, idolatrous nation. Against all odds for a favorable outcome, she followed Naomi, indicating that her attachment was based on something much deeper than a personal, emotional sentiment for another person. In spite of Elimelech’s and Naomi’s apparent lack of evangelistic fervor, Ruth was apparently a recipient of the special grace of God, having somehow imbibed of the true faith, and she was willing to leave all earthly advantages for the sake of the true God. We can say that she was like the heroes of the Old Testament: “[I]f they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Her acts of faith do not end there, however. We can even posit the proposition that her acts of faith were the means of restoring the faithless Naomi back to the true faith. Ruth understood the law of Moses. It was she who initiated the idea of gleaning.

And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

KJV, Ruth 2:2. She had apparently studied the Mosaic law of newly adopted faith. Gleaning was for the poor, like a widow and her family, and the stranger, like Ruth. See Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

When Boaz offered her special consideration and kindness, Ruth bowed down and asked, “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”[[12]](#footnote-12) His answer shows that her conversion was well known to the Israelites of that region.

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

KJV, Ruth 2:11-12. Leaving all for the sake of the true God, as Christ instructed His disciples was the condition of following Him,[[13]](#footnote-13) should have been something very familiar to the Jews of Jesus’ time.

Her gleaning was not merely an act of desperation in seeking sustenance. As a result of her faith, she followed the law of God, and a concomitant result of that obedience was her stumbling on a kinsman-redeemer of her mother-in-law. She did not learn of Boaz’s identity until she returned to Naomi with the product of her gleaning.

And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Ruth was not the only one who faithfully followed God’s law. Boaz sought to fulfill the role of the kinsman-redeemer,[[15]](#footnote-15) even though he was under no duty to do so. Another man was a closer relative. But Ruth sought him out following Naomi’s instruction, and she let Boaz know she was available for marriage. This was an honorable act, not an act of seduction.

And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Ruth could have found another man; she was likely good looking if Boaz thought she could have found a young man if she had wanted. She wasn’t seeking riches or handsome young men. She was seeking to honor the name of her deceased husband and her mother-in-law’s deceased husband.

Why did this make her virtuous? Because she was acting on behalf of her late husband. She was honoring his name. She was subordinating her sexual interest for the sake of her late husband’s name in Israel. This was a covenantally sacrificial decision.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The levirate law, upon which the kinsman-redeemer doctrine was based, indicated the importance of keeping a male’s name honored and alive for future generations. Ruth’s decision to follow it was based on her loyalty to the dead and her faith in the future.[[18]](#footnote-18) Ruth could have counted on such a blessing only if she believed her adoption into a covenant family like Naomi’s would entitle her to the blessings of Abraham. Under the New Covenant, we who believe are adopted into that family and experience those blessings. KJV, Galatians 3:14.

Therefore, the Book of Ruth has much to teach us Gentiles, who believe in Christ. For in believing in Christ, we also have been adopted into the family of Abraham and can experience the blessings promised to him and his seed.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.[[19]](#footnote-19)

This adoption means we are family. Levirate marriage no longer applies because the family name no longer matters. The only name that matters is the name of Jesus Christ. And we are not adopted by marriage but by faith.

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Ruth’s new heart was demonstrated in her sacrificial obedience to God, and in that obedience, she had no idea of the full consequences her acts of faith would have on others, including future generations of believers.[[21]](#footnote-21) I can sum up the meaning of the Book of Ruth no better than the following.

The Book of Ruth presents the story of redemption. A Moabite woman was redeemed through covenantal adoption into a family of marginal covenant-keepers at best. Her mother-in-law was redeemed by the example of her daughter-in-law. An older man was elevated from obscurity to permanent fame by means of an act of grace that normally would have left him in obscurity.

It is a book about the importance of the family covenant in Mosaic Israel – an importance that exceeded both wealth and biological heirship. It is a book about an obscure Mosaic law that twice was central to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is a book about grace and self-sacrifice for the sake of the dead. It is a book about loyalty.

The Book of Ruth should remind us that it is better to make our decisions in terms of God’s covenant than in terms of wealth. It is best to place our wealth at the service of the kingdom of God. We should place our poverty there, too.

1. KJV, Deuteronomy 4:29. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. KJV, Ruth 1:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. KJV, Deuteronomy 23:3,6. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Point Five Press: Dallas, GA, 2012), p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. KJV, Ruth 1:16. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. North, ibid, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Decision is too weak a word to describe Ruth’s resolve. “There was first of all a full imprecation, and then an additional 'bittock,' to lend intensity to the asseveration. ‘But death only shall sever between me and thee!’ Ruth's language is broken. Two formulas of imprecation are flung together. One, if complete, would have been to this effect: ‘So may Yahveh do to me, and so may he add to do, if (אִם) aught but death sever between me and thee!’ The other, if complete, would have run thus: ‘I swear by Yahveh “that” (כִּי) death, death only, shall part thee and me. In the original the word death has the article, death emphatically. It is as if she had said death, the great divider. The full idea is in substance death alone. This divider alone, says Ruth, ‘shall sever between me and thee;’ literally, ‘between me and between thee,’ a Hebrew idiom, repeating for emphasis' sake the two-sided relationship, but taking the repetition in reverse order, between me (and thee) and between thee (and me).” The Pulpit Commentary, Commentary on Ruth 1:17, Bible Hub, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/ruth/1.htm, accessed Feb. 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. KJV, Ruth 1:20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. North, ibid, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Matthew Henry’s* *Concise Commentary*, Commentary on Ruth 1:15-18, Christ Notes, http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?com=mhc&b=8&c=1, accessed Feb. 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. KJV, Hebrews 11:15-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. KJV, Ruth 2:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. KJV, Matthew 10:37-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. KJV, Ruth 2:19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. KJV, Deuteronomy 25:5. Apparently, over time the Israelites had extended the law to apply it to relatives further down the line of relationship, if the eldest brother was not alive to perform the duty of the law. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. KJV, Ruth 3:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. North, ibid, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. KJV, Genesis 12:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. KJV, Galatians 4:3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. KJV, Galatians 3:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. “But there is also a Messianic trait in the fact that Ruth, a heathen woman, of a nation so hostile to the Israelites as that of Moab was, should have been thought worthy to be made the tribe-mother of the great and pious king David, on account of her faithful love to the people of Israel, and her entire confidence in Jehovah, the God of Israel. As Judah begat Perez from Tamar and Canaanitish woman (Genesis 38), and as Rahab was adopted into the congregation of Israel (Joshua 6:25), and according to ancient tradition was married to Salmon (Matthew 1:5), so the Moabitess Ruth was taken by Boaz as his wife, and incorporated in the family of Judah, from which Christ was to spring according to the flesh (see Matthew 1:3, Matthew 1:5, where these three women are distinctly mentioned by name in the genealogy of Jesus).” Keil & Delitzsch, Old Testament Commentary, Ruth 1, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/kad/ruth/1.htm, accessed Feb. 6, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)