

Why Ruth?

Have you ever wondered why the book of **Ruth** is even in the Bible? I mean, it tells a nice little story about a woman who had been through some hard times but finally meets the man of her dreams and everything works out in the end. But is this just a little love story? I don't think God is interested in entertaining us with love stories.

Some suggest the story is simply a means of introducing the lineage of David. After all, the last 10 verses are all about the son Ruth and Boaz had and the lineage to David, the king. But why would God tell us the story about Ruth to do this? After all, He included the first nine chapters of **I Chronicles** chalk full of genealogical information, including David's.

So, why **Ruth**? I don't believe the story of **Ruth** was included to get us to the last few verses of genealogy. Rather, I believe the last few verses of genealogy were given to explain the purpose of **Ruth**.

Back up and think about this story.

Ruth 1:1 says this story happened in the days of the judges. We know about those days. They were turbulent days for Israel. There was no king and everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. Repeatedly, the Jews turned from God and He sent judgment upon them. Repeatedly, they repented, turned back to God and He saved them. In the midst of all this there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem named Elimelech did what was right in his own eyes. Instead of depending on God and turning to Him, he abandoned the home of his fathers and sought refuge in Moab. It seems that judgment came upon them for this bad decision. Elimelech died.

To add insult to injury, Naomi did not return to Israel so her sons could marry Israelites. She stayed in Moab and allowed them to marry pagan wives, Moabitesses. **Deuteronomy 23:2-4** said this was practically a death knell for Elimelech's name and family. No one born of a forbidden union and no Moabite was allowed to be part of the assembly of the Lord, even up to the tenth generation. What was Naomi thinking? She was not a great spiritual example for anyone. She was denying the God who could save her family. And they reaped the fruit of that sowing.

Naomi had been left with her two sons. Now that they had married, they too died and left her with two daughters-in-law and no means of support. She finally got the message. Moab was no place for an Israelite. She was going back home. Perhaps God would care for her then. After all, she had heard that God was relenting in His judgment against Israel. The famine had lifted. Orpah was rather easily persuaded to turn back to her own homeland. Ruth, however, was not.

We have all heard Ruth's commitment to Naomi: "Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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 will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you" (**Ruth 1:16-17**, ESV). And she kept that commitment.

Not only did Ruth keep her commitment and follow her mother-in-law back into the land of Israel, but then she submitted to the Law of God. First, she made her commitment in the name of the Lord, calling Him as witness against her, not the Moabite gods. Then, when she came to Israel, she provided for her and her mother-in-law by gleaning in the field as God's law indicated. Finally, she pursued her husband according to the law of the kinsman redeemer. She had turned her life completely over to God.

While **Ruth 1:16-17** is the passage we've all heard, the key passage of the book is actually **Ruth 2:12**: "The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (ESV). This is the central key. Despite being a Moabitess, what had Ruth done? She had done the exact opposite of Elimelech and Naomi. Instead of abandoning God and seeking refuge in Moab, she abandoned Moab and sought refuge in Jehovah God. And God would reward even her, a Moabitess.

At a time when Jews were repeatedly turning from God, this Moabite woman sought God. In a family that had turned its back on God and reaped the tragic results, she decided to learn from the judgment and surrender to God. God would reward her. And reward her He did. A woman the Law had said could not have a descendent in the assembly of the Lord for 10 generations had a descendent on the throne of Israel in just 3 generations. God did indeed fully reward her.

Considering this book includes the genealogy of David, we know it was written during the time of the kings. It was not inspired as an entertaining love story. Neither was it given to introduce David's genealogy. It was written to remind the Israelites who had come out of the period of the judges and into the time of the kings that their real leader was God. No matter who their king was, their ruler was God. As **Psalms 118:8-9** says, "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes."

Elimelech, an Israelite, took refuge in Moab, he died and so did his sons. Ruth, a Moabitess, took refuge in the Lord and her grandson became king. If a Moabitess could receive such blessing by taking refuge in God, how much more would the Israelites if they followed in her footsteps.

Why **Ruth**?

Because we must learn to take refuge in the Lord. It doesn't matter where we've been, who our parents were, what we did in the past. When we take refuge in the Lord, He will give us our full reward.

Where are you taking refuge?

--Edwin L. Crozier