

• *The story of Ruth whose son was the grandfather of King David*

The Book of Ruth tells the story of a woman, whose husband and sons died after they had all emigrated to Moab. Ruth her daughter-in-law was intensely loyal to her and adopted Naomi's country and faith as her own ¹. The two women left Moab and went to Bethlehem in Judah, arriving at the time of the barley harvest ². As a poor woman, Ruth was allowed to collect the scraps from the harvest. In the course of doing so she was noticed by Boaz who owned the fields ³. He was kind to her, knowing of her devotion to her mother-in-law ⁴. Naomi knew him as a kinsman and urged Ruth to remain close to his workers during the harvest time ⁵. At Naomi's suggestion, Ruth asked Boaz to be her redeemer-husband. He was willing but told her that there was a nearer kinsman who had to be consulted ⁶. Boaz settled the matter with the nearer kinsman and publicly took Ruth as his wife ⁷. Ruth soon gave birth to a son, an heir for Naomi ⁸ and (as it turned out) the grandfather of King David ⁹. The book closes with the genealogy of David, traced through Obed the son of Boaz and Ruth ¹⁰.

¹ 1:1-18
² 1:19-22
³ 2:1-7
⁴ 2:8-16
⁵ 2:17-23
⁶ 3:1-18
⁷ 4:1-12
⁸ 4:13-17a
⁹ 4:17b
¹⁰ 4:18-22

• *A family story*

There must have been many family-stories like this one, passed down from father to son. The first people who told the story could never have dreamed that millions of people would be reading it thousands of years later, in hundreds of different languages.

• *Explains how David came to be descended from a Moabitess*

How did it come to have a place in our Bibles? The story must have been written down in the days of David (as 4:17-22 shows) but before the days of Solomon (who would also have been mentioned if the book were that late). It would have been valued because of its connection with David. It explained how he came to be descended from a Moabitess.

• *Shows how God has purposes for gentiles*

Yet in the providence of God it has other purposes. It shows how God has purposes of incorporating gentiles into His people, and did so even in the family of David himself.

• *Shows how redemption works and a redeemer's qualifications*

It shows us too how redemption works. A redeemer has to have at least three qualifications.

- (i) He must have the power to redeem.
- (ii) He must have the legal right to redeem.
- (iii) He must have the desire to redeem. Boaz illustrates the three points perfectly. No wonder the Christian sees Jesus on every page of the Book of Ruth. It constantly reminds him of One who had the power to redeem, who stepped into our humanity and became a Kinsman-Redeemer, and who redeems us because He wants to redeem us. One can see how it would come to be attached to Judges. After the terrible stories of Judges 17-21, the Book of Ruth when added to Judges gives Judges-Ruth a happy ending!

So as we open the pages of the Book of Ruth, we meet a woman who needed a redeemer.

1. God has mysterious purposes even in the greatest of troubles

1. God has mysterious purposes even in the greatest of troubles. As we read the early pages of the book, we are struck by the way in which everyone is suffering and facing adversity. It is set in the days of chaos, when the judges ruled ¹. Added to the chaotic ways of the nation is a time of famine, which brought greater distress ². Elimelech took his family elsewhere to escape the famine ³, but the emigration did not work out well. Elimelech died ⁴. Their two sons died ⁵. Nothing seemed to work well for Naomi.

¹ 1:1
² 1:1
³ 1:2
⁴ 1:3
⁵ 1:4

• *Nothing that they the family did brought the relief they sought*

• *But God loves to overrule distressing situations according to His purposes*

2. So we see how God slowly began to work

• *Ruth came to faith in the God of Israel*

• *Ruth determined to follow Yahweh and live in Israel with Naomi*

• *Mistake acknowledged*

• *Arrival at harvest time*

Was there anything wrong in their going to Moab? Well, it is hard to see anything sinful in trying to get food when a country is in famine. And yet nothing that the family did brought them the relief they sought. Marrying Moabite girls was definitely not a good idea; they would have no faith in the God of Israel. Orpah certainly worshipped the gods of Moab ¹. It seems that the family ruined their life – and three of them lost their lives – in their attempt to make things easier for themselves.

And yet the rest of the story will make it clear that God has purposes in the greatest of tragedies. He is even able to make our mistakes turn around for good. I doubt whether Elimelech did the right thing in going to Moab, and yet as a result of all that happened, God's king, David turned out to be part-gentile in ancestry. His great-grandmother was a Moabitess. God loves to overrule in distressing situations, and 'work all things together for good' according to His purpose to bring a Saviour to the world.

2. So we see how God slowly began to work. The time came when the end of all of Naomi's troubles was near at hand. The famine ended! Naomi got to hear about it ¹. Somehow it is possible for her to go back. Troublesome days may last a long time, but when God decides to bring them to an end, events begin to move fast!

Some good came out of what happened. Ruth came to faith in the God of Israel. A Moabitess was converted to faith in Yahweh, and insistently told Naomi 'Your God will be my God'. God can bring wonderful things even out of tragedies.

Naomi started to go home. Her daughters-in-law came part way ¹ but Naomi wanted to release them and let them stay in Moab ². There was no point in their coming with her ³. Orpah sees the sense in what Naomi says and leaves ⁴. But Ruth has come to faith in Yahweh. She is determined to have Yahweh as her God, Israel as her home, Naomi as her closest friend ⁵.

They arrive in Bethlehem ¹. Naomi confesses (if we may understand verse 21 in this way) that their going to Moab was a mistake. She was 'full' at the time of their going, but the family panicked and left Israel prematurely. But we can already feel that God is at work, and that things are going to work out well. The family left in a famine, and disaster followed. Now a smaller family arrives at harvest time ², and we can feel that God is about to reverse everything that had happened. He can step in, in the midst of tragedies and work wonders, for those who are in His purpose. He is able to work all things together for good.

¹ see 1:15

¹ 1:6

¹ 1:7

² 1:8

³ 1:9-13

⁴ 1:14

⁵ 1:15-18

¹ 1:19-22

² 1:22



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