

God's Everlasting Covenant

presents

Let's look at a picture of someone who understood what it meant to bless – barekh.

The Story of Ruth

In summary, Ruth is the story of a gentile woman who left her country, family, customs and gods to bless a Jewish woman, Naomi. Naomi was her mother-in-law. Naomi and her husband Elimelech had years before left their home in Bethlehem with their two sons, Mahlon & Kilion, because of a famine in Judah. They went to Moab. Mahlon and Kilion married two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Now, it is important to understand that the Jews hated the Moabites and they were forbidden to intermarry with them. They were a despicable people – and their practices were detested by the Lord because they sacrificed their children in the fire on the altar to their god, Chemosh. It was not a good thing that this family went there. But they did. And they experienced great heartache for doing so. In time, Naomi's husband and her two sons died. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, and urges her two daughters-in-law to go back to their own people and find new husbands. Orpah returns, but Ruth clings to this bereft and bitter Jewish woman. Though Ruth is in pain herself because she has lost her own husband, she commits herself to Naomi and utters her selfless oath. Her timeless words have become the foundation for thousands of couples' wedding vows: "Where you go, I will go, where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal ever so severely with me, if anything but death separates you and me." Naomi finally sees Ruth means what she says, and they return to Bethlehem together. Old friends are happy to see Naomi, but she has changed her name to *Mara*, which means *bitter* – for, she says, "The Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." Ruth decides she wants to take care of mother-in-law and go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain that the reapers leave behind so that Naomi will have food to eat. She is sent to the fields of Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's late husband. Ruth receives favor from Boaz. She has caught his attention because of her humility and desire to bless her mother-in-law. You can bet that the Moabite was the 'talk of the town.' But because of her commitment to Naomi, she catches the eye of Boaz. He marries her, and the Bible tells us that the Jewish people of Bethlehem blessed their union. Ruth & Boaz have a son, Obed. It is a really great story and we unfortunately, don't have time to study all the cultural implications – but suffice it to say that this child blessed Naomi's life so much that the Jewish women said that her daughter-in-law, Ruth, was better to Naomi than having seven sons! This was quite a compliment. In other words, it was Ruth who brought life back into this woman, and turned her life from bitter to one of rich, unfathomable blessing. This child was the grandfather of King David, in the tribe of Judah, and the line of the Lord, Jesus, the Messiah of the Jewish people.

Now, let's look at the prophetic meaning of the story.

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“Your People Will Be My People”

Wherever I have traveled the past few years, I have found the Holy Spirit captivating believers with Ruth and her magnificent message. From a Hebraic perspective, the characters in this book portray Israel and the Church in the last days and their prophetic relationship of reciprocal kneeling to enrich the other.

As the story begins, Naomi (meaning in Hebrew “Pleasant”) is married to Elimelech (“My God is King”). Naomi is a picture of the Jewish people married to God. The names of their two Sons, Mahlon (“Sickly”) and Chilion (“Wasting Away”) reflect the condition of the Jewish nation at the time.

Famine forces Elimelech and his family to leave their home in Bethlehem (“House of Bread”) for a better life outside of Israel. Mahlon and Chilion get married, but not for long—they die after just a few years. Elimelech also dies, as if the kingship of God dies in the life of a pleasant people. Naomi is left alone except for her Gentile daughters-in-law, Orpah (“Back of Neck”) and Ruth (“Clinging One” or “Friend”).

When the famine in Israel ends Naomi decides to go home. She urges Orpah and Ruth to stay behind, find new husbands and start new lives. Orpah turns and goes back. But Ruth refuses. The “Clinging One” declares undying loyalty to Naomi: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. . . . May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.” RUTH 1:16—17

Life has been so hard for Naomi and her trials so severe that she changes her name to Mara (“Bitter”). Nonetheless — and this is where the story overflows with revived prophetic unction — Ruth clings. This Gentile who believes in the God of Israel will not let go of the Jewish people, no matter how embittered they seem. Ruth will not be dissuaded; something tells her it is through and with this people that blessing will be hers.

The Redeemer Comes

Naomi takes Ruth back home to Bethlehem (“House of Bread”) where they find physical and spiritual nourishment. Aging Naomi, for whom prolonged manual labor may have proved too strenuous, teaches the one she now calls her daughter (a picture of the Christian church) to glean leftover grain from the harvest. Ruth literally kneels in the field to enrich her mother-in-law, but thereby nourishes herself as well. Then unexpected blessing unfolds.

Because of her love and commitment to Naomi, Ruth catches the admiring eye of a man named Boaz (“Strength Is in Him”). Naomi is delighted. Boaz (a prophetic depiction of Messiah) is her near kinsman-redeemer, having been related to Elimelech. With Boaz on the scene, the hope of redemption comes into view—but only if the two women (symbolizing Christian and Jew) maintain this reciprocal relationship of kneeling to enrich the other.

Naomi details step-by-step the protocol of redemption that Ruth must follow. Ruth submits to her spiritual mother and so captures Boaz’s heart. “Strength Is in Him” quickly claims her as his bride. The Jews gleefully bless their union: “May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel” (Ruth 4:11).

Their blessing comes to pass: Boaz and Ruth have a baby named Obed (“Servant”). Little Obed so thrills and fulfills Naomi’s heart that she sheds her bitterness and thus the name Mara. Through Ruth she is revived. And through Naomi, Ruth gains

standing forever as a lover of God and mother in Israel, in the direct genealogy of Yeshua, God's Servant.

The Redeemer Returns

Ruth, clinging to Naomi, found favor with her kinsman-redeemer just as Christians clinging to Israel will captivate the heart of their Kinsman-Redeemer today. And through Ruth's friendship, Naomi's nature changed from bitter to pleasant, just as genuine Christian friendship with Israel will transform Jewish hearts.

Conclusion: Ruth is a prophetic picture of the relationship God desires the Gentile Church to have with the Jewish people. Notice that both Ruth and Orpah started out on the journey with Naomi to return to Bethlehem. But Naomi was bitter, and when she insisted that her daughters-in-law return to their own people and land, they both wept and no doubt declared their love for her. And yet, Orpah turned her back and went back to her gentile ways. But Ruth clung to her. And when Naomi saw she could not change Ruth's mind, she relented. Let me quote again from Sandra Teplinsky: *"The story of Ruth illustrates spectacularly how the Church today is called to respond to this unconditional covenant and its unchanging truth of being blessed by blessing Israel."*

Today, many Christians declare their love and support for Israel. In the very near future, it is going to become increasingly unpopular to stand with Israel. Many in the church will, along with the nations of the world, go against Israel with regard to dividing the Land in order for the Palestinians to have their own state. They will say, "Give Jerusalem for their capital!" They will be like Orpah. They will go back to their people and their gods. Many in the church today believe in a Greek-like, western Jesus who is not the Yeshua of the Scriptures, the Jewish Messiah, who is returning to save His people, Israel. God is looking for a company of Ruths who will cling to Israel and to the Jewish people, even when they are bitter...even when they try to push away...Ruth still clung to Naomi. Will we still cling to Israel, even if it will cost us everything? Will we say, "Your people will be my people. What you suffer, I will suffer. What you lose, I will lose. I won't let go of you, no matter what!" Will we be like the Ten Boom family in Holland who risked their lives to help Jews escape the Nazi's? All of the Ten Boom family died in concentration camps, except for Corrie, who lived to tell her story. Are we ready to be like Oskar Schindler who gave up everything and then eventually died a pauper without country or friend in order to save 1100 Jews?

O, that our God would raise up a company of Ruths to bless the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. O that we would be like Ruth and cling to Israel, even when she is bitter. Then our hearts will become one with the Blessor's heart...we, ourselves will become the blessing of Genesis 12:3 – "those who bless Abraham & his descendants". And we will receive the promised blessing in return – a blessing that comes straight from our Redeemer Yeshua, whose heart is enraptured with us because of our love for His beloved people. Our prayer is that you will become a Ruth – we hope it will become your prayer as well.