

## ***For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples Boaz and Ruth: Firm Foundations***

Lesson #7 for August 18, 2007

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 23:3; Ruth 1-4; Matthew 1:4-6.

1. Palestine is a land prone to famines and droughts. When it became very difficult for Elimelech to support his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, he looked across the valley and decided it would be easier to survive in Moab. I am sure that Elimelech had no idea when he moved to Moab that neither he nor either of his sons would return safely back home. While we are not sure of the ages of his two sons, it is clear that they married while in Moab. Some have suggested that Elimelech and his sons may have developed tuberculosis; but whatever the case, all three of them died in Moab. It was only a few miles from Moab back to their home in Bethlehem. Why do you think Elimelech and Naomi did not take their sons back home sooner?
2. How long do you suppose they lived in Moab? After her two sons died, why do you suppose Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem? Did she become very concerned about what would happen to her in her old age? If Orpah and Ruth had remarried Moabites, what would have happened to Naomi?
3. We do not know what family dynamics played themselves out between these three widows. Were Ruth and Orpah familiar with Israelite culture and religion? How much did they know about Israel's God? **Were they attracted by the Israelite religion or were they attracted by Naomi?** Having been married to Naomi's sons, did they think they would have a better chance sticking with her than they would going back to their parent's home after having been married and widowed?
4. What kind of "social security" system was in place in Naomi's day? Do you think Elimelech had "sold" the family property in Bethlehem? Did Naomi recognize that the time of Jubilee was approaching, and did she hope to reclaim some of the property that belonged to her family?
5. **Originally, it was God's intention that the children of Israel would carry the gospel to all of these surrounding nations. Is this a case where the nation failed but Naomi succeeded?** If so, do you think there were others who did as Naomi did? Would you have recommended it?
6. What do you think led Ruth to make that statement in Ruth 1:16,17 that we sing at weddings? For whatever reason, Ruth seemed to identify with Naomi and with Naomi's country, family, and God.
7. Read Ruth 1:8,15,20,21. What can we learn about Naomi from these texts? Did Naomi believe that God had intentionally treated her like that? Could you be a good evangelist with that kind of attitude? **What was attractive to Ruth and to Orpah about Naomi, her religion, and her culture?** Did Naomi treat them like people instead of property as women were often treated in those days?
8. Is your church an effective witness for God? What about you as an individual? Do your life and your actions speak well of God? Are others attracted to your God?
9. What do we know about Ruth's character? It is clear right through the book that she

was a dedicated daughter-in-law and diligent worker. She was very respectful of her mother-in-law, and certainly, she was not afraid of work.

10. Read Deuteronomy 23:3. Was this verse written in response to the unkind treatment that the Israelites received at the hands of the Moabites and Ammonites? Ruth was a descendent of Lot and his older daughter. They should have been kind to their “cousins,” the Israelites. But, how do we explain the harsh words in Deuteronomy 23:3? Was that a mistake on God’s part or on Moses’ part to speak so harshly? When Ruth’s great grandson became King David, did any of the priests or people in Israel raise any questions about his heritage? David himself escaped at one time to the territory of Moab. (1 Samuel 22:3,4) Later, he fought against them and killed many of them. Is that any way to treat one’s relatives?
11. It would take one long day or perhaps two shorter days to walk from Moab to Bethlehem. What do you think happened to Naomi and her daughter-in-law when they arrived back “home” in Bethlehem? Did the community recognize that any property belonged to them?
12. We turn now to the other person in this story—Boaz. What do we know about Boaz? Who were his mother and his father? (Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:5-6) How would your life be impacted if you were the son of a former Canaanite prostitute? We do not know if Rahab was a cult priestess-prostitute or exactly what her position was. Why do you think that one of the heads of the families of the tribe of Judah married Rahab? What do we know about her attitudes toward God, toward the Jewish people, and toward their religion? (Joshua 2:8-13) **Had Boaz had any problems finding a wife from among the Jewish people because of that background?**
13. Given his background, was it easier for Boaz to be attracted to a foreign woman? He seemed to be very concerned about the poor, and he showed no discrimination against Ruth because of her foreign heritage.
14. Was Boaz truly attracted to Ruth because she was young and good-looking? Did he see other qualities in her that made her seem attractive as a wife? Was this “mixed” family—that would soon be the dynastic rulers of the country—set up intentionally by God as a good example of what others should have been doing?
15. Review what we know about Boaz: 1) He was very kind to Ruth when she went to glean in his fields, making sure that she took home plenty of grain. 2) In contrast to the bad times in the area and some very unsavory characters who liked to take advantage of single women, Boaz made special provisions for protecting Ruth. 3) He obviously provided food and water for her while she was in his fields. 4) He gave her additional encouragement of a spiritual nature. (See *Adult Teacher’s Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* page 82)
16. Where did the custom come from that widows should be married and cared for by the nearest male relative and provided with a heritage as well as financial support? Why would such a custom be necessary? Was that their “social security” system?
17. Why do you think Naomi instructed Ruth as she did? Was Ruth intentionally proposing to Boaz? Boaz was apparently a fairly wealthy landowner. Were other young women trying to get his attention?
18. We are familiar with the story of Ruth going to the threshing place, waiting for Boaz to lie down and go to sleep, and then quietly slipping in and lifting the covers and lying down at his feet. Did Ruth, despite her Moabite background, feel that she had

a right to the attention of Boaz? Compare the experience of Tamar in Genesis 38:13-19.

19. As the story unfolded, Boaz worked immediately to secure this young foreigner as his wife. Boaz carefully went through the legal proceedings to clear the way to marry Ruth. He was willing to pay whatever was required to secure the property of Elimelech and thus, become the rightful heir.
20. Our *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* discusses at some length the fact that Boaz is referred to as a "kinsman-redeemer." Do you think that the author of this book—or even Boaz himself as he sought to arrange to marry Ruth—had any idea that he was foreshadowing Jesus and the gospel? What do you see in this story that reminds you of the gospel and God's gracious provisions to save all of us?
21. What is implied by the name "kinsman-redeemer"? How does that fit in with your understanding of the plan of salvation? Does God "buy us back"? What does He pay for us? To whom does He pay it? Does God enter into a "business transaction" with the devil in order to get us back?
22. What risks did Boaz take in marrying this beautiful young woman from Moab? According to the tradition, the eldest son born into this union would be considered the son of Mahlon, Ruth's first husband. If no further children were born to the union, then the property of Boaz would by law go to that son in the name of Mahlon. Do you think Boaz worried about that? Do we know if Boaz and Ruth had any additional children?
23. Surely, this is a most improbable story. To suggest before the events actually took place that Boaz would end up being an ancestor of Christ and would marry a pagan widow from Moab would seem preposterous. But it happened. **Do you think God arranged for the events of this story? Does God do things in our lives today which seem like a disaster at the time but which may lead to a wonderful result in the end?**

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