

Ruth

I am a foreigner and a widow, which means no standing, no hope, no future. But I have been redeemed along with the property of my late husband and father-in-law. My name is Ruth.

I was born in Moab and met a young Israelite named Mahlon. Mahlon was not only a handsome young man but had a fascinating religion. His mother, Naomi, had come with him and her other son, Kilion, along with her husband, Elimelech, to escape the famine in Israel. Kilian married Orpah. Mahlon married me.

Naomi told us about the Creator who chose Abraham to father a nation of priests to spread his Law to all nations. I had always thought of religion as something disgusting to be endured. Moab's origin was from the incest of Abraham's nephew, Lot, with his daughters and our religion involved sacrificing infants in the fire to Chemosh. I was actually glad that Mahlon and I had no children. But then he died, and his brother died. Their father was already dead.

Naomi prepared to return to Israel and told us to go to our parents and find new husbands. Orpah obeyed but I could not. I was loyal to Naomi but also drawn to her God. I told her, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." I did not know how it would turn out but took my cues from the faith of my mother-in-law.

The customs of Israel had some similarities and some confusing differences from what I had known growing up. The poor were generally allowed to glean the remnants of crops after the reapers had passed through so Naomi and I lived on gleanings for a while. But when Boaz, the owner of the field, first talked to me after returning from a journey to Bethlehem, as I believe you have a saying, "the plot thickened!"

It turns out he was a relative of my late father-in-law. Therefore, he had a legal obligation to be concerned about us. But I detected something more. He told me to glean only from his fields and he gave orders that I be protected. And there seemed to be far more left behind than the expected gleanings.

When Naomi found out who the owner was, she told me he was our "kinsman-redeemer." I didn't know what that meant nor the implications. Naomi clearly had a plan, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?" She instructed me to show up in the place Boaz was sleeping, lie at his feet, and be there when he awoke.

I assumed this was some Israelite custom and it played out as Naomi envisioned. Boaz asked, "Who are you?" and I said "I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." He then publicly bargained with his only rival for the exclusive right to redeem my late husband's and late father-in-law's properties and marry me.

I didn't know at the time that Boaz's mother was a Canaanite. The LORD God of Abraham was indeed the God of the nations! When Boaz and I had a son, we named him Obed. Naomi loved him as her own. And we knew that there was something special in the future for this child.

Blessed be the LORD God of Abraham. I praise him for his grace and mercy, shown to me, to Naomi and to Obed.