



Ruth was not a Hebrew. She was a Moabite who married an Israelite. Ruth's husband's family had left Judah during a famine and traveled to Moab where Ruth resided, apparently met and married her husband, Mahlon. His brother Chilion married Orpah another local Moabite. In a nation that prided itself on being the chosen ones of God, both sons had married outside the Israelite faith. It is left to speculation as to whether her husband's parents, Elimelech and Naomi, were pleased or displeased with the marriage.

The story of Ruth took place "*in the days when the judges ruled*" (Ruth 1:1). It was to be in Moab that all the men of this Israelite family, who ventured there for food, were also to die. The death of all the men left Naomi (Ruth's mother-in-law), Ruth, and Orpah (Ruth's sister-in-law) widowed, helpless and without support. In the Old Testament women were not allowed to own property; therefore as widowed women they had no means by which to support themselves.

Knowing that destitution was a possibility; Naomi advised her ex-daughters-in-law to return to their fathers' households where they could find support

until they married once again; since both were childless and young enough to bear sons. It could be that, Naomi was encouraging remarriage as a means of staying viable once their fathers died. Such was the Old Testament planned way of life for women.

While Orpah returned to her father's household, Ruth forfeited the promised quality of life and remained with Naomi to care for her on her journey back to Judah where by this time the famine had ended. Both women loved Naomi; for when Orpah left she wept. Naomi, as a mother-in-law, to have earned the love and respect of both her daughters-in-law and in particular Ruth, a Moabite, of another culture, and one that did not believe in God must have been the ultimate example of a family position. It served her well when her husband, Elimelech, died.

### **Mother-in-law's Love of God**

Naomi loved God. Upon the death of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, when she decided to return to Judah she told her daughters-in-law, "*The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband*" (Ruth 1:9). Naomi had relatives in Judah and perhaps she thought if she made the journey there she could seek assistance from them. But this was not to be the case, Naomi did not

receive help from her relatives and no one offered to take her and Ruth in.

A journey, alone in the Old Testament days, did not promise a widow safety. Yet, we are not told she showed fear of the future, lamenting what would happen to her then, nor becoming depressed. She had a goal according to which she set a plan and set about carrying it out. This shows that Naomi lived a Godly life and placed her trust in the Lord. Naomi lived her life to the fullest because she remained faithful to God and to His Will for her life. It is apparent she did not worry for herself or cause others to worry on her account.

### **Mother-in-law's Personality**

Ruth, as a Moabite, grew up to know and love her mother-in-law, Naomi. Naomi must have been a kind and giving person, certainly thinking of others' needs before her own. Ruth was drawn to her generous nature and chose to stay with Naomi following the death of her husband to care for her. Ruth's personality must have been drawn to the personality of Naomi. The young woman forsook the advantages of returning to her father's house and remained loyal to someone elderly, who lacked any means of support.

When Ruth made the decision to stay and care for her mother-in-law she realized that she was also making a commitment to Naomi's people and Naomi's God. Perhaps her husband did not exact such a commitment from her as a Moabite living in Moab. We do not know the circumstances. But we do know that Ruth, having been drawn to Naomi's generous spirit, desired to adopt this style of life as well and would have difficulty living in Judah outside the Hebrew faith.

We are not told that Naomi tried to talk Ruth into believing in God. We were not told that she sent Ruth home following the death of her son, Mahlon, because she was a non-believer. But with loving-kindness Naomi shared advice, counseled Ruth, and led Ruth through her own love of God, to the Lord. Ruth acknowledges this when she says,

*"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever 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. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).*

## **Mother-in-law's Council**

Once Naomi had returned to Judah; she did not desire to keep Ruth all to herself. Ruth had cared for her mother in law along the way to Judah; and upon arrival worked hard in other people's fields gathering food for her mother-in-law and herself accepting the standing of being a poor who had no choice but to glean just like the destitutes and those who did not own land. *"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands"* (Deuteronomy 24:19).

Gleaning was not an easy job for Ruth; as it required working from morning until late day. Certainly Naomi could not do such work to support herself. Naomi poor and husbandless did not take measures to ensure Ruth's perpetual presence at her side. Naomi continued to encourage Ruth to marry; but this time it was to be to another relative not a Moabite.

Ruth's reputation surpassed her in Judah as all in the small town knew of her qualities and her unfailing loyalty toward her mother-in-law. Her reputation caused many to take notice of her and to admire her. One such person was Boaz, who owned

one of the fields in which she gleaned. When Boaz first met Ruth he said,

*"It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth and have come to a people whom you did not know before"*  
(Ruth 2:11).

Taking an immediate likeness to her commitment to values, Boaz showed Ruth special favor in his fields. When Naomi learned of Boaz's behavior, she encouraged Ruth to continue to work in Boaz's fields and Ruth obliged her mother-in-law. As a near relative Naomi had been aware of Boaz's capacity not only to marry Ruth but to also regain the lands of Naomi's husband according to the Law. Naomi advised Ruth how to pursue and marry Boaz. Ruth took Naomi's advice and eventually married Boaz.

By positioning Ruth into a marriage to a close relative; Naomi also ensured perpetuation of Ruth's faith in God; thus ensuring an everlastingly growing faith. A mother-in-law's wisdom was a powerful influence in leading and committing Ruth to God for the remainder of her earthly life.

A mother-in-law's impact upon family life should never be minimized as the story of Ruth illustrates.

Naomi was an example of a Godly woman and mother-in-law. Ruth's admiration of her mother-in-law's life was exemplified by her care and loyalty towards her. Through Naomi's quiet life style, Ruth learned about God and accepted him as Lord, a thing that did not occur during her marriage to Mahlon. Through Naomi's advice Ruth married a second time from within her previous husband's family. Through Naomi's teachings concerning God and marriage to a Godly man Ruth lived the remainder of her years a happy and blessed life.

One might think this is a grand ending to a story of an indigent widow that found God through her mother-in-law. Not only did Ruth find God, remarry a Hebrew Godly man, but Boaz and Ruth would be blessed with a son, Obed. Obed, was not just simply the son of Boaz and Ruth, but the father of Jesse, the grandfather to David the King and Prophet.

Some thousand years later, the Lord Jesus Christ would be born a descendant of Obed. And yet, Ruth's story was not final. Ruth, the indigent widow who cared for her mother-in-law and listened to her advice would be blessed even more by the Lord as she would be one among only four women listed in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew, chapter one. A woman who gleaned the

barley fields of Judah would come to be written  
among the lineage of kings.

May we all learn from Ruth's inspiring example of  
"showing more love for Naomi than seven sons" (the  
symbol of perfection),

Bishop Youssef

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