

The Book of Ruth

Biblical Reflection for FE 215J:

Ending Poverty: An Immersion Experience in Appalachia

New Revised Standard Version with Notes

Day 1

Chapter 1

Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab

¹In the days when the judges ruled,^a there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem^b in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi,^c and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion;^d they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Naomi and Her Moabite Daughters-in-Law

⁶Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me."^e

^a The setting is premonarchic Israel, before 10th century BCE.

^b In Hebrew, Bethlehem means "house of bread," ironic in view of the famine but foreshadows the harvest. Bethlehem is also the city of David.

^c Naomi means "pleasantness."

^d Mahlon means "sickly" and Chilion means "frail," foreshadowing their early deaths.

^e The only way a childless widow could ensure security was through remarriage and the possibility of procreating in a second marriage. Since Naomi is postmenopausal, she is too old to remarry and faces destitution.

Day 2

Ruth's Vow

¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said,

"Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die--
there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!"^a

Naomi and Ruth Arrive in Bethlehem

¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them,

"Call me no longer Naomi,
call me Mara,^b
for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

²¹ I went away full,
but the LORD has brought me back empty;
why call me Naomi
when the LORD has dealt harshly with me,
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²²So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.^c

^a Ruth's assimilation ritual can be seen as a contractual agreement between she and Naomi.

^b Mara means "bitterness," which contrasts with "pleasant" Naomi. Naomi will not be reinserted in the same social category.

^c The barley harvest occurred in mid- to late April.

Day 3

Chapter 2

Ruth Meets Boaz

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor."^a She said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." ⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" ⁶The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." ⁷She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."^a

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women."^b ⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" ¹¹But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" ¹³Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her." ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from

^a Israelite law required farmers to leave a part of their harvest for gleaning by the poor, the alien, and widows (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). Ruth fits all three socially marginalized categories as a poor foreign widow. Gleaning involves gathering the bits of barley left behind by the reapers.

^b Harvesting required the labor of men and women.

the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."^c

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.^d ¹⁸She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin."^b ²¹Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.' " ²²Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field."^e ²³So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests;^f and she lived with her mother-in-law.

^c Boaz's generosity extends well beyond his legal responsibilities.

^d An ephah is approximately 2/3 of a bushel, an impressive day's work.

^e Also, mentioned in verse 8, a woman working alone in a field was in a dangerous position of being harassed or even assaulted. Consider the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34.

^f The end of the wheat harvest was in early June.

Day 4

Chapter 3

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. ²Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.^a ³Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet^b and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." ⁵She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do."

⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. ⁷When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. ⁸At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman!^c ⁹He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant,^d for you are next-of-kin."^e ¹⁰He said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. ¹²But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. ¹³Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the LORD lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning."^f

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, "It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵Then he said, "Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it,

^a The threshing floor was a common public space, an open, flat area where farmers would transport their stalks of grain where the wind would help separate the wheat from the chaff.

^b In Hebrew, "feet" can be a euphemism for genitals.

^c Apparently, while women were involved in the harvest, the threshing floor was a male space.

^d This request can be interpreted as a marriage proposal or a more general request for protection and assistance.

^e Ruth 3-4 presents a variation on the Levirate obligation in Genesis 38 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10, which require the brother of the deceased to marry the widow and beget a child so that the memory of the deceased man would not die out.

^f Boaz is willing to serve as Ruth's advocate.

and he measured out six measures of barley,^g and put it on her back; then he went into the city. ¹⁶She came to her mother-in-law, who said, "How did things go with you, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, ¹⁷saying, "He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, 'Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"^h ¹⁸She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today."

^g This is the same amount Ruth gleaned on her first day in Boaz's field.

^h Explicitly reverses Naomi's emptiness in 1:21. These are Ruth's last words in the story.

Chapter 4

The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth

No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate^a and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, "Come over, friend; sit down here." And he went over and sat down. ²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here"; so they sat down. ³He then said to the next-of-kin, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech." ^b ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you." So he said, "I will redeem it." ⁵Then Boaz said, "The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance."^c ⁶At this, the next-of-kin said, "I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

⁷Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel.^d ⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he took off his sandal. ⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired^e Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses." ¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow

^a Legal matters were settled at the city gate by the elders who were the leading men of the community.

^b The existence of this property has not been previously mentioned, but in any case, a woman could not sell her deceased husband's property on her own. Boaz acts on behalf of Naomi.

^c No known Israelite law obliges the kinsman to marry Ruth.

^d Similar symbolic gestures were probably used in ceremonies involving inheritance.

^e Ruth's status is bound up with Elimelech's land.

a name in Bethlehem; ¹²and, through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."^f

^f The form of the blessing is similar to Canaanite royal marriage blessings. Alludes to king David's ancestry.

Day 6

An Heir for Naomi and Ruth

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons,^a has borne him." ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse.^b ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed;^c he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

^a Seven is the conventional number to suggest a happy abundance of sons.

^b Probably his guardian, not his wet nurse.

^c Seldom in the Hebrew Bible do non-family members, especially a group of unrelated women. Unique in the Hebrew Bible, Obed is described as being born to a female (Naomi rather than Ruth).

Day 7

Ruth's Ending: The Genealogy of David

¹⁸Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

The Gospel According to Matthew

The Genealogy of Jesus

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,^b the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth,^a and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,^c ⁸and Asaph^d the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos,^e and Amos^f the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.^g

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah,^h fourteen generations.

^a Breaks with tradition of only introducing male forbears.