

The Story  
Chapter 9  
The Faith of a Foreign Woman

*The Story:*

Naomi and her family head for Moab because there is a famine in Israel

Naomi's sons marry two Moabite women – Ruth and Orpah

Naomi's husband dies, then her two sons die

Naomi hears that the famine is over in Israel, so she heads for home

Her Daughter's in law Ruth and Orpah set out with her

Naomi pleads with them to stay in Moab, because there is no chance of them ever getting husbands if they stay with her

Orpah stays, but after a moving speech, Ruth continues with Naomi

When they arrive back, Naomi changes her name to Mara – bitter – because life has dealt bitterly with her

Ruth, for survival, gleans in the field of Boaz, a near relative, and finds favour with him

Naomi comes up with a scheme to get Boaz to fulfil his obligation as a near relative to “redeem” Ruth

Boaz redeems Ruth, marries her, and they have a son – David, who became the shepherd/king of Israel

*Background – Kinsman Redeemer:*

It is impossible to understand this story without understanding the concept of Kinsman Redeemer

This was a practise whereby if a woman's husband died, leaving her childless, it was the responsibility of a near relative – brother of the deceased husband, and if there wasn't a brother, the next closest – to “redeem” the widow, by taking her into his family and having a child by her, so that the name of the deceased relative might continue. This may seem strange to us, but it was practise in those day.

To be qualified to act as a Kinsman Redeemer, there were three pre-requisites:

- You had to be a near relative of the widow
- You had to be *able* to redeem the widow
- You had to *willing* to redeem the widow

Boaz fulfilled those three, except that there was a relative closer to Ruth than he was. But, while he was a nearer relative than Boaz, and was *able*, he was not *willing* to because it might “endanger his own estate” whatever that meant. So Boaz then became the nearest relative who was also both willing and able to redeem Ruth.

Understanding this also allows us to make sense of what Naomi was saying to Ruth and Orpah when she was persuading them to stay in Moab – she, Naomi, was not capable of providing a Kinsman Redeemer because she was a widow. Therefore the only way they would be able to raise a son to continue their name would be to stay and marry a Moabite man.

What is really interesting is how Jesus fitted this model – He became our Kinsman Redeemer:

- Jesus became a near relative by becoming a man
- Jesus was able to redeemer us because he was sinless
- Jesus was willing to redeem us, which he showed by going to the cross

*1. What does Ruth's story reveal about the love of God?*

Looking at this question simply into terms of what we read, without looking at the whole Bible, it shows that God is concerned about individuals. Life is hard, famines happen, husbands die.

Even God's people are not always protected from that. But God shows his love for his people, and we see him lovingly dealing with Naomi, and then with Ruth, who became one of God's people.

Looking at the story from the bigger, biblical, context, we see God preparing to show his love for the world. David, as we know, was the great, great grandfather of Jesus.

What we also see is God working in a way which shows that he is the prime mover in our salvation. God could have secured the family line for Jesus in any number of "ordinary" ways, but he chose to do it in an extra-ordinary way that allows us to see that God is behind it.

*2. What does Ruth's story reveal about how God views all people groups? What does that mean to you?*

The Jews were God's chosen people – they were the ones through whom He had promised Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And having promised that, God would ensure that that would happen. But that doesn't mean that God is opposed to other people groups. God has always loved the world, and God always wanted people from all people groups to love him and worship him. We see this by God allowing a Moabite woman to be a great grandmother of Jesus.

This must impact on the way I see other people groups – other races. If God loved them enough to send Jesus to die for them how can I not also love them, and do what I can to let them know that Jesus loves them.

*3. Both Ruth and Naomi suffered tremendous loss. Why does a good and gracious God allow tragedy to come upon those who love him?*

God created a perfect world where bad things did not happen. All God required of us was to obey him. We chose to rebel. This resulted in the Fall – see Genesis Ch 3. The whole world became "out of joint" with its purpose. That is what sin does. The good news is that it won't always be like this. God will restore the world to its original purpose:

***Rom. 8:18 – 22** I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

To get back to the question: Whether we love God or not, we live in a broken world, and so bad things happen to good people (and to bad people). What God's people can be assured of is this: God will leverage the bad for our good and His glory. God leveraged Naomi and Ruth's hardship such that Jesus' family line was kept alive, in a way that fills us with the confidence that God was behind it.

*4. When difficult times come, what causes you to continue to hope in God?*

We can look at stories like that of Ruth and Naomi, and we can know that God is sovereign.

**Psalm 121** is instructive:

*1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?*

*2 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*3 He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;*

*4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*5 The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand;*

*6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*

*7 The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life;*

*8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

On the face of it, that Psalm seems to suggest we will not face the harmful things of life. But there is a strong tradition through the centuries which understands this Psalm differently from that view. The important verse is **v7**: *The LORD will keep you from all harm*. The emphasis is not on the word KEEP. The emphasis is on the word YOU. Subtle but significant: the promise is not to KEEP you from harm, the promise is to keep YOU from harm. When we pass through these trials we will not be harmed in any spiritual or eternal way. We are not kept from these harmful things, we may go through them but we will not be harmed. A little boat on the vastness of the ocean. Unless water gets into the boat, it doesn't matter how much water there is under the boat. That is the promise – the “water” of the hardship will not “get into us” and harm us. When we face difficult times, it's that promise which keeps us. And we see from the Ruth story – and many others recorded for us in the bible – that that promise is true.

*5. Ruth left her home to follow Naomi and to follow God. How is God asking you to follow him?*

It may be to give something up; it may be to embrace something – a more concerted effort in devotional life; to put your name out there as one willing to undertake a project at the Community Centre. It *may* be a geographical thing, it is probably not though.

*6. In what way do Ruth's actions and responses challenge you? Encourage you?*

I think the aspect of making an unconditional commitment to a person, or a project, is challenging to anyone. So I guess it is discouraging because we might find it difficult to make such a commitment to a person or a task. In fact the only person we would and have made that commitment to is our spouse – if we are married! So the application might be more along the lines of committing to a project, to a church, to a work. Are we challenged because we find it difficult to commit like that? Or are we encouraged because we see how the Lord will never call us to commit to something for he does not also give us the enabling.

*7. What steps can you take to become a more selfless, loving person?*

In Ch 7 we looked at how to grow a deeper faith. What was said there would apply here. The focus of any efforts is NOT to become a more selfless loving person. The focus will be to grow intimacy with Jesus. As we do that, and as we become more like Jesus, the *fruit* will be that we become more selfless, more loving.