

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
November 23, 2025

The Moabite & the Kinsman Redeemer Ruth Ch. 1-4

Introduction

The story of Ruth begins with these words: **“In the days when the judges governed...”** (v. 1a). Just before Joshua died after a lifetime of faithful service, he warned all of Israel:

“Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness. Put away the gods your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:14-15)

The book of Judges recounts Israel’s history shortly after entering the promised land, and just in the second chapter, we are told: **“Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers...”** (Jud. 2:11-12), which characterizes the tone and climate of Israel’s spiritual health. The book of Judges also concludes with the words: **“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”** (Jug. 21:25).

While in the wilderness, God warned Israel that there would be consequences to their choices, especially when it came to their trust of God and obedience to God: **“Beware that your hearts are not easily deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods, and worship them. Otherwise, the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the sky so that there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce; then you will quickly perish from the good land which the LORD is giving you”** (Deut. 11:16-17)

As we move from Judges into the book of Ruth, the opening five verses immediately shed light on the spiritual condition of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech. These verses reveal how Elimelech, in his role as both husband and father, deeply influenced the direction and well-being of his family. The famine in the land did not just reflect a lack of physical food; it also mirrored the spiritual famine within Elimelech’s own heart and soul.

There are some things I want to point out to you that I believe will help you appreciate just how relevant this book is to us today.

First, let me begin by stating that Bethlehem means “house of bread” yet there was no bread in Bethlehem because there was famine in the land due to Israel’s disobedience. God had promised that He would bless His people if they obeyed Him, so the reason why there was no bread in Bethlehem was because of Israel’s unfaithfulness, not God’s unfaithfulness.

Second, we are told that Elimelech was “**a man of Bethlehem in Judah...**”, which means that he belonged to the tribe of Judah. God called Elimelech to live in Bethlehem, yet he chose to move to Moab because he believed that he and his family could thrive in a place outside of where God called him to live.

Some of the things that Elimelech had to know about Moab was that the people originated out of an incestuous relationship after Lot’s older daughter got him drunk for the purpose of having sex with her father so that she could become pregnant with his child (Gen. 19:30-38). Secondly, the Moabites were known for their scheming to get Israel to sin against God (Num. 22-24). Thirdly, the Women of Moab were known for seducing the Israelite men for the purpose of getting them to worship the gods of Moab (Num. 25). Moab was not a place for a family to thrive spiritually, but this is the place that Elimelech took his family to live.

The other important detail we need to consider is that while Naomi’s name means “Pleasant” nothing about her life seemed pleasant. Her husband’s name meant “God is my king” but he certainly did not live like God was his king. The meaning of the names of their two sons were, Mahlon (Weakness, sickness) and Chilion (destruction, failure); both men took for themselves Moabite women who did not grow up worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; taking Moabite women as wives was something God commanded Israel not to do (see Deut. 7:1-4). Naomi’s husband and both of her sons died, leaving her with nothing but two daughters-in-law who were also destitute with no husband or male child.

Naomi Suffered Loss

When Naomi left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons, she left *full*. Because of the famine in the land (v. 1), moving to Moab must have felt like the right decision—an act of survival for the sake of their family. But while in Moab, tragedy struck. Her husband, Elimelech, died. Then her two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth—something God had warned His people against because of the danger of idolatry (Deut. 7:2–3). And after marrying these women, both of Naomi’s sons also died, leaving her with two widowed Moabite daughters-in-law and no descendants of her own.

Naomi had lost the three most important men in her life, along with any hope of lineage, inheritance, or security. There was nothing for her in Moab, and because of her husband’s death after leaving Bethlehem, there was nothing but maybe the kindness of her relatives back in Judah. So when she returned to Bethlehem, it is no surprise that she no longer wanted to be called Naomi, which means “pleasant.” She asked instead to be called *Mara*, meaning “bitter.” She explained the bitterness in her own words: “**The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty**” (vv. 20–21).

Ruth: A Woman of Excellence

Naomi failed to recognize the blessing her Moabite daughter-in-law truly was. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, she urged both Orpah and Ruth to go back to their own people

and gods in Moab. While Orpah left to go back to her people and her gods, Ruth decided to remain with Naomi and even declared to her mother-in-law: **“Do not plead with me to leave you or to turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you sleep, I will sleep. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD do so to me, and worse, if anything but death separates me from you.”** (1:16–18).

One reason Naomi discouraged Ruth from coming back with her was concern for Ruth’s safety. There was significant hostility between Moabites and Israelites. This is clear in chapter two, after Ruth entered a field belonging to Boaz. Everyone in the field knew Ruth was a foreigner, as the foreman explained to Boaz, **“She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from Moab.”** Boaz’s response reveals the real danger Ruth faced. He spoke kindly to her, saying, **“Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but join my young women here. Keep your eyes on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have ordered the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw”** (Ruth 2:8–9). Ruth’s foreign status exposed her to rejection, prejudice, and mistreatment—yet she chose to stay with Naomi anyway, embracing uncertainty and risking lifelong exclusion.

Her courage did not go unnoticed. In chapter three, Boaz calls Ruth a **“woman of excellence”** (3:11)—a term that carries the sense of valor, honor, and strength of character. Remarkably, the same word is used of Boaz in 2:1, while you do not see it in the way the NASB translated Ruth 2:1, just about every other translation does recognize this: **“Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.”** The parallel is deliberate. The narrator wants us to see that Ruth and Boaz are kindred spirits—two people marked by integrity, bravery, and covenant faithfulness in a time when such qualities were rare in Israel.

Boaz: A Kinsmen Redeemer

Boaz is the third important character in the story of Ruth, for he is the only one qualified to serve as Naomi’s kinsman-redeemer. Every kinsman-redeemer had to meet three qualifications:

- 1) He had to be a family member,
- 2) He had to have the ability to redeem, and
- 3) He had to be willing to redeem.

A kinsman-redeemer held several responsibilities in the Old Testament: he could buy back family land lost to famine or debt (Lev. 25:25–30), redeem relatives who had sold themselves into slavery (Lev. 25:47–55), avenge the unlawful death of a family member (Num. 35; Deut. 19; Josh. 20), and step in when a family member faced a wrong they could not fix on their own.

Naomi needed that kind of help. She had lost her husband and both sons. She had no land, no security, and no hope. Ruth could not redeem her, so she went out to glean in the fields—a

provision God had given for the poor and the foreigner (Lev. 19:9–10). That’s where we first meet Boaz. He told Ruth, **“Do not go to another field... I have ordered the young men not to touch you”** (Ruth 2:8–9). Ruth bowed in gratitude, asking why he would show kindness to a foreigner. Boaz told her he had heard of her loyalty to Naomi and her trust in Israel’s God (2:11–13). He saw Ruth as a woman of excellence—worthy of honor and protection.

When Naomi learned how Boaz treated Ruth, she urged Ruth to approach him at the threshing floor. Though the scene might look questionable at first glance, Ruth 3:6–13 makes it clear: both Ruth and Boaz acted with purity and integrity. Ruth lay quietly at his feet, and when Boaz awoke, she said, **“Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”** She wasn’t tempting him—she was invoking covenant language, the same “wings” imagery Boaz used earlier of the LORD’s care (see 2:12). Boaz responded with joy: **“I will do all that you ask, for everyone knows you are a worthy woman”** (3:11). He was both willing and able to redeem her.

And he did. **“So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son”** (4:13). Through Boaz, Naomi’s emptiness was replaced with joy, and Ruth was blessed with a godly husband and a son. The women of the town celebrated:

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you one who restores life and sustains your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. And the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi!” So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. (4:14-17)

What began in sorrow ended in joy. What started with loss ended in redemption. God used a barley field, a faithful woman, and a willing redeemer to bring about His plan—not just for Naomi and Ruth, but through Boaz and Ruth the line of the kings would come with the birth of David by whom all other kings would be compared in Israel.

This leaves us with the point of this little book in the Bible.

There is a True and Better Redeemer

Boaz was not only Naomi’s redeemer—he was also a picture of the Redeemer who would one day come through his and Ruth’s own bloodline. Boaz was only a shadow of a true and better Boaz. Remember the announcement of Jesus’ birth delivered by the angels to lowly shepherds: And so the angel said to them, **“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David [Bethlehem] there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”** (Luke 2:10-11).

It was the disobedience of Israel that led to the famine that compelled Naomi's husband and sons to leave where there was no bread to a place that led to a deeper and more severe famine that left Naomi empty. God used all of the hard things in Naomi's life so that another Son would be born in that same city to do what no other person was able to do; Jesus said of Himself: **"I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me will not be hungry, and the one who believes in Me will never be thirsty"** (John 6:35).

When Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, creation was cursed and humanity was lost. Eden was forfeited, and mankind was expelled from God's presence. The only way for Eden to be restored and the curse removed was for another Adam to come—one who was related to humanity, who had the ability to redeem what was lost, and who was willing to carry out the redemption. Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed; Obed fathered Jesse; Jesse fathered David. Many generations later, Jesus was born to Mary—conceived supernaturally while she remained a virgin—qualifying Him uniquely as the Kinsman-Redeemer mankind and creation needs. How was Jesus qualified?

- 1) **Jesus had to be a family member of humanity**, and He was, as demonstrated by the human bloodline recorded in Scripture.
- 2) **Jesus had to have the ability to redeem**, which He had because the virgin birth made Him both fully God and fully man—perfectly qualified to redeem creation.
- 3) **Jesus had to be willing to redeem**, and that willingness led Him to the cross, where He became our curse and took our sin upon Himself.

Jesus did not remain dead. On the third day He rose in victory! Our Kinsman-Redeemer lived the perfect life we could not live, died as the sin-bearer though He was spotless, and then conquered death itself. All of heaven rejoices that the Redeemer who was slain now stands—alive—interceding for us: **"Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals, for You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth"** (Rev. 5:9–10). And maybe that's where you need hope today.

Perhaps you are living with the consequences of choices you made years ago.

Perhaps bitterness has taken root because life did not turn out the way you imagined.

Perhaps, like Naomi's family, you have wandered far into "Moab"—far from God, far from joy, far from where you began.

But hear the good news: **the book of Ruth declares that no one is too far for God's love, grace, and mercy to reach.**

If God can take a famine, a foreigner, and a broken widow and weave them into the lineage of King David and ultimately Jesus Christ Himself—He can redeem your story too!