

RUTH

**AN ANCIENT GENTILE WOMAN HAS A
CRITICAL MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY!**



by Ray MacDonald

AN ANCIENT GENTILE WOMAN HAS A CRITICAL MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY!

Do you ever wonder why Ruth is such an important book of the Bible? After all, it is a scant four chapters and not even included in the New Testament.

It has no kings, no national leaders, there are no military battles, no miracles and no voices from Heaven.

Yet for millions of women around the world it is a source of inspiration. A demonstration of a friendship without bounds and perhaps as strong an example of faith as the Bible offers.

But as much as we draw inspiration from Ruth's story, there are many rich lessons just below the surface. Lessons we as Christians in the 21st century need to take to heart.

Key Verse

“Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.” (Ruth 1:1-2)

Joshua led the Jewish people into the Promised Land but he left no stable government to rule. For 350 years the Jewish people had no King, they had the Judges. It was not just a time of physical famine but spiritual famine as well.

In these miserable conditions a Jewish man named Elimelech abandoned Israel and fled to the Land of Moab.

The Moabites were the ancient enemies of the Israelites. Their tribe was born out of incest between Lot and his oldest daughter. They warred against the Jews from their lands along the Dead Sea's south eastern shore. They rejected God for stone idols.

The Moabites had fertile fields but in spiritual terms the Kingdom of Moab was a desert.

Yet from this land a Moabite woman became the mother of Jewish royalty, matriarch of the family that produced King David and later the Messiah.

THE SURPRISING PAIN OF LOSING A HUSBAND IN BIBLICAL TIMES

Marriage was much different in the time of Ruth than it is today.

Nowadays while the husband is still appointed by God to be the head of the household, a wife can hold her own job, her own bank account, and support herself after the loss of a husband or son. Even if a single woman falls on hard times there is a whole social safety net for her. But there is a reason the Bible repeats the phrase “widows and orphans” over and over again.

Both Naomi and Ruth were without a family, and family was all that mattered. It was your family that protected and provided for you. More specifically, it was the men who looked after their mothers, wives and daughters.

Elimelech had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, who married Ruth and Orpah. But when Elimelech and later his sons Mahlon and Kilion died, all three women, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah were left as widows.

The Bible’s statement that a husband and wife become one flesh was much more true then than now. When a woman lost her husband it was like losing a limb, it carried very serious legal, social and economic



A modern bride, like seen here in Jerusalem.

hardships.

When Naomi's husband Elimelech died she went from a place of security and comfort to one of vulnerability and desperation. She was as good as an orphan. Destitute and alone she became bitter at God for her fate.

This is why when she returned to Bethlehem, Naomi told her old friends,

“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.” (Ruth 1:20)

Prayer Point

“Dear Lord, thank you for the faithfulness of Ruth. I pray that I would have the same love, please show me how to put that love for your people, Israel, in action as Ruth did.”

Something to Ponder:

Ruth was not born into the family of Israel. What was it about her connection to Naomi and Naomi's people that would cause her to abandon her own people and join herself with Israel?

YOUR GOD SHALL BE MY GOD

Now let's look at this from Ruth's point of view.

Naomi has to make the dangerous journey back to Bethlehem for even a chance at survival. But Ruth does not. If Ruth stays among the Moabites her family is there and the chance of winning a new husband is high. But if she follows Naomi not only would she be without a family. As an outsider men would hesitate to marry her.

This is why, when given the chance, Ruth's sister in law Orpah, made the perfectly rational choice to remain among the Moabites.

But Ruth makes a real leap of faith here. By making the journey with Naomi she is risking starvation and death. There is no Earthly reason at all for her to follow. Nevertheless we read,

“ ‘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)

LEKET: THE COMMANDMENT WHICH SAVED RUTH AND NAOMI

So let's talk about the most common mistake people make reading the book of Ruth.

Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem at harvest time, possibly during the Feast of Shavuot, which we know as Pentecost. The festival marks the forty-nine days between God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt and giving of the Commandments at Mount Sinai. God commanded on the fiftieth day the Jews celebrate the grain harvest, a symbol that God had sustained his people for another year. Every year during Shavuot, Jews around the world read from the Book of Ruth.

But for Ruth and Naomi it was hardly a time of plenty. As unmarried women without sons or fathers they risked starvation.

Naomi urges Ruth to go to see Boaz, a farm owner and Tzadek, a man of Righteousness.

Perhaps Naomi was ashamed to see him because she and her family had fled to Moab, perhaps she was embarrassed to have come back without her sons but with a Moabite woman.

When Ruth comes to him Boaz tells his workers,

"And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not embarrass her." (Ruth 2:15-16)

But this was not an act of charity or love. Boaz was doing what God commanded the Jewish people to do.

See God did not command His people to perform voluntary acts of giving, He demanded "Tzedakah", Righteousness. And He wrote His demands in the Law.



Leket, found in Leviticus 19:10

Drought and starvation were a constant threat in the lives of ordinary people, and especially those on the margins like Naomi and Ruth.

The law Boaz obeyed was called **“leket”**.

Leket means to gather or glean. The commandment meant that as the harvesters would go through the field the needy were permitted to come behind them. If the harvesters accidentally dropped produce the moment it hit the ground it no longer belonged to the farmer but the needy, by law. This is the meaning of leket, the commandment to share with those in need. The poor would be allowed to pick the food up.

Something to Ponder:

Without leket Jesus could never have been born. I know you’re thinking; “what do you mean by this”?

Key Verse

“And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:10)

Being a righteous and compassionate man, Boaz decided to go an extra mile for Ruth.

He went beyond the commandment explaining to his men to drop grain intentionally for her. He didn’t just give to her, he didn’t want her to be embarrassed by her need, he wanted her to maintain her dignity.

Ruth and Naomi’s lives were saved by Boaz’s righteous adherence to God’s laws.

Leket Israel: The National Food Bank, works to practice this commandment in a modern way. We provide food for Israel’s poor by working with farmers, corporations and the Israeli Defence Forces to provide healthy nutritious meals for the poor across the country.



A field of barley in Israel

THE EXODUS OF ABRAHAM, MOSES AND RUTH

Key Verse

“And Boaz answered and said to her, “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)

As Boaz recounts the experience of Ruth in this verse you may think that it sounds a little familiar. Perhaps you were thinking about the Patriarch of the Jewish people; Abraham,

“And the Lord said to Abram, go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your fathers house, to the land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1)

Yes, amazingly, it appears that Ruth, Abraham and Moses had a few things in common.

Abraham left his homeland too. He left his family and his friends. Moses also left Egypt behind and risked the crossing through the Sinai to reach the Promised Land. Abraham, Moses and Ruth left on an adventure as part of God’s divine plan.

It’s interesting that when Naomi and Ruth arrived in the land of Israel they didn’t immediately go to Boaz for assistance. Instead it appears as though Ruth encountered the farm which belonged to Boaz by accident. Perhaps this was by divine plan!

“Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.” (Ruth 2:3)

Prayer Point

“Thank you, Lord that you directed Ruth to the fields of Boaz, a divine appointment as she did not know that this was his field. Thank you God for the direction you give to your people.”

Boaz, knowing that Ruth had left her people, forsaken her homeland, clung to her Jewish mother-in-law and travelled to a land which she did not know received a special blessing from him,

“Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (Ruth 2:12)

Curious word that Boaz used in addressing refuge; ‘wings’. The Hebrew word is כָּנָף kanaph. The implication of the word is to be protected, to



be sheltered. We think of Malachi who said *the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings*. (Malachi 4:2)

Later Boaz receives a late night encounter with Ruth.

“And he said, who are you? And she said, I am Ruth your handmaid, and you shall spread your wings over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman” (Ruth 3:9)

Wings! There’s that word again! It’s like she is saying: “I received a blessing from you that God should spread his wings over me, maybe you should do the same to me as well! Does that sound a bit like a marriage proposal to you? I think so. This is a woman that was really outside of the family - connected only by marriage. A woman outside of the nation of Israel. A member of a nation that was Israel’s ancient enemy. Do you think that’s pretty bold? I know I do.

Boaz does the right thing, he accepts of course! So, it’s not about romance, it’s about character. Ruth is expressing her commitment to Israel and Boaz his fidelity to God’s Word.

So, they went on to live happily ever after. That’s where the story ends, right? Well not really here is the most exciting part. Ruth gives birth.

“There is a son born to Naomi. [through Ruth]’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.” (Ruth 4:17)

Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David! This woman from Moab, a land steeped in idol worship, became attached to the people who worshiped the one true God, and attached to the one family who would ultimately bring the Messiah into the world.

YIBBUM - LEVIRATE MARRIAGE

This is featured prominently in the story of Ruth. The first mention of yibbum (Hebrew for levirate marriage) occurs when Er, the first son of Judah died. Judah instructed his second son, Onan to marry Er's widow, Tamar. *“And Judah said to Onan, ‘Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.’”* (Genesis 38:8)

During biblical times when a father passed away his children would continue his role in life. If a man passed away without having children that mission on earth would go unfulfilled. To prevent this from happening and to maintain the departed chain of life the custom was for his brother, or the nearest kinsman, to marry the widow and produce children.

The Bible shows that when a man and a woman marry they join together and become “one flesh”, they become like one body. So if the husband dies it is as if his wife loses part of her own body, as if part of her dies with him. The wife's deceased husband and his brother share the same parents consequently it is the brother's role to marry his brother's widow.

When she returned to Bethlehem it was the beginning of barley harvest. Beit Lechem as it's called in Hebrew means house of bread.

Fitting, don't you think, that Jesus was born in a town with this name?

Prayer Point

“Thank you Lord that you use unusual people and unusual circumstances to fulfill your promise made to Abraham the Patriarch.”

Something to ponder:

Great things happen when Gentiles become part of Israel's story! Ruth's circumstances were far from ideal. What can we learn from her faith that will help us when we find ourselves in difficult circumstances?

But that story isn't over, God is still writing the Bible! As Christians we mustn't be bystanders we need to be part of the great miracle that is Israel. Through the lives of Ruth and Boaz we have a beautiful picture of how God can use ordinary people who allow themselves to be willing vessels in service to Him.

HOW CAN WE HELP ISRAEL?

There are many things that we can do.

The Psalmist tells us that praying for the Peace of Jerusalem and Israel should be a vital part of our daily prayers. We can visit Israel, a trip to the Holy Land is a marvellous faith building experience, it's such a blessing. But we can be a blessing to the people of Israel by taking a little bit of time as part of our tour to do some volunteer work. We can bless Israel with our finances as well by contributing to charitable activity in the land.

HOW LEKET ISRAEL, THE NATIONAL FOOD BANK, FEEDS THE NEEDY OF ISRAEL

Our work is inspired by the commandment of “Leket”, which means to glean, found in Deuteronomy 24. This commandment allowed the poor of Israel to pick from the fields for food, it was this commandment which caused Boaz to allow Ruth to glean from the fields for herself and Naomi.

We follow this commandment in a modern way, using trucks and warehouses but with the same goal of making sure food from the fields makes it to those in need.

Leket Israel began as a hot meal rescue operation. Every day our staff and volunteers collect thousands of hot meals from hotels, restaurants, corporate cafeterias, Israeli Defense Forces bases, and catered events for delivery to Israel's most needy!

Because of support from Christians like you, food of the highest quality is delivered for free to Holocaust survivors and struggling



families. Over the years Leket Israel expanded into the rescue of agricultural produce and this year the organization will glean over 40 million pounds of fresh produce from 500 farms to benefit Israel’s needy.

All the food rescued by Leket Israel is delivered to 250,000 people each week through 200 non profit organizations. These include food banks, homeless shelters, senior citizen facilities and half way houses.

Let us say together to the people of Israel as Ruth said to Naomi, *“Your people shall be my people!”*

YOU CAN’T LIVE A FULL LIFE ON AN EMPTY STOMACH.

Is God tugging on your heart to be involved in what He is doing in Israel? <https://christianfriendsofleket.org>

Our mailing address is:

Christian Friends of Leket
PO Box 63057 Rpo University Plaz
Dundas, ON L9H 6Y3 Canada
905 525-5673
info@cfleket.org

ISRAEL OFFICE:	US OFFICES:	UK OFFICES:
Leket Israel: The National Foodbank 11 Hasadna St. Raanana 43650 Israel	PO Box 2090 Teaneck NJ 07666-1490 USA	CP House Otterspool Way Watford WD25 8HP England

RUTH

**AN ANCIENT GENTILE WOMAN HAS A
CRITICAL MESSAGE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY!**