

GOD PORTRAYS WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER NINE

NAOMI AND RUTH

Ruth 14

LET ME INTRODUCE YOU to a *pleasant* woman, Naomi, for such is the meaning of her name. She was much loved and appreciated in her home town. Her relatives and friends were many. She had married Elimelech and their home was blessed with two boys. They were quite comfortably situated, owning their own home and enjoying their family.

Their home town was called “**The house of bread**” (Bethlehem) and it was here that He was born who said, “**I am the bread of life.**”

- “**The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world**” (John 6:33).

- “**I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst**” (John 6:35).

- “**Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out**” (John 6:37).

We will forever bless God for Him who was born in Naomi’s home town, because we have found to our own heart’s satisfaction that He is the bread of Life, that He has given us eternal life and He sustains the life He gives.

Naomi and her family lived in the early days when the judges ruled. The crops had failed and everyone was talking hard times. Pessimism is very infectious. One day a traveler told Elimelech that down in Moab nobody talked about hard times, in fact everything was booming! So this discouraged husband decided, just as men do today, “We’ll put a mortgage on our place and move down there for a few years until times are better here, then we will come back.”

I suppose the suggestion was rather a shock to Naomi and many questions were asked. But she was loyal to Elimelech and put no obstacle, even her own preferences, in his way. Making a living was difficult enough at any time. Then too their boys were not strong and the change might do them good. One son was Mahlon (*Sickness*) and the other was Chilion (*Pining*).

But it was a different thing to tell their parents and friends of their decision. Among the many objections the most weighty ones would concern their spiritual welfare.

“Surely you are not going to take your children down to Moab and bring them up among heathen. You remember when the Moabites ruled over us for eighteen years that many were ensnared with their idolatry” (See Judges 3:14; 10:6-7).

“Money is not the most important thing in life. What will you do at the Passover, and on the Day of Atonement, the feast of Pentecost and the feast of Tabernacles? You know every man is commanded to attend and make his offering with a joyful heart at the three feasts.”

Elimelech might have replied, “Oh, you don’t need to worry; we are not going to become heathen just because we move down there. Many who live in Israel have just as far to come to the festivals. You can depend on us; we shall not neglect the things we have always valued.” With tremblings and misgivings their friends saw them go. Like the prodigal they went out full, as Naomi later confessed.

When the festival times came their friends looked but did not find them. They had intended to come but one of them was very ill, or the crops couldn’t be left. And so, as time went on, each absence was less difficult. We read “**and they continued there.**”

They were a happy family and admired by their heathen neighbors for many of their godly qualities, which contrasted so clearly with the principles of the natives. They didn’t turn heathen but many a day their hearts ached for fellowship in the things of God, especially the day when Elimelech was stricken and died.

The three mourners wished they could have had the comfort of their godly home folk and the ministry and prayers of the priest or Levite. “**And she was left, and her two sons**” (1:3).

As she lamented and expressed regret that they had ever left Bethlehem, the neighbors would sympathize and tell her that her husband might have died even if they had stayed in Bethlehem, and besides, she should not grieve or be sorry she had come to Moab, she should be thankful that she had two such fine sons who were a credit to her in their moral uprightness and who would support her in her widowhood.

The time came when her sons went out with the girls. That was an anxious time for Naomi. She had many a chat with them about marrying the ungodly. She longed for the support of their father to corroborate what she said. They might have argued with her. “But mother, the girls we are going with are nice girls”—and they were. “Where would you find a kinder girl than Orpah—even her name is *kind*,” said one. “Or a more contented and comely girl than Ruth,” spoke up the other brother.

All of Naomi’s objections were overruled and the boys married, and she found her daughters-in-law unusually kind and considerate. They did things together, shared all their joys and sorrows, for sorrows soon came and the three women were the chief mourners who attended the funerals of the two sons.

Deep were the exercises of heart with Naomi now because of the Lord’s dealings with her. She realized that it was the Lord who gave and the Lord who had taken away.

Had she made a mistake in leaving the godly influences of Bethlehem for worldly and material advantages, when they had not sought the Lord's desires for their life? About that time news came to her from her old home. **"The Lord hath visited his people in giving them bread"** (1:6).

A terrible homesickness came over her. She felt she must go home, and nothing could detain her. Her daughters-in-law said they could not part with her or let her go alone. She was all they had left of their dear husbands. They had lived with her in joy and in sorrow and she was "easy to live with." She had won from them respect and honor and deep-seated love. A good mother-in-law makes a good daughter-in-law, and the same is true the other way round.

The good-byes had been said and the Moabites perhaps wondered at Ruth and Orpah's decision to leave their own people and religion and go with Naomi. Her prospects were not very promising. She had no bank account and there had been a foreclosure of the mortgage on the property she left. There was nothing materially to attract them.

As they went on their way, Naomi kept questioning in her own mind whether she was right in letting them come with her. Did she dread meeting Mrs. "I-told-you-so" with her two heathen daughters-in-law or the censure of those who warned her against the move ten years ago? At one point on the way she said, **"Go, return each to her mother's house [they had their own mothers—and then she paid them such a compliment]: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me"** (1:8).

They had been good to their husbands and she did not neglect to express her appreciation of their daily kindnesses. She was not embarrassed to ask the Lord's blessing on them. She advised them to marry again. She made no demands on them for her own comfort or future.

They pleaded to accompany her to her people. She refused to use high-pressure influence for her own advantage, and with tears and expressions of love she confessed, **"Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me"** (1:13).

She confessed it took widowhood and childlessness to bring her back where the Lord wanted her. She regretted that they had been involved in the discipline. Surely **"no man liveth to himself."** **"And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her"** (1:14).

Orpah reached her decision. She had had the same experiences as Ruth, and though she was attracted and made a start in the right direction she turned back. What a mistake it would have been for Naomi to use persuasion then! If it had not been the Lord Himself who was the attraction, there would have been disappointment in her choice. Her mother-in-law realized this. She said to Ruth, **"Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law"** (1:15). Her people and her gods attracted Orpah. She would have been very uncomfortable among the Lord's people; though she admired them she was not one of them.

Ruth did not make Orpah's decision a precedent for herself. She had a steadfastness of purpose. She had counted the whole cost and decided the attraction of the Lord far eclipsed anything the old life had to offer.

Her vows of devotion exceeded the solemnity of even the marriage vows.

What expressions of love ever surpassed those Ruth spoke and that to a mother-in-law, **"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee"** (1:16).

It was when Naomi took steps in the right direction herself that others began to be blessed and drawn to the Lord. David too confessed, **"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, then will I teach transgressors thy way and sinners shall be converted unto thee."** Solomon too cried, **"Draw me and we will run after thee."**

When one is attracted to the Lord, others are influenced. The Lord said to Peter, **"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."** Ruth continued, **"For whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried"** (1:16-17).

She handed over the reins of her life to another allowing that other to choose her path. **"Not my will but thine be done."**

Does this not remind us of our Lord's words, **"Take my yoke upon you"**? *"Let Me take the reins and allow Me to direct your ways and you shall find rest to your souls."*

"Where thou lodgest I will lodge." I will be content with any circumstances as long as I have your companionship. How sweet these words must have sounded in Naomi's ears! How much sweeter in the ears of the eternal Lover of our souls to hear expressions, too rarely heard, of contentment with Him, acknowledging Him as **"God of my life"** (Psalm 42:8)!

"Thy people shall be my people." Yes, I will let the Lord choose my associates. Those acceptable to the Lord would be acceptable to her. And then she added the crowning point of her resolution and her confession of faith, **"thy God shall be my God."** She turned to God from idols.

Her decision was irrevocable, it was for life and involved her future for time and eternity. **"Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried."** The Christian is associated with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. **"This is my blood which is shed for you."** Buried with Him, the world is through with us, then Christ ever liveth to make intercession for us. The oath of allegiance is sealed with **"the Lord do so to me and more also if ought but death part thee and me"** (1:17).

And Ruth and Naomi lived together until death did part them; but now they are reunited, enjoying the same Lord.

When Naomi saw that Ruth was really determined to go with her, then she ceased entreating her. So they two went on together until they came to Bethlehem. The people saw a strange sight, two lonely widows, an old Jewess and a young Gentile walking together. Two whose background, upbringing, religion and interests could not have been more diverse. Mere pleasantness of disposition did not form the unbreakable link between them. But each was in right relationship to God so there was harmony in life. Naomi, a restored backslider and Ruth, a new convert enjoyed a common salvation. Each became a partaker of the “**grace of life**” and each was helpful to the other.

“And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?” (1:19).

And she said unto them, “Call me not ‘sweet’ but ‘bitter,’ for the Almighty hath humbled me. I went out full and the Lord hath brought me back empty. Why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me and afflicted me?”

The neighbors were deeply moved as they saw Naomi’s reduced condition. How touched they must have been by her spontaneous confession, “**I went out, the Lord hath brought me home**”! There was willfulness in departure, the anticipated joy and prosperity had evaporated; but God’s care and concern for her did not evaporate. The Lord went after her, took her by the hand and brought her back home. All the time in the far country she was not “**at home**.” As with the prodigal, she was brought back to plenty, for they came at the beginning of barley harvest.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, whose name was Boaz or “*strength*.” Naomi had not boasted of her rich relatives nor encouraged Ruth to expect that they would assume their support. Galatians 6 which tells us to bear one another’s burdens also insists that every man shall bear his own burden. Some lazy Christians refrained from work because they expected the Lord to provide for them. The apostle Paul, who himself labored with his own hands and paid his board, commanded them to go to work and not talk so much but eat the bread they earned themselves.

“And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I will find grace. And she said, Go, my daughter. And she . . . gleaned in the field after the reapers; and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech” (2:2-3).

The cupboard was bare and Ruth couldn’t see her beloved Naomi in want. The harvest had begun so she put on her gleaner’s apron and started for the country. She hoped and prayed that someone would be kind enough to foreigners to let her glean out the corners of the field or gather what was left in the field which, according to the law, was for the fatherless, the stranger and the widow “**that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands**” (Deuteronomy 24:19).

“Her hap” was to come to the field of Boaz. “**The steps of a good man [or woman] are ordered of the Lord**” (Psalm 37:23).

Everyone in the harvest field was busy, and when the owner came into the field Ruth was surprised to hear the salutations. Boaz said to his hired men, **“The Lord be with you.”** The employees replied, **“The Lord bless thee.”** Would it not be refreshing today to hear employees praying for the employer’s blessing and vice versa? Such a relationship between capital and labor would end all strikes. The keen-eyed landowner was personally interested in everyone in his fields.

Observing Ruth, he asked who she was. He was informed she was the Moabitess who came back with Naomi and who had gleaned tirelessly ever since she obtained permission. Her industry was her recommendation. Boaz went and spoke to her kindly. He tried to put her at ease and make her feel at home. **“My daughter, go not to glean in another field, abide here fast by my maidens”** (2:8). “You are welcome here.” Does this not remind us of what Peter said to Cornelius the Gentile and his relatives, **“In every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”** (Acts 10:35)? If Christ receives folk, who are we to refuse them?

After Boaz’ kindness to Ruth, it was the duty of the servants to accept her too. He encouraged her to drink freely of that which the young men had drawn and to come and dine with him and his servants. She was overwhelmed by such kindness. **“She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”** (2:10).

The law would have shut her out since a Moabite was excluded from the congregation of Israel to the tenth generation; but grace brought her in, grace on the ground of her personal confession of faith in God.

Boaz said, **“It hath fully been showed me, all thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust”** (2:11-12).

Ruth never forgot these words. It was her confidence in God, her genuine piety and loving-kindness, as well as her diligence that commended her to Boaz. **“A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised”** (Proverbs 31:30).

Naomi’s prayer, **“The Lord deal kindly with you as ye have dealt with the dead and with me”** (1:8), was being answered.

Genuine kindness is like a homing pigeon. What we sow we reap. **“Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor”** (I Corinthians 2:8). Ruth’s renunciation reminds us of Moses when he chose **“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward”** (Hebrews 11:25-26).

Though she was such a new worker, she was as welcome at the table of Boaz as the oldest servant; and he reached her parched corn. The Lord is solicitous for the comfort, happiness and nourishment of each lamb of His flock. He expects the undershepherds to be as thoughtful for those in their care.

Thank the Lord for the many Sunday school teachers and Christian friends who have heard the Lord's word, "**Let fall some handful purposely for her.**" "**He daily loadeth us with benefits.**" We have indeed profited by that which others have ministered to us, but there is special sweetness in that which we receive directly from the Lord's own hand. So she gleaned till evening and beat out that she had gleaned.

She did not carry away the chaff. She threshed out enough for ten men. "**Prove all things; hold fast that which is good**" (I Thessalonians 5:21). She was like the Bereans who "**received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so**" (Acts 17:11). Such are called God's noblemen. It is deplorable that there are so many weak, lean Christians who always depend on the teaching of others and never search the Word for themselves.

Naomi had supper ready when Ruth returned. When she saw what Ruth brought home, she lifted up her voice in thanksgiving and prayer. "May he that took notice of thee be blessed."

"Mother, the man's name was Boaz."

It would have been a treat to have seen Naomi's face light up as tears filled her eyes and she exclaimed, "**Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead**" (2:20). Did she blush as she recalled how she had thought that the Lord was against her? In almost whispered words she said, "The man is near of kin unto us, one that hath right to redeem" (2:20, margin).

Ruth added, "He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest" (2:21). Naomi was full of rejoicing as she realized the Lord's guidance and the way He provided for them.

Naomi knew the law. If a man were impoverished and had lost possession of his land, one of his kinsman had a right to come forward and pay the debt with all its encumbrances and restore the land to its former owner.

In the East, marriages are arranged by the parents. At the end of the barley and wheat harvest, work was slack, and Naomi said one day to Ruth, "**My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?**" She wanted to see Ruth in a home of her own. Dr. Parker points out that the word for rest is *Menuchah* meaning a place of security, protection of honor and of harmony. Every home should be called *Menuchah*. When the Lord invites those weary and heavy laden, it is to a place of rest, relaxing in security, understanding and love. Naomi explained that the time had come to put in her claim to the kinsman redeemer.

She advised her to make herself look pretty, put on some perfume, and seek a psychological moment to have a private chat with Boaz. Boaz was at the threshing floor and was very busy all day, but Naomi advised Ruth to go late at night and seek this interview. We would think such behavior very indiscreet, but Naomi knew the man and knew the customs or she would not have given this counsel.

Ruth came to the threshing floor and lay at his feet. Surprised, he roused up and whispered, **“Who art thou?”** As instructed, she said, **“I am Ruth thine handmaid; spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art the one that hath the right to redeem”** (3:9). At the Jewish marriage ceremony, we are told the husband spreads his skirt or talith over his wife as a pledge of protection. It makes one think of the Scottish expression, **“Come under my plaidie.”**

Christ came, took on flesh, that He might be our Kinsman and redeem us from slavery and poverty, restore us to Himself and spread His skirt over us. David’s words in Psalm 49 are full of thoughts of this little Book of Ruth when he says that no man can redeem the soul of his brother, it is too costly, but **“God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,”** and more than that—precious words— **“for he shall receive me.”**

Boaz blessed her for her confidence in him, and commended her for her chaste behavior in the fields, adding that all the city knew she was a virtuous woman.

He hastened to assure her of his care, **“And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.”** Our Kinsman-Redeemer has undertaken our case completely and handled all our concerns to the satisfaction of God, so that He can turn to us and thank us for our confidence in Him and say to us, **Fear not, peace be with you, thy faith hath saved thee.**

Boaz would not disappoint such confidence. He cared for her reputation and told her to rise before daylight. He sent her home with far more grain than she herself had beaten out. He poured six measures of barley into her veil saying, **“Go not empty to thy mother-in-law.”** This was a pledge that he would care for Naomi too. The Lord asked Peter to follow Him and leave his fishing, but He let him realize that He also cared for Peter’s mother-in-law.

“Then Naomi said, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day” (3:18). Our future is in His hands, **“The Lord will perfect that which concerned me”** (Psalm 138:8).

Young Christians need to remind themselves of this and be quiet, knowing that the Lord will undertake for their best interests, and they can wait His time. He will perfect that which He hath begun.

“Then went Boaz up to the gate and sat him down there” (4:1). He lost no time and sought a righteous settlement of all that was involved for Ruth. There was a kinsman nearer than he who had a right to redeem. At first this man said he was willing to redeem the property but, when reminded he must buy the property not only from Naomi but from Ruth and marry her, he refused saying he was unable to do so. He turned to Boaz and said, **“You buy it.”**

Then the man plucked off his shoe and gave it to Boaz to show that he gave up all his claim to the property. So, in the presence of the elders Boaz paid the price and claimed Ruth as his own. Boaz, like Christ, was able to redeem (Hebrews 7:25), willing to redeem (II Corinthians 8:9), mighty to save (Proverbs 23:11).

In Colossians (2:14-15) there is a remarkable passage which explains this transaction. **“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them.”**

When a debt was to be settled they presented an itemized account of all the charges and when it was fully paid, they used to nail the cancelled evidences in a public place as a notice to all that everything had been paid. **“Blotted out . . . taken away.”** What emancipating words to forgiven sinners as they view Him, who was nailed to the cross and was made **“sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”** (II Corinthians 5:21), and who answered for us.

And Boaz said to the elders, **“Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all . . . Moreover, I have purchased Ruth to be my wife.”** And they said, **“We are witnesses . . . The Lord bless the woman who is come into thy house, and do thou worthily and be famous in Bethlehem.”**

Ruth was no longer thought of as a Moabitess, but as the wife of Boaz. **“Christ also loved the church, and [paid the price of redemption] gave himself for it; that he might sanctify [change its status] and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish”** (Ephesians 5:25-27).

There is a wonderful promise to the stranger that joins himself to the Lord, to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord. **“Even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people”** (Isaiah 56:7).

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. The Lord gave her conception and she bare a son.

In chapter two, Boaz had prayed the Lord to recompense and reward Ruth for her faith; here in the fourth chapter he himself is God’s answer to his own prayer. And the woman said to Naomi,

“Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel; and he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David” (4:14-17).

Yes, a greater Kinsman than the neighbors ever dreamed of came through Ruth the Moabitess as we learn from the genealogy in Matthew 1, the most famous in Israel, the true Restorer of every age. He restored that which He took not away.

“Thy daughter-in-law loveth thee better than seven sons.”

Divine love does not diminish natural love, but enriches it in deeper consideration for others and does not limit itself to family relationships only.

Think of the grace on the part of Ruth and Boaz when they allowed the neighbor women to choose the name of her child. Divine love is something money cannot buy, rank cannot procure, nor power command. Naomi’s return was like the prodigal’s. She came back to love and companionship.

A song was put in her mouth, and years of usefulness followed. The songs came out in future generations through her great-grandson David, and at the birth of the Kinsman who wrought eternal redemption, the heavens were opened and the angels burst forth with, **“Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth and [at last] good will toward man.”**

To Ruth was granted a full recompense and reward, for He rewarded her faith far more **“exceeding abundantly”** than she could ask or think. Is Ruth’s God your God? Have you come to trust under the shadow of His wings?

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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