

Ruth: A Stranger No More

I. God Can Turn Cursing Into Blessing

Through Elimelech's carnality the Book of Ruth is introduced. The entire book speaks of blessing that came out of cursing. Elimelech left the land he was called to and moved to a foreign country, against God's will. Yet, even in his disobedience, God's hand was still upon Elimelech's family.

Of course, God would rather bless us through our obedience rather than our disobedience. But even if we have been disobedient, I serve a God who is so powerful He can turn a negative situation around when we turn our hearts back to Him. Romans 8:28 says, "*All things work together for good...*"

God is not the author of disobedience; Satan is the author of disobedience. You and your own wrong choices are the authors of disobedience, but your disobedience is not greater than God. Your rebellion is not greater than God. And your sin is not greater than God's forgiveness. It is arrogance to think, "If I sin, God's going to go under. His kingdom will be completely destroyed. Jesus will fall off the throne. I will mess up the whole plan of God!" Even in the midst of your rebellion, God can turn circumstances around and, if necessary, use someone else to accomplish His will.

II. You Are Responsible for Your Actions

God had great plans for Elimelech's life, but Elimelech made the wrong choice, and as a result, went the wrong direction. Elimelech's wife, Naomi, and his sons followed him. In the end, Elimelech and his sons died. Naomi and her daughter-in-laws were left behind. Naomi decided to return to the land God had called them to and one daughter-in-law, Ruth, was determined to go with her. When Naomi returned to the land, and Ruth with her, God did tremendous things. They received the rewards of obedience. The outcome of their lives was not determined by Elimelech's decision; it was determined by their own individual decisions.

Our reactions in life are so important. If we react in faith, God is able to turn our situation around no matter what someone else has done to us. I hear this excuse so often, "My kids are that way because of their dad."

No, your kids are that way because of the decisions *they* have made. We can't go through life blaming everything that's in our life on someone else.

In today's society everyone wants to blame someone else for the way they are when *we are responsible* for the choices and decisions we make in life. It doesn't matter where you were raised, what part of town you came from, or how much money your family makes. Those elements do not guarantee your success or your failure. Just because your family was poor doesn't mean you are destined to become a failure. And just because your family is prosperous doesn't guarantee your success.

We have to deal with the nature of the flesh, and we overcome that nature through our decision to walk with God daily. God can remove you from the worst conditions and bring blessing and success when we decide to follow after His Word.

Ephesians 2:11-13:

Wherefore remember, that ye [being] in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

This passage is a great description of you and I before we were born again, but it's also a great description of Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth. Ruth was not only a *stranger* because she didn't believe in the Lord, she was also a *stranger* because she was a Moabitess. The Moabites were a cursed group of people because of their attitude toward the Jews. Their ancestry could be traced back to the time when Lot was cast out of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and his two daughters committed incest with him while he was drunk. One of their offspring became the Moabites, and because they constantly came against Israel, there was a curse placed on them.

I don't care if there's a national curse on a group of people, the way to turn a curse around is by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some teach that there are ancestral and generational curses from the

past. I believe certain sicknesses can be hereditary and if there has been dysfunction in your family, those dysfunctions can be allowed to affect future generations without our minds being renewed to the truth of God's Word. But there is no sickness or dysfunction that is greater than the blood of Jesus Christ!

In the story of Ruth, we see a woman who has come from a cursed race, yet, that curse is turned around by her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! No longer is she a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel and to the covenants of Israel. Ruth actually enters in by faith and becomes an Israelite. She becomes a member of Naomi's family, is recorded in the lineage of David, and ultimately in the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the natural eye, it seemed foolish that Ruth would leave everything she had ever known. She was leaving her friends, her culture, and her way of life to live in a place where Moabites were despised. She was going to a place where her race was despised, her gender was despised, her widowhood was despised, and was traveling with Naomi, a backslidden woman. But once again, we find God turning a very adverse situation around for good. Even the opinions of people can be turned around by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:11:

Wherefore remember, that ye [being] in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

The world is divided into two segments — Jews and Gentiles. In the Old Testament, God instructed the nation of Israel to evangelize the rest of the world. God gave Israel His covenants, promises, precepts, and the plan of salvation, and expected them to take His message to the world.

In the flesh, most of us today are still Gentiles, but God doesn't see us in the flesh anymore. The moment we were born again, God saw us as sons and daughters. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, bond or free. God simply says we are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. The same was true for Ruth because by faith she became part of the commonwealth of Israel.

III. Ruth's Moabite Background

Ruth 1:1-2:

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land [Israel]. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Elimelech's family dwelled in Moab, established their home there, and remained. Later verses tells us, the sons each married a Moabite woman, but not until after their father died. Elimelech didn't live long. Although we're not told exactly how long he lived, by the time his sons died they had only been living in Moab for ten years.

Mahlon married Ruth. Ruth's life was surrounded by paganism. The Moabite religion worshipped many gods, all of which were demons. In fact, the New Testament tells us in Ephesians and in Romans that the gods which other people serve are demonic powers. To serve anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father, is serving demons.

Nothing in the Word of God indicates that all the Moabites were cruel, evil, and wicked people. The Bible doesn't say Ruth was evil. However, the system of the Moabites was wicked. Many of the Moabites were honest, sincere people trying to serve the gods of their day.

The people of Moab believed they had to continually appease the gods or trouble would come upon them and/or their land. If they suffered a drought, famine, or plagues in the land, this meant the gods were angry and the people had to somehow appease the wrath of the gods. They did this by offering child sacrifices to a god called Molech. In the lap of the statue of Molech was a fire and the Moabites would place children at the top of the statue and the children would slide right into the fire and be consumed. It was considered a great honor for your child to be designated, even from a young age, to be offered to Molech in times of drought and famine. Usually the firstborn of the family, the designated child, would have marks placed on them at a very young age. He or she would live childhood knowing, "One day I could be the child who is offered

to Molech." Once a child passed a certain age, he would be spared being sacrificed.

As people who live in freedom and know the truth, it is difficult to imagine a loving parent sacrificing his or her child. However, we see something similar in our day. Some children in the Middle-East are raised to believe that strapping a bomb to their body and blowing themselves up in the name of their religion will bring great rewards in the afterlife. Even worse, their parents promote this thinking, believing the sacrifice of their child's life a great honor. But our God, the true and living God, has placed a love inside of people for families, not a desire to sacrifice them.

I once talked to a soldier who had lived in Middle East for some time. This soldier had met a man whose son would one day strap a bomb to himself, and the soldier asked him, "What happens if your son dies?"

The father of the child replied, "I've got plenty of other children."

That kind of thinking is foreign to us. In fact, we as parents would throw ourselves on a bomb before we would let our kids be blown up. We would rather our kids have a full life and we would be willing to sacrifice our lives for that to happen. Religion perverts the truth. When children become expendable to their parents, deception has corrupted their values and they become opposite to God's intention.

In addition to child sacrifices, the Moabites had sexual orgies to assure there would be a balance of both rain and sunshine for their crops to produce a plentiful harvest. Fertility rights in the temple with priestesses and prostitutes were supposed to bring fertility to the land so the crops would grow. Like the attitude toward child sacrifices, it was considered a great honor for your daughter to be chosen at a young age to become a prostitute in the temple.

These practices and beliefs are abhorrent to us, but religion turns everything upside down and values become perverted. Ruth was raised in this type of society. Ruth had never learned about a God of love and mercy. All of her gods were angry and needed to be appeased.

Let's take it one step further. Imagine Elimelech and his family settling in Moab. Elimelech is backslidden — he was a Hebrew who chose, as an act of his will, to move to Moab, knowing how contrary their beliefs were to his own. As negatively as the Jews would have viewed Elimelech's

move to Moab, they would have viewed Ruth's move to Israel. Elimelech's excuse was a famine in Israel. He was willing to follow after prosperity, where the crops were growing and economy appeared to be doing well. He moved his wife and two sons and not long after the move, he died leaving his wife and sons alone. Although Naomi was grieved at the loss of her husband she probably thought, *My two sons are young and they're strong and they can have children, and between my sons and grandchildren, I will be taken care of!*

V. Naomi's Influence

Imagine Naomi's reaction when her son Mahlon introduced Ruth to her. Naomi probably warned him, "Son, you know what our God told us. We're not to intermarry with these people." But Naomi had lost her influence because of the influence of the land in which they were living. After Mahlon announced his intention to marry a Moabitess, Naomi's other son, Chilion, announced he too, would marry a Moabitess named Orpah. In less than a year's time, Naomi's two sons were married and then unexpectedly died. Ruth is suddenly left alone with two daughters-in-law who are Moabite women.

Imagine yourself in Ruth's shoes. Imagine meeting Naomi and as they sit down to talk, Ruth recognizes something different about this family, even in their backslidden state. She begins to question, "What is different about *you* as opposed to *me*?"

Naomi probably began to share some things about God. Can you imagine a backslidden person witnessing? Even when a believer is backslidden, the gospel is greater than them. Ruth probably heard accounts from Naomi about the way she and her family worshipped God. And Naomi probably heard accounts of things God had done in the past for the children of Israel. For the first time, Ruth probably began to hear about a God who really cared for her.

Orpah probably heard the same testimony. Although Naomi was not living for God, Ruth and Orpah learned of a God who was different from their god—a God of grace, a God of mercy, a God of miracles, a God of signs and wonders, a God of answered prayer, and a God who was concerned about *them*. In other words, this God was not a selfish god that required the sacrifice of children and for women to become prostitutes to appease his anger. This was a loving God who came to save, redeem, protect, be a companion and friend, and never abandon His children!

With her husband and sons gone, Naomi had to make a decision. She decided to return to Israel. She would once again, establish her home in Bethlehem. Naomi made a commitment to God and returned to fellowship with the Lord. Although she was in her “pigpen,” she finally *came to herself*.

VI. God Has a Plan for You

Naomi made the decision, "Although I have no money, I'm going back home. I don't know if my friends will take me back. I don't know what I'm going to face when I get there, but I do know that was the last time I was in God's will. I have been miserable for ten years. I have been out of God's will for ten years. I want to be back in God's will for my life. Even if I die in Israel and have no friends, I'd rather be in God's will than to be in this miserable condition here in Moab." Naomi's mind was set and her two daughters-in-law decided they would go with her. They had to come to a place of commitment and their place of commitment was making a choice for God.

God had a plan for Ruth, and I believe God had a plan for Orpah, just like God has a plan for you. God had a plan for you even before you were saved. God's first plan for your life is the plan of salvation, but God also has a plan for you every day after that. If you reject salvation, the rest of His plan is still remains, but you cannot partake of that plan. You may have turned down the plan of salvation over and over again, but God has a plan for the rest of your life — a plan for blessing, a plan for supply, a plan for happiness, and a plan for joy. All these things are available to you, but you have to go back to where you turned from God's plan and make it right. You have to go back to that plan of salvation and say "yes" to Jesus, so the rest of His plan can take over.

If you've been born again for five years, but a week ago you sinned against God, turned your back on Him, and went your own direction, God still has a plan for the rest of your life. Ask God to forgive you and return to the place you were before you decided to go your own way.

This is precisely what happened to Naomi. She was a believer but had backslidden. Yet, in the midst of it, she decided to go back to the place where she had left the will of God. She wasn't returning in a better condition than when she left; she was returning in a worse condition. Although both of her daughters-in-law said they wanted to go with her,

when it came down to a commitment of accepting the Lord, Orpah said "No," but Ruth said "Yes" and followed Naomi to Israel.

God had a plan for Ruth. Even though she was a Moabitess and a widow, God had a plan for her. Before Ruth ever knew God, God knew her. Isn't that good news? Before you ever knew about God, God knew about you! Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God had a plan for us before the foundation of the world!

God knew Ruth's name and where she lived. He knew about the death of her husband and her religion. He knew about all the bondages she had in her life, but He also knew the condition of her heart. He knew her secret thoughts. God not only knew about her present condition, but God had a plan for her future—a great plan for her future!

The first part of God's plan was to bring a Moabitess into the commonwealth of Israel. The verse we started with in Ephesians says that we were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel. How in the world could He do that? God had a way of doing it and it was all done legally. Aren't you glad it was done legally for us by the blood of Jesus Christ? Aren't you glad you can stand right beside a Jew today and if they know Jesus Christ, you can both say that you know Jesus Christ and you're both members of God's family? It was all done legally by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Secondly, God was going to bring a woman into the genealogy of David and of Jesus. God was going to vindicate Ruth's mother-in-law and bring her from carnality back into a place of spiritual and natural blessing in Israel.

God used events that had already taken place. He used the disobedience of Elimelech and his sons to bring Ruth to the point of finding Him. God could have brought Ruth to Him another way, but God used the disobedience of Elimelech and his two sons to bring her in. God didn't condone their disobedience, but He turned it around for good—Ruth's conversion—and He received glory for it!

In a similar way, Pharaoh hardened his heart against God, yet in the end, his hardness of heart caused hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to accept the Lord as their Savior. The Bible says that when the Jews left the Egypt, a *mixed multitude* went with them (Exodus 12:38). That *mixed multitude* included many other nationalities, but how were these

nationalities able to leave with the Jews? They accepted the God of the Jews. They accepted the Lord as their Savior. What was it that caused them to accept the Lord as Savior? Was it the faithfulness of God alone? No, it was also the disobedience of Pharaoh. As Pharaoh stood up and challenged God, Pharaoh lost. He didn't lose privately; he lost publicly. Every time a plague came, he was publicly disgraced. He would back up and say, "Nope, I've changed my mind," and he would challenge God and God would challenge him. When you challenge God, you can count on losing, and whenever Pharaoh challenged God, God won!

Was God the author of Pharaoh's disobedience? No! Satan was. Pharaoh had a hard heart. However, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart was not greater than God. God used the hardness of Pharaoh's heart to bring victory!

What have people done to you? God is greater. What have you done to other people? God is greater. Perhaps you've hurt someone and it seems irreparable. God can heal it by His Spirit and by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He can forgive and restore, just like He did in Ruth's situation. Even in its carnality, Naomi's family had an effect on Ruth.

VII. It's Your Choice

Ruth 1:14-17:

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: 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: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Here's the choice they had to make: Both of Orpah and Naomi were confronted with the same decision. One said "Yes," and one said "No." What a commitment Ruth made! This was not only a commitment to the Lord; it was a commitment to the one who led her to the Lord!

It wasn't just the Lord that Ruth committed her life to; she also committed her life to walking with Naomi. Ruth, in essence, proclaimed, "You're the one who introduced me to Jesus. I look to you to be the one who will teach me about Him. Teach me about your covenant with your God. Teach me about your land." And she said, "I'm going to cling to you. I'm going to cling to you so much that I'm going to be with you till the day you die. Death is the only thing that will ever separate you and me, because I'll live where you live, I'll eat what you eat, your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

Ruth accepted the Lord as her Savior and said, "The God you have served, I will serve." Again, Ruth accepted the Lord and served Him through the witness of a backslidden woman. This demonstrates how powerful the gospel is. Ruth heard the gospel and witnessed its power. Ruth accepted the Lord as her Savior, but Orpah did not.

You can give the gospel to people, but you can't force them to accept it. When Jesus hung on the cross, two thieves were hung on crosses on each side of Him. Both witnessed and heard the same thing, yet one rejected Jesus as Lord and Savior and other accepted Him.

Both Orpah and Ruth witnessed the same thing. They married into the same family, they heard the same stories, they were both left widows, and they were both given the same chance to accept the Lord. As they were being led to Bethlehem, they probably heard the stories of the gospel again were told how to accept the Lord, until Naomi finally said, "There comes a point when you have to make a decision."

Immediately, Orpah said, "I can't do it. I cannot accept. I'm going to go back to my way of life, to my religion, and to my friends," and she turned around and left.

Naomi then asked Ruth, "Are you going to follow after her? You might as well go back too if that's what you're going to do."

But Ruth's response was different. She answered, "No, I'm going to follow after your Lord and I'm going to follow after you." She clung to Naomi, and she clung to the Lord.

VIII. Ruth and Naomi's Desperate Circumstances

When Ruth and Naomi arrived in Israel, they were financially destitute. They had no family and no one to take care of them. They had no avenue

for provision and probably stayed with a friend until they could establish a home of their own.

One day Ruth told Naomi, "I must find a job." Naomi's response was, "You can't get a job. First, you're a foreigner. You're a Moabitess. Next, you're a widow. There's no man to take care of you. The only job you could possibly get is as a gleaner in the fields. "

Gleaning was a very difficult job. A gleaner would work all day and by the end of the day would only have enough to provide for the next day. It was a day-by-day job.

When Ruth decided to be a gleaner, she had a choice as to which field she would glean, and she chose the field of Boaz. This is the first time she was guided by the Holy Spirit. Even a new convert can be guided by the Holy Spirit!

Ruth chose Boaz's field and began to glean. She worked hard and one day she met Boaz. He was kind to her and made sure she had provision. Ruth was astonished by his generosity, because she was a Moabitess and Boaz was an Israelite. She was also a widow, which meant she was poor, and Boaz was very wealthy. Despite her circumstances Boaz treated her with kindness and this was difficult for Ruth to understand. Even in her own country, she was never treated so well.

IX. The One and Only Kinsman Redeemer

Ruth 2:10:

Then 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?

When Ruth met Boaz and she fell down before him.

Ruth 2:11:

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shown me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how 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.

Boaz had inquired about Ruth. He looked across the fields and saw her one day and asked, "Who is that woman?"

His servants answered, "We don't know." So he began to investigate and found out who she was.

Ruth 2:15-16:

And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:

And let fall also [some] of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave [them], that she may glean [them], and rebuke her not.

Boaz instructed his own workers to drop large handfuls of remnants of the sheaves to the ground. "Let her come up and actually start to pull off the ears of wheat stalks that are here. Don't rebuke her for it. Remember, I gave you permission to do this. "

Can you imagine the size of basket of grain Ruth was bringing home? Naomi must have seen the overflowing basket and chided Ruth, "We don't do glean that way in Israel. You may have stolen in your home country, but you can't steal here. I don't know how you've gleaned all this, but something is wrong Gleaners in Israel never bring home this much!"

Ruth responded, "In all honesty, there are giant handfuls of wheat lying on the ground to be gleaned and I'm working hard to fill up these baskets and bring it all home.

Naomi questioned, "How can this be? I've watched many gleaners. They gather barely make enough to even get through one day. How is it possible for you to be bringing this much home?"

Ruth answered, "Well, it's because of the man who owns the field where I am gleaning.

Naomi asked, "What's his name?"

She said, "Boaz."

And Naomi said, "I'm related to Boaz! He's a member of our family!" Suddenly, the whole plan of God was revealed to Naomi.

Naomi began to explain to Ruth, "Do you realize there's a law in the Word of God that says you are entitled to a kinsman redeemer? One of my kin who is single can marry you, and in so doing you would automatically become a part of our family no matter what nationality you are. Do you realize Boaz is the only man in the entire nation who can redeem you, and you chose to glean in his field?"

Ruth didn't choose that field; God chose it. Ruth heard from the voice of the Holy Spirit, and where everything looked impossible, God had a plan. God caused her path to cross the path of the one person in all of Israel who could redeem her.

She suddenly became a joint-heir with all that Boaz possessed and all the nation had to offer. She married into the line of Boaz, eventually became the great-grandmother to David, who ruled over Israel, and the lineage carried on right up to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ! All of this happened because of her obedience to God. Ruth forsook everything to follow the God of Naomi, even when it looked like there was no future for her. Regardless of the circumstances, Ruth declared to Naomi, "I'll cling to you and I'll cling to God." And when she went arrived in the nation she had not previously known, God divinely led her, and she met her kinsman redeemer!

Our Kinsman Redeemer is Jesus! I was once a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, but now, by the blood of Jesus Christ, I have been brought into His family. Jesus is the Kinsman who brought me as a stranger into the family and through His blood, I'm now redeemed and part of the family of God. That is our testimony!

Through the life of Ruth we see how God has a plan for our life. Just as Boaz accepted her into the family, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been brought into *His family*. No longer do you belong to the prince of this world. Satan is as powerless over you as he was over Ruth when she decided to follow after God.

By a simple act of faith, we can be brought into the family by our Kinsman Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for us, and who wants to bring us into the family and share equally everything that belongs to Him!