

The History Channel: History's Lost & Found
The Kinsman-Redeemer
The Book of Ruth

Intro: Ruth is the only OT book named after a non-Jew. It is set in dark times with famine and death as its context, but it really has no bad characters in it—unless God is the culprit.

We have a lost and found table in our lobby periodically. It always becomes a mess. A passerby would say that it looked like a pile of junk—umbrellas, articles of clothing, toys, tattered books, and miscellaneous keys, eyeglasses, watches and other items pile up on the table.

God must have a lost and found department. A woman named Naomi ends up on the table. She doesn't seem to fit anywhere, and no one will claim her.

Equally lost, misplaced, and distressed is her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, a Moab woman who chooses to move to Bethlehem deep in Hebrew territory.

Who will rescue these women so lost and misplaced? They will ultimately be rescued by God the Father through a kinsman, a relative, who will become to them a Redeemer. He will purchase from them their family land, take Ruth to be his wife, and raise up children for Naomi and her departed husband.

Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer. He became our brother, taking on flesh and becoming human. He redeemed us by paying the ultimate price for our deliverance—his own life.

I. The Inspiring Kindnesses: v1:16-17. Mark Devers in The Message of the Old Testament identifies kindness as a key theme of the Book of Ruth.

Interestingly, I found out about Mark Devers book from a chef in a restaurant in the Nashville airport. I ordered Huevos rancheros, one of my favorite dishes, and it was simply perfect that morning. I was already thanking God for his kindness, and I thanked the waiter. He told me to thank the chef who was working at a table next to mine. When I did, we entered into a conversation, and I learned that he had received Christ as savior only four years earlier and was contemplating going to seminary. I told him about this idea I had for a year of preaching called The Year of the Message, but that I didn't really know of a resource that took the message of each book of the Bible and explained it. He told me to wait right there. He left and returned with Mark Devers book which gives the central message for each of the 39 books of the OT. It is a resource that I used for this sermon this morning—the product of an act of kindness by a chef in the Nashville airport.

Devers is correct. Kindness is a beautiful dimension of this story of Ruth.

A. Orpah and Ruth have been kind to Naomi, as she states in 1:8. They have supported and loved her even though they were daughters of Moab and she was a Jew, and even despite the death of their husbands and her sons.

B. Naomi performs a kindness for her daughters-in-law. She invites them to stay with her and return to Judah. Then she performs another kindness—she dis-invites them and suggests that they return to their own people and their own gods. She is simply trying to be compassionate. She knows what it feels like to be alone as a woman in a foreign country.

C. Ruth has an even greater kindness in her heart. She is in difficult straits. The terrible plight of this single woman, widowed and penniless, a Moabite in a Jewish man's world, is obvious. Yet Ruth intends to bless and care for her aged mother-in-law despite the loss of her husband. Naomi urges her to go back to her people and her gods. But Ruth replied: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Despite the evident kindnesses, Naomi falls into a sour mood. We are not guaranteed that the kindnesses of people around us will make our spirits sweet. We may not see those kindnesses as acts of God. We may only see the trials and difficulties and losses as his acts. Naomi sees herself as emptied and ruined by the Almighty.

Even good people need a Redeemer. Naomi is a good person. But she has fallen into a pit from which she cannot extract herself. She needs help from outside of herself. She needs someone to do for her what she cannot do for herself. This is the roll of the kinsman-redeemer.

II. The Bitter Complaint:

- A. Naomi is uprooted by a famine in the land. They move to a foreign land, Moab, so that they can eat.
- B. Naomi sustains a terrible bereavement: “Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons” v1:3.
- C. Naomi is disappointed that her two sons marry Moab girls. This would not have happened, she tells herself, if Elimelech had stayed in Bethlehem and had lived until their boys were married to proper Hebrew ladies.
- D. Naomi sustains a complete bereavement: her two sons die. They die without giving her a single grandchild. The line of her husband, Elimelech, is completely lost.
“It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has gone out against me!” v1:13.
- E. Naomi wears her loss on her sleeve: “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me” v1:20-21.
 - 1. God is the culprit.
 - 2. Naomi is angry at the Almighty
 - 3. Is this the truth? Is this how life works out for those who follow the Lord? This is the question that the Book of Ruth addresses.

III. The Surprising Answer: The Book of Ruth does not leave us wondering about the goodness of God. It provides a powerful argument for how God takes life’s lemons and turns them into lemon juice for us.

- A. **The Surprising Perspective:** Boaz tells his new acquaintance, Ruth, “May you be richly reward by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” v2:12. This is the perspective of Boaz, a man of faith who greets his harvesters with the Gideon Announcement—“The Lord is with you!” (v2:4).
We do not know that Ruth was seeking refuge in the God of Israel when she came to Bethlehem with Naomi. We do know that it was her family loyalty that prompted her to come and to remain with the old woman that she had learned to love.
Ruth’s presence with Naomi was to be her true answer from God. James suggests, *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything* (James 1:2-4).
- B. **The Surprising Romance:** v4:9-13. Ruth and Boaz choose to love each other. Boaz is considerably older. He knows that Ruth could land a younger husband. But she sees in him the qualities of character that she wants to live with for the rest of her life
- C. **The Surprising Birth:** v4:13. God blesses them with a child. Naomi is the adopted grandmother here. She sees this child as her very own grandchild, and she is correct in this. Ruth has promised that they will always be family.
- D. **The Surprising Blessing:** Ruth 4:14-15: *The women of Bethlehem said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”*
This birth is not only significant for Naomi and Ruth. It is also significant for us. Obed, the baby boy born to Boaz and Ruth, is the grandfather of King David and part of the lineage of the Messiah.

Conclusion: We often quote William Cowper's hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way." The first three stanzas say this:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*