



*Welcome to our reflection on Ruth Chapter 3,
for the fourth week of Bible Month 2020...*

This is the fourth and final reflection in our series for Bible Month, which this year focusses on the book of Ruth. Each will reflect on one chapter of the book from a different perspective. The material for these reflections has come from the '30 days with Ruth' Bible Month material, offered by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust. Today's reflection is inspired by, and directly draws on, resources prepared by Charlotte Hendy, Discipleship and Evangelism Enabler for Girls' Brigade Ministries.

[The phrases in “ “ come from her material in '30 days with Ruth']

As we begin, find a comfortable place ...you probably need about half an hour when you hope you will not be interrupted...you might also want to have with you those things which help you to reflect... this week you might want to have a Bible with the whole book of Ruth available to you, or the previous week's leaflets...you might choose to have a notebook and pen handy, or some paper and coloured pencils... a holding cross...or a lit candle...whatever helps you to be both relaxed and attentive to God and to yourself...

The material offered for this fourth week is maybe the most challenging to translate to written and podcast format – it was written months ago for a group to work on together, and it focusses on cooperation, shared experience and shared action... Charlotte writes “This Bible study is written in the spirit of cooperation, encouraging you to think about your own story: the part you play and those whom you journey alongside”.

As we begin...pause and notice what your experience of these past weeks has been. Has it been an experience of community or of isolation? Who have been the people with whom you have shared this time, physically or by letter, phone or digital means? Who has supported you and who have you supported? How does it feel to be encouraged at this present moment to think about those with whom we share our journeys?

So as we begin, let us pray...

Gracious God, as we pause in your presence and in the company of scripture, we trust to your care all those people and situations which are on our minds...help us in this time to be attentive to the words we encounter, to those things which you will help us to see and hear, to our own story and the stories of those around us...help us to learn and grow as we reflect. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

When we have taken time to acknowledge how we come to scripture today, and to pray, we hear Ruth Chapter 4. We have it here from the New Revised Standard Version, which is a modern translation of the Hebrew text, and from 'The Message', which is a paraphrase where we hear scripture in language which tries to reflect the way we speak and use language today. You may also like to read from another translation or paraphrase.

Ruth Chapter 4 (NRSV)

No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.' And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down.

He then said to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.' So he said, 'I will redeem it.' Then Boaz said, 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance.' At this, the next-of-kin said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.'

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, one party took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, 'Acquire it for yourself', he took off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.' Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.’ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

Ruth Chapter 4 (The Message)

Boaz went straight to the public square and took his place there. Before long the “closer relative,” the one mentioned earlier by Boaz, strolled by.

“Step aside, old friend,” said Boaz. “Take a seat.” The man sat down.

Boaz then gathered ten of the town elders together and said, “Sit down here with us; we’ve got some business to take care of.” And they sat down.

Boaz then said to his relative, “The piece of property that belonged to our relative Elimelech is being sold by his widow Naomi, who has just returned from the country of Moab. I thought you ought to know about it. Buy it back if you want it—you can make it official in the presence of those sitting here and before the town elders. You have first redeemer rights. If you don’t want it, tell me so I’ll know

where I stand. You're first in line to do this and I'm next after you."

He said, "I'll buy it."

Then Boaz added, "You realize, don't you, that when you buy the field from Naomi, you also get Ruth the Moabite, the widow of our dead relative, along with the redeemer responsibility to have children with her to carry on the family inheritance."

Then the relative said, "Oh, I can't do that—I'd jeopardize my own family's inheritance. You go ahead and buy it—you can have my rights—I can't do it."

In the olden times in Israel, this is how they handled official business regarding matters of property and inheritance: a man would take off his shoe and give it to the other person. This was the same as an official seal or personal signature in Israel.

So when Boaz's "redeemer" relative said, "Go ahead and buy it," he signed the deal by pulling off his shoe.

Boaz then addressed the elders and all the people in the town square that day: "You are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and Kilion and Mahlon, including responsibility for Ruth the foreigner, the widow of Mahlon—I'll take her as my wife and keep the name of the deceased alive along with his inheritance. The memory and reputation of the deceased is not going to disappear out of this family or from his hometown. To all this you are witnesses this very day."

All the people in the town square that day, backing up the elders, said, "Yes, we are witnesses. May GOD make this woman who is coming into your household like Rachel and Leah, the two women who built the family of Israel.

May GOD make you a pillar in Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem! With the children GOD gives you from this young woman, may your family rival the family of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah."

Boaz married Ruth. She became his wife. Boaz slept with her. By GOD's gracious gift she conceived and had a son.

The town women said to Naomi, "Blessed be GOD! He didn't leave you without family to carry on your life. May this baby grow up to be famous in Israel! He'll make you young again! He'll take care of you in old age. And this daughter-in-law who has brought him into the world and loves you so much, why, she's worth more to you than seven sons!"

Naomi took the baby and held him in her arms, cuddling him, cooing over him, waiting on him hand and foot.

The neighbourhood women started calling him "Naomi's baby boy!" But his real name was Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

This is the family tree of Perez:

Perez had Hezron,
Hezron had Ram,
Ram had Amminadab,
Amminadab had Nahshon,
Nahshon had Salmon,
Salmon had Boaz,
Boaz had Obed,
Obed had Jesse,
and Jesse had David.

Charlotte says "The book of Ruth ends with the birth of Ruth and Boaz's son – Obed. This is followed by the genealogy of David, who we learn is to be Obed's grandson. As followers of Jesus we know that the story doesn't end there – Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus himself was born of this line of David."...

"But how did we get here? The book of Ruth contains many things, but one of the most integral themes throughout is the relationship between two women – Ruth and Naomi.

They work together and support each other at different times and in different ways...We see this most beautifully in Ruth 4:17, where the women say 'A son has been born to Naomi'...we know that Ruth gave birth to baby Obed...[but] Naomi is part of the story too. It's such a beautiful picture: an outcome that both have worked together and supported one another to achieve."

Having heard the final part of the story, pause and wonder what stands out particularly for you from Chapter 4...Why is this word, phrase, idea or event important to you at the moment? You might want to make a note for yourself, to draw or doodle a thought...you might pause and pray, wondering with God...

As we reflect further together you might like to have your preferred translation of the whole book of Ruth in front of you, or to look back over the previous booklets. Take some time to wonder about the following questions...pausing as you need to...

How do Ruth and Naomi support one another throughout the book?

If your life were a story split into four chapters, what events would fall into each chapter? How would you choose to tell the story? Are there times where you are 'silent', as Ruth and Naomi are silent in chapter 4?

In the Bible Month material, the chapters are headed 'The story of Orpah', 'The story of Boaz', 'The story of Ruth' and 'The story of Naomi'. Do you agree, or would you give these chapters different titles? How would you title the chapters of your story?

Who is alongside you in the present chapter of your life? How might you and they work together, and support one another?

The book of Ruth points us to Jesus – where do you recognise God at work in your life right now?

In parallel with the ‘Testimonies of Home’ which we shared at the beginning of Bible month – is there a story of your own life you would like to take time to write, as we draw our Bible Month reflections to a close? If so, is there anyone you would choose to share this with?

Again, you might like to pause here and jot down some notes, sketch or doodle...you may need to make a phone call or write a letter, you may need to talk with God...

When you are ready, set aside anything you may have been doing to help you reflect, pause and take a few deep breaths...

As you prepare to return to the things of this day, you may choose to pray, inspired by what you have discovered...or to draw this time to a close by praying the Lord’s Prayer...

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.