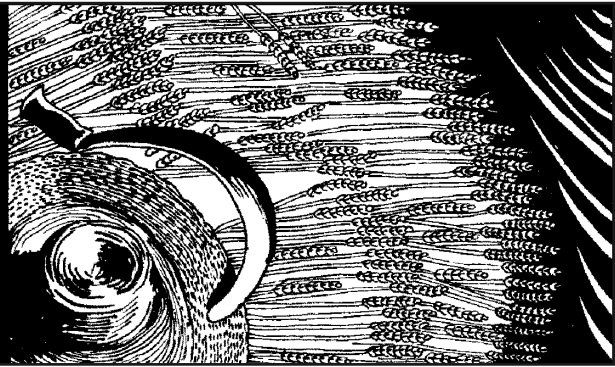


RUTH



To preserve the inheritance of each head of family and the piece of land he owned in the midst of his tribe was considered in Israel as the way to protect the dignity and the freedom of everyone. This practice of redeeming the land together with the name of the one who died without children is highlighted in the case of Ruth.

An old tradition held that among David's ancestors, there was a foreign woman named Ruth. She protagonizes this beautiful story. These pages preserve for us scenes from the lives of the Palestinian farmers, Christ's ancestors, as they lived for centuries. In the simple life of these peasants we find true culture, an exquisite human quality, and unconscious nobility.

A spirit of supranational openness inspires this story written around the fourth century B.C. Shortly before this, Ezra had forced the Jews to get rid of their foreign wives who might have enticed them to follow pagan religions. By contrast, here the protagonist of the story is a foreign woman. Ruth accepts the true God of Israel and she is welcomed into the community of the people of God.

Your God will be my God

Jdg 2:16

1 There was a famine in the land during the time of the Judges, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah departed with his wife and two sons to sojourn in the country of Moab. ² The man was Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. A little later, after they had settled in Moab, ³ Naomi's husband Elimelech died. She was left with her two sons, ⁴ who married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth.

Dt 23:4;
Ezra 9:1

After living in Moab for about ten years, ⁵ Mahlon and Chilion also died and Naomi was left bereft of husband and two sons. ⁶ Having heard that Yahweh had come to help his people

by giving them food, Naomi prepared to return home. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law, she took the road back to Judah.

⁸ It was then that Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. And may Yahweh be kind to you, as you have been to your dead and to me. ⁹ May he also grant each of you rest in the home of another husband." She kissed them goodbye. But they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "No, we will go back with you to your people."

¹¹ Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why should you come with me, when I have no more sons to become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters. I am now too

Dt 25:5;
Mt 22:23

old to marry again. Even if I hope to have a husband tonight and give birth to sons, ¹³would you remain unmarried waiting for them to grow up? No, my daughters. I won't share my lot with you for it is too bitter. Yahweh's hand has been raised against me!"

¹⁴Again they sobbed and wept. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law returns to her people and her gods. You too must return. Go after her."

¹⁶Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you. For I will go where you go and stay where you stay. Your people will be my people and your god, my God. ¹⁷Where you die, there will I die and be buried. May Yahweh deal with me severely if anything except death separates us." ¹⁸Realizing that Ruth was determined to go with her, Naomi stopped urging her.

¹⁹So the two went on till they reached Bethlehem. Their arrival set the town astir. Women asked, "Can this be Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara for Yahweh has made life bitter for me. ²¹I came away full but go back empty. Why call me Naomi, when Yahweh has afflicted me?"

²²Thus it was that Naomi returned from Moab with her Moabite daughter-in-law and arrived in Bethlehem as the barley harvest began.

Ruth gleans in the field of Boaz

2 ¹Naomi had a well-to-do kinsman, Boaz, from the clan of her husband Elimelech. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to pick up the left-over grain in the field whose owner will allow me that favor." Naomi said, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³So she went to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. It happened that the field she entered

belonged to Boaz of the clan of Elimelech.

⁴When Boaz came from Bethlehem, he greeted the harvesters, "Yahweh be with you." They returned the greeting, "Yahweh bless you."

⁵Noticing Ruth, Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "To whom does that young woman belong?"

⁶The foreman replied, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She came this morning and asked leave to glean behind the harvesters. Since then she has been working without a moment's rest."

⁸Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Don't go away from here to glean in anyone else's field. Stay here with my women servants. ⁹See where the harvesters are and follow behind. I have ordered the men not to molest you. They have filled some jars with water. Go there and drink when you are thirsty." ¹⁰Bowing down with her face to the ground, she exclaimed, "Why have I, a foreigner, found such favor in your eyes?"

¹¹Boaz answered, "I have been told all about you—what you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death, how you have gone with her, leaving your own father and mother and homeland, to live with a people you knew nothing about before you came here. ¹²May Yahweh reward you for this! May you receive full recompense from Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

¹³Ruth said, "May I prove worthy of your favor, my lord. You have consoled your servant with your kind words, though I am not the equal of your maidservants."

¹⁴Boaz called her at mealtime, "come over, have some bread and dip it in the wine." As she sat among the reapers, he handed her some

Ps 129:8

1S 25:23

roasted grain. She ate her fill and had some left over.

Lev
19:10

¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his men, "Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not scold her. ¹⁶And pull some stalks from the bundles; leave them scattered for her to glean." ¹⁷She worked until evening and when she threshed what she had gleaned it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸Ruth carried back to town the threshed barley, which she showed to her mother-in-law. She also gave her what she had left over from lunch.

¹⁹Naomi asked her daughter-in-law, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the man who took notice of you be blessed." Ruth told her mother-in-law about the owner of the field where she had worked. "His name is Boaz," she said. ²⁰Naomi exclaimed, "May Yahweh bless him! God indeed is merciful both to the living and the dead. This man is a close relative, one with a right of redemption over us."

²¹Ruth continued, "He even told me to stay with his servants until they finish harvesting the grain."

²²Naomi said, "It will be better for you, my daughter, to go out with his maidservants than to go working in some other field where harm might come to you."

²³Ruth, therefore, stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the wheat and barley harvests. And she continued living with her mother-in-law.

She went and lay down at his feet

3 • ¹Later Naomi talked to Ruth: "My daughter, is it not my duty to see you settled in a home where you will be well provided for? ²And is not Boaz, who has treated you kindly with his maidservants, a close relative of ours? Tonight at the threshing floor, he will be winnowing barley.

So bathe and perfume yourself, then put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor. But don't make yourself known to him till he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴Take note of the place where he lies down to sleep. Then go, uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do."

⁵Ruth answered, "I will do as you say." ⁶She went down to the threshing floor and did as her mother-in-law told her.

⁷Feeling happy after eating and drinking, Boaz went to lie down at the end of the pile of grain. Ruth then approached quietly, turned back the covering of his feet and lay there. ⁸At midnight the man awoke when he turned over and felt someone lying at his feet. He got up and was startled to find a woman there. ⁹"Who are you?" he asked.

The answer came, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread the corner of your cloak over me for you are a kinsman who has right of redemption over me." ¹⁰Boaz said, "May Yahweh bless you, my daughter! This kindness of yours now is even greater than that which you have

Es 2:12;
Jdt 10:3

• **3.1** Why does Ruth want to have Boaz for her husband? In order to follow the so-called "Levirate" law, mentioned in chapter 38 of Genesis.

When a man dies without leaving children, the sacred duty of his widow is to marry the nearest relative of her deceased husband. The first son she would bear him would take the

name of the dead man and be considered his son.

This explains Ruth's sacrifice. She gives up marrying a young man and accepts being the wife of an older and foreign man, because this can give her a son "for" her dead husband. Thus Ruth fulfills the mysterious plan of God who predestined her to be among Christ's ancestors (see Mt 1:5).

Dt 25:5;
Mt 22:24

shown earlier, for you have not gone after young men, rich or poor. ¹¹Have no fear, my daughter; I will do for you all that you ask, since all my townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. ¹²It is true that I am a close relative, but there is another still closer. ¹³Stay here for the night. In the morning, if he wants to claim you—good! But if not—as surely as Yahweh lives—I will claim you myself. Lie here till morning.”

¹⁴She lay at his feet till morning and got up before anyone could be recognized. For Boaz said, “It must not be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.” ¹⁵Then turning to Ruth, Boaz said, “Hold out the mantle you are wearing.” She did so and he poured into it six measures of barley. He helped her lift the bundle, then went back to town.

¹⁶Ruth returned home to her mother-in-law, who asked, “How did you fare, my daughter?” She told her everything ¹⁷and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley because, as he said, he did not want me to go back to my mother-in-law empty-handed.”

¹⁸Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, till you learn what happens, for he will not rest until it is settled today.”

The Levirate law

4 ¹Meanwhile Boaz went to the town gate and sat there waiting for the closer relative about whom he had spoken to Ruth. When he saw him coming, he called him by name and said, “Come here and sit down.” And so he did.

²Boaz picked out ten from the city elders and asked them to sit with them, which they did. ³Then he said to the other man who also had right of redemption, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our

brother Elimelech. ⁴I thought of bringing this matter to you before our elders here, because as the closer kin you have more right to lay claim to it. But if you have no wish to redeem it, let me know because I am next to you in line.”

The man replied, “I am willing to put in my claim. I will redeem it.” ⁵Boaz continued, “If you buy the land from Naomi, you will also have to take the Moabite Ruth, widow of the late heir, and her sons will inherit the name and the land of the dead.”

⁶The man said, “Then I cannot redeem it, because I might endanger my own estate. Redeem it yourself.”

⁷It used to be the custom in Israel that for a contract of redemption or exchange to become binding, one party had to take off his sandal and give it to the other. This act legalized transactions.

⁸So the man took off his sandal and said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.”

⁹Boaz turned to the elders and all those present. “This day you are witnesses that I buy from Naomi all the holdings of Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I also take Mahlon’s widow, Ruth the Moabite, as my wife to raise up a family for her late husband, so that the name of the dead will be restored to his inheritance and be present among his brothers when they gather at the gate of his town. Do you witness this today?”

¹¹The elders and all those at the gate answered, “We witness. May Yahweh make the woman coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper in Ephrathah and be of good standing in Bethlehem. ¹²And through the offspring Yahweh will give you by this woman, may your house become like that of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

Obed was the father of Jesse, who was David’s father

¹³So Ruth was taken by Boaz and became his wife. Yahweh made her conceive and give birth to a son.

1S 1:19 ¹⁴The women said to Naomi, “Bless-
 ed be Yahweh who has provided you
 today with an heir. May he become
 Lk 1:58 famous in Israel! ¹⁵He will be your
 comfort and stay in your old age, for
 he is born of a daughter-in-law who
 loves you and is worth more than
 seven sons.”

¹⁶Naomi took the child as her own
 1S 17:12 and became his nurse. ¹⁷And the
 women of the neighborhood gave

him his name, saying, “A son has
 been born for Naomi.” They named
 him Obed. He was the father of
 Jesse, who was David’s father.

¹⁸This, then, is Perez’s family line:
 Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hez-
 ron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab,
²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon
 of Salmon,
²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed,
²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse the father
 of David.

2:5-15;
 Mt 1:3-5;
 Lk 3:
 31-33