

# OUR NEAREST KINSMAN

## Ruth, Chapters 1 - 4

*"Ruth said...wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God". (1:16)*

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It could well be that some of us are now in the 'old age' category! Our focus in this writing is on an elderly woman brought to our attention in the Book of Ruth; her name is Naomi.

In the first chapter of Ruth, we read that Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, and their two sons, lived in Bethlehem, in Judah. Famine came to the land and Elimelech chose to take his wife and sons from their home and to journey into the land of Moab to escape the famine. In the years that followed, Elimelech died and his two sons each married Moabite women. Moab was a country steeped in idolatry. After ten years in that land, Naomi's two sons both died (Ruth 1:5).

Naomi made a decision to return home. She had heard that there was no longer a famine in Judah and that *"the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread"* (1:6). Continuing on from 1:6, we read that both of Naomi's daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, started off with Naomi, but, after a short distance, Naomi, in great concern for her two widowed daughters-in-law, urged them to

*"Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."(1:8)*

The response from both was "Surely we will return with you to your people" (1:10)

Naomi then spoke to them of the fact that she had no more sons that they could marry (the custom of the Israelites being for a brother to marry his deceased brother's wife, so as to raise up a son as the deceased's inheritance). Naomi wanted them to understand fully that going with her would mean great sacrifice and that, as she had no other sons for them to marry, they would probably be widows the rest of their lives.

Having heard this, Orpah chose to turn back, but not so Ruth. In 1:16-17 Ruth's reply is

*"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*

Surely this is a most beautiful picture of selfless devotion, of a choice to forsake all and to follow and be faithful to Naomi, and not only to Naomi, but to Naomi's God. Naomi discerns that Ruth understands the uncertainty of her future and that her declaration is one of absolute sincerity, and is satisfied. And so, the two women, the elderly and the young, journey on together.

It seems that in the witness of Naomi's godly life in which she had shown love and respect to her Moabite daughters-in-law, they had been drawn to Naomi's God. Orpah though, faced with the issue of great sacrifice, decided it was too big a price to pay to follow Him, and turned back to her people and their 'gods'. Ruth's choice was to forsake all, choosing to go on into an unknown future because the desire was in her heart to follow Naomi's God. Verse 18 states that she was "*determined*" to go with Naomi.

Chapter 2 describes the further unfolding of events. With Naomi and Ruth arriving back in Bethlehem, we see God's hand moving in bringing Ruth to glean in the very harvest field that belonged to a man named Boaz, a godly man, who also was a near 'kinsman' to Naomi. Boaz was gracious and generous to Ruth, and protective of her wellbeing. The outcome we see in Chapters 3 - 4 is that Boaz gladly fulfilled his role as a near 'kinsman' to Naomi and Ruth, choosing to take Ruth as his wife. Ruth, in due time, bore a son, who was named Obed, whose descendant was King David.

There is so much we can think on in this beautiful story of the selfless love of Ruth, but our focus is on Naomi. Naomi experienced great sorrow, and no doubt a lonely heartache to be with her own people during the years she lived in Moab. Yet, in these circumstances of loss and grief, God was working out His good purpose. Naomi's faith was sorely tried and yet her suffering was to be replaced

with delight in the birth of a son to Boaz and to Ruth, who had become a woman of faithful allegiance to Naomi's God and to her.

A point here we may like to reflect on; it may have seemed to Naomi that the years lived in Moab had been pointless, barren and useless. But, God, in His gracious mercy, was working in and by these circumstances of grief and loss. He had a 'bigger picture'. Naomi's quiet godliness of living out faith in the most difficult and grieving situations had, by God's grace, resulted in the conversion of Ruth.

God hadn't left Naomi; His faithful love had been present through her trials, following on to wider, fuller consequences than she could ever have imagined. God used Naomi in His glorious plan of salvation running down through the line of Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth, to King David and on in the genealogy of Christ.

God gave Naomi a "*near kinsman*" and he became to her a "*nourisher of old age*" (4:14-15). Her joy was restored as she was again received into, welcomed and respected by the community. Naomi became the carer, the nurse, of the child Obed, gladly serving God in this way.

We, too, have a 'near kinsman', the Lord Jesus Christ, who will be to us also 'a nourisher of our old age'.

Let us delight in the words of the following readings:

Psalm 92:12 *"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree...they shall still bear fruit in OLD AGE; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*

Psalm 148: 1,7, 12-14: *"Praise the Lord!...Praise the Lord from the earth;..both young men and maidens, OLD men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted. His glory is above the earth and heaven...Praise the Lord".*

And, lastly, this beautiful, sure promise for those in the twilight years:

Isaiah 46:4 *"Even to your OLD AGE, I am He, and even to grey hairs, I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."*

H I M S E L F --- The All-Sufficient One ---will do it!

*"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."*  
(Psalm 30:5)