

GOD IS LOYAL TO NAOMI

Ruth 4

The book of Ruth is a “bridge” between the time of the local judges, a time of great spiritual and moral apostasy (1:1), and the coming kingship of Israel. God was looking for a man after his heart to sit on the throne of Israel. By God’s grace, Ruth’s loyalty made her a part of that story!

THE CLOSER RELATIVE REFUSES TO REDEEM NAOMI’S PROPERTY (VV. 1–6).

Following the Mosaic Law, Boaz met with the elders of Bethlehem at the gate (the place where business was transacted). The closer relative expressed interest in redeeming Elimelech’s property, but when he discovered that it involved marrying Ruth, he refused. Marrying Ruth would have endangered the inheritance of his own children.

This custom may seem strange to our Western minds, but it is one that God required of the nation of Israel. They were to perpetuate the line of clan members and also help them retain their land. The two were closely tied, and family members were to come to the aid of those who were in danger of losing either their family line or their property. The Year of Jubilee, every fifty years, was a testimony to this fact: all property was to return to its original owners (Lev 25:8–17). In the intervening years, an Israelite was able to liquidate his property to gain cash, and the nearest relative was to redeem it (buy it back for him) in order to keep the land in the family (Lev 25:23–28).

While the writer of Ruth does not make a big deal of it, the nearer relative’s refusal to obey God’s law (cf. Lev 25:25) demonstrated his lack of loyalty to God and to Naomi and Elimelech. Perhaps this kind of unfaithfulness to God and his law was just commonplace in a time when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). It is recorded that the unfaithful relative took off his sandal to confirm his unwillingness to redeem Elimelech’s property. The only other reference to this custom in the law is in Deuteronomy 25:5–10, which also deals with one who refuses to perform the duty of levirate marriage (perpetuating the line of a relative). In this case, the law prescribes that the widow was to pull off his sandal and spit in his face to demonstrate the shame of one who was disloyal to God and family. His family would then be called “The house of him who had his sandal pulled off” and bear that shame indefinitely.

BOAZ REDEEMS NAOMI’S PROPERTY (VV. 7–12).

The refusal of the nearer relative to marry Ruth cleared the way for Boaz to demonstrate his loyalty to God, to Naomi (and Elimelech), and to Ruth, who had shown that same loyalty to Naomi and God. Upon hearing Boaz’s declaration, the elders and people at the gate pronounce a beautiful blessing on Ruth. Their words are significant: they compare her to Rachel and Leah, the matriarchs of Israel, as well as to Tamar, a disgraced woman, and the great-great-great-great-great grandmother of Elimelech, to whom God showed great mercy (Gen 38:6–30; cf. Matt 1:3).

GOD REWARDS RUTH'S LOYALTY (VV. 13–22).

Not only was Naomi's property returned, she was rewarded with a grandson: Obed. This baby boy, a gift of God's grace, would be considered the grandson of Elimelech and Naomi and carry on his line. The women of Bethlehem blessed Naomi and praised the life-giving God. Their blessing praises God's faithfulness to her and his ability to bring life to her family in spite of the death of her husband and sons.

Naomi's final blessing, years after her death, was being a part of the kingly line of David, God's anointed sons. The epilogue of the book gives an idea of the significance of Boaz and Ruth's son Obed: he was the grandfather of David, the king of Israel.

Key verses: *"Then all the people who were at the gate and 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 act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman'" (Ruth 4:11–12).*

How might Naomi have praised her faithful God? Ruth? Boaz?

Am I in tune to the faithfulness of God in my life? What are some of the ways I regularly praise God for his faithfulness in my past?