

A Story of Blessing

Shalom! My name is Boaz and I would like to tell you a story of how Yahweh, the Almighty God who you know by the name of “The LORD” does wonderful things that we cannot imagine. He delights to bless His people, of whom I am most blessed. I am sure that you have heard my story before but, since you are not from around here, you may not have understood just how amazing it is.

The story I want to share with you began many years ago when I was just a young man. Our land was afflicted with a famine. Things were very difficult and it seemed strange living in a town named Bethlehem, which means “house of bread” when there was no bread to eat. When I asked my father why this famine fell on us he said that Yahweh had promised that if we obeyed Him and walked in His ways, He would bless the land with bountiful harvests but, He also promised that if we turned away from Him, we would be afflicted. And so we were.

We lived in the land of Judah which means “Let Yahweh be praised” but there was little praising in those days. I could see it in the lives of my own relatives, Elimelech whose name means “God is King” and his wife Naomi which means “pleasant, sweet and delightful.” They were Ephrathites which means “fruitful” but none of that seemed to mean much to them. They even gave terrible names to their sons. Mahlon means “weak and wounded” and Chilion means “failing and coming to an end.” Can you imagine naming your children things like that?

When the famine came they were among the first to leave. They heard there was food in Moab so that’s where they went. I would rather starve than to live in Moab. Instead of serving the Almighty, the Moabites worship a horrible demon god called Chemosh. Their idea of worship is to sacrifice babies by placing them in the red-hot hands of his bronze statue. They sing and chant to the screams of their children. Unimaginably Horrible! But that is where they went.



Elimelech and Naomi went to Moab looking for an easier life but things didn’t go so well for them. Elimelech died not too long after going there. I guess they had gotten used to living in Moab because Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women. Hashem told us not to intermarry with unbelievers because when you marry, you are not just marrying a person but also a whole way of life. Fortunately, the women that Mahlon and Chilion married were not terrible. Orpah and Ruth were sweet women who were just raised in that horrible sewer. Still, when you disobey the Almighty, you don’t need to expect things to go well for you. In only about 10 years Mahlon and Chilion died leaving Naomi both a widow and childless.

It is hard to be a widow even in Israel, but you can only imagine how hard it is in a wicked country like Moab. Naomi was totally hopeless now and bitter too. She was especially bitter against the Almighty because she believed that He was punishing her. Yet, in her desperation,

she decided to return to Israel. Now her widowed daughters-in-law were desperate too. They were living with Naomi so when she decided to come back to Israel, they were going to come too. Of course, Naomi knew they would not be welcome in Israel. When we first came to the land with Moses, the Moabite king Balak hired that wicked sorcerer Balaam to curse us. Adonai turned his cursing to blessing but Balaam still advised the Moabite king how to get us to curse ourselves by getting into sexual orgies with the Moabite women and worshipping their demon gods. Yahweh was furious with us and 24,000 people died in a plague before the zeal of Phinehas stopped it. We really need priests like him today! Things never got any better between Israel and Moab so Naomi was right, Ruth and Orpah needed to go back to their own land.

But Ruth wouldn't go back. I suppose that just because you were raised in a sewer doesn't mean you like it. Elimelech and his family were not the most godly people but somehow Ruth learned about the ways of Yahweh and longed to be a part of His people. Wicked people hate our righteous laws but they are so pure and holy that people like Ruth are drawn to them. That is why Yahweh called us to be a people in the first place. He told Abraham that He would make Abraham great so that he could be a blessing to all nations. Ruth told Naomi, ***"Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where 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. May יהוה {the LORD} do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."*** I rarely hear Israelites say things like that but can you imagine those words coming from someone from Moab?!

I can't imagine Ruth staying with Naomi. Naomi was so bitter when she got back to Bethlehem that she said, "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara" which means bitterness. But there was an unquenchable fire within Ruth. She didn't know it, but the Almighty had great plans for her and He was drawing her to Himself and directing her every step. And that is where I come into this story of blessing!

Ruth and Naomi came back to town just as the barley harvest was starting. It was a very good harvest and the fields were full of beautiful heads of grain. I had hired a lot of workers to help me harvest my grain. When I entered the field and saw the workers already binding up huge sheaves of grain my heart was overwhelmed. I shouted out to the workers, ***"יהוה be with you!"*** And they immediately echoed back ***"יהוה bless you!"*** Things were very different in Israel now than when Elimelech and Naomi left. The chastisement of Yahweh had brought us back to our senses and taught us to walk in obedience to Him. A righteous man is always blessed, even in times of deep trouble and sorrow the Father is close to him. But when a nation walks in obedience to the Father, He can pour out great blessings on them.

Now the righteous laws that God gave us through Moses are unlike the laws and customs of any other people. Unlike all the demon gods, Yahweh deeply cares about widows and orphans. He said that when a farmer harvests his fields, he must not harvest right to the edge or in the corners. That grain is for the poor to come get so they will have something to eat also. In fact, we are not allowed to pick up anything we drop and even if we forget to pick up a whole sheaf of grain we are not allowed to go back for it. It's the same for harvesting grapes and olives.



Well, like I said, the Father delights in directing the steps of those who seek Him and He directed Ruth's steps to my fields. As I started working with the other harvesters, I saw her gleaning among the other poor people. Oh yes, she really caught my eye! I asked one of the workers who she was and they told me that she was Ruth the Moabite. He told me how she had been working diligently since dawn and had only taken one short break. I had heard how she was caring for her mother in law, Naomi and seeking to learn the ways of Yah. Now I could see that she was also beautiful and hardworking. I definitely needed to get to know this young woman!

When it was time for my harvesters to eat lunch and rest, I called her over to eat with us. You could see my foreman roll his eyes when I gave her a share of the food. Yes, I guess it was enough for several meals but everything within me wanted to bless her. Yahweh delights in blessing those who are faithful, caring and hardworking... and He blesses through us. Like, Abraham, He blesses us so that we can bless others. The blessings flow through us to others. If we try to dam them up for ourselves, the bright, clear waters become a stinking black sludge. Even in Israel, men sometimes mistreat women so I told Ruth to not glean in anyone else's fields and to stay close to the other women who were working in my field. I also sternly told the men that they were not to bother her in anyway. In fact, I told them that when they are binding up a sheaf near her, make sure that they are "clumsy" and drop some so she can pick it up.

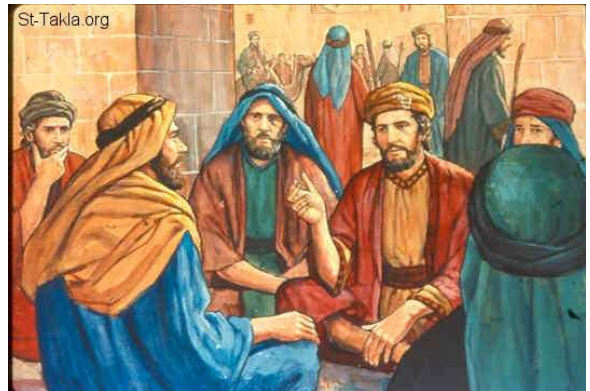
Ruth worked all day and when my workers went home she was still there beating out the grain from what she had gathered. My neighbor said that she carried home over 60 pounds of grain that night. Naomi was very worried that Ruth had not come home by sunset but she was stunned when Ruth finally got home carrying such a load of food. Well, that woke something up within Naomi and suddenly she began to see how Yahweh was working a blessing for her despite her bitterness toward Him.



When we finished harvesting the field, I had a celebration for the workers. It was a beautiful night so, with a little wine under our belts, we just sacked out on the thick piles of straw left beside the threshing floor beside the sacks of grain. The next thing I know, my feet are cold and when I sat up to cover them, I saw a woman laying by my feet. It was Ruth! In my grogginess, I wondered what this meant. She spoke quietly to me invoking Yahweh's law of the redeemer and asking me to be a covering and protection to her and Naomi. Can you imagine a Moabite understanding such things. The spirit of Adonai rose up within me and filled my heart. I blessed her in the name of the Almighty and told her that she has nothing to fear. Everyone in town recognized her as an exceptionally worthy woman of character.

I explained to her that I was indeed a redeemer but that there was a redeemer closer than I was. Our laws require that the closest relative be the redeemer if he is willing. I told her that I would take care of the matter and if he would not be a redeemer to her then I certainly would! I wanted to make sure that Naomi also understood that I would take care of the matter right away so I told Ruth to hold out her cloak and I filled it with barley, tied it up and set it on her shoulders. It was the surety of more blessings to come!

At dawn I went and sat at the city gates. That is where our townsmen take care of all kinds of business from buying and selling land to settling legal disputes. Soon the other redeemer came by on his way to town. I called him over and told him to sit down and then called ten other elders of the town to join us. I explained that Naomi was a poor widow and that she was selling her property. Our righteous laws say that land can never be sold in perpetuity, that is, forever. It must remain with families for the Father gave it to us as a gift. Even if it is sold, it returns to the seller in the year of Jubilee - but that was many years away. The law said that if a person had to sell their land because they were poor, the nearest kinsman should buy it.



Well, the other redeemer did indeed want the land. A good piece of land will bring wealth to those who work wisely and diligently. But then I told him the rest of the story... Ruth and Naomi came with the land! That sounds strange to foreigners but the Father is deeply concerned with our welfare. If a man dies childless, his name and his heritage is lost. That is a tragedy because the Father has great plans for all of us. So He wrote into our laws that the redeemer should also take the wife of the man who has died and raise up children in his name so that his heritage could continue. When the other redeemer heard that, he backed out. He didn't have children of his own yet so he wanted the blessing of the first born to go to a son born in his name, not Mahlon's.

That is understandable. It was also exactly what I was hoping for! Without giving him a chance to change his mind, I quickly claimed the right of redemption in the presence of the elders of the city. DONE!! The joy of Yahweh flowed through me. Not only was I getting the finest, and noblest woman in town as my wife, I was walking in the center of Almighty's plan for my life!

I rushed to share the news with Ruth and Naomi. The whole town was excited and we had a grand wedding. Even the other women of the town looked up to Ruth's noble character. I heard one of the old women telling Naomi that Ruth was "worth more to her than seven sons!" Can you imagine that? Women can be mean spirited toward other women... especially a Moabite! But, as I said, Ruth's character and devotion to Yahweh set her apart.

Sure enough, it wasn't long before Ruth had our first child, a son! By tradition he would have been named Mahlon after his father but the women of the town had other ideas. Why curse a child with a name that means "weak and sickly"? Instead, everyone called him "Obed" which means "diligent worker" after the character they saw in his mother.

Me? I have been so blessed in so many ways. There is nothing that can compare with the life of walking in humble obedience to the Almighty. The more we submit to Him, the more blessings He can pour into our lives. It was such a delight to teach my son the Torah, the instructions God gave us and to watch him grow into a fine man. When I was very old, Obed had a son named Jesse. Not long afterward, the Father called me home to be with Him but I was still able to see Jesse continuing to work our land. He had seven sons, some of them were truly impressive men but it was the youngest that seemed to inherit my love of God. His name was David. Adonai responded to his love by raising him up as King over all Israel! But that is a story for another day.

Shalom my friends,

May Yahweh bless you and keep you;
May Yahweh make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
May Yahweh lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

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2017-10-28