

EVERY WOMAN IN THE BIBLE

The Levite's Concubine (Judges 19)

Date: About 1200 B.C. (?)

Name: Unknown

Main Contribution: Her fate unveils the depths to which a society that does not value women as persons can fall.

Her Role In Scripture:

The story of the Levite's concubine is found in the concluding chapters of Judges. These chapters, out of chronological order, show in three vivid pictures what can happen in a society that loses its spiritual and moral bearings.

Judges 18 tells the story of an Israelite who set up an idol and hired a Levite to serve as his family priest. The story reveals how pervasive the influence of pagan religions had become during this era, and how the knowledge of God and His ways had been corrupted. Judges 19 then tells a shocking story that illustrates the moral decline that followed.

The Levite's concubine (a secondary wife) ran away and returned to her father's house. The Levite went to get her and bring her home. On the journey the Levite refused to stop in a town inhabited by Canaanite people, going on instead to Gibeah, a town populated by fellow Israelites.

But the men of that town gathered to gang rape the Levite. When they pounded on the door of the house where he was staying the Levite pushed his concubine outside. The text says that "they raped and abused her throughout the night" (Judg. 19:25). The next morning, when the Levite arose to continue his journey, he found her dead beside the door.

The Levite took the concubine's body to his home, cut her body into sections, and sent them to the other tribes of Israel, calling them to assemble and punish the rapists.

The story is stunning in its portrait of moral depravity. The men of Gibeah were just like the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, intent on homosexual rape of strangers. But the outraged Levite was no better, for he readily turned over his concubine to be miss-used in his stead. His utter selfishness, lack of compassion, and unconcern for her seem beyond comprehension. While the story horrifies us, it fills in the blanks in the picture of a woman's life during this era as no other story could. In Deborah we see the heights to which a woman might rise in a patriarchal society; in the story of the Levite's concubine we

see the depth to which a culture that fails to affirm the intrinsic value of every person can fall.

The Levite's Concubine: An Example For Today:

***When people choose to have sex outside of marriage, they lose sight of the value God places on individuals. Ultimately they will see others as the Benjamites saw this poor woman they killed; nothing more than an object to be used.**

*** Our culture claims sexual sophistication. In fact it glorifies illicit sex. As a result we are becoming desensitized to the evils of sexual impurity. To object, is not to reflect Victorian morality but to take a stand for the value and worth of every person. Sexual immorality is a type of slavery where people use others for their own gratification with no concern for consequences to others or to themselves.**

RUTH & NAOMI (The Book of Ruth; Matthew 1:5).

Date: About 1100 BC (?)

Name: Ruth (Rooth: "friendship)

Naomi (Nay-OH-mee: "pleasantness)

Main Contribution: Ruth the Mobabites, influenced by her mother-in-law Naomi, married an

Israelite and their son became the grandfather of David, in the line of

Christ.

Ruth, the central figure in the Book of Ruth, is one of the most lovable women in the Bible.

And her abiding love embraces the person you would least expect it to, her mother-in-law Naomi. Naomi was a Hebrew from Bethlehem-Judah, while Ruth was a foreigner from Moab, a flat tableland to the east of the Dead Sea. Ruth's Moabite background is frequently stressed.

Though this neighboring people, were hated by early Israel, Ruth finally won their hearts and minds as an ideal daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. The people of the little town of Bethlehem admired her, not because her genius or her foresight, or her great beauty, but because she of her womanly sweetness. Her story, which finally ends in her marriage to Boaz, a man of influence and wealth, is one of the most beautiful romances in the Bible.

She was modest, meek, courteous, loyal responsible, gentle yet decisive. She always seems to do the right thing at the right time. The Bible does not give a clear-cut description of her appearance, however literature and art have portrayed her as beautiful.

At the beginning of the story, Ruth is a young widow of Mahlon and faces an uncertain future, as well as her mother-in-law Naomi and her sister-in-law Oprah, widow of Chilion. From this point on Ruth herself becomes the embodiment of all that is fine in a young widow. We do not hear her crying out at the loss of her husband, but expressing her affection for him in her loyalty to his mother, his people, and his country and to his God. Nor do we find her pitying herself, though she and her mother-in-law are destitute. Instead she chooses to follow her mother-in-law wherever she leads, and she does so in a spirit of love.

Ruth's husband and his father Elimelech and mother Naomi and brother Chilion had left Bethlehem ten years before because of a famine. Recent explorations of the land of Moab had given confirmation of the fertility of the plains of Moab, this had also been implied in a statement that this is why Naomi's family went there to escape the famine in Judah. There have been proven statements made by well-known archaeologists of the Holy Land, with information about a close association among the Hebrews and the Moabites, which is confirmed by the story of Ruth.

Naomi and her family had gone into the fertile, well watered highlands of Moab east of the Dead Sea, but there her husband and her two sons died.

Old and tired, Naomi longed to return to the land of her birth. All three women wept as they stood to say good-bye. Naomi pleader with her two daughter-in-law to turn back to their mother's house. Oprah did turn back, but Ruth clung lovingly to Naomi, and she made the most wonderful confession of love spoken by a daughter-in-law. “ Don't ask me to leave you, or to not follow after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God; Where you die, I will die and I will be buried there.

Ruth never swerved for her unselfish purpose during the many trials that followed. Nor did she ever complain because she had given up everything, her country, her relationships with young friends, or her chance to marry a man of her own country.

The young and beautiful daughter-in-law and the old and wise mother-in-law now turned their faces toward Palestine. The journey was less than 120 miles, but this distance represented a long, tiring, and dangerous journey in this time frame of thirteen centuries before Christ, especially for two lone women, who were alone and only had a small amount of money for their most basic needs, and no protector. This journey through desolate places did not separate them, but only made them closer to each other.

When they finally reached Bethlehem, in order to support them, Ruth performed the lowliest of tasks, that of following the harvesters in the fields, and gathering up the fragments of grain that fell, and which were left there for the poor. Without the feelings of self-pity or dread of a difficult, demeaning task Ruth gleaned all day in the hot sun, returning to Naomi joyfully at the end of the day with her small harvest.

One day, as Ruth was in the field collecting, she came into a field owned by Boaz, a large landowner, who was a distant relative of Ruth's husband. For awhile, Ruth worked with the other "gleaners" as an unknown person to Boaz. She worked all day from sun-up to sun-down.

Ruth was a humble woman, and therefore she did not run to Boaz, her husband's relative, and introduce herself. She worked quietly every day at her task. One day when Boaz had finally become aware of this pretty woman, he asked his servants who she was, and they told him she was a Moabitess who had come back with Naomi from the country of Moab. Boaz immediately offered her protection, he asked her not to glean in any field except his own, and ordered his young men not to touch her, and invited her to drink of the water which they had drawn.

Later he demonstrated his admiration for her in little kindnesses, for he knew she was a kind and gentle woman supporting her mother-in-law. Boaz, was a man of God, also a man of intelligence and with a high code of morals, and appreciated Ruth's high code of morals, her quiet loveliness, her inborn purity, and her generous soul. He began to shower her with small favors. He asked her to come and eat with him. As she sat among the reapers he passed grain to her, and instructed his helpers to pull some of the stalks of grain from their bundles and leave them for her to make her work easier and more productive.

When Ruth would return from the fields each day with about a bushel of barley, Naomi would ask questions about her day's work. One day Ruth told Naomi she had gleaned a field owned by Boaz, Naomi knew who he was and blessed him, and told Ruth that Boaz was a relative to them.

The scene is now set for a beautiful romance. Naomi, an honored matron of Judah, took the next step for a brighter future of her beloved daughter-in-law. She told Ruth to go to the threshing floor at night, where Boaz would be winnowing his grain. She told her to wash

and anoint herself, and put on her best clothes, and to go where Boaz was after he had finished eating and drinking. Then she told Ruth to take it one step further.

She said, that when Boaz laid down for the night, you go to that place and uncover his feet, and lay down there; and he will tell you what you shall do next. (Ruth 3:4). Ruth knew that Naomi would never tell her do something improper, and say: “All that you say, to me I will do.” (Ruth 3:3).

The bold yet humble advance of Ruth was accepted by Boaz with a tender dignity and a chivalrous delicacy. He treated this act of surrender to his protection as an honor due him, for which he was very grateful. He hurried to assure her that he was in her debt for the preference she had shown him. He became very careful for her reputation and chastity as if she had been his daughter.

The situation recommended by Naomi and adopted by Ruth was a legal call on Boaz, as the supposed nearest kinsman of the family, to fulfill the duty of that relationship.

This part of the story is handled in the Bible with great delicacy and restraint. First Boaz told his servant not to let it be known that Ruth had come to the threshing floor. There might be idle gossip. He also knew that there was a nearer kinsman than himself, one who would have a prior claim to Ruth.

He immediately sent word to Naomi that he gladly accepted the legal protection of her daughter-in-law. Then he summoned the next of kin. This man waived his right to the young widow, admitting that he did not care to redeem Elimelech's portion of the land; a necessary part of matrimonial transaction, which assured the continuation of family life, preservation of property and the welfare of widows.

Boaz had shown his honorable and business like traits of character in going to the gates of the city before the elders. Then he went public to tell that he had brought Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be his wife. And the lovely stranger in Judah became the wife of the rich land proprietor Boaz. By her perseverance and faithfulness, she had achieved the seemingly impossible. She had been lifted out of obscurity and poverty to influence and plenty.

From this marriage of Ruth and Boaz sprang an auspicious lineage, the House of David. Before the birth of her son Obed, Ruth was assured that her child's name would be “famous in Israel”. And Naomi was told that the child would be a nourisher of her old age. The neighbors, rejoicing with her, said, “Your daughter- in- law, who loves you, and is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” (Ruth 4:15). And Naomi joyfully took over the duties of nurse to her grandchild.

Love had worked the miracle in Ruth's life. She was beloved by all because she was so lovable. She had proved that love can lift one out of poverty and obscurity, love can bring forth a wonderful child, love can shed its rays, like sunlight, on all whom it touches, even a forlorn and weary mother-in-law. Ruth's love had even penetrated the barriers of race.

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