



MEGILLAT (SCROLL OF) RUTH

The Story of Ruth begins with a famine in *Eretz Yisrael*. Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons, Machlon and Kilion, leaves from Bethlehem in Judah to live in Moab.

Elimelech fled from Bethlehem not because he was hungry — he had more food than he needed. He was very wealthy. He was afraid that the poor and hungry would come knocking on his door for help. He was more concerned with his fortune than the plight of his people. Responsibility to his fellow Jews came last in his list of priorities, and for that he was punished. Elimelech died in Moab, leaving his righteous wife Naomi a widow.

His two surviving sons, Machlon and Kilion, should have seen the hand of *Hashem*, and returned to Bethlehem, but they did not. They stayed in Moab and married Orpah and Ruth, two Moabite princesses, elevating their status in their comfortable, self-imposed exile. The two men also died, and then there were three widows. Having lost her family and her fortune, the righteous Naomi turned her sights back to Bethlehem where she had belonged all along.

Both daughters-in-law wanted to accompany her, but Naomi said no.

Why go to a strange land, to a life of loneliness and poverty? Orpah kissed Naomi good-bye and went back to Moab, but Ruth clung to Naomi with a fierce loyalty and the immortal words:

Wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d; where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried (1:16-17).

Naomi and Ruth went back to Bethlehem where they lived as paupers.

Young, vigorous Ruth cared for her aged, broken mother-in-law, begging and scrounging in the fields. There she met Boaz, who, according to the Sages (*Bava Basra 91a*), was the Judge Ivtzan (*Judges 12:8*), who had just lost his wife. His extensive properties were managed and run by his many employees.

He saw Ruth gathering neglected sheaves in the field, and he admired her honesty and modesty, not to mention her devotion to Naomi, his relative. Boaz recognized his responsibilities, not only to help the two women but to preserve their self-respect while doing so.

During the harvest, while Ruth spent her time gleaning in Boaz's field and had at least limited access to him, Naomi hoped that Ruth's 'chance



encounter' with Boaz was providential and that Boaz would 'redeem' Ruth by marrying her, thus perpetuating Machlon' s memory.

But then the harvest was over and Boaz made no such move. The prospect that Ruth might meet Boaz again was remote, and Naomi feared that since Boaz had not taken the initiative when Ruth was near, he could hardly be expected to respond to more conventional suggestions of marriage when she was out of sight. For all they knew, Boaz might even be offended at the mere suggestion of a marriage to Ruth. After all, Naomi was destitute, Ruth was of Moabite stock, and Boaz was a man of substance, the Judge and leader of the generation. Could Naomi expect simply to ask him to redeem and marry this girl?

Naomi realized that she had to take a bold initiative. She therefore decided that the best course - however daring and unconventional — was for Ruth herself to approach Boaz very privately and remind him of his responsibility to the family of his dead uncle, Elimelech. In a personal confrontation - convinced that her motives were sincere his compassion for her bitter plight might be evoked. It was.

As an outgrowth of these events, Boaz married Ruth and she conceived on the last day of his life. Their child was Oved, grandfather of King David, first of the royal family of Israel—the House of David. The *Talmud* calls Ruth *Ima Shel Malchut*, (mother of royalty), because her progeny included David and Solomon, and the future *Moshiach* who will end all exiles, return Israel to its greatest glory, and lead the entire world to the destiny for which it was created.