

# Ruth - a Virtuous Woman

In Proverbs 31, the mother of King Lemuel taught her son about what type of king he should try to be:

*Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings (Proverbs 31:3).*

Perhaps because of this particular warning, Jewish tradition suggests that King Lemuel is another name for King Solomon, who is infamous for his love of women – a king whose wives turned his heart away from God. However, the advice provided in Proverbs would be relevant to any king.

Whichever king of Israel or Judah Lemuel was, he was encouraged by his mother to seek after a very special kind of wife – a ‘virtuous’ woman. Out of the many ‘virtuous women’ recorded in the Bible, one in particular seems to be the embodiment of the virtues described in the oracle – Ruth the Moabitess, found in the book which bears her name.

The special type of woman Lemuel’s mother wanted him to marry was rare:

*Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10).*

Ruth was known to be a ‘virtuous woman’ (the identical Hebrew phrase) by all the people in Bethlehem (see Ruth 3:11). There are many qualities which Ruth demonstrated which earned her such an honourable reputation, and they are very similar to those described in Proverbs 31:10–31. For this brief thought, three elements will be considered.

## Hard-Working

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is incredibly hard-working and diligent:

*She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands (v13).*

*She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple (v22).*

*She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants (v24).*

Ruth certainly fits this description – gleaning was hard work and she worked at it throughout the day.

*So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied (Ruth 2:17–18).*

## Kindness

A further godly trait of the virtuous woman is that she exhibits kindness.

*She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness (Proverbs 31:26).*

Ruth was complimented twice for her kindness, firstly by her mother-in-law and then by Boaz (her future husband):

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me" (Ruth 1:8).

Then he [Boaz] said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich" (Ruth 3:10).

## **Praised by Her Husband**

Because Ruth was so hard-working, practical and kind, she received praise from Boaz, a man who appreciated Ruth's godly virtues:

*Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter... All the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:10–11).*

Boaz was unrestrained in his praise of his wife-to-be, but we never read of this resulting in arrogance or self-adulation on the part of Ruth. The example of Ruth therefore follows another Proverb:

*Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips (Proverbs 27:2).*

As we might expect by now, the dynamic between Boaz and Ruth echoes further descriptions of the virtuous woman in Proverbs:

*Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the*

*LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates (Proverbs 31:28–31).*

Perhaps Boaz is also in the background of Proverbs 31:

*Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land (v23).*

We see that this was exactly the case with Boaz:

*Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend, sit down here." So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down (Ruth 4:1–2).*

## **A Prophetic Picture**

The Bible often talks about the relationship between Jesus Christ and his followers as being like a marriage. The idyllic pairing of Boaz and Ruth teaches us about this.

Just as Ruth, a virtuous woman, was clearly "the crown of her husband" (Proverbs 12:4), so the followers of Jesus need to be morally beautiful, like a crown made worthy to adorn the king's head. Let us try to follow Ruth's example of hard work, diligence and kindness, looking forward to the return of Jesus. He will...

*...bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).*

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