

CHEMOSH FESTIVAL - 6 men, 2 women

4 Men from Moab plus Khiliown and Mahlown; 2 women –Ruth and Orpah

Hushan: Ah Khiliown. You've come, good man. This is my friend Marak.

Marak: Khiliown..a good Canaanite name.¹

Sibmah: Tonight is our night, my friends. Kir Hareseth and its women are ours.

On the Festival night, the town square is filled with the enchantments of Moab.

Hushan: Chemosh has blessed our women with beauty. May he bless our fields with fruitfulness!

Sibmah: Don't be greedy, friend. Pass the wineskin. And I will drink in his honor.

After taking a gulp he passes the skin to KHILIOWN, who halts only momentarily before he drinks.

Hushan: To Chemosh!

Others: To Chemosh!

Khiliown: (*murmurs uneasily*) To Chemosh!

They round a corner. A crowd is gathering for the parade. In the crowd are some stunningly beautiful young women. ORPAH is tall and elegant. RUTH is her friend. She has come along to the Festival reluctantly.

Khiliown: How do I look?

Hushan: Don't worry. There she is. The one I told you about.

Khiliown: Which one?

Hushan: Are you blind? Isn't she the most beautiful woman you've ever seen? It would do you good to meet her.

Khiliown: They all look beautiful tonight.

Hushan: There she is. (*Orpah steps into the light only momentarily*). She just stepped into the light.

KHILIOWN notices RUTH as she steps into the light.

No not that one. She's a beauty too. But too shy. The taller one.

Khiliown: I can tell you want her for yourself. You just want me to make it easier for you.

Hushan: No. Not at all. We Moabites look out for each other. Right?

Khiliown: Right.

Hushan: Go ahead, speak to her.. You want a lively girl!

Sibmah: The livelier the better.

Marak: (*seeing a girl in the torch light*) Will you look at that?

Hushan: See how the bangles from her tiara shimmer in the light.

Khiliown: What's her name?

Hushan: Orpah.

¹ Chilion means 'pining' or 'consumption'. Mahlon means 'sick' or 'wasting'. These names are found at Ugarit, so they are old Canaanite names. Perhaps this shows something of the pagan influence already at work in their parents, Elimelech and Naomi.

*(ORPAH turns towards KHILIOWN.)
(At this time the festivities can be seen in the distance. Moabites revel before the figure of CHEMOSH. KHILIOWN advances towards ORPAH and speaks to her. ORPAH pretends to be embarrassed at KHILIOWN's forwardness. They converse, awkwardly at first and then relax, exchanging laughter. KHILIOWN offers her a drink from his wineskin. They break away momentarily. KHILIOWN goes to his friends and wants to introduce them to ORPAH, RUTH and their friends, which is what they have been waiting for.)*

Ruth: Orpah, let's be heading home now.

Orpah: But Ruth, the ceremonies are soon to begin. We can't go now. And you know that father-god only bestows a blessing on those who stay the night. Especially for the midnight sacrifices.

Ruth: No, let's go.

Orpah: I'll be right here with... Khiliown.

Marak: *(taunting Mahlown)* What is this? A wandering Jew!

Patim: On your way to prayer are you? *(MARAK and friends come towards MAHLOWN to heckle him.)*

Sibmah: And whose little skirt is that on your shoulders? *(Taking the shawl)*

Patim: Let us show you the one true God. Hail to the God of Moab!

Marak: Hail Chemosh!

Sibmah: You can see our God now, can't you? But where's yours?

Hushan: Have you ever seen him?

Marak: Well. Keep looking!

Mahlown: Where's Khiliown?

Sibmah: *(stepping forward as if ready to start a fight)* Where did you get that accent?

Hushan: *(overhearing)* What do you want with him?

Mahlown: He's my brother.

Hushan: How could that be? Khiliown is no Hebrew.

Sibmah: He's one of us. He drinks with us to Chemosh *(Holding up his wineskin).*

Mahlown: *(By this time he is furious. He sees KHILIOWN with ORPAH. As he approaches KHILIOWN, SIBMAH, HUSHAN, PATIM and MARAK try to block his way. MAHLOWN pushes them aside.)* Khiliown!

Khiliown: Leave me alone, Mahlown.

Mahlown: You are coming home. How dare you behave this way! A son of Israel! You bring dishonor to the name of the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth. You defile Him who brought our fathers out of Egypt by bowing before the idols of Moab. You deny your birthright!

Khiliown: What birthright? *(He spits in contempt)* My father left me nothing!

Mahlown: I speak of the heritage of the Lord God of Yisrael. Who is God over all. *(The crowd is startled at this commotion.)*

KHILIOWN is stunned and then with a loud cry of anger he charges at his brother MAHLOWN who throws him to the ground. They wrestle and in the process MAHLOWN'S prayer shawl is torn. Ruth and Orpah look on in unbelief. Ruth is moved by the words, courage and conviction she sees in MAHLOWN. KHILIOWN is obviously defeated in this match.

Mahlown: Now come home.

3 Men- Elimelech, Ben Ibzan and Beriah

SCENE 3B- In the marketplace

(As the lights come up, 2 men are in discussion with Elimelech near the town well DSR. It is later that day).

Ben Ibzan *(could also be played by Jehoash)*: So, Elimelech, it is true? You are leaving the land of our fathers?

Elimelech My small crops have dried up, and so has my pottery business. In Moab my trade flourishes.

Ben Ibzan: So does their idolatry and their many detestable practices.

Beriah: That is why my family is moving up north, to Ephraim. My son Tob and I have managed to sell our land here and have found a bargain property with my father-in-law up north. Come with us there!

Elimelech: Uncle Beriah, I am a potter, not a herdsman. And I see no blessing here at the moment. And besides, it's not as if I am about to worship idols. *(Turning to his neighbor)* My friend, remember we have studied the law together since childhood...

Ben Ibzan: And it seems that the both of you have forgotten its lessons. We are the people of the covenant. How can it be the will of God to forsake the land HE has brought us to? *(To Elimelech)* Time and again the people of Moab have caused us trouble, raiding our villages, hiring prophets to curse us, seducing our men and inviting them to worship their idols.

Beriah: And they offer their own children to be slaughtered in ritual sacrifices to their god, Chemosh.

Ben Ibzan: And what of your sons, Mahlown and Kiliown? If you stay there what kind of legacy will you leave them? They will have no property. And if they marry, as well they should, it could only be to Moabite women.

Elimelech: Our property here is worthless dust. I managed to sell a piece of it, though it did not bring much of a price. I'm happy to be rid of it. Kir Hareseth is the city of potters. There, with the help of Naomi and my two sons, I am sure to prosper. And when the famine is over. I will return. You'll see.

Ben Ibzan: I wish I could convince you both to stay. We will miss your whole family Eli. And you Beriah. We will miss you all. Shalom!

Elimelech: We will miss you too. But surely, we will meet again.

SHIMROM, 2 BOYS, 6 LADIES (4 ladies gossiping by the well, Naomi and Ruth)

Women are drawing water from a well in the center of the square. Men are huddled in conversation In the town square there are children playing. They pretend that they are fighting Philistines. They charge Shimon when they see him. He is fond of children in his peculiar way, as they are fond of him. Naomi and Ruth remain on the sidelines as Shimon moves into the center of the square with the children.

YOUNG BOY: Oh look Philistines! Let's get them!

SHIMRON: There, there boys. I may look like a Philistine to little runts, like you, but I suggest you take your games elsewhere.

BOY: Who have you brought with you Shimron? Who are the strangers?

SHIMRON: Oh nothing too out of the ordinary. An Egyptian princess who was kidnapped by pirates at sea, but whom I daringly rescued when they came into port.

CONIAH: Really?

BOY: Why is she dressed like a widow?

SHIMRON: It's a good disguise isn't it? Now run along before I send some real Philistines your way.

(NAOMI pulls her veil up as if it makes her more inconspicuous.)

HANNAH: Who are those ladies with Shimron? Why one looks a lot like Elimelech's wife, Naomi?

TARA: Naomi? How could that be? She looks too old.

ABAGAIL: Where is her family?

TARA: She has returned...

HANNAH: Naomi? Is that you?

NAOMI: Hello Hannah!

ABIGAIL: Naomi?

NAOMI: Abigail *(They embrace)*

ABIGAIL: But where is your husband?

NAOMI: Elimelech died not long after we arrived in Moab.

ABIGAIL: And the boys?

NAOMI: Mahlown and Khiliown also are dead.

ABIGAIL: Oh Naomi. Naomi. Naomi.

NAOMI: Don't call me Naomi. There is nothing pleasant about my life now. My husband and two sons have died. Can't you see that the hand of the Almighty has gone out against me, My life is filled with bitterness. I'm a bitter old woman now.

TARA: *(noticing Ruth)* Who do you suppose that is?

REBECCA: She is obviously a Moabite.

HANNAH: Maybe she is Naomi's servant.

TARA: I don't think so. From the way Naomi talked I think she lost everything. She couldn't afford to hire a servant.

HANNAH: You don't suppose...

TARA: ...that she is her daughter in law?

RACHEL: No, it couldn't be.

HANNAH: Do you think Naomi would allow her sons to marry an idol worshipper?

TARA: It is forbidden.

RACHEL: Well what then?

HANNAH: Quickly, we must find out. *(They go off gossiping).*

CONIAH MEETS RUTH

CONIAH: There she is! The Egyptian princess.

SETH: Really...

CONIAH: That's what Shimron told me.

SETH: Well why does she wear a widow's veil?

CONIAH: Could you think of a better disguise?

SETH: We better not bother her or she'll order our heads cut off!

CONIAH: Why is she gleaning the fields like a common laborer? There is only one way to find out. I'll ask her.

SETH: No. Coniah. Don't talk to strangers. What if Abiram finds out? You know what your brother would say.

CONIAH: I'll never know who she is, if I don't ask.

SETH: You can, but I'm going home. *(He exits)*

CONIAH approaches RUTH

CONIAH: Shalom, your majesty. *(He bows)*

RUTH: Do all Israelite children show foreigners such respect?

CONIAH: Only if they are a princess. You are a princess, aren't you?

RUTH: My husband called me that, but no, I am not.

CONIAH: Are you from Egypt?

RUTH: No.

CONIAH: Your accent..Perhaps you're from Edom, or the mountains of the east?

RUTH: Guess again.

CONIAH: Persia? Paran. Zin?

RUTH: No.

CONIAH: Closer?

RUTH: *(nods)*

CONIAH: Hivite, Jebusite, Gergashite, Anakim?

RUTH: Actually I'm from Moab.

CONIAH: I thought so all along.

RUTH: My name is 'Ruth' which means 'I am a friend'.

CONIAH: My name is 'Coniah' which means..*(pause)* I don't really know what it means. Tell me of your land, Moab. You are not all thieves and baby-killers are you?

RUTH: Of course not.

CONIAH: I didn't think so. You speak our language?

RUTH: Yes. We both speak the same words

CONIAH: But when **you** speak them they sound different.

RUTH: (*correcting him*) When **you** speak them they sound different. But at least the meanings are the same.

CONIAH: That's true.

RUTH: Though our people have their differences, our customs might seem strange, and although our skin may be a different shade. We are very similar to you. We have similar hopes, desires and dreams.

ABIRAM, CONIAH's older brother enters and overhears this conversation.

ABIRAM: Coniah! You are supposed to be working in the fields, not chatting with foreigners.

CONIAH: This is Abiram, my brother. Abiram this is Ruth. She is from Moab. She is going to tell me stories about her home.

ABIRAM: You would do better to learn well the stories of Israel first. My brother has this strange fascination for people from other lands. Perhaps he gets it from his grandmother, Rahab, who was a Canaanite from Jericho.

RUTH: Oh yes. My late husband told me of her great courage.

ABIRAM: Coniah has this idea that somehow they are more ..special.

(SHALISHA enters, gleaning upstage right)

RUTH: A false idea of course. I'm sure as he grows older he will find out that people are more or less the same.

ABIRAM: Do you think so? I have not found that to be true.

RUTH: You think not, my lord?

ABIRAM: My best friend was murdered by a Moabite. He went there to do some trading and was killed by thieves.

RUTH: I'm so sorry, my lord.

ABIRAM: Coniah, I think you should come home right away.

CONIAH: It's not her fault that he was killed.

ABIRAM: Coniah, I think we need to teach you a little more history.

RUTH: With due respect, my lord, I recognize our country has not always been supportive of Israel, but not all of our people are to blame.

ABIRAM: Enough said, daughter of Moab. Coniah. We have more productive ways to spend our time.

CONIAH: But it's not fair!

ABIRAM: We are leaving.

SHALISHA AND RUTH

(SHALISHA comes downstage to Ruth)

SHALISHA: That young man was so rude.

RUTH: He has his reasons for hatred. They all do.

SHALISHA: I'm Shalisha. I understand you are from Moab.

RUTH: My name is Ruth. My husband was from the tribe of Judah.

SHALISHA: I too am a widow. Of Zedekiah. Let me help you get started. You can stack your grain over here. By placing your shawl on top of it, it will mark it as your own. If we can gather enough sheaves we can go together to thresh them this afternoon. If you do well enough there should be enough for a loaf of bread at the end of the day.

RUTH: Only one loaf? How do widows survive.? We will never make enough to keep us throughout the year.

SHALISHA: *(She returns to gleaning)* And we will never make as much as hired workers. If women get jobs in the fields it will be to work with their husbands. Some widows have family, brothers, fathers or sons who look after them. They don't have to worry much at all. Then there are others who have to beg. As for me, I hope for a go'el.

RUTH: A go'el?

SHALISHA: A kinsman redeemer. A brother or near relative of your husband, who will take you as his wife, give you a home, and hopefully give you a son.

RUTH: ..To lay claim to the family inheritance.

SHALISHA: Do they have redeemers in Moab?

RUTH: No. And although, it sounds very strange to me, it must be wonderful to have hope.

BOAZ: Son, it is time that we had a talk.

ABIRAM: What is it father?

BOAZ: It is about Ruth.

ABIRAM: The Moabite.

BOAZ: Is that all you see?

ABIRAM: What I see is that you have gone out of your way to show kindness to a person, who, according to our law, is to be treated as an enemy. (*Boaz gives him a look*). Forgive me, I spoke out of turn.

BOAZ: Indeed you have. You think yourself an expert in the law do you? Can you tell me then about the spirit behind the laws of Moses? Were the commands given to make us self-righteous? Were they given to make us a proud, hateful and suspicious people? I think not! The command to prohibit Moabite or Ammonite from entering the assembly of the Lord was given to preserve our devotion to God in the purity of a covenant commitment. It is not to promote a national elitism. The promised seed of Abraham is given to bless all nations, to bring light to the Gentiles. Ruth has proved her devotion to the God of Israel, and is a daughter of the covenant, but you can't see that.

ABIRAM: What I see is that you take the position of the foreigner over me.

BOAZ: It is my position that all the nations of the earth call Him blessed.

ABIRAM: If I hated her before I hate her even more now that I know that she has come between me and my father. (*He turns to leave*).

BOAZ: (*stunned by his son's outspokenness*). Where are you going?

ABIRAM: Away from here! (*He starts to exit*).

BOAZ: Leave if you must! Go find another field to work in until you are rid of your anger.

SCENE WITH NAOMI AND CONIAH

CONIAH: *(in the manner of Boaz)* Is this the home of Ruth, the widow of Mahlown?

NAOMI: Yes.

CONIAH: Is she here?

NAOMI: No, she is still in the fields.

CONIAH: I have something for her! *(He presents the flowers)*

NAOMI: They are beautiful. You must be Boaz's son?

CONIAH: My name is Coniah. You know of me?

NAOMI: Ruth cherishes your friendship. I am Naomi, her mother-in-law.

CONIAH: Ruth is very special. My father and I both think so.

NAOMI: I think she is very special too. Your father has been very kind to her.

CONIAH: That's because she is beautiful.

NAOMI: You think so?

CONIAH: My father and I BOTH think so.

NAOMI: He does, does he? I think she is beautiful and brave.

CONIAH: It is hard for people to accept foreigners.

NAOMI: I know. I was a foreigner for many years in Moab.

CONIAH: Where they are NOT all thieves and murderers...

NAOMI: Of course not.

CONIAH: My brother does not like Moabites.

NAOMI: So I understand.

CONIAH: He especially dislikes Ruth.

NAOMI: Why do you think that is?

CONIAH: He says its because one of his friends was killed by a Moabite thief in the desert. But I think its more than that.

NAOMI: What do you think is the reason?

CONIAH: I think that it is because father favors her.

NAOMI: He does! You think it is more than kindness or pity that makes him so generous?

CONIAH: I don't know why he is so kind to her, but I know that it makes Abiram mad.

RUTH: It's been very hard for Ruth to leave her own land to come to Israel.

CONIAH: She should have a father-in-law like Shalisha has, who could arrange a marriage for her.

NAOMI: Ruth doesn't have a father in law. I'm afraid she only has me.

CONIAH: Well then, maybe you should find her a go'el, so she could have someone to take care of her?

NAOMI: You mean a kinsman redeemer?

CONIAH: I'd marry Ruth, but I'm too young.

NAOMI: This is true. But maybe something can be done.

CONIAH: Do you believe in miracles?

NAOMI: I used to believe in miracles very much.

CONIAH: Father says that if there is a secret wish in your heart that doesn't go away, you should ask God for a miracle and that He can make it happen.

NAOMI: I know I'm just an old woman. But maybe I can do something.

CONIAH: You can always pray.

NAOMI: When I think about it. Ruth has been an answer to prayer for me.

CONIAH: Naomi?

NAOMI: Yes Coniah.

CONIAH: Is my father your cousin?

NAOMI: My husband's cousin. Yes.

CONIAH: That's a near relative, isn't it?

NAOMI: Coniah? Do **you** believe in miracles?

CONIAH: Why yes.

NAOMI: Then pray that Yahweh will show us a way.

CONIAH: Us?

NAOMI: Ruth may not have a father in law. But she has me. I am a woman, and you are a child. We would probably not be permitted to appear before the elders at the gate, but we can make our requests before the courts of Yahweh.

CONIAH: You mean, when we pray..

NAOMI: Yes. Coniah let's make an agreement.

CONIAH: What kind of agreement?

NAOMI: You pray that God will show me a way to help Ruth, and I will pray that God changes the heart of Abiram and that he will find out that Ruth is not so terrible after all.

CONIAH: That would be a miracle!

JEHOASH: Fellow elders. Boaz, has a legal matter he would like to bring before us.

JUDGE: What does it concern, Boaz?

BOAZ: You all remember the sad story of the household of ‘Elimelech’, the husband of Naomi . My cousin Eli died shortly after leaving Bet’lehem in the time of famine. His two sons, Mahlown, the elder, and Khiliown, the younger, died also in Moab, leaving their widows, Ruth and Orpah.

CHEPHIRAH: (*disdainfully*) The Moabites.

BOAZ: Yes, they were born in Moab. However, when Naomi chose to return to Judah. Ruth pledged to adopt the ways of Israel, saying to Naomi, your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

JEHOASH: Reports we have heard about Ruth have been conflicting.

BOAZ: We are not here to bring Ruth to trial. This matter has to do with the estate of Elimelech.

JUDGE: That is correct. Before Elimelech left Bet’lehem he sold a portion of his field, and then gave the title deed to the elders so the remaining land could be held in trust for himself and his descendants upon his return. Sadly neither he nor his sons ever came back to Bet’lehem. The matter sounds quite straightforward. Recite the law:

JEHOASH: “Upon the death of a husband in Israel, his property goes to his eldest surviving son, rather than the widow.” Since both sons died without children and because Orpah forfeited her claim by maintaining her Moabite position, Ruth, as the widow of the elder son, has the rights to the full estate, ONLY IF the next of kin will... marry her so that she might raise up children to possess it in the name of the family.”

JUDGE: Very interesting. But what has this to do with you Boaz?

BOAZ: I am a near kinsman and I want to marry Ruth.

JUDGE: You want to marry Ruth, the Moabites?

BOAZ: I want to marry Ruth, who is more a child of Abraham than you or I. She left her home, turned her back on her idolatrous nation to travel to a land she had heard about but never seen. She came from a far country and lived as a stranger in a strange land, putting her trust in God alone. Once here she has revered our God and honored His ways.

JUDGE: I can see the man is smitten. But Boaz, why not marry one of our own kind?

BOAZ: Though we are from different lands we are of the same heart. In loving the Lord our God we are one. And is my action without precedent? Do not forget that Moses himself, the giver of the law, took a Gentile wife...

JEHOASH: The daughter of a priest of Midian, I might add.

BOAZ: ...Or Jacob's favorite son, Joseph who married a Gentile wife..

JEHOASH: .The daughter of an Egyptian priest, I might add.

JUDGE: Boaz, you argue your case well. But what about the matter of being a near kinsman? Are you, in fact, the nearest surviving kinsman to Elimelech?

BOAZ: No, there is another. I have called him here today.

JEHOASH: Call Tob.

PRIEST: Tob, Beriah's son? I did not know he was back in Bet'lehem.

TOWNSPERSON: Here he is.

BOAZ: Tob is the son of my uncle Beriah. He left Bet'lehem during the famine. He and his father sold their claim here and have been living in Ephraim for the past ten years. Recently his father died and he has fallen into poor straits and has returned. I have offered him some assistance..

(Whispering among the crowd. People push TOB forward out from the crowd. Ruth is observing the proceedings with Naomi from a distance. They cannot be heard by those at the Gate).

(Seeing Tob) Turn aside friend.

RUTH: *(Indicating TOB to Naomi)* That is him!

NAOMI: Who?

RUTH: The man who attacked me in the field!

TOB: *(Bewildered at being summoned to the gate and addressed so forthrightly by Boaz).* What is all this about? I have done nothing.

NAOMI: *(To Ruth)* Are you sure?

RUTH: I am certain of it.

BOAZ: I did not hire him, as he is a kinsman, and I did not want him bound by me. He did odd jobs in return for my provisions.

NAOMI: *(To herself, thinking of TOB attacking RUTH)* How could a kinsman do that?

RUTH: Oh Lord, help Boaz.

JUDGE: Proceed.

BOAZ: *(To TOB)* Tob, you may not be aware that Naomi, Elimelech's widow, who has returned from Moab, has to sell the parcel of land which belonged to our cousin Eli. You are the closest surviving kinsman. I am obliged to tell you that you have the right to claim this land and buy it. The elders and those assembled here shall serve as witnesses.

If you will redeem it, do so. But if not, tell me, that I may know. There is no one who can claim nearest kinsman, but you. And I am after you.

TOB: You did you say a parcel of land?

BOAZ: You can claim the land if you are able and willing to pay the price.

RUTH: Lord, please no.

TOB: I will redeem it.

(NAOMI comforts RUTH)

BOAZ: You are able to pay five hundred shekels?

TOB: I have just received word that my father's field in Ephraim has finally sold and was only today preparing to make a journey to claim the price as my inheritance. *(Laughs)* Just think if you had asked me yesterday, I would have had to refuse! *(Gloating in his victory)*. Sorry cousin Boaz. Elimelech's field will serve me well so that I can redeem my father's claim in Bet'lehem and raise up his name here once again.

BOAZ: **Your** father's claim? Do not think that you can reestablish the name of your father on Elimelech's land! For Elimelech's son, Mahlown, whom you remember, had a wife who is here in Bet'lehem. On the day that you acquire the land you must also take Ruth, *(he points to her)* the Moabitess to be your wife in order to raise up the inheritance of the household of Elimelech and Mahlown. You will also take Naomi into your care.

NAOMI: *(To herself)* Don't you think for a moment..

TOB: (*Tob seeing RUTH*) Do you expect me to marry a Moabite?!

BOAZ: Will you redeem the land and take the Moabite as your wife?

TOB: I don't exactly know how much money has been acquired from the field. . It may not be enough..

BOAZ: Will you redeem the property?

TOB: If I use my inheritance proceeds to purchase Elimelech's, I will jeopardize my own. I may end up with nothing. (*pause*) Nor would I want my children to be the offspring of a Moabitess.

NAOMI: (*to herself*) Hypocrite!

TOB: I relinquish my right. You redeem the land and the woman. Buy it all for yourself, Boaz.

BOAZ: I will. Gladly. You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Khiliown and Mahlown. Moreover, I hereby betroth Ruth, the widow of Mahlown, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the dead that the name 'My God is King' might not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.