

## **The Story of Susannah (From the Apocrypha)**

Susannah was the wife of a rich man living in Babylon. In the custom of that day, disputes were heard in private homes by elders appointed to be judges for this purpose.

Two such elders officiated at Susannah's husband's house in the mornings. When the two elders saw Susannah walking in her garden they were inflamed with lust but did not tell each other of their desire.

One day when they departed after the morning's judging they farewelled each other, but independently each one turned around and returned to the garden hoping to find Susannah on her own. Each finding the other, they then confessed their lust to each other, then hid themselves in the garden.

Susannah, wishing to wash herself as the day was hot, requested her maids to set up a bath in the garden which they did, then left, closing the gates behind them.

The elders then approached Susannah demanding that she lie with them or else they would claim that she sent her maids away so that she could have an affair with a young man.

Susannah refused them and cried out. The elders then opened the gates, the servants came in, and the elders made their false accusation.

Susannah was then condemned to death.

She cried out to the Lord and he heard her cry and raised up the spirit of a young man called Daniel to come to her defence.

Daniel spoke out to the people and arranged to interview each elder separately. Finding that their stories did not match with regard to which tree they saw Susannah with the fictitious young man, the elders were found guilty and executed.

The statue portrays Susannah being surprised by the elders at her bath.

The front panel at the base shows the Elders propositioning Susannah.

The back panel shows the Elders being lead way for execution whilst Susannah is comforted.

## **The Story of Ruth (From the Old Testament)**

When the land of Judah was experiencing a famine, Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahon and Kilion travelled to Moab where conditions were better.

Elimelech subsequently died, whilst the sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. After 10 years the sons both died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law in difficult circumstances. Hearing the conditions had improved back in Judah, Naomi decided to return. Ruth and Orpah started off with Naomi but she urged them to remain in Moab as she had nothing to offer them and they had a better chance of remarrying in Moab. Orpah then returned but Ruth declined, giving rise to one of the well-known and beautiful passages of scripture where she says "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried."

They returned to Bethlehem when the barley harvest was beginning. Ruth asked Naomi if she could go and glean barley from the fields after they had been harvested. Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a wealthy man named Boaz, and it happened to be in one of Boaz's fields that Ruth started gleaning the grain.

When Boaz visited the field he enquired who the young lady was. He was told Ruth's story so he was full of compassion for her and invited her to follow on after the harvesters where she would be able to collect more grain. He also invited her to share in the evening meal with the other workers.

When Ruth returned home she told Naomi of her good fortune. She then continued until the harvest was finished. Naomi then instructed Ruth to go to the threshing floor where the workers were

celebrating the end of the harvest. At night she was to go to where Boaz was sleeping, uncover his feet and lie down at his feet.

Boaz awoke. When he found out who was lying there he praised Ruth for coming to him when she could have chosen a younger man.

Boaz then married Ruth.

The back panel below the statue shows Ruth embracing Naomi as she declares her intention to return with her, with Orpah in the background returning to Moab.

The front panel shows Boaz instructing his workers to allow Ruth to glean the barley.

### **Rebekah (Genesis Chapter 24)**

Abraham and his son Isaac were living in Canaan. Abraham was very old and Isaac was unmarried. Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman, so sent his servant back to his homeland which he had originally left on account of famine there.

The servant returned to the town of Nahor where he asked the Lord for a sign as to which girl he should choose for Isaac. He camped by a well with his camels and Rebekah came to the well to draw water. He asked her to draw water for him to drink and she agreed and said that she would also draw water for his camels. This was the sign that she was the chosen one.

The servant returned to Rebekah's house that evening and discussed all that had transpired with her family and brothers. They agreed that if Rebekah was willing, that she could travel with the servant back to Canaan. She agreed and they set off the next morning.

As they approached Canaan, Isaac went out into the fields to meditate and happened to see them and went forward to meet them. Rebekah asked her servant who was the man approaching them. The servant explained that it was Isaac, so she took a veil and covered herself.

The statue shows Rebekah looking into the distance for the first sign of her future husband.

*(Note that the original notes incorrectly name Joseph instead of Isaac.)*

There has been a question as to why the bases for Rebekah and Modesty differ from those for Ruth and Susannah.

I can find no explanation for this. However one possible reason is that Modesty has no story attached, so no side panels could be prepared. Then in the interests of symmetry, one of the other statues would also need the same simpler base. Rebekah would be the logical choice as her story is simpler than the other two.

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