

The Book of Ruth

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Studies in the Book of Ruth

The Bible is a gradual unfolding of the character of God, and of His plan of redemption. For instance:

Genesis is the book of beginnings—beginning of the universe, sin, judgment, man.

Exodus is the book of redemption—first by blood (Passover), then by power (Red Sea).

Leviticus is the book of worship.

Numbers is the walk and warfare of the believer.

Deuteronomy is the book of obedience—this is the most spiritual book of the Pentateuch, insisting on implicit obedience to Jehovah, His Word, and His laws.

Joshua is the book of possession—entrance into and possession of the inheritance in the land of Canaan.

Judges is the book of failure—disobedience always brings distress, doubt and death.

Samuel is the book of the kingdom—united under Saul, David, and Solomon; then divided.

Between the books of failure and the books of the kingdom is the book of Ruth, which sets forth the marriage of Boaz and Ruth.

This has tremendous teaching in our day. The book of failure (Judges) represents Christendom. The books of the kingdom (Samuel) represent the Millennium. The book of Ruth, which depicts the marriage of Boaz (Christ) and Ruth (the Bride) is between the two.

This points us to the marriage of Christ and the Church which will take place after the age of failure and before the Millennial kingdom is set up.

Two books devoted to women: Ruth (Gentile), Esther (Jew).

The story begins in the beautiful little town of Bethlehem in Judah. The house of bread, the house of praise. This is where the Lord was born 1100 years later—Matthew 2:1.

Elimelech with his wife Naomi enjoyed their inheritance in God's land, they were in the center of God's will.

The scene in a capsule is this. Here is Elimelech which means "My God is King" and Naomi which means "pleasant." They are found in the center of God's will, with God as their King, living in the house of bread, and in the place of praise.

Something went wrong—they became careless and indifferent in the things of God. They became lean in their souls and sick in their heart. This is seen from the fact that they named their boys Mahlon, which means "sick", and Chilion, which means "pining".

In this weakened condition of soul Elimelech and Naomi came face to face with a crisis. A testing time came upon them for which they were totally unprepared.

"It came to pass...there was a famine in the land"—verse 1.

They reached the bottom of the flour barrel. This really was God's call to repentance. But instead of repenting they moved to Moab. They left the center of God's will, left God's people, left God's place and went to Moab, among them godless relations and friends.

Their plan was to sojourn in Moab, that is their stay was to be only temporary. They did not intend to live permanently in Moab. But verse 2 informs us that “they continued them.” Elimelech and Naomi utterly failed the testing.

The years passed swiftly. Elimelech took sick and died. He died outside the will of God, outside the land of Canaan, outside of God’s place for His people. Elimelech failed God and is buried in a lonely grave, on a lonely hillside in Moab.

Then tragedy struck again, the two sons, who by this time had married Moabite women, took sick and died. This union was forbidden in the Scriptures.

Now, there are three lonely graves, of three Hebrews, lying in the cold unfriendly soil of a hostile country. The disobedient Israelites were buried in the wilderness.

Look at Naomi for a moment or two:

Verse 6—then she arose.

Verse 7—then she went forth.

She did this because of a faithful witness—verse 6.

Naomi rose after the death of her husband, after the marriage of her two sons to Moabite women, after the death of her two sons, after her heart had been broken by bereavement, after her soul had been crushed by corroding care. Then she arose.

Sin always brings sorrow and suffering. Disobedience spells death. Sin, disobedience, willfulness, and waywardness always end in sorrow and death.

Further examples of departure from God and the consequences:

1. Abraham—Genesis 12:10. Departed into Egypt (the world). While there he acquired Hagar, who became the mother of Ishmael, who is the father of the Arab nations. We can see in the 20th century A.D. the fruits of Abraham's backsliding in the 20th century B.C.

2. Samson—Judges 13-16. 16:1—"And Samson wet down into Timnah, a town of the Philistines. He took a wife from among his people enemies. He turned his back on God and His people. He ended having his eyes put out and grinding corn in a dungeon, until his death.

3. Jonah. God said, "Go to Nineveh." Jonah fled to Tarshish—note the price he paid. Note also the blessings of obedience.

4. The prodigal son.

Ruth 1 & 2

Picture the two women arriving in Bethlehem. Travel stained and weary, Naomi aged and bent. The ten years in Moab had made its mark on Naomi. The experience in Moab had been bitter. She went out full, but had lost everything in Moab.

As they entered into Bethlehem the city was moved. They thought of the once charming and pleasant Naomi. They remembered the happy, winsome, pleasant wife of the elegant Elimelech.

Now looking at this worn and aged woman they asked, Is this really Naomi?

v. 20—"Call me not Naomi, call me Mara." Mara means "bitter."

This is the testimony of believers who turn their backs on God.

Note the testimony of Naomi. "The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

Beloved take this exhortation to heart. God will deal bitterly with an erring child. Not in anger, but in the hope and expectation of recovery.

v. 21—"I went out full."

In God's presence there is fullness. No saint of God can dwell in the presence of God and be empty.

Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen was full of faith. Dorcus was full of good works. The seven deacons were full of wisdom.

In Bethlehem, Naomi was full. She left loaded with God's blessings, she came home a pauper.

The prodigal son had the same experience. "The Lord hath brought me home again."

How gracious God is. She attributed his return home to the Lord.

Notice the tragic expression "empty." How expressive! How instructive!

It was home. But the inevitable end of ten years away from God is emptiness.

Naomi's testimony is clear:

1. The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.
2. The Lord has testified against me.
3. The Almighty hath afflicted me.

This should serve as a warning to any back-slidden Christians.

Ruth 2

From this point Ruth takes the prominent place over Naomi. This illustrates the point that a backslider, ever after he returns, seldom rises to the heights of spirituality. Examples: Moses, Elijah, Peter, Barnabas.

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem "in the beginning of barley harvest." A time of blessing and rejoicing. It is always so with the one who returns to the Lord. Better days were ahead for the now humbled and chastened Naomi.

As a Moabite, Ruth was particularly odious to the Jews. A Moabite was not permitted under any

circumstances to enter the fellowship of the congregation of God—Deuteronomy 23:3. Ruth would have been voted the most unlikely woman to succeed. But “Grace” triumphed over law, heaped over every obstacle, overcame every difficulty.

Ruth the Moabite became the bride of Boaz and the restorer of life to Naomi. Ruth means “satisfied.” She sought the Lord and in seeking Him was blessed by Him.

v. 6-7—Note that Naomi arose and with her two daughters-in-law began her journey from Moab to Bethlehem.

Note the principle “Separation always precedes sanctification.”

The evil world must be given up if we would know the joy of the Lord’s presence. The swine troughs and hog pens must be forsaken if we would sit at the Father’s table and enjoy the Savior’s love.

v. 8—“Go return to your mother’s house.”

Naomi the backslider was not restored in her own soul. Therefore she could be of no help to others. There had been no confession of sin. She had lost her first love and zeal. She had no desire to retrieve her daughter-in-law from idolatrous Moab.

Instead of inviting and encouraging them to come with her to Canaan and to accept her God, she discouraged them. Poor Orpah, under duress, went back into the world.

A backslider is one of the most effective tools of Satan in discouraging others to come to Christ.

Naomi's second outburst was much stronger and more convincing than the first. See verses 11-13. Orpah succumbed and returned to her people and her gods.

v. 14—Ruth's great decision. "Ruth clung to her."

Ruth's decision was made in the face of tremendous difficulties.

1. Her past was against her. She was trained to worship gods.

2. Naomi seemed against her. She pled with her to return.

3. The future was against her—self-exiled.

Despite these she decided in favor of Canaan and God.

Consider the outcome.

The kinsman who failed to follow the law of Moses and redeem. Naomi and Ruth, because of self interest, have not even mentioned his name in the story. But Ruth, who gave up all to follow Naomi's God, eventually rests in the lap of luxury and love, and her name is numbered even to this day.

"Wither thou goest I will go."

This is one of the many faith decisions mentioned in the Scriptures. Those who made this decision of faith were always well rewarded by God.

Verses 16-17 contain one of the most precious rubies in Ruth. It is a classic in literature, and one of the most touching. It is the sincere outpouring of a heart captivated and determined to follow the true God.

The two statements which to me are very significant are "thy people shall be my people and thy God my God."

There is a divine principle stated here.

1. Ruth realized to the fullest extent that she was renouncing her past life and affiliations and from henceforth she would worship and serve the God of Naomi Hebrews, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
2. She decided to make God's holy people her people also.

These two principles are still as important today. Those who would receive the blessing of God must make Him Lord of their life, must separate themselves from worldly companions and fellowship with God's people. This is where many a sincere soul has been shipwrecked. They have held on to old friendships rather than make new ones among God's people.

To ensure God's blessing on our lives, and spiritual progress in divine things there must be complete detachment from all worldly friendships and a complete attachment to Jesus Christ.

Then there must be a realignment of one's self with the people of God.

Note now the phrase, "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part you and me." This means, "May a severe judgment fall on me if I am not true to my vow."

v. 1—At this point we are introduced to Boaz. He was Naomi's kinsman. This means that under a provision of God, made for widows, he was obligated to redeem Elimelech's property and to raise children to the one who had died "without a name in Israel."

Boaz is a beautiful type of Christ our Redeemer. Boaz was mighty and wealthy. He came from Bethlehem.

v. 2—“Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn.” This was a question of life and death for herself and Naomi. As believers it is necessary to “glean ears of corn” from God’s Word to survive spiritually.

v. 3—“She happened to come to a portion of the field belonging to Boaz.”

This was not a coincidence, it was the leading of the Lord. World shaking events often hinge upon apparently insignificant incidents.

1. The sleepless night of a king ends in the salvation of a nation. Esther 6:1.

2. The selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites, resulted in the saving of the world.

3. The capture of the little Jewish maid ends in the cleansing of Naaman.

4. Rebekah was at the well when Abraham’s servant arrived, the result of this was her marriage to Isaac.

5. The Samaritan woman came to the well when Jesus was there, the result a harvest of souls.

Ruth entered the harvest field of Boaz, it ended in a happy marriage, a little baby, a great King, and finally a great Savior.

Boaz took Ruth and she bore Obed. Obed had a son called Jesse. Jesse had a son called David. This was the royal line from which our Lord came.

No circumstance in our life is unimportant. Each incident is a part of God’s place. Isaiah 55:8, 9.

v. 5—“Whose damsel is this?”

it is interesting to note that the mighty, wealthy Boaz should take notice of a poor, weak, helpless stranger. Boaz is a type of the Lord and gives us a perfect picture of His marvelous grace towards the weakest and most insignificant of His people. Examples: David Livingston, Mary Slessar, D.L. Moody, David Brainard, William Carey, Moses, David, Gideon.

Ruth going to work in Boaz' field was God's plan to bring them together. It was the beginning of the romance.

v. 7—Note Ruth's diligence. "She hath continued from morning until now." The last phrase can be interpreted, "She hath not rested even a little."

The early church was credited with "continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine."

Paul urges Timothy to "continue"...in the doctrine...in supplications and prayers...in the things he had learned. To be diligent in every aspect of our Christian life will bring the approval of men and the blessing of God. Ruth is an example of this.

Notice now Boaz' protection and provision for Ruth—v. 8-9. "Go not to glean in another field." "Do not leave my field." "Abide close by my maiden." Boaz also provided for her safety and her sustenance.

v. 10—Notice Ruth's prostration. "She fell on her face and bowed herself down." This speaks of worship. Compare the woman who was a sinner and the leper who returned to thank the Lord for his healing.

v. 11-12—Boaz commends Ruth for her sacrifice and faithfulness and prays for God's blessing upon her.

v. 14—Communion. He reached her parched corn. Corn is the food of the Promised Land. Leeks, onions and garlic was the food of Egypt. Manna was the food for the wilderness.

Think how Ruth must have felt about all this. He reached her parched corn and “she was satisfied.” She also had sufficient leftover to satisfy Naomi too.

v. 15—Despite these favors Ruth’s efforts to glean did not slacken. Boaz again rewarded her efforts by leaving “handfuls on purpose” for her. Reproach her not.

v. 17—The result of her day’s work gleaning in the field was that she had sufficient food to last Naomi and herself for five days. She beat out what she had gleaned. We must beat out what we glean from the Word.

v. 19—On his return, Naomi asked her “Where hast thou gleaned today?” Ask the same question.

The manna had to be gathered every morning. So we must glean every day from the Word.

v. 20—Ruth is told of the relationship of Boaz.

v. 22—Naomi’s counsel, “It is good.”

v. 23—Ruth continued to glean until the crops were harvested.

Ruth’s sacrifice was beginning to pay off. She had left her own people to follow an old woman through the desert, infested with robbers and wild beasts. Now she is sitting at the table with Boaz eating corn. What a transformation. The story does not end here.

Boaz charges his young men not to remind her that she was a Moabitess, a poor pauper, an unclean Gentile, a widow, a dependent outside the elite house of Israel.

“Reproach her not.” Compare or own situation. Praise God.

Ruth 2 & 3

Where hast thou gleaned today?

Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned and she was satisfied. Then she shared it with another.

This is ever the divine order:

1. There is the gleaning.
2. There is the beating.
3. There is the eating.
4. There comes the sharing.

We are living in days of great activity.

The doctrine of activity is past in the place of feeding on the Word of God. We are told that the way to grow is to work. But how can we work without drawing strength from Communion?

We can only give the overflow to others. Let us see how this works in two instances in the New Testament.

John 1:35-42—After John the Baptist pointed out Jesus for the second time as the Lamb of God. Two of his disciples left him and followed Jesus—v. 37.

There were with Jesus for a day—v. 39. What a day that must have been! The communion, fellowship, and instruction.

While with Him they gleaned, then they beat out what they had gleaned, they ate and were satisfied, then they shared the overflow.

Andrew found his brother, Peter, and told him, “We have found the Messiah”—v. 41. Peter came and believed that Jesus was the Messiah—v. 42.

John 4 (The woman at the well):

1. She gleaned in the presence of the Lord.
2. She beat out the great truths He taught her.
3. She ate and was satisfied.
4. She then shared the overflow of her heart.

See verses 23 through 29, and 39 through 41.

v. 19—the man’s name is Boaz.

Ruth not only worked in his field, but she also confesses the name of the lord of the field. She becomes a living witness.

v. 20—Blessed be He of the Lord, who has shown kindness both to the living and the dead.

The living would be Naomi and Ruth. The dead would be Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion.

One of our next kinsman. See Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

“Kinsman”—a kinsmn was one who possessed common blood, which was strongest and nearest to its origin in the father’s house. It was the duty of the kinsman to redeem near of kin. Naomi recognized this and encouraged Ruth to walk in the way of God—v. 22.

v. 23—Ruth followed the instructions of Naomi.

This relationship can also be seen in the New Testament. Paul and Timothy—see Titus 2:3-5. The older sisters should teach the younger.

Ruth 3

v. 1—Naomi’s concern for her daughter-in-law. In chapters 1-2 the thought is “finding grace.” In chapters 3-4 the thought is “finding rest.”

It should be the desire of every believer who has found rest themselves to seek rest for those younger in the faith.

Notice the steps in Ruth’s experience to final rest:

1. She found a degree of rest in Canaan—sanctification.
2. She also found rest in the fields of Boaz—service.
3. She found complete rest at the feet of the one she loved—submission.

Notice something else here. Before Ruth found rest there were certain things she had to do. She had to leave Moab, enter Canaan, work in the field, keep herself pure, and enjoy fellowship with and abandon herself to the lord of the harvest.

If we would enjoy rest, we too must abandon all fleshly pursuits. We must enter/cultivate a relationship with the Lord. We must busy ourselves in the Lord’s service, keep ourselves unspotted from the world, our fellowship must be with the Lord, and we must surrender ourselves to Him without reserve.

The result will be perfect rest, fullness of joy, fruitfulness of service, and an indescribably relationship with Christ. This is what God wants for each of us. This is what we should desire for each other.

Naomi’s desire for rest for Ruth no doubt included marriage. Ruth’s desire was exactly the same. No surprise that there was such a happy ending.

Note Naomi's instruction in verses 2-4. Read and explain the setting. Ruth's preparation: wash thyself, anoint thyself, dress thyself.

Before we can have full fellowship with Christ, our heavenly Boaz, we must:

1. Wash ourselves—we must be clean, pure, holy.
2. Anoint ourselves—we must be anointed with the Holy Spirit.
3. Dress ourselves—this dressing is outward and inward.

Had Ruth not adhered to these standards, Boaz would not have accepted her. We also cannot expect to be accepted by the Lord if we do not adhere to these standards.

Notice where Ruth was to obtain the blessing.

v. 4—"Uncover his feet and lie down." She surrendered herself implicitly and unreservedly to Boaz. She trusted her present and future to him. This is the only way to spiritual success.

v. 7—Ruth uncovers Boaz' feet. This was perfectly in order.

v. 8—Boaz awoke at midnight and a woman lay at his feet.

v. 9—Who art thou? Ruth replied, "I am Ruth, thine handmaid."

She is not now Ruth the Moabite, nor Ruth the Gentile stranger, nor Ruth the weeping widow, but Ruth thine handmaid.

Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman. (This was a proposal.)

v. 10—Boaz recognized her love for him, inasmuch as she had not followed the young men whether poor or rich. The truth of separation from the world.

To gain the attention, favor and full blessing of our heavenly Boaz, we must sever our relationship with everything that would come between us and Christ.

v. 11—Notice the testimony Ruth had.

Ruth had not been in Bethlehem too long, but the inhabitants knew that she was a woman of pure character. This drew forth the love and commendation of Boaz.

Ruth 3

v. 2—Boaz is winnowing his harvest, separating the chaff. This winnowing was the last phase of the harvest.

v. 3—Wash yourself, anoint yourself, put on your raiment. Before Ruth could see Boaz she had to do the aforementioned. She must be suitably attired (inwardly and outwardly). So we must also be before we can see God.

See Hebrews 12:14—“Follow peace with all men and believers without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Consecrating: Ruth abandoned herself to Boaz. We must do likewise to Christ.

Change of garments—garments of salvation and righteousness.

v. 4—He will tell you what you shall do. “If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.” Ears must be sensitive to God’s voice.

v. 5—I will do all you say. Surrender.

v. 6—And did all that her mother-in-law told her. “Obedience is better than sacrifice.”

v. 7—She came softly, and uncovered his feet, and lay down. The place of humility and reverence.

Mary, the sister of Martha—Luke 10:38-42.

The woman of the city—Luke 7:36.

v. 9—I am Ruth your handmaid (servant).

Ruth's request: "Spread your skirt over me." This was the Oriental symbol of protection. This action of Boaz is typical. Our heavenly Boaz is represented here.

The Lord takes notice of us. He crowns our life with blessing as He woos us towards Him. As we come to Him in humility and lay ourselves at His feet, He spreads His mantle over us.

In the first instance He saves us, at other times He protects us. Illustrate: Ruth 2:12, Psalm 17:8.

Thou art a virtuous woman.

All the city knew that she was a good woman. Ruth was a virtuous woman. Boaz also was a virtuous man.

His conduct as well as that of Ruth was exemplary.

Naomi continues to counsel Ruth. Ruth follows the counsel and advice of Naomi.

Shall I not seek rest for you?

Naomi is just about to reveal her plans of how Ruth could find rest. Up to this point Ruth had had a life of toil, while she had satisfaction from recent events, she did not have rest. The rest that Naomi sought would only come after Ruth was married to Boaz.

Rest when applied to the believer is in two aspects:

1. There is the present aspect.

The Spirit-taught person can have rest. In the same way as the Israelites left the wilderness and entered into Canaan and had rest, a believer can enter a spiritual sphere and have rest here and now.

2. There is the future aspect.

When we are at home with the Lord: after the Judgment Seat, the Marriage, then comes REST. Sweet, eternal, perfect rest.

Boaz, the Kinsman Redeemer

True to his word of 3:11, Boaz went up to the gate of the city. The gate was a place of justice and judgment. 4:1-2.

The nearest of kin could not redeem Ruth—v. 6. It was his privilege to do so (Leviticus 25:25-31, 47-55; Deuteronomy 25:5-10). He said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” Then he pulled off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. In doing so he surrendered all claims to the estate and to Ruth.

v. 9-10—Boaz is now in full possession of all the property of Elimelech. Also he bought Ruth to be his wife.

v. 11—the reaction of the people. The Lord made her like Rachel and Leah. It was their desire that Ruth should become fruitful. To acquire power in Ephratah and to be famous in Bethlehem, like the house of Perez. Perez was the direct ancestor of Boaz, Jesse, David, Solomon, Zerubbabel and Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born.

v. 13—The climax is reached, “So Boaz took Ruth.”

The result of this union was the birth of a son whom they called Obed. Naomi nursed him.

Verses 17-22 show that Obed was a descendant of Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Lessons:

1. “Famous in Bethlehem”—“Power in Ephratah.” Jesus was born here.

2. The inability of the nearest kinsman to redeem. “No one can redeem his brother nor give to God a ransom for his soul.”

3. Boaz is a picture of Christ who can redeem us.

Ruth is a picture of the Church, the Bride of Christ. She was a Gentile, Boaz a Jew. Describe the marriage of the Church to Christ. The Rapture, the judgment seat of Christ, the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19), the return to earth with the Lord, then an eternity of bliss.