

THE BOOK OF RUTH

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Introduction

This book, containing the beautiful story of Ruth, is closely linked with Judges. The beginning of the book makes this clear: "Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled." The events happened during the period of the judges. It therefore belongs next to that book. In the Hebrew Bible it occupies another place. We find it there next to the Song of Solomon, followed by Lamentations. Five books are called by the Jews "Megilloth" and are read by them at different feasts commemorating past events. The Song of Solomon is read during Passover; Ruth at Pentecost; Lamentations on the ninth day of the month Ab in memory of the destruction of Jerusalem; Ecclesiastes is read during the feast of Tabernacles and Esther they read when they celebrate Purim.

The author of the book of Ruth is unknown. The conclusion of the book shows that it must have been written after David had been made king. However the late date assigned to it by the critics, after the exile, is incorrect. We do not enter into their arguments. Any intelligent reader must see at once that its place between judges and Samuel is the right place, for it is as sequel to the former and an introduction to the latter. If we read the books of Samuel we discover that they do not contain any reference whatever to the ancestors of the house of David. To supply this deficiency is one of the reasons why this book was written. It is more than probable that Samuel is the author.

The story is so familiar that we do not need to repeat it in this brief introduction. Ruth the Moabitess is the chief character in the story. She who was cursed by the law becomes married to Boaz and as we learn from the ending, Ruth is the great-grandmother of David. Her name appears therefore in the first chapter of the New Testament in the list of ancestors of Him, who is David's son and David's Lord. She is the third Gentile woman in the genealogy of our Lord. The two Canaanitish women, Tamar and Rahab, precede her. The promises made to Abraham that the Gentiles were to receive blessing through his seed are confirmed through the history of these Gentile women among the ancestors of David and our Lord.

The typical dispensational meaning of the story of Ruth is interesting and has many blessed lessons. (The best application we have seen is in the Numerical Bible to which we acknowledge our indebtedness.) Ruth is often given as a type of the Church, as the bride of Christ. This application is difficult to make and leaves much of the beautiful story unexplained. Naomi represents Israel in unbelief, widowed and in bitterness. Ruth is the type of the remnant, who is called and received back by grace (like the sinners of the Gentiles) identifying itself with Israel's ruin, as Ruth identified herself with Naomi. The Kinsman-Redeemer, who espouses their cause and through whom Naomi's bitterness is changed to joy, who marries Ruth, is the type of the Redeemer, Christ. We shall follow briefly this correct dispensational foreshadowing in the annotations. A special division of this little book is not needed. The story has been divided into four chapters which makes another division unnecessary.

Analysis and Annotations

CHAPTER 1

The Story of Naomi: Orpah and Ruth

1. Naomi and her sorrows (1:1-5)
2. The return (1:6-13)
3. Orpah turning back, Ruth cleaving (1:14-18)
4. Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem (1:19-22)

The story begins with a famine. Elimelech, "my God is king," and Naomi, "pleasant," leave Bethlehem, "the house of bread," to go to the land of Moab, the heathen country. The story ends in Bethlehem with a marriage. Naomi far from the land, in unbelief and bitterness, bereft of Elimelech, her two sons also dead, Mahlon, which means "sick," and Chilion "pining," pictures Israel's condition, away from the land, no longer married unto Jehovah, but forsaken. Like Naomi, Israel has had trouble upon trouble and sorrow upon sorrow. There is no hope for Naomi amidst the Gentiles in Moab, as there is no hope for Israel among the nations. Hearing that Jehovah had visited His people with bread, she arose that she might return from Moab. Then Orpah said farewell to remain in Moab, while Ruth, the Moabitess, clave unto Naomi. She had faith and the beautiful words she addressed to Naomi were the expression of that faith. Not alone did the poor Moabitish woman say "thy people shall be my people," but also "thy God my God." It was grace which had drawn her. She thus clung closely to Naomi, became one with her in all her misery, yet with a faith, a confidence in Naomi's God, which Naomi did not possess. When Israel sets her face homeward once more, there will be in the midst of the unbelieving nation a remnant, searching for the promised blessing, longing for God, a remnant* which ultimately will come in touch with the mighty Kinsman-Redeemer and inherit through Him the promised blessings.

* Of this remnant called through the grace of God, after the true Church has left this earthly scene, the prophetic Word has much to say. Read: Is. 6:13; 10:21-22; 11:11; Micah 4:7; Zeph. 2:7; Ezek. 9; Rom. 11:5 and many other passages. In the Psalms we read the future prayers of this remnant, the sorrows and sufferings they will have and the glorious deliverance when the King comes.

This remnant is represented in Ruth, cleaving to Naomi. But the objection may be raised that Ruth was a Gentile. How can she represent the remnant of Israel? Israel through her unbelief has become practically the same which the Gentiles are. They are "Lo-Ammi," not my people (Hosea 1:9). The grace which called and saved Gentiles will call and draw them. Therefore this remnant is called "according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5-6).

Naomi is back in Bethlehem, empty and with a bitter spirit. She calls herself "Mara" which means bitter. This pictures Israel's return in unbelief. And it was at the time of the barley harvest. The harvest, as our Lord tells us, is the end of the age. When that end comes, after the true church has been gathered home, Israel, like Naomi, with a believing, trusting remnant cleaving to her, represented in Ruth, will return.

CHAPTER 2

Gleaning in the Field

1. Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz (2:1-3)
2. Grace shown to Ruth by Boaz (2:4-17)
3. Ruth hears concerning Boaz (2:18-23)

Boaz comes now upon the scene. His name means "in Him is strength." He is called "a mighty man of wealth." As the kinsman-redeemer he is a beautiful type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one in whom there is strength, the rich one. Ruth knows at first little of him and the coming relationship with the wealthy one. Boaz is related to Elimelech, whose name "my God is king" is typical of Israel's faith. Through Elimelech only Naomi (the nation Israel) has a claim on Boaz. And she can only lay claim through Ruth. Even so Israel has a claim on the blessings promised to her through the remnant which returns to Him in the beginning of the harvest, the end of the age; that remnant, as stated before, is represented in Ruth.

How simple and beautiful is the story which follows. The mighty man of valor knows evidently all about her, though he does not act at once in her behalf. He appears on the harvest field. Beautiful greeting he brings! "The LORD be with you"; and they answer him, "The LORD bless thee." Gracious are his words to her, who had cast herself upon his grace, for Ruth had said to Naomi, "Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace." She anticipated in faith, though she did not fully know what grace was awaiting her. Even so the remnant of Israel in the last days. How he permits her to continue in the humble work. He provides for her. She is only to glean in his field. She is not to be molested; his gracious power shields her. She can also drink of the water he provides. Then she falls on her face. Beautiful are her words of humility, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Then she hears from his lips that he knows all about her. More than that. He assures her of coming blessings, blessings Ruth will get because she trusted; blessings not of works, the law covenant, but of grace, because she believed. "The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

All foreshadows dispensationally the soul-exercise of the believing remnant of Israel, when the harvest begins, and the gracious dealing of the Lord with that remnant. Another application may also be made on spiritual

lines of a soul which seeks blessing and how the Lord deals in His grace with those that seek Him. This we cannot follow in these brief annotations. Then he comes closer to her. She receives from his own hands. He also, unknown to her, gives instructions that "handfuls on purpose" are to be dropped, just for her. What evidences that the mighty, wealthy Boaz loves the poor stranger, Ruth! So the remnant will gradually learn of His love. And we also find our comfort here. We glean in His Word. It is typified by the wheat, the barley and the corn. Then when we feel our need and dependence on Him, and plead, as we always should, our ignorance, He drops the handfuls on purpose, so that we find just what we need for our spiritual sustenance and comfort.

And Naomi tells her something about Boaz. But she only calls him "one of our redeemers." She should have said he is the redeemer. The secret who he is and what he will do for her, the trusting Ruth, she will learn only from himself. So unbelieving Israel does not know the full story of Him, who is the Redeemer. Boaz, Christ Himself, will make it known when He reveals Himself in His grace and power to the remnant of His people.

CHAPTER 3

At the Feet of Boaz

1. Naomi instructs Ruth (3:1-5)
2. At his feet (3:6-7)
3. The discovery (3:8-13)
4. The six measures of barley (3:14-17)
5. He will not rest until he have finished the thing (3:18)

What follows in the realization of redemption must be connected with Leviticus 25, the law concerning the redemption of an inheritance and the other law about the marriage of a brother-in-law as given in Deut. 25:5-12. See the annotations on that passage. Naomi gives instructions to Ruth which are based upon that law. But notice it is the question of the rest. "My daughter, shall not I seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" She then is seen resting at his feet. Blessed truth indeed which even Naomi realizes, rest can only be found at the feet of the redeemer. This truth is known to all His beloved people. He promises rest and He giveth rest. Like Mary it is the good part for us to be at His feet.

But what is Boaz's occupation when Ruth seeks him to claim her full blessing? "Behold he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshing floor." The winnowing is a sifting process by which the wheat is separated from the chaff. Read Matthew 3:12. The threshing floor is Israel. The dark night of tribulation is coming for them, when the mighty One will do the work of separating among His people. "His fan is in His hand." In that coming night the believing remnant will seek, like Ruth, the place at His feet and claim Him as their own redeemer. Critics and unbelievers have often sneered at this scene and suggested evil motives. They do the same with other portions of the Word of God. Only an evil mind can read evil into this beautiful scene. It was at midnight when Boaz became conscious of her presence and asked, "Who art thou?" She answered, "I am Ruth." She owns all she is and prays that he may cover her, "for thou art a redeemer." Notice the steps. His question--her answer and prayer because she believed in him as the kinsman redeemer.

She tarried there during the night. "And she lay at his feet till the

morning." Then she left not empty handed!

CHAPTER 4

The Redemption and Marriage

1. The other kinsman (4:1-5)
2. His refusal (4:6-8)
3. Boaz's redemption (4:9-10)
4. The marriage (4:11-13)
5. Naomi's happiness (4:14-17)
6. The ancestry of David (4:18-22)

And now the other redeemer, who cannot redeem, appears. Boaz sits in the gate and hails the one whom he knew as he passeth by. He calls him not by name but said, "Ho, such a one! turn aside, and sit down here." If Boaz had not called him he would surely have passed by. Then ten men also sit down. The case is stated and the other redeemer is willing to redeem the land. But when he hears that he also must take Ruth the Moabitess, he declares his powerlessness to do it. "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance. Redeem thou my right to thyself, for I cannot redeem it." Whom does this unnamed redeemer represent who can redeem the land but can do nothing for the poor stranger, the Moabitess? This powerless redeemer is the law. Ten witnesses are there confirming his inability to do it. These represent the Ten Commandments. The curse of the law rested upon the Moabitess for it is written, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD, even to the tenth generation forever" (Deut. 23:3). Therefore the law could not bring in Ruth, but only keep her out. Her case is indeed hopeless from the point of the law. Grace alone can help her. And this grace is beautifully seen in Boaz. He acquires both the land and Ruth, the Moabitess. "And Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife." It is a blessed type of Him who has paid the redemption price for the land and the people. The great day is coming after He had the fan in His hand, at the time of the harvest, when He will redeem both by His gracious power. Then all the blessings will follow--which are but faintly seen in Ruth's union with Boaz. "For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not, thou shalt not be ashamed; neither be thou confounded: for thou shalt not be put to shame. For thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall He be called" (Is. 54:3-5). "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land be any more termed Desolate. But thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah; for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married" (Is. 62:4).

The conclusion of this precious little book is the generations of Pharez ending with David. Ruth became the great-grandmother of David.

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