

The Book of Ruth

CHOICES
Ruth 1 and 2

Introduction from the English Standard Version:

“The book of Ruth tells of a young Moabite widow who, out of love for her widowed Israelite mother-in-law, abandoned her own culture, declaring, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16). Though she was destitute and needing to rely on the kindness of others, Ruth’s disposition and character captured the attention of Boaz, a close relative of her deceased husband. Boaz fulfilled the role of kinsman-redeemer and took Ruth as his wife. Ruth serves as a wonderful example of God’s providential care of His people, and of His willingness to accept Gentiles who seek Him. Ruth was an ancestor of Christ. The author is unknown, but the genealogy at the end suggests that it was written during or after the time of David.”

There is no problem in dating the book of Ruth. Verse one says, “Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled...” (1:1). The book of Ruth teaches that despite the prevailing apostasy of the nation there were some individuals seeking to live godly lives by their observance to the Mosaic laws. The character, integrity, and piety of Boaz stand high; his knowledge of both Jehovah and the law stand in contrast to the ignorance, immorality, indifference, and idolatry of most in Israel at that time.

Warren Wiersbe characterized Israel by anarchy, apostasy, and apathy.

Israel, in general, recognized no authority. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25); that is, **anarchy**.

They failed to follow the Lord, being indifferent to God’s clear commands; that is, **apathy**.

They compromised and lived like the heathen nations; that is, **apostasy**.

Each one of these failings builds on the other.

Right in the middle of this period of prevailing ignorance, immorality, indifference, and idolatry we have the story of Ruth. Ruth is one of two books of the Old Testament dealing primarily with a woman. The other woman is Esther.

Note some contrasts between Ruth and Esther:

1. In Ruth you have a Gentile marrying a Jew.
In Esther you have a Jewess marrying a Gentile.
2. The book of Ruth begins with a famine.
Esther begins with a feast.
3. The book of Ruth ends with the birth of a baby.
Esther ends with the death of an enemy.
4. Ruth tells the story of poverty in Bethlehem.
Esther tells the story of riches in a king's court.

Both Ruth and Esther were very significant in the preservation of a nation.

The book of Ruth reached forward to a climax in the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. It provides the vital link between the time of the judges and the kingship of David; Ruth was the great-grandmother of David.

John Phillips gives a summation of the book of Ruth as follows:

When the story opens Ruth was a pagan. She was a member of a hostile race and cut off from any knowledge of the living God. In fact, as a Moabitess, she was not only without God but she was without hope for the Law of Moses legislated with particular severity against her people

Deuteronomy 23:3-4

³"No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ESV

Yet, in spite of this, we see God setting in motion a chain of events which brought Ruth at last to Boaz. Yes, and lifted her into the royal line and gave her a living link with the Christ Himself

Matthew 1:1-6

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

The **first link** in the chain of events that brought Ruth to Boaz was a famine (1:1), a providential act of God over which she had no control and about which she probably knew nothing and cared less. For the famine was not even in Moab, it was in Judea. Yet it was the beginning of things for Ruth although she did not know it.

The **second link** in the chain was a family. There moved into her life a family from Bethlehem. Although they were away from God and although they were in a place where they had no right to be and although their testimony must have been dim indeed, yet Ruth first heard of Jehovah through this family. She married into this family and had a first-hand opportunity to see and to hear for herself their devotion to their God. For despite their backslidden condition there must have been much about the family of Elimelech which spoke to her heart.

The **third link** in the chain of events was a funeral. In fact there were three funerals one after another. Ruth's husband died. It was a tragedy at the time, perhaps, but she could never have come to know Boaz as God intended her to know him without that funeral. God is too loving to be unkind, and too wise to make any mistakes.

The **fourth link** in the chain was fear. Her mother-in-law, Naomi, announced one day that she was leaving Moab. The only light Ruth had, and a dim, poor light it was, was going out. She feared to be left in the dark and she voiced her resolution to get to know Naomi's God in one of the most forthright statements of purpose in Scripture (1:16-17).

The **fifth and final link** in the chain was a field. For when she arrived at Bethlehem and sought some means to support herself and Naomi she went out to glean "And," says the Spirit of God, "her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz" (2:3). That's how she was sought by God. God overruled the affairs of her life until she was brought face to face with the one who was to become her kinsman redeemer.

From this point on the story moves swiftly. Ruth was taught by Naomi to put herself at the feet of Boaz and ask to be redeemed; i. e., ask Boaz to be put into his family. Then she was bought by Boaz, according to the redemption laws of Israel, and made his very own.

One does not have to look very far to see how all this pictures our own redemption.

First, God the Father takes the initiative and begins to move behind the scenes to bring us into the presence of His Son. And under the sound of His word, God the Holy Spirit teaches us the "simple" plan of redemption and then God makes us willing to ask the Lord Jesus to become ours and to make us His. Then the Holy Spirit shows us how the redemption price has been paid at Calvary and, unworthy as we are, He lifts us up and makes us His very own.

CHOICES

One of the most familiar passages in the Bible:

Ruth 1:15-18

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. ESV

WERE THERE ANY BELIEVERS during the period of the Judges?

Not many, but God is never without a witness and we have Samson's parents and Naomi and Ruth to offset the apostasy of the time.

Amid the sorry examples of the wasted lives of the people in the time of the Judges, we have one of the most moving romances of all time. Everything about Ruth is honorable. She is a pagan Moabite woman that comes to know the true God and is blessed to be the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David, whose Royal Son is the Christ.

1. NAOMI'S SUFFERING in MOAB

Ruth 1:1-5

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

There is more mention of Bethlehem in the Book of Ruth than of any other place in the Old Testament. A lot of history builds up in the birthplace of the Christ.

Names in the Bible had meaning. Every time a Hebrew called another Hebrew by name they immediately thought in terms of its meaning. We have long since stopped associating meaning with our names.

At one time, long ago, I looked all of the names in the OT and wrote the pronunciation in the margins of my Bible. That is one reason I am having so much difficulty getting used to this new Bible.

To escape the famine in Judea:

Elimelech [el-ee-meh'-lek; my God is king];
takes Naomi [no-om-ee';pleasant];
and their two sons, Mahlon [makn-lone'; sick];
and Chilion [kil-yone'; decay] to Moab.

While Elimelech and Naomi find food, they do not avoid suffering.

Elimelech dies. Naomi's two sons took wives of the women of Moab:

Mahlon married Orpah [or-paw'; stubborn] and

Chilion married Ruth [rooth; friend].

But then Naomi's two sons die leaving Naomi virtually alone.

2. NAOMI'S DECISION to MOVE

Ruth 1:6-13

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and^f given them food. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."

It may be that Naomi had long wanted to leave this pagan culture and return to the land of the people of God. With her husband and two sons gone she is free to go; besides that she has heard that the famine is over in Israel. Both daughters-in-law start out with Naomi, but Naomi wisely advises them to stay home where their chances of finding another husband are much better.

3. CHOICES for ORPAH and RUTH

Ruth 1:14-18

¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Both Orpah and Ruth loved Naomi. It seems that Orpah had been willing to worship the God of her husband, Mahlon, but could just as easily return to her gods in Moab. Apparently, to Orpah, religion was a matter of convenience.

But Ruth, obviously, had been converted to the true God and provides us with, perhaps, the greatest testimony of love spoken by a mere human.

4. NAOMI'S BITTERNESS

Ruth 1:19-22

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Naomi's friends are excited to see her. Naomi shares her heart with the people in her hometown. She had gone away "pleasant" but is now "bitter."

5. RUTH GLEANS in the FIELD

Ruth 2:1-7

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. ⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." ⁷ She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."

Naomi still had her land but it could provide no sustenance. The Law provided for the poor in that they could glean the fields after the harvesters had gone through. The Law even commanded that the harvesters be sure to leave some for the gleaners. Ruth gladly volunteered to glean for herself and for Naomi.

In the **providence** of God, Ruth finds the field of Boaz who is her near-kinsman.

Something (providence again) attracts Boaz to Ruth.
Of all the gleaners why does he notice her?

Boaz learns that she is Ruth, the Moab woman who has been so devoted to Naomi and to the LORD. He is impressed already by her character.

6. RUTH'S INTRODUCTION to BOAZ

Ruth 2:8-16

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹² The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" ¹³ Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

When Boaz meets Ruth he is kind to her and she expresses her gratitude.

The main point of the story is that Boaz is attracted to the spiritual qualities of Ruth. We are not told if she is physically attractive or not.

Boaz, who was much older and who had never married, was waiting for a wife whose love for the LORD was like his own.

7. The BLESSING of RUTH's WORK

Ruth 2:17-23

¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah {~ 22 liters} of barley. ¹⁸ And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over^f after being satisfied. ¹⁹ And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one ofⁱ our redeemers." ²¹ And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.'" ²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." ²³ So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

When Ruth comes home with her first day's gleanings Naomi realizes that God is already at work.

Since Naomi's husband and sons were dead, no one could carry on the family name. The Law of the "kinsman-redeemer" could be applied (Deut 25:5-10).

The Law concerning Levirate marriage.

Deut 25:5-11

⁵ "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. ⁶ And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. ⁷ And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' ⁸ Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,' ⁹ then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' ¹⁰ And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.'

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The Lord Jesus Christ is the Kinsman-Redeemer for all His people.