

Lesson from Ruth

There is so much there for the Christian to appreciate in the book of Ruth. God's grace and love is clearly evidenced throughout as an example to us and is so far beyond our ability to fully appreciate. When we realize how undeserved we are to be the objects of His love and grace, it makes it that much more precious.

The book of Ruth is actually set during the fairly dark days of the book of Judges (Ruth 1:1; possibly written by Samuel). There are so many things that happened in Israel during this time that appears to make us think that Israel didn't deserve any grace from God at all, at least as a nation. However, there were individual Jews who loved and worshiped God and who also lived morally upright lives, doing their best to remain obedient to God in those dark times. This allowed them to continue in *fellowship* with God (which should be the daily goal of every Christian). But by far, it seems that a general spiritual malaise covered the Land of Israel.

This is not unlike today, in my opinion. There is a growing darkness coming to the fore throughout the world today. It is so because of the push of satanic forces through individuals and groups of people who are thoroughly opposed to God. These blasphemers are solely motivated by the evil enveloping them, having given themselves over to it. Consequently, as Paul notes in Romans 1, they will naturally go from bad to worse. Anyone associated with them will be dragged in the same downward direction in which they are descending. Ultimately, this is the result of people and nations attempting to rise against God, wanting nothing to do with Him, not even wanting to think of Him any longer (Psalm 2). It is clear that God eventually throws them over to their desires, giving them what they seek.

However, though the times were spiritually disconsolate, there were blessings for some people who had not cast God off. Because of that overall spiritual void though, it is understandable (yet still wrong), that Naomi (the mother-in-law of Ruth), felt completely abandoned by God after her husband died and then her two grown, married sons also died, leaving her and her two daughters-in-law widows. Naomi believed God's hand was against her because of the deaths of the men (v 13). Isn't that like us? When bad things happen, we are often tempted to think God has not only left us, but is punishing us for something. Certainly, He could be *chastising* us for unconfessed sin. Yet, the more we know about how God works (through Scripture), the more we know that this is not always the case (i.e. Joseph in Genesis).

So Naomi, with her two daughters-in-law heads back *from* the country of Moab to Israel. (As a reminder, Moab was the illegitimate son of Lot's incestuous union with one of his daughters.) Naomi wanted to go back *to* Israel because she'd heard that God had provided food for people there. The fields were once again producing grain and other crops.

The Mosaic Law held that a farmer should leave some of the crop in the fields so that people passing by could help themselves if they were hungry. Naomi knew that if God was indeed blessing the people of Israel with good crops, there would be excess left in the fields for "gleaning."

Naomi did not want either daughter-in-law to go with her simply because she had no way to provide for them and certainly had no other sons to give to them in marriage. She wouldn't be having anymore children either so she believed it was pointless for her two daughters-in-law to continue with her. Both daughters-in-law were from Moab, so it was natural that Naomi wanted them to remain there for better chances to find a Moabite husband and she (Naomi) would return to Israel. One daughter-in-law tearfully obeyed and went back to her people in Moab, while the other, Ruth, did not. Her strong wishes were expressed and her comments to Naomi are often used in marriage vows.

...whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God (Ruth 1:16b)

This dedication and commitment so moved Naomi that she relented and allowed Ruth to remain with her. It is interesting that once they arrive in Israel, Naomi seems to want to help Ruth find a husband. Naomi loved Ruth. She did not want Ruth to be alone.

Chapter 2 introduces the "kinsman redeemer" that had been set up in the Mosaic Law for situations when a man dies and leaves a wife without any children. In this case the "redeemer" was to marry the widow and have children with her so that her first husband's name and progeny are carried on in Israel and this often included land earmarked for the deceased husband. One such kinsman redeemer is introduced in verse three by the name of Boaz. Interestingly enough we learn that Boaz comes from Bethlehem (v 4). He has "reapers" who work for him to gather in the crops and he oversees their work.

Ruth had already arrived to Boaz' fields and had asked the reapers for permission to glean. Verse 7 tells us what a hard worker Ruth was and was not afraid to work in the fields. Once Boaz took notice of her, it is clear that he wanted to protect her.

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

Calling Ruth "daughter" was a sign of respect and indicates that Boaz was not in Ruth's age bracket. As a result of Boaz' words to her, Ruth falls at his feet in appreciation for his kindness. She understands that Boaz is trying to protect her by letting her know that she should remain in his fields where she can be protected. Being in another field might put her at risk where she might easily be harassed or even physically abused. Boaz also ordered his own workers to leave her alone and to ensure that no one bothered her.

Boaz is clearly concerned for her safety, which also signifies the dark times then. As we further learn, Boaz seems drawn to Ruth already. I'm sure many of us know what love at first sight is like. I can still remember the days when I really started noticing the woman who eventually said

"Yes" to my marriage proposal. It certainly felt like love at first sight then and I'm very glad she felt the same.

Boaz keeps a very watchful, protective eye on Ruth. In Ruth 3, we learn of Naomi's counsel to Ruth; what she should *do* and what she should *say* to Boaz to encourage him to be the kinsman redeemer for Ruth.

At night, Ruth goes and lies at Boaz' feet. She uncovers his feet and he wakes realizing someone is there. Understandably, he is a bit startled in the dark and could not easily see who was there. Ruth responds, "*I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman*" (v 9).

Ruth was actually proposing marriage to Boaz! She wanted Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer so that she would no longer be alone and would be able to have his children. Verse 10 shows us how pleased Boaz was by this offer, considering Ruth could've gone to a younger man, but chose Boaz instead.

This is really reminiscent of when a person becomes a Christian. When their eyes are open to the truth, they *embrace* Jesus, literally thanking/asking Him to come into their life as Savior/Lord. God opens our eyes. We embrace truth and *receive* Him and as His adopted Bride, we will eventually marry Him. Just as Boaz responded with delight at Ruth's desire to marry him, so does Jesus respond with delight (and the angels of heaven worship Him), over the salvation of one person.

There was one hurdle left to deal with as far as Ruth was concerned and that was another kinsman redeemer who was closer to the family than Boaz. That other kinsman had the first right of refusal shall we say. Notice in the text how Boaz is very careful to comply with all aspects of God's will? In fact, he appeared *eager* to do so. Are we eager to fulfill all of God's will?

The next day, Boaz sits at the city gate waiting for the nearer kinsman redeemer and when he happens by, Boaz invites him to sit. The man does so and then Boaz invites ten men of the city to also sit to watch the proceedings and be able to testify that all was done according to the Law. The ten men would be legal witnesses to the "transaction."

Initially the nearer kinsman redeemer says he *will* redeem Naomi's claim because he thought that it merely involved redeeming the land that belonged to Elimelech, Naomi's deceased husband. When Boaz tells the nearer kinsman that he would also have to take Ruth as his wife, he states he is not in the position to do that, so he *legally* passes his rights as kinsman redeemer onto Boaz. This is signified by passing his sandal to Boaz. The ten men of the city verify the business arrangement and everyone goes their way.

Boaz is now legally able to redeem Elimelech's land and marry Ruth, redeeming her and Naomi from their situation. Nothing will keep Boaz from completing the agreed upon transaction.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son (v 13 of chapter 4)

Naomi remains Ruth's mother-in-law even though her two sons had died and Boaz is not her flesh and blood son. Naomi becomes the grandmother of Ruth's and Boaz' son roughly a year later. The child is named Obed by Naomi and the neighbors. Normally, the name would've been given by the mother, Ruth, but not in this case. Obed became the father of Jesse and Jesse, the father of David, who as you undoubtedly know became Israel's second king after Saul's failure to remain true to God's will repeatedly. In his arrogance, Saul essentially did exactly what Lucifer (Satan) did by elevating himself over God. But that's for another article.

Think of it. Had Ruth not implored her mother-in-law to allow her to remain with her, none of this would have happened. God is in the details and even those things which may initially appear to us to *not* to be under God's sovereign control often turn out to be (again, as in the example of Joseph).

Ruth - a *gentile* from Moab - is "redeemed" by a Jewish man, Boaz. Ruth represents the Church, redeemed by Jesus. What is also very interesting here is the fact that we know Jesus ultimately comes from the Davidic line, doesn't He? Consider though that the union of Boaz and Ruth is a union of an Israelite (Jew) and a Moabite (Gentile). This means that within Christ's own lineage, there is a Gentile component.

There is just so much here in this short four chapter book of Ruth to cover in one article, but I hope this set you digging. God woos those who come into the Church as Boaz wooed Ruth. As Boaz cared for and redeemed Ruth, so does Jesus care for and redeem us.