

# Ruth

## *A Suggested Outline of Ruth*

- I. Ruth's Sorrow (1)
  - A. Naomi's wrong decision (1:1–5)
  - B. Naomi's wrong counsel (1:6–18)
  - C. Naomi's wrong attitude (1:19–22)
  
- II. Ruth's Service (2)
  - A. God guides Ruth (2:1–3)
  - B. Boaz shows kindness to Ruth (2:4–16)
  - C. Naomi encourages Ruth (2:17–23)
  
- III. Ruth's Surrender (3)
  - A. She obeys Naomi's counsel (3:1–5)
  - B. She submits to Boaz (3:6–13)
  - C. She waits for Boaz to work (3:14–18)
  
- IV. Ruth's Satisfaction (4)
  - A. Boaz redeems Ruth (4:1–12)
  - B. Boaz marries Ruth (4:13)
  - C. Boaz and Ruth have a son (4:14–21)

## *Introductory Notes to Ruth*

### **I. Background**

It is difficult to believe that the events in this book took place during the time of the Judges, a time when Israel was a divided and defeated nation. But during the worst of times, God reveals His love and still works on behalf of those who fear and trust Him. We live today at a time when there is “no king in Israel” (Jud. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), for the Jews rejected their King; but during this time, a beautiful love story is taking place in this world: God is getting a Bride for His Son. The Book of Ruth is a harvest story, as the “Lord of the harvest” gathers His sheaves (John 4:31–38).

We aren't certain just where the story of Ruth fits into the history recorded in the Book of Judges. It's possible that the famine was caused by the ravages of one of the invading armies that God used to discipline His people. There must have been peace between Judah and Moab or Elimelech and his family would not have been able to move there. During the period of the Judges, peace was possible in one part of the land while there was trouble in another part.

## **II. Theology**

While the immediate purpose of this little book is to trace the ancestry of David the King, there is much spiritual truth found in this story. Ruth was from Moab, and the Moabites were excluded from the nation of Israel (Deut. 23:3). But because she put faith in the God of Israel, she was accepted, an illustration of God's grace to the Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–22). Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, is a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price to redeem us and make us His bride. The unknown kinsman was unwilling to jeopardize his inheritance for the sake of Ruth, but Boaz so loved Ruth that he made her a part of his inheritance! The grace of God and the providential leading of God are major themes of this story.

Ruth became an ancestress of the Messiah (Matt. 1:5) and of David, through whose line the Messiah was promised (2 Sam. 7). Like Rahab (Josh. 2; 6; Heb. 11:31), Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew and became a part of "salvation history" (Matt. 1:5). This book may be a small one, but the story it tells is a part of the greatest story ever told.

## **III. Practical Lessons**

There are many lessons we can learn from this wonderful book:

- (1) No matter how difficult the situation may be, if we surrender to the Lord and obey Him, He will see us through.
- (2) No person is so far outside the reach of God's grace that he or she cannot be saved. Ruth had everything against her, but the Lord saved her!
- (3) God providentially guides those who want to obey Him and serve others. Because Ruth was concerned for Naomi, God led her and brought her into a life of happiness.
- (4) It does no good to get angry at God and blame Him for our mistakes. God used Ruth to lead Naomi out of despair and into His blessing.
- (5) There are no "small decisions" with God. Ruth's decision to glean in the fields led to her becoming an ancestress of King David and of the Messiah. Read Ps. 37:3–7 and see how it is fulfilled in Ruth's experience.
- (6) It is wise to wait on the Lord and let Him work out His loving purposes. "The one who trusts will never be dismayed" (Isa. 28:16, NIV). After we have done all that we can do, we must trust the Lord to do the rest; and He will never fail us.

## Ruth 1–4

This is the eighth book in the OT, and eight is the number of new beginning. The events in Ruth take place during the days of the Judges, but what a difference between these two books! Instead of violence and lawlessness, we see tenderness, love, and sacrifice. It is good to know that there are still good people in bad days, and that God is at work in the “corners of the land” though violence may fill the news. Ruth and Esther are the only OT books named after women. Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew; Esther was a Jew who married a Gentile; but God used both of them to save the nation. Ruth is placed between Judges and Samuel for a definite reason. Judges shows the decline of the Jewish nation; Samuel shows the setting up of the Jewish kingdom; and Ruth pictures Christ and His bride. During this present age, when Israel is set aside, Christ is calling out His bride from among the Gentiles and the Jews. As we shall see, this brief book has a wonderful typical meaning. It is a love story and a harvest story, and that is what God is doing in our world today.

### I. Ruth's Sorrow (1)

#### A. *A wrong decision (vv. 1–5).*

Why a famine should come to Bethlehem (“house of bread”), we do not know; possibly because of the sins of the people. Instead of trusting God in the land, Elimelech (“God is my king”) and Naomi (“pleasantness”) take their two sons to the land of Moab. Abraham made a similar mistake when he went to Egypt (Gen. 12:10ff). Better to starve in the will of God than to eat the enemy's bread! They plan to “sojourn” briefly, but instead they “continue” until the father and the two sons die. The names of the two sons may reflect the sorrow of their sojourn: Mahlon means “sickly” and Chilion means “pining.” “To be carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6). Jews were not to mix with the Moabites (Deut. 23:3), so their wrong decision brought them the discipline of God.

#### B. *A wrong direction (vv. 6–18).*

Backslidden Naomi desires to return home, but she is not wise enough to invite her daughters-in-law to accompany her! Beware of the advice of a carnal Christian. Imagine Naomi sending these women back to their heathen idols! She thought that (like her) their only interests were fleshly, but Ruth had higher desires than bread and marriage. Orpah returned to the old life, but Ruth “clung to her.” She desired to follow the true God, Jehovah, and to abandon the old heathen life. “I will go!” was her steadfast decision, in spite of Naomi's unspiritual direction.

#### C. *A wrong disposition (vv. 19–22).*

Their return home moved the city, for great changes had taken place in Naomi. Do we detect here a bitter spirit against the Lord? Is she blaming God for her sorrows? These verses certainly ought to warn the backslider of the great cost of getting out of the will of

God. "Call me Mara—bitterness!" We shall see that God uses Ruth to change her mother-in-law's attitudes toward life and toward God.

## **II. Ruth's Service (2)**

Barley harvest was in April, and Ruth enters into the harvest as a poor gleaner; see Deut. 24:19–22 and Lev. 19:9ff. Note her dedication and determination: "Let me now go to the field" (v. 2); "Let me glean and gather" (v. 7); "Let me find favor" (v. 13). God leads in her choice of fields so that she comes face-to-face with the one man God had chosen to redeem her and marry her! "I being in the way, the Lord led me" (Gen. 24:27). God does not bless and guide lazy people; those who do the task at hand will find His direction. Boaz protects Ruth and provides for her long before he marries her, a perfect picture of our Lord. All of this comes from God's grace (v. 2), favor (v. 13), and kindness (v. 20). How good it is to see Naomi losing her bitterness. God was going to use the Gentile Ruth to restore Naomi's blessing again, just as God is saving Gentiles today and will one day restore Israel to her place of blessing.

## **III. Ruth's Surrender (3)**

Back in Moab, Naomi had told Ruth she would find rest among her own people (1:9), but now she realizes that there is rest only with the people of God and in the will of God. The time has come for Ruth to present her claims to Boaz and give him opportunity to be her kinsman-redeemer. The OT law provided that a kinsman could buy back an estate which had been lost through poverty (Lev. 25:23–55). This kept the land in the possession of the proper people. The kinsman, of course, had to be willing and able to redeem. Ruth followed the custom of the day and presented her case to Boaz: if he was to redeem her deceased husband's estate, he must also marry Ruth, the widow. Men often slept at the threshing floor to protect the grain. "Spread your skirt over your handmaid" (v. 9) was Ruth's legal claim to Boaz, asking him to be the kinsman-redeemer and claim her as his wife. Certainly it took faith and courage for her to take this step. Boaz rejoiced that this younger woman did not reject him because of his age, and he promised to fulfill the duty of a kinsman the next day. Note that he did not send her away empty-handed!

We can see in Ruth's actions a beautiful illustration of the believer's relationship to Christ. Certainly if we want fellowship with Him, we must be washed, anointed (the Holy Spirit), and clothed (v. 3). Our proper place is at His feet. It is "night" now, but we fellowship with Him until the morning comes (v. 13) and He claims His bride for Himself! As the result of our fellowship, we ought to have food to share with others (vv. 15–17).

## **IV. Ruth's Satisfaction (4)**

Another man in Bethlehem had prior claim on the estate, so Boaz approached him the next day. The man was anxious to claim the land, but he did not want Ruth! "I cannot marry her lest I mar my own inheritance!" How wonderful that Christ was willing to make us part of His inheritance and claim us as His bride! How unselfish was His love for us! The unnamed kinsman knew that any sons Ruth bore him would carry, not his name,

but the name of her first husband (v. 5); and thus he would lose the estate the son would inherit. It was "a bad business deal" from his point of view; certainly he had no love for Ruth. Boaz was willing to pay any price to redeem the woman and her estate simply because he loved her. What a wonderful picture of Christ and His love for the church!

We now discover the significance of this book: Ruth becomes an ancestress of David. Deuteronomy 23:3 excludes a Moabite from the congregation of Israel "even to the tenth generation"; but the grace of God makes Ruth the Moabitess a member of the earthly family that gave Christ to the world (Matt. 1:3–6, and note the mention of Tamar and Bathsheba, further proof of the grace of God).

This book begins with a funeral and ends with a wedding! It opens with famine and closes with fullness! Ruth's love for her mother-in-law and her willingness to obey the Word brought her into joy and blessing. The decision she made in chapter 1 determined her future. Had she gone back to her heathen way of life, she would have been heard of no more. Note, in closing, some special lessons:

*A. Prophetical.*

Chapter 1 shows Israel out of the will of God and suffering His chastening. But then God begins to deal with a Gentile (Ruth), just as today He is calling out from the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14). Naomi's blessing came after Ruth's wedding, just as Israel will be restored and blessed after Christ and His church are united.

*B. Typical.*

Certainly Boaz is a picture of Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer. Christ took upon Him our flesh (without sin, of course) that He might redeem us. He paid the price, and He did it because He loved us. Like Boaz, He is the Lord of the harvest; He supplies our needs; He redeems the inheritance for us; He gives rest.

*C. Practical.*

Backsliding is a serious matter; it cost Naomi her husband and her sons. No matter how difficult the circumstances may be, the only place for God's people is in the will of God. When we seek satisfaction from the world, we pay a high price. However, God is willing to forgive backsliders and restore them to favor. Naomi could never regain the lost time out of God's will, but she did regain her joy and testimony.