

RUTH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to the book of Ruth. It is only four chapters long but as you will see, they are packed with spiritual truths for us to apply to our lives. Now we have just finished the book of Judges and what a sad, dark history regarding the children of Israel. We are told that, **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** Judges 21:25. Thus, we not only saw spiritual adultery but immorality that filled the land.

Now, in saying that, keep in mind that the book of Ruth takes place during the timeframe of the book of Judges and many feel that it was during the time of the Judge, Gideon. And think about when we finished up the book of Judges, there was not a lot of hope out there. The nation was dark, it was evil, the people of God had turned to idols and immorality. Not a great picture to say the least. And for some 300 years this went on in Israel, but in the midst of all that darkness the light of God was shining from the lives of some of the people. In fact, the book of Ruth is like an island of peace in the midst of a fierce storm. This book is like a diamond shining, glistening against a very black backdrop.

Folk's, it is easy to lose hope, to see what is going on in our nation and just throw up our hands, but never forget this. God has His faithful remnant that He is working in and through to accomplish His work on this earth, even when things look dark and hopeless. In fact, I should say in spite of what is happening around us, God is still working!

Let me give you an example. Roman Polanski raped a 13-year-old girl some 30 years ago and fled the country and has been living freely all those years until he was arrested in Switzerland. Now, actress Whoopi Goldberg defended this man and what he did by saying, "I know it wasn't rape-rape. I think it was something less, but I don't believe it was rape-rape." How evil are we when we can defend a pedophile because he is a popular movie director. Our nation is truly dark!

Yes, people still mock and put God and the God of the Bible down today as they did back then, but again, let God's Word speak for itself. Interesting enough, "When Benjamin Franklin was the Ambassador to France, he spoke to a group of intellectuals who continually scoffed at his belief in the Bible. Unconvinced that these men were familiar with the Book they mocked, Franklin said, 'By the way, gentlemen - I have come across a most intriguing love story that I would like to read for you tonight. I think you'll find it interesting.'

He then proceeded to read a hand-written copy of the book of Ruth. After he finished the four short chapters, his audience was ecstatic. 'That is the greatest love story we have ever heard.' they exclaimed. 'You must publish it at once.' Franklin answered, 'It has been published. It is the Bible.'" To say the least, His scoffers were silenced. And what they said is true.

The book of Ruth is one the greatest love stories ever told. It is more than just a love story between Boaz and Ruth. It is a story of God's great love towards man. It is a story of redemption. Thus, you will see that this earthly story has a heavenly meaning. And in just 4 short chapters we will see God's great love for us, as He is our kinsman redeemer, purchasing us back to Himself through His sacrifice.

Now, according to Jewish tradition, the authorship of the book of Ruth is ascribed to Samuel, as was the book of Judges.

Regarding this book of Ruth, J. Vernon McGee wrote:

The Book of Ruth is very important in connection with the coming of Jesus Christ into this world. Without this little book, we could not connect the house of David with the tribe of Judah. It is an important link in the chain of Scripture that begins with Genesis and goes right down to that stable in Bethlehem and to the cross, to the crown, and to the throne of David on which our Lord will someday be seated. This is a very definite reason Ruth is included in the canon of Scripture.

However, the primary purpose of the book of Ruth is the presentation of an important phase in the doctrine of redemption. Redemption is possible only through a Kinsman-Redeemer. God could not redeem apart from a Mediator. Since only God could redeem, it was necessary for Him to become that person. Boaz furnishes the only figure for the Kinsman-Redeemer aspect of redemption which is so essential for any proper theory of the Atonement. This little Book of Ruth comes down to our level and tells the commonplace story of a couple who love each other. They were ordinary folk, average folk, and their love story is a mirror in which we can see the divine love of a Savior for you and me. As we proceed into the Book of Ruth, we see this wonderful love story unfold before us.

- J. Vernon McGee, Thru The Bible Vol. II, p.88

Now there are only 85 verses in this book and yet the titles for God that are used are amazing. We see that the name YAHWAH is used some 17 times, ELOHIM is used 3 times and the word EL SHADDAI (THE ALL-SUFFICIENT ONE) is used some 2 times. Not only that but the words, redemption, redeem, kinsman redeemer are used over 20 times! Look at this; we can clearly see that the theme of this book is the redemption of sinful man by God. And, this is the eighth book of the Bible and eight is the number of new beginnings. That is so true for our Kinsman Redeemer; Jesus Christ as He gives to each of us a new beginning! With that said, let's begin our study through the book of Ruth starting in chapter 1 and verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we read of this love story that truly pictures the love of our Savior for all of us as He comes and redeems His bride, the church!

RUTH 1**VERSES 1-2**

1. It was during the period when the Judges ruled that God brought a famine in the land. You see, this was not just what some would call “Mother Nature” acting upon the land but it is Father God who brought this judgment. This should have been no surprise to the children of Israel because God warned them in Deuteronomy 11:13-17, **“And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.’ Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the Lord’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.”**

2. Now God brought this famine upon the Land so that they would return to Him, but instead, this man leaves the land of Bethlehem, the House of Bread and heads to Moab! And we are told specifically that this is the Bethlehem in Judah, in fact, it is Bethlehem Ephrathah, an ancient name for the city of Bethlehem in Judah and specifically the place where our Savior would be born! (Micah 5:2).

Now think about what this man and his family had to do to get from Bethlehem, the House of Bread to the land of Moab. He had to travel through the Jericho pass, through the awful Judean wilderness by the Dead Sea, go across the Jordan River into the land of Moab! He had to work hard to move away from what God desired. Yes, there was a famine in the land but God brought about the famine so this man and his family and the rest of the people could see their sin and repent and return to the Lord, but instead they ran away!

3. How could this man do that? The same way we do! When God turns up the heat upon us, brings some kind of famine into our lives to draw us back to him, we too tend to run away. Sometimes we run to another church because we don't like what we are hearing, it is uncomfortable for us. Sometimes we change jobs, we change spouses, we do this and we do that and the reality is, God did not want you to run away but to repent and return to Him! Seek Him and don't run to Moab because as the Bible tells us, Moab is God's garbage pot or wash pot! (Psalm 108:9). Don't go from the House of Bread to the garbage pot! What an important lesson for us to learn because running from the House of Bread, our Bethlehem is not going to be beneficial, as we will see with this family!

4. This man, Elimelech, whose name means, "God is king" did not live that way, God was not king in his life! And the idea here is that he went to Moab for a short time, just until the famine was over in Bethlehem. The problem was not with Bethlehem but with Elimelech and that sojourn down in Moab would last ten years and he would never return to Bethlehem and neither will his sons, as we will see!

5. One more point and that is what the names of this family mean. We said that Elimelech means, “God is my king.” Naomi means, “pleasant.” They had two sons, we don’t know if they were twins or not but one was named, Mahlon, which means, “sickly.” And the other son was named Chilion, which means, “pinning.” Now we don’t know if these boys were unhealthy and that is why they named them like this or that Elimelech and Naomi were “sick” and “tired” of the situations they were facing and thus, they just ran away thinking it would be better for them, and as we will see, it is not better, it never is better to run away from God!

VERSE 3

1. Remember that Elimelech’s name means, “God is king” and if you are living in garbage, in the world, that relationship will always die! God will never be king of your life if you live your life in worldly things. You can’t serve two masters and the world will win out if you let it!

VERSES 4-5

1. Naomi was now left to raise these two boys in the world and as they grew, they married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, something that they should not have done. What was the problem? They were following in their parent’s footsteps and thus, suffered because of it.

2. Now we don't know if the death of Elimelech and now Mahlon and Chilion is the result of the judgment of God or it was just their time. But the spiritual principle is there; death spiritually speaking is the result of walking away from God, being where you should not be!

3. And now there are three widows and no children. They had no means of survival, and widows were among the lowest and most disadvantaged classes in the ancient world! Naomi had no family in Moab, there was no one to support them and they were in a desperate situation.

VERSES 6-7

1. So in this desperate situation, Naomi hears that God is blessing His people once again and she wants to be part of that, she wants to partake of the good things of God and thus, she is going to return. Folk's, may our life, the joy we have in the Lord, the blessings that God is pouring down upon us, cause those that have backslidden and those that don't know the Lord, want to partake of what we have and either return or come into the family of God!

2. If that is where you are at this evening, living outside the blessings of God, don't hear and see the good things that God is doing and just stop there. Return to Him or come to Him and see what God can do in you and through you for His glory! But you must take those steps of faith as Naomi was going to do!

VERSES 8-9

1. Why did Naomi encourage her daughter-in-laws to remain in Moab? Because it was their home, they did have family there and thus, they could remarry. Naomi wanted God to bless them and that sounds great. But think about it. Do we pray for our family to be blessed in this world only to die in their sins? No we don't. We don't want them to be comfortable in this world but we want them to follow us, to come to Jesus and sometimes that is done through tough times. I am not saying we shouldn't pray for those that are unsaved to be blessed, but there are times, as is true with Christians, that God will use those hard times to draw them to Him! And yes, Naomi and her daughter-in-laws loved each other as you can see here, kissing each other and weeping over this separation. It was hard for them to leave each other, but Naomi thought it was best, but it wasn't!

VERSES 10-13

1. Naomi was telling these girls about a command that God gave in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 regarding a widow. It basically says that if a woman's husband dies without having children, that his brother or nearest relative was duty bound to marry her and their first-born would be under the dead brothers name. And Naomi says that by the time she married and had children, by the time these children were old enough to marry them, they would not want to wait that long. In fact this was just a foolish thought considering Naomi's age. Thus, she encourages them to remain in Moab to marry one of their own.

2. And notice what Naomi does here, she says, “. . . **for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!**” Do you see what Naomi is doing? She is blaming God for what is happening in her life! Some try to paint Naomi as not accusing God for bringing this upon her life but was expressing her belief that God was in total control of the situation. I don't see it that way. You see, she is telling her daughter-in-laws not to go with her, God's hand is heavy upon her and it was God that has done this to all of them so it was better to be away from her! How sad when we misrepresent God, like Naomi did. We blame God for the things that have happened to us, and share those feelings, as wrong as they may be, with the unsaved. And as the unsaved listen, they get a warped picture of who God is. Instead of blaming God, we should take a look at our own heart, and either repent of our sin or learn the lessons that God is trying to teach us. For Naomi, at least she was returning to Bethlehem, but there is much she will need to learn in her growth in the Lord, in her trust in the Lord!

VERSE 14

1. Notice the difference between Orpah and Ruth. Orpah gives Naomi a kiss of emotion but not devotion. Thus, we see Orpah return to her own people in Moab, not going with Naomi. On the other hand, we see Ruth cling to Naomi, not letting go. She wants to stay with Naomi and there is more than just emotion seen here, it is devotion. But why did she do that? Let's read on and see!

VERSES 15-18

1. It seems like Naomi is trying to discourage Ruth from coming, why? Maybe she wanted her to be sure of the decision she has made, because it was not going to be easy. It would be much easier for her to remain in Moab than to go to the House of Bread, to Bethlehem.

2. And what a response by Ruth. She has forsaken her old life, the god's she worshiped and now wants to worship the God of Israel! Her faith is so strong that she says that it is only death that will stop her from following Naomi and the God she serves! I believe Ruth is saved at this point; she has come to know the God of Israel!

3. This can be applied to our lives today. We too need to count the cost if we want to be a disciple of Christ. You see, to be a disciple of Christ you must deny self, put everything that you once held in high esteem, behind, and put Christ first. It is a difficult path for many to follow, and many start out down that road with a lot of emotion, but they are dragged back into the world, their true love. Jesus said, "**He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.**" Matthew 10:37-38. It is as Spurgeon wrote, "Ah! You will never win any soul to the right by a compromise with the wrong. It is decision for Christ and his truth that has the greatest power in the family, and the greatest power in the world, too."

Orpah saw what it would cost her, and for her it was not worth it. It just cost too much. I wonder if she still feels that way? On the other hand, Ruth saw that the cost was meaningless when compared to the return - a relationship with the true and living God. What I find interesting is that Orpah's name means, "stiff-necked" and it does fit. You see, she turned from God to go back to the world, to go back to the things that she loved, the god's she was serving. On the other hand we see Ruth. And Ruth's name means, "friend" and Ruth forsook the old life and followed the Lord. And folk's, as Ruth was a friend of God now, so too are we called a friend of God through Jesus Christ! (John 15:15).

VERSE 19

1. Now as you read this it just says, "**Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem.**" Not a big deal, but it was. Keep in mind that this was over a 50-mile journey and it was just these two women. They were open targets for anyone. It was a dangerous journey. Not only that but the descent from Moab to the Jordan River was 4,500 feet. And then, from the Jordan River to Bethlehem it was a 3,750-foot ascent! Thus, it was a difficult and dangerous journey for them and yet, there is no record of any trouble, why? It is simple, because God was with them and God was watching over them. What a beautiful picture that is for us, and what the Lord does for us as we journey!

2. As they come to Bethlehem the city is excited to see Naomi and they are wondering if this is really her. Keep in mind that she has been gone for 10 years and those were some tough years, she probably did not look the same anymore! You see, the woman that left was not the same one that was returning. Sin had its toll on her life and what was taking place on the inside, her heart, had now overflowed outwardly, in her flesh. She was an empty shell of the woman she once was. As the people looked, they were astonished and even questioned themselves if this was truly Naomi! That is what sin, that is what running away from the Lord will do in our lives!

VERSES 20-21

1. Remember that Naomi's name means, "pleasant" but she tells them not to call her pleasant, but to call her Mara, which means bitter! As we move on I think we are beginning to see Naomi recognize her sin. Trials in our life have two basic effects, they can make us better or they can make us bitter. We choose which we want. They can make us better by drawing us closer to God. Or they can make us bitter and we can become angry with God. Instead of allowing this to be a period of growth in our Christian walk, we become stunted in our growth. And as you allow this bitterness to grow it will eat away at you until it is manifested in physical problems. Be careful.

2. This is interesting to me. Naomi and her husband left Bethlehem because they thought they had nothing, they were empty and they went looking for something in the world.

But, in the end, when Naomi evaluates her life, she realizes she had much in the House of Bread, living where she should have lived than living in the world! Thus, here it is, plain and simple. You may start out full but sin will cause you to return totally empty and broken, as Naomi did. As one writer put it regarding the mathematics of sin, “Sin adds to your sorrows, subtracts from your energy, multiplies your troubles, and divides your loyalty.” You can't win in sin and God is going to chasten you, trying to draw you back to Him so that your joy may be full and not empty! You see, the fullness of joy we have in this life is not found in this world, but in Christ, in His presence!

3. In Psalm 119:65-67 the Psalmist shows us the chastening of God. He says, **“You have dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. Teach me Good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.”** God's Word opens our eyes to sin, but if we refuse to look and deal with it, God will chasten us to get us back on track.

VERSE 22

1. Here we are given the timeframe of when they returned to Bethlehem, it was during the time of the barley harvest, and most of us would just read over that and miss what the Lord is showing us. The book of Ruth is a story of redemption. Thus, the barley harvest took place in the month of Nisan, March/April. What Jewish feast took place during this time of year? It is the Feast of Passover and that, of course is the Feast of **REDEEMPTION!** Interesting, Ruth comes to the Lord on the feast of redemption. Not only that, but as we move on in this story we will see Boaz fall in love with a gentile woman, Ruth, and they will get married about 50 days later – on the Feast of **PENTECOST!** This speaks of the birth of the Church or the Bride of Christ. Interestingly enough, Ruth is a gentile bride! What a coincidence! No, it is the sovereignty of God as His hand is upon all things!

RUTH 2**VERSE 1**

1. Here we are introduced to a relative of Naomi's through her husband Elimelech, and his name was Boaz, which means, "standing in strength." Now this is interesting to me because Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem 10 years earlier because there was a famine and yet God provided for Boaz even during this difficult time. In fact, it says that he was **"a man of great wealth."** I think that was true physically but more importantly I believe it was true spiritually, that is where his strength came from, the Lord. In fact, that phrase is translated in the book of Judges as, **"a mighty man of valor"** relating to Gideon and Jephthah. (Judges 6:12, 11:1).

VERSES 2-3

1. Here is the welfare program of the Old Testament and it is a good one. We can read of it in Leviticus 19:9-10, **"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God."** And in Leviticus 23:22 we also see this, **"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God."** The poor could gather food but they would have to work for it, and I think that is a good program.

2. And so Ruth goes to glean from the fields and she just happens to go to the area of land that is owned by Boaz, how lucky! No, it has nothing to do with luck. You see, there are no accidents with God. God was guiding her! And notice how natural it was. We miss out so many times in what God wants us to do because we are looking for the thundering from Heaven and miss His still small voice! Be open to what God is showing you, it may seem very natural but as we will see, God can do supernatural things that way!

VERSE 4

1. How many of you have that kind of relationship with your boss? I would have to guess, very few if any! But don't let that stop you from blessing them by the work you are doing for them, and letting the joy of the Lord flow from your life!

VERSES 5-7

1. Why was Boaz so interested in Ruth? I think he was falling in love with her. She caught his eye and now he is inquiring about her. And I want you to notice that as she was working, others were watching and taking notice of what she was doing. Her heart is submissive as she asks to glean from the field. She could have said, "I have come for my Leviticus 19:9-10!" But she didn't! And she worked hard and only rested a short time. Folk's, when others watch us work, what are they seeing? You see, they are watching us and seeing if our faith is real, if we do what we say we believe!

VERSES 8-9

1. Boaz tells Ruth to stay in his fields close to his workers, the female workers who would tie together the cut stalks of grain. And what a picture this is painting for us. Here we see Boaz, as the lord of the harvest, tell Ruth to stay close to him and not to glean anywhere else. You see, you will never find what you are looking for in another field. We are to stick close to Christ and His Word. Jesus said in John chapter 10, “**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.**” John 10:27. If we are truly one of His sheep, then we will follow Him, we will be obedient to His Word. If we are not one of His sheep then John tells us we will not remain with Him but we will go back into the world, another field. John tells us “**They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.**” I John 2:19. I love this picture the Lord is painting for us!

VERSES 10-13

1. Once again look at how humble Ruth is. For many, they might say, “It is about time you recognized what I was doing. I have been working out in that sun all day! What took you so long?” Not Ruth, she is so thankful at the grace that has been extended to her by Boaz just as we should be thankful for the grace that God has extended to each of us! And by what Boaz tells us, she is a believer. She has taken refuge in the Lord, just as a tiny bird struggles to get under the wings of a foster-mother. There is not only trust but there is also security. May we take shelter under the shadow of His wings!

VERSE 14

1. Here is another beautiful picture the Lord is painting for us. Boaz, the lord of the harvest has Ruth share with him the bread and vinegar or wine, which are symbolic of communion. And as she partakes of this meal, she is satisfied! Not only that, but she is willing to share with others what the lord of the harvest has shared with her. Those are New Testament attributes folk's!

2. Listen to what Spurgeon has to say regarding our satisfaction in Jesus. He wrote, “‘She did eat, and was satisfied.’ Your head shall be satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; your heart shall be content with Jesus, as the altogether lovely object of affection; your hope shall be satisfied, for whom have you in heaven but Christ? Your desire shall be satiated, for what can even the hunger of your desire wish for more than ‘to know Christ, and to be found in him.’ You shall find Jesus fill your conscience, till it is at perfect peace; he shall fill your judgment, till you know the certainty of his teachings; he shall fill your memory with recollections of what he did, and fill your imagination with the prospects of what he is yet to do. You shall be ‘satisfied.’” May we be satisfied in Jesus!

VERSES 15-16

1. Boaz is providing for Ruth above and beyond all that she could ask or think. Does that sound familiar? It should because in Ephesians 3:20-21 Paul tells us, “**Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**” God provides for us and many times we don’t even understand how or why, but He is gracious and He is merciful and He gives to us abundantly!

VERSES 17-18

1. After a long days work, Ruth gleaned about ½ bushel of barley, about 30 pounds, which was more than enough to provide for these two women for one week! And Ruth brings her blessings home with her to share with Naomi! Not only did she bring this grain home, but also she brought home the leftovers from the meal that Boaz shared with her. That truly is a special woman, one who has been touched by God and she may not have known a lot about this God, but what she knew was manifested in her life!

VERSES 19-20

1. When Naomi saw all that Ruth had gleaned that day and the other food she brought, she was dumbfounded. She couldn’t believe what she saw and she wanted to know what field that Ruth was gleaning in. And when Naomi found out it was the field of Boaz; she realized that he was a near relative, a goel or kinsman who could redeem the land that they sold when they left for Moab ten years earlier.

VERSES 21-23

1. Ruth explains to Naomi that Boaz wants her to stay close to his young women in the fields and Naomi encourages Ruth to do just that. Now if you look at how Naomi is responding, as she sees the Lord blessing, she is no longer Mara or bitter but Naomi or pleasant. What changed in her life? It wasn't the Lord but it was her attitude towards the Lord. She saw the hand of God working even in difficult situations and truly, that is what God was showing them all along, they just ran from Him and now Naomi has returned!

As I begin to close this evening, let me leave you with this. I think that we many times run from God, run from what He is doing in our lives, run because we can't get our way, and that is never good. If we are in sin, we need to repent and get right with God. If we are not in sin and just going through tough times, we need to keep focused on God knowing that He is working and there is a reason we are going through this season. Don't run to the world for help, run to the Lord, take refuge under the shadow of His wings. And as you do your walk with the Lord will be richer and fuller and you will grow!

Let me leave you this evening with these words from Psalm 61:1-4, **“Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.”** The world has nothing for us but the Lord wants to shelter us and protect us from the storms that are out there. May we let Him!