

Bible Study: Jan. 17, 2023
God's Love Story: Ruth
(Ruth 1)

I. Introduction

The story of Ruth, like many other books of the Old Testament, is important for a number of reasons. Here are five of them.

A. Ruth Holds a Pivotal Position in Old Testament History.

- 1. First, the story of Ruth makes up the eighth book of the Bible and unfolds at an absolutely critical time in Jewish history. Genesis is the book of beginnings. Genesis starts with God creating the universe, carefully establishing a beautiful garden in which to house His masterwork, fashioning Adam out of the dust of the Earth and Eve out of Adam's side. With His first commandment not to eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil, God launches His ultimate purpose — to create a divine family by conforming mankind into His divine image. Adam sins and plunges all of his descendants into spiritual death and slavery. Genesis goes on, generation after generation, through Cain & Abel, Enoch and Noah, and then brings us to Abraham. In Abraham, God sets forth a covenant, a collection of amazing agreements and promises, of which we, as children of faith, are still the benefactors. Abraham & Sarah give birth to Isaac, Isaac & Rebekah give birth to Jacob & Esau, and Jacob fathers 12 sons who draw Genesis to a close by immigrating, leaving the Promised Land for the favor and advantages of Egypt.**
- 2. The next four books move us ahead 400 years where we find the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob reduced to slavery. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy tell the story of Moses delivering Abraham's family out of Egypt and God making another covenant with them — a covenant that included not only the The Ten Commandments but 620 other commandments as well. The Jewish people fail and fall in the desert. Only two of the original million or so who left Egypt make it into the Promised Land. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy combine all of God's various laws with the story of the generation that died wandering in the wilderness.**
- 3. Joshua, the sixth book, tells the story of Moses' successor leading the next generation in and conquering the Promised Land. Joshua is largely a book of faith & triumph, including stories like how the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River and how the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.**
- 4. But where Joshua is largely a story of victory and triumph, Judges, the**

seventh book, is a story of Israel's next 300 years, a plummeting downward spiral into moral degradation and idolatry.

5. The ninth book, 1 Samuel, carries us then on a breathtaking resurgence, a rocket-trail to the very height of Israel's history under the reign of King David. And so if you picture Jewish history from the beginning of Judges, Book #7, to the end of 1 Samuel, Book #9, the story would look like part of a wild roller-coaster ride. Judges is the screaming downward spiral into deep debauchery, political anarchy, civil war and sin as dark and raunchy as anything that happened in Sodom & Gomorrah — while 1 Samuel rockets us upward to the heady heights of Israel's history under Kings David & Solomon, the brightest and wealthiest epoch in their 4,000 years of existence.

Sandwiched in-between these two books, unfolding at the absolute worst season in Hebrew history, lies the stories of two women. One is the Book of Ruth, a deceptively simple romance. And the other woman is Hester, the star of the very first chapter of 1 Samuel, whose prayer to conceive a child marks the turning of a nation.

B. Ruth's Story Is a Type, a Beautiful Prophecy about Us, Gentile Believers.

We, you and I, have a place here in the Book of Ruth. Ruth is a type — a true story, directed by God, depicting a Gentile woman finding refuge and salvation under the hand of the God of Israel. We're going to see that unfold as we read the story.

C. Ruth's Story Captures Both the Grace & the Faithfulness of God.

At the lowest point in Jewish history, Ruth appears like a token of hope; a living, breathing promise not only to the people of Israel but also to Gentile nations. It lets us know that, in times like hours in which it often seems that darkness reigns, God, our hope and our redeemer, is still working on our behalf.

D. Where All of the Other Books of History Focus on God's Dealings with a Nation, the Nation of Israel, Ruth Reveals God's Sovereignty in Individual Lives.

E. The Book of Ruth Presents a Prophetic Portrait of the New Testament Church as the Bride of Christ and Jesus as Our Bridegroom, Our Kinsman-Redeemer.

II. The Story of Ruth Unfolds in Only Four Chapters, Made Up of 85 Verses.

A. Chapter 1: Ruth & Naomi

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man

from Bethlehem (House of Bread) in Judah (To Give Praise), together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek (God is King), his wife's name was Naomi (Pleasant, Graceful, Agreeable) and the names of his two sons were Mahlon (Afflicted) and Kilion (Destruction). They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

a. Understand the difficulty of that situation.

- Israel's spiritual heritage before God was all about their existence as a nation. God's promises to Abraham, His Covenants to that point were directed toward Israel as a nation. To go outside of the nation of Israel was, in many ways, to step outside of that covenant & tradition.
- The Moabites were not friends of Israel historically. In Gen. 19, Moab is born out of the incestuous coupling of Abraham's nephew, Lot, with his oldest daughter. Either out of her bitterness or her moral depravity, Lot's daughter names her child Moab, meaning "Of her mother's father," referring to their incest.
- There was no love lost between the Moabites and the Jews. Moabites fought wars with Israel. At one point, capturing a Jewish town of Nebo, the Moabites sacrificed Nebo's entire population to their God. In Moses' time, when the children of Israel came close to Moab as they wandered in the desert, the Moabite king hired Balaam the prophet to curse Israel, but God would not let that happen.
- Moabites had their own pagan God known as _____ the Destroyer. Rituals included human sacrifice.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah (Gazelle or Back of the Neck) and the other Ruth (BFF, Delightful, Pleasing). After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

- a. When God gave Moses the Law, He barred three groups of people from entering the Tabernacle. One was illegitimate children and the other was the descendants of Moab and his brother Ammon. It was also against the Law to marry a Moabite if you were living at the time of your marriage within the nation of Israel. Naomi's sons were not outside of the Law as husbands, because they were outside of the boundaries of Israel.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. 8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

a. Note the depth of emotion and dedication

11 But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

b. Bitter bankruptcy, Under the law, God’s Hand Turned

c. Understanding the Laws of Hebrew marriage and inheritance.

In an agricultural society, children were especially important for at least three reasons. First was that children were a family’s labor force; if a farmer wanted to prosper, he needed children. Second was that children were a family’s social security. And third is that, in a land where their foundational faith was entirely tied to the land, a family’s ability to pass on land as an inheritance was absolutely critical. Their descendant’s place in the Kingdom of God depended upon their claim to the land.

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. 15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” 16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. 19(a) 19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest.

d. Ruth as a type of the Gentile Church

First, understand that Ruth & Naomi came back from Moab to Israel in bitter poverty. Naomi, as a Jewess, can be seen as representative of the entire nation of Jewish people who had abandoned their God over the period of 300 years recorded in Judges. Israel as a nation had forsaken their God again and again and descended into a spiritual condition where Judges 17:26 and 21:25 both say, “*In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*”

Ruth was no better off than Naomi, and, in that condition, she represents us as Gentiles.

Eph. 2:1-3 — “*You used to be dead because of your offenses and sins 2 that you once practiced as you lived according to the ways of this present world and according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now active in those who are disobedient. 3 Indeed, all of us once behaved like them in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and senses. By nature we were destined for wrath, just like everyone else.*”

Ruth returns at the time of the barley harvest. The wheat harvest came about 50 days later and is associated with Pentecost. Grapes ripened later in the fall and are associated with the feast of Tabernacles.

There were traditionally three harvests annually in Israel. The barley harvest came first in the early spring and is associated with Passover and the Resurrection. In Leviticus, God commanded that the Jewish people would perform a wave offering using the very first of the barley harvest, the first harvest of the year. Jews referred to this day as the festival of “First-Fruits.” And certainly Ruth would have been among the very first-fruits of Gentiles coming to faith in the God of Israel.

Barley was also a symbol to the Jews of “overcomers,” and again Ruth fulfills that image. Barley was a hearty plant and resistant to droughts and storms. God used a barley cake as a symbol of Gideon’s army in Judges 17. Jesus also fed the multitude with barley bread in John 6.

Both Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem, in the same way that both Jews and Gentiles come to Christ together but not at the same time.