

BIBLE STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

YEARS OF TRAGEDY (Ruth 1:1-7)

Ruth belongs to the 12th or 11th century B.C., and tells of how Naomi went to the land of Moab where her husband and her two sons died. She then returned to Judah with one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth. Ruth as a widow then married Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer, and so became the great grandmother of King David. At one level, it is a charming little story, with a happy ending. Iain Campbell says that it is 'at heart, a romance', while Barry Webb calls it 'a gentle book'. It is both those things, but God's kindness has a severe side.

Warren Wiersbe has four chapter headings: weeping (chapter 1); working (2); waiting (3); and wedding (4). Or tears (1); toil (2); trust (3); and triumph (4). For all its gentleness and romance, the book begins with ten years of tragedy and sorrow.

Notice four things:

- (a) God providentially rules in all things on this earth.
- (b) the role of the kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, who points to Christ, the greater kinsman-redeemer.
- (c) God extends His grace to the Gentiles. Ruth is not a Jew but a Moabitess.
- (d) Through Ruth would come David, and ultimately, in His humanity, the Messiah, Jesus (Rom.1:3-4).

1. When did Ruth live? (1:1) How was the land afflicted? (note Lev.26:14-15, 19-20) What did Elimelech (which means 'God is king') do? (1:1-2) What are the names of his wife and two sons? To where did they go? What do you think of this move? _____

The exact date is not given, but it was in the days when the judges ruled. The book of Judges tells of 300 years of corruption, apostasy, immorality, idolatry, invasions, and lawlessness (Judges 21:25).

Bethlehem means 'house of bread'.

Matthew Henry is rather hard on Elimelech, and calls him 'a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit'. Warren Wiersbe too says: 'Better to be hungry in the will of God than to have a full stomach and be out of His will.' One commentator quotes the last cable of a Salvation Army officer in Shanghai in 1949, as the Communists closed in: 'I'm sitting in the premises and standing on the promises!' But there are times when a Christian is allowed to flee.

Erma Bombeck once wrote that 'the grass is always greener over the septic tank'.

2. What disasters overtook the family in Moab? (5:3-5) What do you make of this? (Ex.34:11-12, 14-16; Deut.23:3)? _____

To live in Moab was asking for trouble; to marry Moabite women was a double invitation to trouble. We know the will of God by His revealed word, not any blessings through His providence. Augustine said that it is better to limp along the right road than to race along the wrong one.

3. After ten years what did Naomi decide to do? (1:6-7) Who sent the famine and who lifted the famine? _____

The Westminster Confession of Faith declares: 'God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (V,1)'.

William Cowper:

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

RETURNING HOME (Ruth 1:8-22)

1. Can a believer give bad advice? (1:8-9) How is this bad, yet affectionate, advice? _____

This is a touching scene; there is much genuine affection here. Robert Hubbard says that the reference to the mother's home or room in verse 8 refers to where marriages were arranged. That fits.

2. What does Naomi say to them, and what do Orpah and Ruth argue at first? (1:9-10) _____

3. What is Naomi's response to that? (1:11-13) What does she call her daughters-in-law? How does she understand her situation? (1:13) _____

Robert Hubbard sees no reference to levirate marriage, but it seems to be there (Deut.25:5-6).

4. How do the daughters-in-law respond to this? (1:14) What does Orpah finally decide to do? What does Ruth do? _____

Ruth clung to Naomi in verse 14 - the same word that is used to describe the marriage relationship in Genesis 2:24.

5. What does Naomi tell Ruth, for the fourth time? (cf. 1:15; note vv. 8, 11, 12) Is this good advice from someone who seems to know the true God? Do believers always get it right? (see Matt.15:22-23) _____

David Atkinson writes of Naomi's 'unshaken faith'. It may be unshaken, but it is not too clear-headed. Naomi is too willing to send her daughters-in-law back to a land full of idolatry and evil. Advice can be kindly but wrong, so beware.

6. What is Ruth's moving commitment in verses 16-17? How extensive is this commitment? _____

These are probably the most moving words in the whole of the book of Ruth. Naomi was not the ideal mother-in-law, but her relationship with Ruth led ultimately to Ruth's coming to faith. God promised Abraham a land and a people. Ruth is saying to Naomi: 'Your land will be my land, your people will be my people (she had not met them yet!), your God will be my God (she was finished with Chemosh), and may God curse me if this is not for life.

7. Illustrate the three things that can be said about this commitment.

(a) ***this cost Ruth something.*** Ruth 2:11; Matt.9:9; Heb.11:24-26; Luke 14:25-27, 33; Heb.13:13; Mark 10:29-30 _____

(b) ***this was real commitment to the God of the Bible.*** _____

(c) ***this was real commitment to the people of God.*** Ps.16:2-3; Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor.12:12 _____

John Wesley: 'the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion'.

8. What is Naomi's response when she sees Ruth's determination? (1:18) _____

9. What happens in verses 19-22? When did Ruth and Naomi arrive back? What must have Naomi been like as a travelling companion? _____

Bethlehem was a small town, and all the people turned out to see Naomi return. Verse 22 says that harvest time was near; it must have been about April.

RUTH MEETS BOAZ (Ruth 2:1-13)

The story of Ruth seems to be a simple and artless account of how a widowed Moabitess made her way to Judah with her widowed mother-in-law, and there met a kinsman-redeemer who married her. But there is more to it than just being a story with a happy ending. It is the unfolding of God's purposes in history, a pointing to the coming of the Messiah, the true kinsman-redeemer, and to the calling in of the Gentiles.

1. Who was a relative of Naomi's late husband? (2:1) _____

2. What do we learn about Boaz in the following verses:

(a) 2:2-3; behind this is Lev.19:9-10; Deut.24:19; see Isa.58:6-7, 10-11. _____

Robert Hubbard is being rather dismissive when he says that it was 'like trying to eke out survival today by recycling aluminium cans'. This was the law of God for Israel, but many landowners resented it, so Ruth was looking for one who would show her grace or favour.

(b) 2:4; see too Job 31:13-15. _____

This is the man of faith interacting with his workers.

(c) 2:5-9. _____

(d) 2:11-12; Ps.36:7. _____

3. What do we learn about Ruth from the following verses:

(a) 2:7; see Ex.20:9; Prov.20:4; Eph.6:5-6. _____

(b) 2:10; behind this is the character of God, cf. Deut.10:18-19. _____

(c) 2:13. _____

This wealthy man has stooped down as it were to help this foreign woman.

4. How does the meeting of Boaz and Ruth appear? (Ruth 2:3; literally 'her chance chanced upon'. Note Ahab's death in 1 Kings 22:34; it was not chance - see 1 Kings 22:38 and 21:19). Who was actually behind it all? (Ruth 2:20) What does this teach us? _____

BOAZ - RUTH'S KINSMAN-REDEEMER (Ruth 2:14-23)

1. To whom does the whole of the Old Testament point? (Luke 24:25-27) In Ruth 2:20 the key Hebrew word is *goel*, and the NIV translates it as 'kinsman-redeemer'. How is Boaz a kinsman-redeemer who points to Christ as the greater kinsman-redeemer? _____

2. How does Boaz look after Ruth in 2:14-16? How does he go beyond the law which obliged Israelites to look after the poor, widows, strangers and orphans? _____

3. How much does Ruth glean? (2:17) What does this tell us about Ruth? _____

An ephah is quite an amount. It is a loanword from Egyptian, and it means 'basket' or 'basket-full'. Robert Hubbard thinks that it weighed about 29 pounds but others put the figure higher than that. One 19th century English visitor to the Russian countryside commented on the Russian peasants who chose a wife along the same lines as they would buy an ox - the bigger and stronger the better.

4. How is Boaz a type of Christ? (Rom.5:6-8) _____

5. What did Ruth do with the ephah of barley? (2:18) What did Naomi ask? (2:19) What does Ruth tell her? _____

6. What does Naomi say in response to that? (2:20) Who is Boaz? How does

Naomi interpret Boaz’s meeting with Ruth? Why did Christ become our kinsman? (Heb.2:14-17) How did He become our redeemer? (Job 19:25; Eph.1:7) _____

Boaz was a near relative of Elimelech, Naomi's dead husband. As such, he could redeem either property (Lev. 25:23-28) or people (Lev.25:47-49). Boaz redeems Ruth from being a landless widow. Christ redeems sinners from death and judgment.

7. What else did Boaz say to Ruth? (2:21) _____

8. What was Naomi’s advice to Ruth for the next day? (2:22) What did Ruth do the next day? (2:23) _____

9. Whom did Christ come to redeem? (Isa.11:10; Eph.2:12) How does Ruth point to this? _____

RUTH'S PROPOSAL (Ruth 3)

In Ruth 3, Ruth proposes marriage to Boaz, and Boaz accepts.

1. What is Naomi seeking for Ruth? (3:1) _____

The idea is not so much a home, as the RSV and the NIV have it, but rest.
2. What is Naomi’s plan? (3:2-5) How shrewd is she? What does Ruth say?

Ruth would be actually proposing marriage to Boaz. Naomi is a match-maker, rather like Emma in Jane Austen's *Emma*. We live in an age of feminism, and we produce Kylie Minogue and Nicole Kidman. The Bible was written before the onset of feminism, but in Judges 4, it tells of Deborah who led the Israelites into battle against Sisera's army, and of Jael who actually killed Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head. The Song of Deborah praises Jael in the same way that the New Testament praises the virgin Mary, as blessed amongst women (Judges 5:24-27). In First Samuel 25 Abigail intervenes in a dispute between her foolish and selfish husband Nabal and King David after Nabal had refused to help David and his men.

3. Should 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4 be taken to the extreme that it is always wrong to dress up? _____

Ruth dresses appropriately for the occasion. She is out to impress, so she bathes, she puts on perfume, and her best clothes.

4. What does Ruth do in Ruth 3:6-9, and what does she finally ask Boaz? How risky was this? _____

The meaning of verse 9 might not be obvious to us but it is a proposal of marriage (see 2:12 for the same Hebrew expression; see too Ezekiel 16:8).

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the groom in the wedding service of the Teutonic tribes would tread on the bride's foot as part of the ceremony. This was to show his authority over her. But in the Bible, the kinsman-redeemer and husband is to take his bride under his wing, under his protection.

5. How does Boaz respond this? (3:10-11) What does he respect about Ruth?

He was evidently older than Ruth, and he appreciates that she did not chase after the younger men. Boaz calls Ruth 'a virtuous woman' or 'a woman of noble character' (NIV) or 'a bride worth winning' (Ronald Knox).

6. What is a possible challenge to the marriage? (3:12-13) To what does Boaz submit first? (note Ruth 4) _____

7. What is Boaz's advice then? (3:13-14) Why does Boaz send Ruth away before dawn? (note 1 Pet.2:11-12) _____

Ruth had put him in quite an awkward situation. He could not send her away in the middle of the night. There was no street lights, and that would be dangerous. Geoffrey Blainey in *Black Kettle and Full Moon* points out that Ned Kelly carried out his most daring raids when there was a full moon. Otherwise, he could have been riding off into the darkness, and into danger. Henry Lawson's *The Lights of Cobb and Co* has a line: 'The mail-coach looming darkly by light of moon and star'. Blainey writes that in 1860 'Country roads were unlit, and traffic virtually halted when night fell.'

A number of commentators see sexual relations here, but that is precisely what Boaz is seeking to avoid - the reality and the appearance of doing wrong. Joseph was put in a similar situation as Mary was chosen by God to bear the Christ child.

8. What did Boaz give Ruth? (3:15) _____

The Hebrew says, literally, that Boaz gave Ruth 'six of barley'. The NKJV guesses that that was six ephahs of barley, but that would weigh about 264 pounds. Unless Ruth was built like Arnold Schwarzenegger, that seems too much. Leon Morris guess that it means six seahs of barley, which is about 88 pounds in weight, which is still rather hefty. The ESV says simply, and sensibly, 'six measures of barley' - whatever that was. However much it was, Boaz was showing kindness to Ruth and to Naomi.

9. How does Naomi respond to all this? (3:16-18) What is her advice? How shrewd is she? _____

All the rage today is about relationships. But relationships depend upon character and godliness.

BOAZ REDEEMS RUTH (Ruth 4)

1. What was the problem when Ruth proposed to Boaz? (3:12-13) _____

2. Whom does Boaz meet at the gate of the city? (3:1) _____

Robert Hubbard helpfully calls him Mr So-and-So.

3. What does Boaz tell the redeemer-man, and what is his response? (4:2-4) How is this an initial disappointment? _____

Boaz is both godly and shrewd. A. Boyd Luter: 'If Boaz lived today, he could easily be an expert at fly fishing'.

4. What does Boaz then tell the man? (4:5) _____

My guess is that initially he thought that he might have to marry Naomi who was past child-bearing age, so the land would stay in his possession. But if he married Ruth, the land would go to her son whom he had fathered in the name of Mahlon (Ruth's dead husband).

5. What does the man then say? (4:6) What then takes place? (4:7-10) What is the custom of the day? _____

6. What is the blessing that the people and elders utter for Boaz and Ruth? (4:11-12) _____

7. What happens then? (4:13) What do the women tell Naomi? (4:14-15) _____

8. What is Naomi's role now? (4:16) _____

9. Who names the young son? (4:17) _____

Obed means 'servant'.

10. What is the significance of the genealogy in 4:17-22? _____

It is a story to warm the heart - the book that began with three funerals ends with a wedding.

11. How do you see God's providential care for His people in the book of Ruth? (see especially 4:13, 14-15) _____

In the midst of the trials of life, Christians need to remember that God is working His purposes out over the whole of human history. We make up just a little part of one chapter. In chapter 1 of Ruth all looks tragic and grim, but here in chapter 4 there is hope and joy.

12. How do we see God's grace to the Gentiles? (see too 1 Thess.1:9-10) _____

John Carroll in *The Wreck of Western Culture* opens with: 'We live amidst the ruins of the great, five-hundred-year epoch of humanism. Around us is that "colossal wreck". Our culture is a flat expanse of rubble. It hardly offers shelter from a mild cosmic breeze, never mind one of those icy gales that regularly return to rip us out of the cosy intimacy of our daily lives and confront us with oblivion. Is it surprising that we are run down? We are desperate, yet don't care much any more. We are timid, yet cannot be shocked. We are inert underneath our busyness. We are destitute in our plenty. We are homeless in our own homes.'

13. What is God's picture of the Kinsman-Redeemer? (4:14, 18-22; Matt.1:5, 16) _____

Thomas Boston: 'Christ takes the soul, as one marries a widow under a burden of debt: and so when the creditors come to Christ's spouse, she carries them to her Husband, confesses the debt, declares she is not able to pay, and lays all upon Him.'

As Boaz redeemed Ruth, so the Lord of glory who became our kinsman will redeem all destitute sinners who embrace Him by faith.