

Commentary & Notes on Ruth

The commentary and notes below are adapted from the teaching materials of Annie Kartoizian (1906-1989). In 1934 Annie became a missionary in China with OMS. During World War II she spent 21 months in a Japanese concentration camp as a prisoner. She was repatriated in 1943 and sailed on the famous vessel Gripsholm. In 1949 she made a miraculous last-minute escape from Beijing before it fell to Mao's Communists. When she could no longer enter China, Annie went to Taiwan. Annie and her family have been life-long friends of our family. In 1989, while pastoring with the United Armenian Congregational Church of Hollywood I had the honor of participating in her funeral. It was during those years in Los Angeles that Annie gave me her teaching notes (the commentary below) - laboriously typed on what is now yellowed paper with hand written marginal notes, many of which are in Chinese. - Pastor Steve

INTRODUCTION

Theme

Ruth is the only book in the Bible devoted only to the history of a woman.

This book shows God's long-suffering with Israel (Exodus 34:6,7). Typically the Book of Ruth may be taken as a foreview of the church (Ruth), as the Gentile bride of Christ, the Bethlehemite who is able to redeem (Acts 26:18; Ephesians 3:5,6). Boaz is seen as a type of Christ, who bought his bride. Ruth also gives a normal Christian experience. Elimelech and his family may also typify the history of the disobedient Jews who left their God and then returned to Him.

Date And Setting

Judges 6:1-6 - the story of Ruth begins here (1:1,2). Ruth probably is contemporary with Gideon. In Hebrew Scriptures Ruth is put with Psalms, Proverbs, Esther, Ruth, Song of Solomon. The events recorded in Ruth cover a period of ten years.

A spiritual outline of the period can be found in Judges:

1. Failure in battle (Judges 1:21,29-31,33,34; 3:5)
2. God's people left Jehovah to worship idols (Judges 2:6-19)
3. Intermarriage (Judges 3:5-11; 17:7-9)
4. Brother against brother (Judges 17-21)

Five oppressing nations

1. Mesopotamia (Syria) - distant and NE of Israel
2. Moab - SE and adjoining Israel
3. Philistines - SW, cost of Mediterranean adjoining Israel
4. Canaanites - right in the land promised them
5. Midianites - SE and more distant

Name Of The Book

The book is named for its principle character. The genealogical table in 4:18-22 is quoted by Matthew (Matthew 1:3-6) and showing Ruth to be an ancestress of Christ.

Author

The author is not known. Hezekiah, Ezra, or Samuel have been suggested.

The Kinsman Redeemer

The duties of a kinsman:

1. Redeem inheritance of his poor kinsman (Leviticus 25:25)
2. Redeem person of his poor kinsman (Leviticus 25:47-49)
3. Raise seed to his dead kinsman (Deuteronomy 25:5,6)

A kinsman must be:

1. Able to redeem (Ruth 2:1, i.e. Boaz)
2. Willing to redeem (Ruth 3:12,13 contrast with the near kinsman who was not willing [Ruth 4:6])

Christ as our Kinsman Redeemer

1. Able (2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:18-20)
2. Willing (John 10:15,18; Hebrews 10:9)

Brief Outline Of The Book

1. Decision - chapter 1 - our part
2. Service - chapter 2 - our part
3. Rest - chapter 3 - God's part
4. Reward - chapter 4 - God's part

COMMENTARY AND NOTES

Chapter 1

Verse 1: *"In the days when the judges ruled"* is a picture of the life of Israel during the first half of the period of the Judges. Judges 21:25 states: *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."* Turning from God and doing one's own will is very dangerous - God had forbidden it in the law (Deuteronomy 12:8). The result: 1) The people fell under the power of various enemies, first one and then another, suffering grievous afflictions and hardships at their hands; 2) the morals of the people were greatly corrupted; 3) it was easy to copy the customs and ways of the people among whom they lived; 4) enmity and strife arose among the people themselves.

Famine is found in the history of the Jews that when they were in a backslidden condition, famine was one of the punishments sent by God (2 Samuel 21:1; Judges 6:3-6) - therefore the whole nations had gone astray at the time we read here (2 Kings 8:1; 17:24-26; Ezekiel 5:11,12;16,17; 14:21). The famine was from God. It was one of the consequences of the spiritual condition of the people; but it was sent with a view to blessing in the end. God's visitations are not only for the purpose of punishing men for their sins, but rather with a view to their recovery through humble repentance and self-judgment.

Verse 2: Elimelech means "God is my king." His name was a witness against the principle way of life at that time "no king in Israel" (Judges 21:25). A king is one who has to be obeyed, but it seems that Elimelech did that which was right in his own eyes in the matter of forsaking his own inheritance and of departing from God's land, with the object of mending his fortunes in what was the last place on earth where an Israelite should have

been found (Acts 26:18; 1 Kings 21:3). As long as every thing is prosperous, he is content to serve the king. But as soon as famine comes he starts for Moab.

By contrast with Elimelech, whose name is the first in the book, we have as the last name, David, the man by whom God's kingly rule was to be established in Israel, and of whom was to come the King of kings and Lord of lords (4:22).

Elimelech's departure was the more significant because his privilege was to belong to Bethlehem (house of bread) in Ephrata (Fruitfulness) (Micah 5:2). It was a serious mistake to leave the lot of his inheritance which was God-given, in seeking to escape out of the hand of the Lord and form the rod of His discipline. When His chastening hand falls we should humble ourselves and seek the purpose of His visitation.

The two sons bore highly significant names: Mahlon (a sick person) and Chilion (wasting away). Naomi means "pleasantness." Ruth means "satisfied." Our story finds Ruth in the lowest place in the world; but it leaves her in the place of highest honor - every woman in Israel ardently desired the high honor of being one of the mothers of Christ. The story of Ruth furnishes a clear and beautiful illustration of what the grace of God does for every stranger to the covenant of promise (every Gentile). They lived in Moab and remained there.

Verse 3: The folly of the course pursued by Elimelech was quickly made manifest. He was cut off and the family deprived of its head.

Verse 4: One evil leads to another. The sons took wives from among the daughters of Moab. This was a known transgression against the Lord (Exodus 34:14-16; Numbers 25:1-3; Deuteronomy 7:3,4). It was presumptuous to attempt to build up their father's house by contracting marriages in defiance of the word of God.

Verse 5: Instead of the marriages being fruitful, both sons died, leaving not offspring. Humanly speaking, the house of Elimelech was wholly blotted out. This to an Israelite was an unspeakable calamity. Israel is sometimes spoken of as a widow bereft of her children. Naomi gives us such a picture. Israel widowed: Exodus 22:24; Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 15:8; 18:24; Lamentations 1:1-15; 5:3

Verse 6: The news which reached Naomi is typical of the "good news" of the gospel - bread is a common figure for life, hence it serves to remind us of Jesus (John 6:32,33,48). That there is "bread-life" is a reminder to the backslider (Naomi) and good news to the sinner (Ruth).

Verse 7: *"Then she arose...to return (verse 6) ...she set out from the place where she was" - like the prodigal son who said, "I will arise and go to my father..." (Luke 15:18).* She arose to go back to the place from which she had gone in disobedience.... Both Orpah and Ruth accompanied Naomi and to all appearances the one was just as settled in her purpose to make this great change as the other. But there was a difference at heart.

Verses 8-14: Orpah's mind was full of the things of the land of Moab. She was not separated in heart. She was not under the influence of things not seen and hence returned to her people and her gods (verse 15). Orpah was affectionate, but an

affectionate heart will not take one to heaven. Naomi had nothing to offer them in worldly advantages. Orpah counted the cost and went back.

Verse 15: Ruth had faith and could not be persuaded to return to her land.

Verses 16,17: Ruth's reply is remarkable for its completeness. It consists of six items which make her reply one of complete committal. All of these are contemplated in the call of the gospel.

1. Go: Ruth renounces all freedom of choice and commits herself to a path which may lead she knows not wither, and whose course from beginning to end is to be determined by another.
2. Lodge: She makes no stipulation as to where or of what sort the lodging-place should be. The desire that filled her was to be always in the company of the one to whom she had committed herself.
3. Your people - my people: Orpah had returned to her people but Ruth made a decision which meant separation - those who would go unto Him must be a separated people. This is recalled afterwards in her favor (Ruth 2:11).
4. Your God - my God: It means much for the human heart to part with all its gods, all in which it puts its trust.
5. Die: Ruth made a life-long choice. She had not thought of merely making a trial of Judah and its people (Luke 9:32). She gave no backward look.
6. Buried: Ruth's consecration to Naomi did not end even with death.

Verses 19-21: Her townspeople said, "*Is this Naomi?*" (verse 19) who went away with her husband and two sons? She comes back with only a poor Gentile girl? Naomi answers, "*Do not call me Naomi (pleasantness); call me Mara (bitterness)*" (verse 20). Naomi had lost her sweet name because she had gone into a far country - the far country of disobedience. Moab is the land of bitterness to the child of God - all joy is lost there. "*I went away...the Lord has brought me back*" (verse 21). The sheep went astray but the shepherd brought it back again. "Full" and "empty" is always true when there is disobedience.

Verse 22: They arrived at the right place and they came at a good time - the beginning of the barley harvest. This was the early springtime, barley being the first of the grain that ripens in the spring (Exodus 9:31,32). This was a time of joy; the one who came on the scene at the beginning of the barley harvest was in good time to partake of the joy and blessing of the entire harvest.

Chapter 2

Verse 1: Boas signifies "in him is strength." He was a kinsman and a mighty man of wealth. He is a type of Christ who became our kinsman and who is of great wealth.

Verse 2: Ruth had a right to glean in the fields (Leviticus 19:9,10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). The privilege of reaping after the gleaners and in the corners of the field was Ruth's as a "stranger" and a widow. God's children have a responsibility toward the poor and needy.

Verse 3: "*She happened to come*" - nothing just "happens" in the leadings of God. Ruth had solemnly declared to Naomi, "*Your people shall be my people*" (Ruth 1:16) - she had

accepted them all without seeing them or knowing them. Boaz was included. When we accept Christ we accept all them that are Christ's.

Verse 4: This verse shows Boaz to be a gracious and kind man, God fearing, and sincere. He is the son of Rahab (Matthew 1:5). Tradition says that the manger was part of Boaz's ancestral home.

Verse 8: *"Do not go to glean in another field"* - gleaning means getting something to satisfy yourself with. So the Lord tells us not to look for anything to satisfy outside of His fields. There is much sorrow, sadness, poverty, and need among God's people because they go to glean in other fields beside that of the master. He has enough to satisfy us.

Verse 9: Perhaps from the well of which David spoke (2 Samuel 23:14-16; 1 Chronicles 11:17,18)?

Verse 10: She is overwhelmed with the benefits of grace - bread to eat, forgiveness of the past, and humble but fruitful labor. What touched her most was that Boaz himself should take knowledge to her and speak kindly to her.

Verse 11: *"All that you have done...has been fully told to me"* - He knows the cost of our separation. It is sufficient that He know. He knows also if the separation be only a surface one.

Verse 14: He fed her because she obeyed him implicitly. She found Him to be the Satisfying Portion; but it cost her obedience to His directions.

Verse 15: cf. Deuteronomy 19:9,10;23:22; 24:19-22.

Verse 16: These handfuls are given to those who obey implicitly; something above and beyond that which is promised. He who obeys will find such abundant grace in His sight.

Verse 17: The measure of Ruth's gleanings was about an ephah of barley. A single day's supply per person was one omer (Exodus 16:16,36). An omer is the tenth part of an ephah. Ruth was able to gather ten times the amount of one day's provision. It was beaten out grain - no chaff.

Verse 19: Naomi was astonished at what she brought at the end of the day - the exceeding abundance (Ephesians 3:20).

Verse 22: Naomi knew the blessing that could come from continuing in the fields of Boaz.

Verse 23: Ruth continued her course both humbly and faithfully - even unto the end of the harvest.

Chapter 3

It is appropriate at this point to give an explanation of the laws of God (given to Israel) which provided for the benefit of the impoverished Israelite kinsman-redeemer.

The first of those duties of kinship was to redeem or buy back the inheritance of the poor

relation, who had been compelled through poverty to part with it (Leviticus 25:25). The second duty was to buy back or redeem the person who was sold into slavery (Leviticus 25:47-49). The third duty which the law imposes upon the kinsman-redeemer became binding upon him in case his relative's lineage had been cut off by death, thus blotting out his name and house in Israel. The kinsman was to raise a son to his dead brother (Deuteronomy 25:5,6), so that his name be not put out of Israel (see Genesis 38:7-11). Such was the hope and privilege of Naomi when she said, "He will redeem you" (verse 13).

Christ is our Kinsman Redeemer: Kinsman (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4,5; Hebrews 2:14,15) He is the Son of Man. He is able to Redeem (John 10:15,18; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7,14; Hebrews 7:25; 1 Peter 1:18,19)

Verse 1: The harvest is over. What is to become of Ruth and Naomi now?

Verse 3: Naomi instructs Ruth to take her rightful place at the feet of Boaz. There was much faith involved in willingness to take that position of promise. Three things were required of her - washing, anointing, change of raiment: purity, sanctification, and righteousness. If these are met, all the fullness of promise in Christ is ours.

Verse 9: She went in faith and claimed the blessing that was hers. Ruth had had one marriage which proved unfruitful. But there was promise of complete fulfillment of all desire.

Verses 12,13: There was yet another kinsman to be sought out. He was a nearer kinsman.

Verse 15: Continued obedience brought her even more than she had ever obtained before, even during the harvest time.

Verse 18: Naomi states her faith.

Chapter 4

Verse 1: Boaz was ready to perform the part of kinsman to that "stranger" from the land of Moab, though naturally she would have been to him and to any Israelite, and object of aversion. There was one obstacle - a nearer kinsman than he.

This nearer kinsman is usually taken to represent the law: "*What the law could not do*" (Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:21). It is also stated to be "*our old self*" (Romans 6:6). The flesh could not redeem the natural earthly man. Redemption is wholly beyond the means of the nearer kinsman.

Verses 2-4: All this was done in accordance with the law (Leviticus 25:8-10,25).

Verse 5: The right to acquire the field cannot be separated from the obligation to marry the widow, and so to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. The nearer kinsman of Ruth would have possessed himself of the field but would have ignored his obligation to the living and to the dead. Such is the thought of the natural man - sets himself to recover and repossess the earth, but sets aside the obligations of the law of

God and ignores the presence of sin and death in the world (cf. Deuteronomy 25:7-10).

Verses 9,10: Ruth took whatever Boaz gave her - if it was six measures of barley, she took that. Now he is going to give himself to her. She had the faith to believe that the impossible could be hers. So faith takes all that Jehovah gives, and the greatest gift if Himself.

Verses 13,14: *“Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer”* - these ought to be our constant words of praise.

Verse 16: The blessing does not stop there. Obed (one who serves) was born to Ruth - from him came David, out of whose roots came forth the Branch. Considering Naomi to be the type of the nation Israel, we see the future hope of Israel. Ruth typifies the experience of every sinner from among the Gentiles who turns to Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Isaiah 49:6ff; 60:3; Ephesians 3:6).