

NAME

The title “Ruth” comes from the main character of the book: Ruth. Ruth (רֹוּת for רַעוּת) means “friendship.” (Boaz means “swift strength”) She was a young Moabites widow who gained the honor of being in the family tree of Jesus Christ. This is one of two books in the Bible which bears the name of a woman. Ruth is a Gentile who came to live among the Hebrew people and married a Jewish husband in the royal line of David. Esther, on the other hand, was a Jewish girl who lived among the Gentiles who married a Gentile who sat on the throne of a great Gentile empire.

AUTHOR

The author is anonymous and cannot be known with certainty. Jewish and Christian scholars have argued for authorship by Samuel. Also suggested have been Hezekiah and Ezra.

DATE

Ruth is probably a contemporary of Gideon. Judges 6:1-6 corresponds to Ruth 1:1,2. The events of the book cover a period of about 10 years.

THEME

Type of Literature: History & Government

Halley (page 43): The Beginning of the Messianic Family of David

Mitchell: The Romance of Redemption / The Book of Redemption’s Romance

Ruth is in reality a love story and yet it is absolutely unique in that the word “love” is never used. It not only contains the beautiful story of the love between a man and a woman, but also, even more remarkable, the account of a deep love between a young wife and her mother-in-law. After reading the book of Judges, one gets the all too well founded conviction that the condition of the people was one of total deterioration. But suddenly the Holy Spirit records a lovely story which took place.

The Book of Ruth sets forth the romantic aspect of redemption. Boaz redeemed Ruth not because of legal obligation, but because he loved her. Likewise God redeems us not out of cold legal obligation, but because He loves us (Romans 5:8). Redemption is not some cold legal business, but it is a romance! As an example of the Law of the Kinsman-Redeemer in action Ruth demonstrates the spirit of the Law. Law is instruction in how we are to live. Ruth points to the manner which we are to live.

From WCBS Notes - Dr. Ronald B. Allen “Notes on the Book of Ruth” © 1985

Vic Jameson and Don C. Westfall describe the book of Ruth in this way (Bull at a New Gate, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965, page 18):

“There is this doll named Ruth, who married a foreigner only he died. So she went with her mother-in-law to the land from whence he came. And she met a man name of Boaz, and gleaned in his fields.

“And while she was gleaning in the gloaming, Boaz glanced at the grainfield and got a glimmer of this girl.

“And he said to himself, ‘Boy, what she could do with a vacuum cleaner!’

“And so he asked her to marry him and she being no dummy said yes and so they were married and I donno whether they lived happily ever after because the Book doesn’t say anything about that but you got to admit they were famous.”

“Moral: Mothers-in-law can’t be all bad.

Key Word (Nelson’s): “Kinsman-Redeemer” The Hebrew word for “redeem” גָּאֵל “gā’al” (“redeem, act as kinsman, be redeemed, avenge”) appears 13 times in Ruth and basically means “one who redeems.” The word is used 90 times in the Pentateuch, Ruth, Psalms, and Isaiah.

Key Verses (Nelson’s):

“But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’” (Ruth 1:16).

“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.” (Ruth 3:11).

Key Chapter (Nelson’s): Chapter 4: In 22 short verses, Ruth moves from widowhood and poverty to marriage and wealth (Ruth 2:1). As kinsman-redeemer, Boaz brings a Moabite woman into the family line of David and eventually Jesus Christ.

Setting

Location of Moab - see Halley page 197 / see map page 6 “The Setting of Ruth” (ESV)

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The Position of the Moabites vis-à-vis Israel.

I suspect the many readers of the Book of Ruth would be surprised to learn the nature of the legal status of Moabites in Israel. But the legislation in Deuteronomy 23:1-8 has major significance in our reading of the story of Ruth and Naomi. The fact is this: Moabites were excluded from the congregation of Israel for ten generations. That is, if a proselyte were to come to saving faith in Yahweh, it was expected that his or her descendants would be excluded from full participation from the community for an exceedingly lengthy period.

The reason for this exclusion is given by Moses in these words:

“Because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever” (Deuteronomy 23:4-6 NKJV).

This means that the Moabites had the legal status of bastards in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:2). Yet in the case of Ruth we have a Moabite who is accepted into the congregation immediately and fully. She is given the blessings of the patriarchs. Her child is celebrated enthusiastically as a full partaker of the blessings of the covenant. And she is judged to be of far greater worth than even her son (Ruth 4:15).

How we deal with these contrary data (Deuteronomy and Ruth) will determine our understanding

of the book and its role in biblical theology. An overriding question we ought to have concerns the role of the book in the canon. That is, what is the canonical contribution of this book in our understanding of God and His people?

The period of the Judges, and so of Ruth (see Date above) was one of political chaos when even the “good guys” were not so good (Judges 3,4) and of religious chaos including an apostate priest (Judges 17). Additionally, the time of the Judges includes debased moral chaos evidenced by homosexuality and sexual abuse (Judges 19).

From Class Notes on Judges:

Following the time of Joshua, Israel was without a national leader. Every man was a law unto himself. Every tribe was a law unto itself. God’s people experienced internal as well as external conflict. Anarchy and idolatry were rampant. God’s people had failed to cleanse the land of the heathen with their idols and pagan religions and so God’s people were continually being dominated by them. From without they were being harassed by enemies on all sides.

About Baal, Ashtaroah, and Asherah (Judges 2:13; 3:7 - cf. Numbers 22:41; 1 Kings 15:29-33)

Baal is the name of the supreme male divinity of the Phoenician and Canaanite nations. Ashtaroah was the supreme female divinity. Both names are often used in the plural, designating not many statues but many modifications of the gods themselves (Judges 8:33; 2 Kings 1:2,3,16). The name means “lord” in the sense of “master, owner, possessor” (Hosea 2:16). The rites of worship were abominable, cruel, and licentious. They sacrificed not only captured enemies but also their own children.

The worship of Baal among the Jews was done with pomp and ceremony. Temples were erected to him (1 Kings 16:32; 2 Kings 11:18); his images were set up (2 Kings 10:26); his altars were very numerous (Jeremiah 11:13); were erected on lofty eminences (1 Kings 18:20), and on the roofs of houses (Jeremiah 32:29); there were priests in great numbers (1 Kings 18:19), and of various classes (2 Kings 10:19); the worshippers appear to have been arrayed in appropriate robes (2 Kings 10:22); the worship was performed by burning incense (Jeremiah 7:9), and offering burnt sacrifices which occasionally consisted of human victims (Jeremiah 19:5).

The groves are connected with Ashtaroah, which was perhaps the proper name of the goddess, while Asherah is the name of the image or symbol which was of wood - or the groves where she was worshipped (1 Kings 16:32,33).

Note: Moloch also came from Phoenicia. Worship included the sacrifice of children who were burned alive or killed and then burned as an offering.

Outline:

- I. The Decision of Faith (Ruth’s decision for Jehovah) chapter 1 - our part (Decision)
- II. The Provision of Faith (Ruth’s decision of service for Naomi) chapter 2 - our part (Service)
- III. The Intention of Faith (Boaz’s promise and provision) chapter 3 - God’s part (Rest)
- IV. The Compensation of Faith (Boaz’s marriage to Ruth) chapter 4 - God’s part (Reward)

RECIPIENTS

God’s people - specifically the Hebrews...and us.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

The Book of Ruth links the genealogy of the Tribe of Judah to King David and fills in a valuable gap of David's ancestry during the time of the Judges.

Kartozian: 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. Boaz is seen as a type of Christ. (cf. Acts 26:18; Ephesians 3:5,6).

Allen: The purpose of the book seems to be to explain something of God's intentions respecting the spirit of the law.

The purpose of Ruth is to portray a pastoral love scene, an oasis of fidelity in a barren time of sin, idolatry, and infidelity (and that, involving a woman from Moab).

A further purpose is to indicate a Gentile strain in David's genealogy. It illustrates the Gentile's capacity to turn to Jehovah (and the outward scope of the Gospel to the nations).

The Book of Ruth portrays both the romantic love story of Ruth the Gentile and Boaz the Jew and the magnificent drama of reconciliation between God and humanity. As the kinsman-redeemer Boaz redeemed Ruth from poverty and childlessness, so God redeems helpless and sinful humanity.

Regarding The Kinsman-Redeemer

The Book of Ruth provides the only concrete example of the Law of the Kinsman-Redeemer in action.

1. Examples of the Hebrew word for "redeem" גָּאָל "gā'al".
 - Genesis 48:16: *"The angel who has redeemed me from all evil"*
 - Leviticus 25:25,26: To redeem/deliver a person or property that had been sold for debt. The person (kinsman) who "redeemed" the one in financial difficulties was known as the Kinsman-Redeemer (cf. Ruth 2:20).
 - Leviticus 25:25,48,49: The responsibility to redeem belongs to the nearest relative: brother, uncle, uncle's son, or a blood relative from his family
 - Deuteronomy 19:6: The redeemer is the "avenger of blood" who's duty is to execute the murderer of his relative (KJV = "The Revenger" Numbers 35:19,21,24,27)
2. Qualifications of a Kinsman
 - a. Able to Redeem (Ruth 2:1)
 - b. Willing to Redeem (Ruth 3:12,13; 4:6)
3. Duties of Kinsman

The Kinsman-Redeemer was responsible for preserving the integrity, life, property, and family name of his close relative or for executing justice upon his murderer. Specifically he was to:

- a. Redeem inheritance of his poor kinsman Leviticus 25:25
- b. Redeem the person of his poor kinsman Leviticus 25:47-49
- c. Raise seed to this dead kinsman Deuteronomy 25:5,6

4. Kinsman-Redeemer as an example of God's relationship with His people

God promises to redeem His people: *"Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment'"* (Exodus 6:6).

"You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph" (Psalm 77:15).

God redeems His people from Egypt Isaiah 51:10; 63:9

God redeems His people from Babylon Isaiah 48:20; 52:3,9; 62:12

5. Comparison of Old Testament Qualifications and Christ's Fulfillment

<u>Old Testament Qualification</u>	<u>Christ's Fulfillment</u>
Blood Relationship	Galatians 4:4,5; Hebrews 2:16,17
Necessary Resources	1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18,19
Willingness to Buy	John 10:15-18; 1 John 3:16
Willingness to Marry	Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 19:7

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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