

Old Testament Survey—Ruth

Last week we began our study by contemplating the word *messy*. We talked about how life can become *messy* at times. I suggested that word aptly summed up the book of Judges. Life became quite messy in Israel following the death of Joshua and the generation that followed Joshua. In a world where “everyone does what is right in his *own* eyes,” as the last verse of Judges says people were doing, life gets messy. When everybody does as he or she sees fit, the book of Judges shows in graphic clarity that life spirals out of control and society begins to crumble. We see this especially as we note how the book of Judges ends. When everyone does as he sees fit, it affects the way we view sex and handle justice (ch 19), the way we view religion (ch 18), the way we respond to problems (ch 21), and the way we view marriage (see 21:21).

But even at a time like that, God is still in control and He is still at work demonstrating faithfulness to His covenant promise to Abraham. It’s not insignificant that the very book to follow Judges is the tiny but powerful book of Ruth.

Discuss: What comes to your mind when you think about the book of Ruth?

**Who wrote the book?**

The author is unknown.

**When was the book written?**

During the Monarchy Period--perhaps in the 9th Century B.C. ( Harrison )

The events in Ruth start in the time of the Judges and end in the time of David.

**Why was the book written?**

Strange events in Ruth:

A Jewish family leaves the Promised Land to go to Moab . They go from the "land" of Israel to the "country" of Moab (1:1).

Ruth leaves her own family in Moab to return to Israel with Naomi (1:16).

Ruth's decision to follow Naomi was really a decision to follow Naomi's God (1:16).

Ruth meets Boaz who instructs his servants to leave extra grain on the ground (2:16).

Ruth spends a night at the threshing floor (ch 3).

Boaz informs Ruth of a nearer kinsman (3:12).

Boaz calls a town meeting and exchanged a sandal with a man (4:8).

The book doesn't identify the nearer kinsman, but calls him "Ho, such an one!" (4:1). In the Hebrew this rhymes, "Paloni Almoni." The writer protects the man's identity by essentially referring to him as "John Doe."

Boaz maintained the family name of Mahlon, Ruth's first husband (4:10).

**Key Issue:** Who owned the land in Israel? In Israel, God owned the land. The Israelites, as God's covenant people, were caretakers of God's land. Actually, God divided the land and parcelled it out according to tribes, clans, and families. Thus, the land was given by God to families as their inheritance. A "family" referred not to a father and mother and three kids, as in our Western culture, but for the Israelites, "family" denoted a larger group, like a clan. It was important that a man's family name be preserved in his inheritance.

But what happened if a man died without children to carry on the name? A kinsman could take his place. Some other extended family member could keep the family tree alive.

### Background: Two features of ancient law in Israel seen in Ruth:

1. *Levirate Marriage*--referred to in three passages (Gen 38; Deut 25:5-10; Ruth 3-4). This law regulated marriage customs when the man of the house died. By law a surviving male family member was to insure that offspring was born to keep the family line intact.

2. *Kinsman Redeemer*--referred to in Lev 25:25-28. The kinsman redeemer was the responsible next of kin who acted to prevent property from being lost to the family. It was the kinsman redeemer's responsibility to see that land stayed in the family.

**Key:** Ruth could have married someone else, but then Naomi would have been left homeless. But if Ruth married a kinsman of Elimelech, she would have a husband, AND Naomi would have a kinsman. So when Ruth asked Boaz to marry her because he is the "kinsman," she is asking him to care for both Ruth and Naomi.

**Note:** There would have been other bachelors for Ruth to marry, but Boaz was a kinsman who would guarantee Naomi's safety.

### **What is the outline of the book?**

- I. Ruth the Foreigner (ch 1)
- II. Ruth the Servant (ch 2)
- III. Ruth the Engaged (ch 3)
- IV. Ruth the Married (ch 4)

**Discuss:** Why does the book end in a genealogy?

The genealogy connects common people like Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz with what mighty king? David. The book answers the question, "How did Israel get from the messy period of the Judges to King David?" The book shows that some seemingly obscure events in Moab and Bethlehem played an important role leading up to the arrival of Israel's greatest king.

The genealogy is a vivid reminder that history is His Story, that history is not haphazard, that God is sovereign.

## **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

Ruth reveals how in His providence, God works out His purpose and plan for His people.

Discuss: Who is the main character in the book of Ruth? Ruth? Naomi? Boaz? No, these are all secondary characters. The focal point of the story is God.

God is the hidden character in the book of Ruth. He insures Ruth's safety and success. In Ruth, God is both active AND hidden. We see Him at work, but working behind the scenes. There are no visions or voices from heaven in Ruth, but the sovereign hand of God is at work orchestrating the events in the life of a family (and a nation).

We can get discouraged reading the Bible when we see the miracles, and think, "God doesn't work that way in my life..." Ruth reminds us that God is working in everyday life, and we must not forget it. We serve a God Who works in hidden ways, often behind the scenes. We don't see God on center stage in Ruth, but by the end of the book we can see that He was there all along, even in the tragedies.

Discuss: It's been said that in counseling *the language you use will affect the solutions you propose*. With that in mind, why is it improper for Christians to use the terms 'fate' and 'luck'?

## **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

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### I. The book of Ruth teaches us about our God.

Discuss: What do we learn about God from the book of Ruth?

#### **A. Our God is a Sovereign God (ch 1).**

In 1:20-21, Naomi turned to God in the midst of her grieving. Though she didn't understand "why," she knew God was sovereignly in charge.

#### **B. Our God is a Providing God (ch 2).**

#### **C. Our God is a Moral God (ch 3).**

God, Who is righteous, expects His people to live righteous lives. In ch 3, we see that Ruth is a virtuous woman (11), and that Boaz was a man of selfless character (3:11, 18).

#### **D. Our God is a Redeeming God (ch 4).**

God comes to the aid of His people, here by providing a kinsman for two widows.

Note: There is a Christology in Ruth, that is, Ruth teaches us about Christ. Christ is our Kinsman Redeemer. There are four characteristics of a kinsman redeemer which Christ fulfilled.

a) A kinsman is related to the one he helps.

Christ became a human (Jn 1:14; Phil 2:6). He became "related" to us.

b) A kinsman must be ABLE to redeem and help.

Christ had the ability to secure our redemption. He had the price of redemption, His own blood.

c) A kinsman must WANT to redeem.

Boaz wanted to, but the other man didn't. Christ wanted to redeem us.

d) A kinsman must do the work of redemption.

Christ did the work by offering Himself (see Gal 4:4-5; 1 Pet 1:18-19).

## II. The book of Ruth teaches us about **Ourselves**.

Notice how what we've learned about God should affect our lives...

### **A. Because God is sovereign, He expects us to trust in Him.**

Ruth exemplifies "trust" for us, as Boaz recognized (see 2:12).

### **B. Because God is a providing God, He expects us to be a praying people.**

Prayer is the natural response to our recognition of God's providence (see 1:8-9; 4:11). Notice that all the prayers in Ruth, though brief, are answered.

### **C. Because God is a moral God, He expects us to be moral and upright in our character and relationships.**

**D. Because God is a redeeming God, He both enables and expects us to live as a holy, redeemed people (see Tit 2:14).**