

Ruth 1

Introduction

Everyone has a favorite book of the Bible. While all the books are valuable and to be enjoyed by the believer, certain books are particularly enjoyable. For me, Ruth is that special favorite book.

Journey to Moab

1. When does the story take place? When did the judges rule Israel? Before or after Moses? Joshua? David? The dates were around 1375-1041 BC? Read Ruth 4:18-22. How far back from David did Ruth live? Which Judge ruled at this time? People disagree over this, since the genealogy allows for gaps (i.e. the term for father could also be translated ancestor), but it must have been between Gideon and Jair (Judges 6 - 10:5).
2. Names and their meanings are very important in the Bible. What are the four members of the family? Elimelech means "my God is king", Naomi means "blessed", Mahlon means "sick" and Chilion means "pining." How do the names fit in their lives?
3. Why do they leave Bethlehem? Where do they go? Where do the Moabites come from? Read Genesis 19:30-38. What was their history with Israel? Read Numbers 22:1-6.
4. What happens to Elimelech? Who do the sons marry? The name Orpah means "stubborn" and Ruth means "friendship." How do these names fit?

Return to Bethlehem

1. Why does Naomi return? What is the reaction of her daughters-in-law? How do the two daughters-in-law react? What is significant about Ruth's response? This reminds me of a parable of Jesus. Read Matthew 13:1-23. Which soil best describes each of the daughters-in-law?
2. What does Naomi do when she gets to Bethlehem and is recognized? Why is she bitter? How is this like how we react when trials come?
3. What time do they arrive? The beginning of barley harvest was around the end of April, after the Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits, but before Pentecost. What is significant about these end markers to us? Do you think they are significant to the story?

Ruth 2

In the Fields of Boaz

1. Who is Boaz? What is significant about Boaz being a “mighty man of wealth” or a “man of great wealth”? Read Leviticus 25:25-29,35-38 Given Boaz’s great wealth and God’s commands to help each other, what does this say about Elimelech running to Moab?
2. What does it mean to glean? How is Ruth allowed to do this? Read Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:15-22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22. What in particular is so important about the holiday in Leviticus 23? Given that Deuteronomy is often referred to as the law interpreted, what is important about the differences in this passage? Is it just luck that brings Ruth to Boaz’s field? Then what?
3. What is noticeable about Boaz’s greeting and the response of his workers? What does this say about Boaz’s character? What is the next thing Boaz says? How does he notice Ruth out of all the women in the field?
4. What do the comments of the man in charge of the harvest have to say about Ruth’s character? How well must she be known in Bethlehem given this and Boaz’s statement to her? How hard does Ruth work? Does it seem usual? Does Boaz merely fulfill the requirements on him? How does Ruth react? Does Ruth claim she will pay him back? What is so significant about Boaz’s reply (see v.12)? Given the complement to her in Boaz’s reply, does Ruth feel she earned the favor? How does this relate to our relation with Jesus?
5. Does Boaz stop the blessings at what we have seen? What else does he do? How much does Ruth glean that day? (an ephah is about 1/2 bushel or 30-40 pounds). What does this say about our life as a Christian? Can we depend on God to supply our needs? Read Luke 12:22-34. If we are faithful can we count on great riches? Why not?
6. What does Naomi say when she sees the gleanings? What does she say when she hears whose field it is from? Who does Naomi credit with the kindness? Why does Naomi say not to go to others fields? Why didn’t she say this before? How long does Ruth stay in Boaz’s field?

Ruth 3

At the Threshing Floor

1. What does Naomi mean when she says "...shall I not seek security for you, ..."? Why the sudden interest in marrying Ruth off? Many have said that Boaz is much older than Ruth, who was probably in her early twenties. He is certainly older than Ruth, but does it seem likely that he is close to Naomi's Age? If Boaz is near Naomi's age, why doesn't she marry him? About how old is Naomi? Read Ruth 1:11-13. Naomi is either toward the end of childbearing age (else why would she if I had a son, for she certainly lacked faith in God's providence) or just after childbearing age, hence early 40's to 50's. Thus Boaz is most likely in his early to mid thirties - not quite the old man many paint him to be.
2. What is winnowing and where would it be done? A Threshing floor was a large, flat stone (or hard packed earth) area where the grain could be pounded to break the grain into wheat and chaff (straw). After the grain had been pounded by a flail (see Ruth 2:17), the wheat would be separated from the chaff by throwing it in the air and letting the breeze blow away the chaff. The breeze blew in the late afternoon till just after dark at this time of the year, hence the reason for the time of day, and you would have to do this outside town. When you were done it would be late so you would have to sleep with the wheat so it was not stolen. Note how accurate the Bible is in even the small details!
3. What is Naomi's plan? Why ask in secret? Read Deuteronomy 5:5-10. What could she have done? What if he did not want to marry her? Is anything inappropriate suggested in Ruth uncovering Boaz's feet and sleeping there? Does the Bible avoid mentioning sin when it arises in people it is describing? What woke Boaz? What was Ruth doing at the time? Boaz was guarding his food (and hence while "his heart was glad" suggesting he had had some wine he was not likely drunk), and he woke up due to some slight disturbance (also suggesting he was not drunk), so what is the likelihood of there being a prior inappropriate relation without his knowing?
4. What does Ruth ask? Compare Ruth 2:12 to Ruth 3:9, noting that "spread you cloak" can and often is translated "spread your wing". Why does Boaz call Ruth blessed? What did Ruth do in the beginning? What is the kindness she is doing now? Did Ruth also show kindness in how she did this latter good thing (refer to #2 above)?
5. What is a virtuous woman in the Bible? Read Proverbs 31:10-31. How is Ruth like this? Who wrote Proverbs 31 (Read v.1)? Who is King Lemuel? Rabbinical tradition holds it is Solomon (Lemuel being Bathsheba's personal name for him, note that in cultures in this area mothers give their sons a personal name that only they use). Assuming for the moment it was Solomon, who might his mother be basing the description of the ideal wife on?
6. Is there any catch to the plan? What does Boaz say about if the other will press his claim? Is Boaz abandoning his restraint and going against the law for the woman he would marry? Is Boaz not eager for the marriage then?
7. Why does Ruth leave before light, if there is nothing wrong in what was done? Read Romans 14:14-18. Why does Boaz give her so much grain? How does Naomi interpret it? How does this apply to us? Does Jesus wait to save when we call on him? Can we trust in his salvation?

Ruth 4

At the City Gate

1. Where does this take place? Why were there so many elders of the city around to witness it? Note that city gates were the city halls and merchant squares (like the mercat crosses of the middle ages), thus business deals were made here and any action requiring judgment was brought here. Why ten? One possible reason is this was the number needed to witness a marriage in ancient Jewish tradition. Was Boaz ready for the nearer kinsman? Had he thought through the best way to do it? How well known does Boaz seem to be at the gates (recall Proverbs 31)?
2. Why does Boaz say Naomi sold (or is selling) some land? Recall Leviticus 25:35-38. This was a notification that she was poor and seeking help, but not marriage. Does the kinsman want to redeem? Why doesn't he? Several possible reasons have been suggested: he might have a family and inheritors thus not want to divide the inheritance more (Read Deuteronomy 25:6 - only the first son took the dead man's inheritance not the rest), 2) Moabites were outside the covenant and so no matter how great Ruth was she could be displeasing (Read Deuteronomy 23:3-6), 3) he might not have the money to both buy the land and support a wife and family. How is the transfer of redemption right like that in Deuteronomy 25:7-10?
3. What is the name of the nearer of kin than Boaz, who we meet in the first verse? Why is this man, who plays a key role in half the chapter, unnamed but Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are named and they just go to Moab and die? Would this unnecessarily defame the family line of this man? Was he sinful or wrong for not redeeming? Recalling that the book of Ruth is the Gospel told as a romance, what could this possibly mean that there is another closer redeemer? Is there another who wants to redeem but cannot? Read Romans 3:19-26. How does the Law desire to redeem but cannot? Might this give another reason for ten witnesses? Why can't our sacrifices and deeds save us? Read Haggai 2:10-14. Does our sin pervade all we do? Is there a taint of selfishness when we help others?
4. Who were Rachel and Leah? Read Genesis 29:14-18, 35:23-26. Who was Tamar? Read Genesis 38. How does this relate to v. 18? What is the significance of v.14? Who is the kinsman spoken of? What is the significance of the number seven in scripture? How does the scripture view sons? Read Psalm 127. How great is the compliment that Ruth is greater than seven sons? Read 1 Chronicles 2:13-15. How is this an interesting comparison? How does v.16-17 show fulfillment of the Levirate marriage? Why is Boaz listed as the father of Obed in v.21 (also 1 Chronicles 2:12)? Read 1 Chronicles 2:3-4. The situation with Judah and Tamar introduced Levirate marriage, but here also the dead did not receive the legal claim in the genealogy because of their sin. How does this relate to Boaz and Elimelech?