

Outline of the Book of Ruth

A Story of Loyalty, Redemption, and Faith

Introduction:

The Book of Ruth is one of the shortest yet most valuable books in the Old Testament. It is a narrative of love, loyalty, and divine providence, set during the time of the judges in Israel. The story highlights the faith and devotion of Ruth, the Moabitess, and her journey toward becoming part of the lineage of King David. It is one of only two books named after women, Esther being the other. Both lived in dark days for Israel. Esther, a Jew, married a pagan king and was the means in God's purpose to save Israel from wicked Haman. Ruth, a pagan, married a Jew and was the means in God's purpose to continue the royal line to Christ.

It ranks high amongst literature for its elegance and simplicity of style and the touching theme. Benjamin Franklin, an American statesman and inventor, was indignant when French aristocrats rubbished the Bible. So, being quite ingenious, he wrote out Ruth with minor changes to disguise that it was from the Bible and had it read to his friends. They were most impressed and asked where he had found this beautiful, ancient document. Franklin enjoyed telling them it was the book of Ruth in the Bible they despised.

Examples of its elegant language:

Ruth's immortal words "intreat me not to leave thee..." and the gracious way Boaz and his reapers greeted each other "The Lord be with you." "The Lord bless thee". Naomi's advice to Ruth "It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field."

Valuable Insights into life in Israel, the example of levirate marriage, the role of the kinsman redeemer or go'el, moral living amid an immoral society, the operation of God in the lives of ordinary men and women, and much typical teaching are all packed into the little book of 4 chapters and 85 verses.

Setting:

Between Judges and Samuel. Ruth 1:1 "in the days when the judges ruled" These days were marked by anarchy. Judges 21:25 "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Which Judge? Maybe Gideon for there was a famine then, but likely earlier since Boaz was the son of Rahab.

Judges end with no king in Israel, Judges 21:25; Ruth ends with David.

The marvellous grace of God is seen by the inclusion of Ruth in the royal line, also in Ruth 4:18 tracing the line back to Pharez, the outcome of Judah's failure and Tamar's scheme. What a contrast with the beautiful levirate marriage story of Ruth and Boaz! The author is unknown but many credit Samuel, supported by the reason that Samuel who anointed David as king, would want to establish David's right to the throne as descended from Judah.

Chapter 1: Loss and Loyalty on the Road

Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chillon, leave Bethlehem, "the house of bread", due to famine and settle in Moab. While in Moab, Elimelech dies, and Naomi's sons marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. After about ten years, both sons also die, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law widowed. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem and urges Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab to rebuild their lives. The lament of Naomi is a warning against the dreadful loss due to backsliding; "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

Orpah chooses to stay in Moab, but Ruth displays extraordinary loyalty by refusing to leave Naomi, famously declaring, "intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." So, Ruth accompanies Naomi back to Bethlehem, initiating the story of redemption and renewal.

The chapter begins with a famine and ends with a harvest.

Chapter 2: Gleaning and Gladness in the Field

In Bethlehem, Ruth seeks to provide for herself and Naomi by gleaning leftover grain in the fields during the harvest season. God overruled so that she finds herself working in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy and kind landowner who is also a relative of Naomi's late husband. Boaz endured the famine conditions and prospered, in stark contrast to Elimelech. Boaz notices Ruth's dedication and kindness toward Naomi and begins showing favour to her, ensuring she is protected and provided for while she works.

When Ruth returned home in the evening with an abundant supply for both her and her mother-in-law, Naomi exclaimed "Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." There was gladness in the home that night.

Chapter 3: Pleading and Promise in the Threshingfloor

Naomi devises a plan for Ruth to seek Boaz's protection as a kinsman-redeemer, a custom in Israel where a relative could marry a widow to preserve the family's lineage. Ruth follows Naomi's advice, visiting Boaz at the threshing floor and presenting her plea to him to act as her redeemer. Boaz is moved by Ruth's courage and virtue, but he explains that there is a closer relative who has the first right to act as the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz promises to resolve the matter and assures Ruth that he will act honourably regardless of the outcome.

Chapter 4: Redemption and Restoration in the City

Boaz approaches the closer relative to discuss redeeming Naomi's land and marrying Ruth. The relative declines, unwilling to jeopardize his own inheritance. Boaz steps forward and fulfils the role of kinsman-redeemer, marrying Ruth and restoring Naomi's family line.

Ruth and Boaz have a son named Obed, who brings joy and hope to Naomi. Obed becomes the grandfather of King David, placing Ruth in the genealogical line of Jesus Christ.

Themes and Significance

- Loyalty and Commitment: Ruth's devotion to Naomi and her willingness to embrace a new life and faith exemplify deep loyalty and selflessness.
- Divine Providence: The story illustrates how God works through ordinary people and events to accomplish His plans.
- Divine chastisement: Backsliding is costly.
- Intelligent use of Names of God: Jehovah, Elohim, El Shaddai,
- Redemption: Boaz's role as the kinsman-redeemer highlights the biblical theme of redemption, ultimately pointing to the redemptive work of Christ.
- God's grace: Ruth, the Moabitess, becomes part of Israel and its sacred history, Gentiles are blest.

The significance of names: 7 principal characters, 8 names.

Elimelech - "my God is King" Naomi - "my pleasant one"

Mara — "bitter" Mahlon - "sick" Chilion — "pining"

Orpah - "neck, hind, fawn Ruth — "beauty" or "friendship"

Boaz - "in him is strength"

The significance of omitting the names of the servant overseeing the reapers and of the nearer kinsman.

Conclusion:

The Book of Ruth is to be enjoyed and will enrich our devotion to our great Redeemer. There are lessons to be learned on the danger of backsliding and its cost. There is beautiful typical teaching from the field and the threshingfloor. The example of Ruth in love, loyalty, humility and piety is a model to follow. Boaz, a mighty man of wealth, is a beautiful type of our Redeemer, near of kin, able and willing to redeem. The book also yields dispensational truth.