

In the book of Ruth we come to a sparkling gem placed in the setting of the full body of Scripture in exactly its God-chosen place. I find four specific facets to this sparkling jewel of a book:

**1. Historical** – This story bridges the dismal, *"everyone did right in his own eyes"* period of the Judges with the regal monarch reigns of kings Saul, David and Solomon found in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. It identifies Boaz and Ruth, the story's hero and heroine, as the great-grandparents of King David. And it establishes the ten-generation bloodline of the Messiah from Perez, son of Judah, through King David.

**2. Allegorical** - An allegory is a story that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning. And in this instance, the love story of Boaz and Ruth reveals the hidden meaning of the love story between Jesus and His church. Ruth the Moabite represents Gentiles who were excluded from the chosen nation of Israel. But Ruth is drawn into a place of acceptance by the kinsman-redeemer typified by Boaz. And the romance of redemption is consummated in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, typifying the marriage of Christ with His church.

**3. Prophetical** - The couple of Elimilech (meaning "God is King") and Naomi (meaning "pleasantly blessed") represent the nation of Israel in favor with God. Their leaving Bethlehem ("the house of bread") and going to Moab ("who is your Father?") represents the rebellion of Israel in leaving their God. Ruth being brought into Israel represents Gentiles brought into relationship with God by the Christian-Jew evangelists. And Boaz redeeming Gentile Ruth represents Jesus the Christ redeeming His church of all peoples during the harvest time at the end of the age. The ultimate blessing of Naomi and marriage of Boaz and Ruth prophesies the end of the age when Christ will rule with harmony and blessing for all.

**4. Doctrinal** – The book of Ruth teaches the doctrine of redemption like no other book in the Bible. For redemption to occur in God's economy you need a kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman is a near-relative. And a redeemer must have the price and the power to redeem. Boaz was a near relative of Naomi, mother-in-law of Ruth, and had the money and ability to redeem. Jesus as the God-man is a near-relative of mankind. And Jesus clearly has paid the ultimate price of death and blood to redeem. And His power and position to redeem as God-man is unquestionable.

All this marvelous truth, and we haven't even begun the text of the book. These four facets of the story will be more fully developed as we go through our study of Ruth. But for the rest of our lesson today, let us focus on the first chapter. Borrowing from the late, great J. Sldlow Baxter, I title it "Love's Resolve." I could summarize the story in my own words, but it would not be as powerful or poignant as God's unadulterated Word. And the reading of the 23 verses of chapter one only takes about four minutes – so let me read it to you. I encourage you to follow along in your Bible.

*At this point, I encourage you to read the text of Chapter One of Ruth for yourself.*

### **AT THE BEGINNING OF BARLEY HARVEST**

Let me comment on this closing sentence first. *"And they came to Bethlehem ..."* would finish this opening scene appropriately. Naomi departed from Bethlehem, and ten years later returned to Bethlehem with Ruth. But what is the significance of adding *"at the beginning of barley harvest?"* Yes, the story goes on to tell of Ruth gleaning in the barley fields at harvest time. But is there a deeper meaning implied? I say yes.

Do you remember when Jesus was explaining to his disciples the kingdom parables found in Matthew 13? In Matthew 13:39 He says: *"the harvest is the end of the age."* I believe this is a key to our closing phrase in chapter one of Ruth. More than just setting the scene for the rest of the story, this phrase gives a prophetic "hint" that Ruth being brought into the land of the Jews is a prophetic reference to the beginning of the age of grace which began at Pentecost, A.D. 33, when the Holy Spirit entered the lives of all Christian believers. From this time forward the Gentiles were openly brought into the kingdom through the evangelistic efforts of Peter, Paul and the others.

Furthermore, did you know that the Jews even today read the book of Ruth at their remembrance of Pentecost? Spooky-amazing – right? And the age of grace still continues today, inviting all to come to Jesus who would be redeemed from slavery to sin into the kingdom of righteousness – redemption bought by the precious shed blood of the God-Man, Jesus, our kinsman-redeemer!

## WHEN THE JUDGES GOVERNED

The story of Ruth is set in the day “when the judges governed,” according to Ruth 1:1. And look back one verse in the Bible, to the closing verse of Judges.

**Judges 21:25** *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*

In the historical environment of spiritual decay, there is this “rose” that blooms among the filth of idolatry and chaos – the story of Ruth. When there was no king that ruled in Israel, though God was to be their king, there is provision made for a king to come – David – who would be a king after God’s own heart. For Ruth, by Boaz, becomes the great-grandmother of King David.

## FAMINE BRINGS CRISIS

Apparently there was a happy Israeli family of husband Elimelech (“God is King”), wife Naomi (“pleasant blessing”) and two sons Mahlon (“joy-song”) and Chilion (“perfectness”). The names alone are meant to portray happiness and blessedness. But famine brings crisis, and Elimelech makes a choice to take his family to heathen and enemy Moab. You might remember that Moab was the son of father Lot by his incestuous union with his eldest daughter. It was one bad decision to leave the town of “House of Bread” (Bethlehem) which would become so prominent in the future, and another bad decision to go the despised Moab where both sons married Moabite women after father Elimelech had died. Here is God’s law concerning the heathen nations around Israel:

**Deuteronomy 7:3-4** *“You must form no marriage alliance with them. Your daughter you must not give to his son, and his daughter you must not take for your son.”*

Ten years pass, and the two sons die. And prophetically, there was no more of “God is King” or “joy-song” or “perfectness.” The men had died, and so had the blessing on the family. Naomi is left with her two husbandless daughters-in-law. Word comes that the famine has passed in Bethlehem so Naomi decided to return to the only hope she knows – the homeland of her family and faith.

She excuses her daughters-in-law from going with her, as they will find far-better chance of survival as widowed women in Moab than in Israel. But love has grown between the women, so the choice is hard. One chooses to stay – Orpah. And one chooses to return with Naomi – Ruth. Do you not see that this is allegory of some Gentiles choosing to stay with their false-god and ways, and some choosing to depart and choose a new path toward the true God. Ruth’s testimony of loyalty rings loud and strong through the ages, and challenges the hearts of all who would follow Christ:

**Ruth 1:16** *“Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”*

Note that not only did Ruth choose Naomi’s God, but Naomi’s people. And so in choosing Christ must I choose Christ’s people – His church. Note also that Ruth goes on to pledge her loyalty unto death (1:17). Our commitment to follow Christ is a life-long pledge, despite the challenges and difficulties that will surely come to dissuade us. Just as our commitment to our marriages is a life-long pledge that must stand the test of many heart-wrenching situations that would pull us apart. Those of you who are married – I urge you to right now to re-vow in your heart to the Lord that you will stay faithful to your spouse until death. Let Ruth’s vow be your inspiration.

## RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

How fraught with drama was Naomi’s return to Bethlehem with Ruth. She returned knowing “*the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me*” (1:20), and no longer wanted to be named “pleasant-blessing” but renamed “bitter” (Mara). Naomi had title to her husband’s portion of land, but could not redeem it as a woman without a near-kinsman to redeem it for her. She as an aged widow was in dire straights.

In the same way prophetically, Israel has returned to the land in 1948, not with great joy, but with bitter memory of the suffering persecution and rejection she has felt for centuries. And Jews generally continue to carry this past stigma and sense of rejection. God's promise to His chosen people is still true, but has not yet come to pass:

**Isaiah 54:4-8** *“Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; and do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced. But you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your husband is your Maker, whose name is the Lord of hosts. And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, Who is called the God of all the earth. For the Lord has called you, like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you.”*

And think of the drama for Ruth to come to Israel. She had heard the law of the Lord:

**Deuteronomy 23:3** *No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord ...*

Ruth did not yet know of God's redemptive plan for the Gentiles, nor of His “mystery of the ages” yet to be revealed some thirteen hundred years later:

**Ephesians 2:11-13, 19** *Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands – remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household.*

**Romans 11:25-26** *For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery – so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel shall be saved, just as it is written, “the Deliverer will come ...”*

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

For now we must leave this great “Romance of Redemption,” but we will return to it in the next number of weeks. In the meantime, remember Ruth's great testimony of faith: “Your God my God.”

And remember God's promise that we now can know through the teaching of the New Testament:

**Romans 8:3-4** *For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did - sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

**PRAISE GOD FOR OUR KINSMAN-REDEEMER** – Jesus the God-man who became one of us to be our close kinsman, and who has paid the price of redemption through His shed blood, and has shown His redemptive power by His resurrection from the grave!