

BIBLE STUDY ON RUTH

January 9, 2019

In the Time of Solomon

Profound changes were taking place for the Israelites.

People no longer portrayed the Lord as only intervening in its history by special appearances. The presence of God was understood in the ordinary course of human events.

Another fundamental theme of this time period was that actions had consequences.

In the story of Joseph the Lord did not intervene directly or show himself openly.

Divine purpose became evident more subtly in the drama of his relationship with his brothers.

And divine purpose was disclosed in the actions and consequences in David's family.

We will see that unfold in the story of Ruth (great-grandmother of David).

Ruth is one of five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in the *Gospel of Matthew*.

In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is located among the Writings (towards the end of their Bible).

Setting (Ruth 1:1-5)

Story is set in the time of the judges.

Book of Judges describes it as a period of religious and moral immorality and national disunity.

Famines were frequent and were generally caused by lack of rainfall or destructive hail storms.

In some situations they were said to be sent as punishments to the ungodly.

Righteous people were preserved by God.

In Amos a famine indicated the absence of communication with God (famine of words).

We are introduced to Elimelech (my God is king) of Bethlehem in Judah.

He was a man of wealth and more than likely the head of a family or clan.

He was married to Naomi (pleasant).

They had two sons named Mahlon (to be weakened or sick) and Chilion (complete / perfect).

Ephrata was the old name for Bethlehem.

They went into the country of Moab to escape the famine (30 miles) (7-10 days on foot).



Moab is a mountainous tract of land in Jordan and lies on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. According to Genesis 19 the ancestor of the Moabites was Lot by incest with his eldest daughter. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah his daughters conceived a plan to lie with Lot. Eldest daughter got Lot drunk to facilitate the deed and conceived Moab (from my father).

God renewed his covenant with the Israelites at Moab before they entered the Promised Land. Moses died there and was buried in an unknown location in Moab. After the conquest of Canaan, the relations of Moab with Israel were mixed. Moab was often in conflict with the Israelites but there were also times of peace.

Back to the Story: Elimelech died and the two sons married Moabite wives. Name of the one wife was Orpah (neck) and the name of the other wife was Ruth. Ruth has no known etymology.

Tradition says that Orpah was married to Chilion. In rabbinic literature, Orpah was identified with Herse, the mother of the four Philistine giants. These four sons were given to her for the four tears which she shed at parting with Naomi. According to a legend in a Midrash, Orpah was a sister of Ruth. Her name was changed to Orpah because she turned her back (neck) on her mother-in-law. They lived in the land for ten years before Mahlon and Chilion died.

Three Women On the Move (Ruth 1:6-18)

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law started to head back to Bethlehem. It is unclear how they heard that the Lord had restored food in their hometown. Naomi told them both to return to the house of their mother with her blessing:

Let the Lord deal kindly (hesed) with you (as you have dealt with the dead and with me).

Let the Lord grant you security.

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud.

The daughters-in-law persisted in going with Naomi to Judah.

Naomi was adamant that they return because she understood she could offer them no future.

A woman's worth and security depended on family.

Women could not work for wages and women could not cultivate land without male relatives.

Naomi did inherit the land in Bethlehem but it was useless to her.

Her only hope of livelihood was managing the household and raising the children of a husband.

She needed sons and not daughters because grown sons would support her.

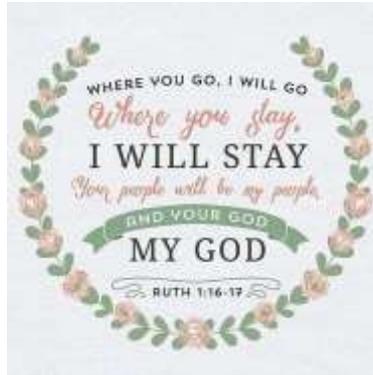
A childless widow (too old to remarry) was both worthless and vulnerable.

Her age and poverty sealed her fate. Her position was less than a slave.

Orpah returned to her family but Ruth refused to leave Naomi.

Ruth (a non-Israelite) swore her commitment to Naomi in the name of God.

She acknowledged the God of the Israelites as her God (Hebrew word used is *Elohim*).



Down to Two Women (Ruth 1:19-22)

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem which created a stir among the people.

In her remarks to them she no longer wanted to be called Naomi (pleasant) but Mara (bitter).

Comment: In Exodus 15 the Israelites complain to Moses that the water was bitter (same word).

Naomi believed the Lord caused this calamity upon her (Old Testament understanding).

Like Jeremiah, Job, and the psalmists she was open and honest before God in her suffering.

Ruth modeled devotion and Naomi modeled complete honesty.

Her words pointed to the greatness of God who controls the whole universe.

She trusted that God controls all things even though it seemed unjust to her.

Her faith entrusted her to God in the midst of unanswerable difficulties and questions.

Chance Encounter (Ruth 2:1-9)

Naomi had a relative on her husband's side (a rich man) whose name was Boaz (be strong).

Ruth volunteered to glean among the ears of grain left behind by the reapers.

It so happened she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.

Boaz noticed Ruth and asked the servant to help him identify the woman out in the field.

Boaz spoke directly to Ruth and instructed her to glean in his field only.

She was to keep close to the other young women and follow their lead.

The young men were to leave her alone. She was to drink from the vessels of the young men.

God cared enough about the poor to make provision for them in the law.

In Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 24 God laid down as a law that ...

Land must not be reaped to the borders in order to provide for the poor.

Gleaning was his way to care for the poor and oppressed in their society.

Any stalks which fell out of their hands or were left in the field were for the poor to gather.

Every landowner had the responsibility to care for others as a sign of how God cared for them.

Noticed for Her Good Deeds (Ruth 2:10-17)

Ruth questioned Boaz on why he was so benevolent to her.

He had heard her story from others and invited the Lord to bless her fully.

Ruth was grateful and understood the significance of his care for her.

Boaz invited Ruth to share some bread and wine (Eucharist).

She ate until she was satisfied and had some left over (feeding of the 5,000).

Boaz allowed her to glean among the standing sheaves (a big deal).

She gleaned until the end of the day and had an ephah of barley (half a bushel).
It was enough to feed both Naomi and Ruth for about five days.
Boaz went beyond the legal laws.
He allowed Ruth to glean among the workers before they finished.
His orders to follow the servant girls positioned her in a place for ideal gleaning.
She was guaranteed a good portion for her hard work.

Abundance (Ruth 2:18-23)

Ruth had enough for herself and for her mother-in-law.
When questioned about where she worked, Ruth told Naomi about the kindness of Boaz.
First Naomi thanked the Lord who showered them with goodness.
Then Naomi shared with Ruth that Boaz was a relative of her late husband.
Naomi cautioned Ruth to follow the instructions of Boaz to remain safe.
And Ruth continued her work until the end of the harvest.

In Hebrew the word *go'el* is used for the first time in Ruth 2:20.
Same word will reoccur eight times in Chapters 3 and 4.
It comes from the word *lig'ol* which means *redeemer* (next of kin).
In the Hebrew Bible it denotes a person who is charged with restoring the rights of another.

In the Book of Isaiah, God is called the Redeemer of Israel.
God redeems his people from captivity and it involves moving onto something greater.
For Christians the title is applied to Christ.
Christ redeems (those who believe) from all evil by offering himself as the Paschal Lamb.



Assignment for January 16
Read Ruth 3-4