

BIBLE STUDY ON RUTH

January 16, 2019

Matchmaker (3:1-5)

On her own initiative, Ruth secured a food supply for Naomi and herself.
Ruth also made a very promising contact with Boaz, a relative of her late father-in-law.
Naomi wanted for Ruth what every Jewish mother desired for her daughter – a secure home.
Remember that the family of Ruth was living beyond the Jordan in Moab.
All the family Ruth had in Bethlehem was Naomi who was an elderly widow.

Naomi knew that their only hope was in the Jewish levirate marriage law (*Yibum* in Hebrew).
Law is detailed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10.
It requires a man to marry the childless widow of his brother in order to produce a child.
Firstborn that she bears shall carry the name of the brother that died.
Name of the deceased must not be blotted out of Israel.
It also guarantees that the property would not be lost to the family.

As outlined in Deuteronomy, the brother might refuse to marry the widow.
If that is the case then the widow must go to the gate of the city where the elders sit.
She must inform them that her brother-in-law has refused to marry her.
Elders must call the brother to them and ask him again to marry the widow.
If the brother-in-law refuses then the ceremony (called *halitza*) takes place.
Widow loosens or removes his shoe, spits in front of his face, and states –
So shall be done to a man who refuses to build up his brother's house.
Only after this symbolic act is completed will the widow be free to marry someone else.
Today only the Orthodox Jews continue to require that *halitza* be performed.

Ruth has met this fine gentleman, Boaz, who has already shown kindness to her.
But the relationship has gone nowhere!
Not willing to let things take their natural course in matters of the heart, Naomi devises a plan.
Naomi is determined to do everything in her power to procure a husband for Ruth.
It is significant that Naomi had previously prayed for a husband for Ruth in 1:8-9.
Here she is exerting herself to bring about the answer to her own prayers.
In this case we see divine and human actions work together in the achievement of his purpose.
Believers are not to wait passively for events to happen ...
But they must seize the initiative when the opportunity presents itself.

Naomi in essence says to Ruth – Go! Ask him to marry you!

Ruth Proposes (3:6-7)

In the winnowing process the trodden-down grain was thrown up in the air against the wind.
Threshing floor was carefully leveled with a large cylinder roller.
It was consolidated with chalk so that weeds would not spring up.
Farmer remained all night in harvest-time on the threshing-floor to protect his valuable grain.
He also remained for the winnowing which was done at night to catch the breezes.
Duty is so important that the master oversees the job himself.

From Isaiah 41:14-16 we also learn that the harvest season usually ended with a celebration. Naomi somehow knew the banquet was that very night, saw the opportunity, and took it. Plan Naomi proposed was full of risk and danger.

Ruth would expose herself to the possibility of humiliation or the violation of her chastity. But Naomi knew the character of Boaz and knew him to be a man of honor and integrity.

Ruth was to anoint herself and then put on her best clothes.

Motives seem questionable when we read the word *stealthily* in verse 7.

In the Hebrew the word means *quietly* (so as not to be heard).

It is the same word used when David cut the skirt from the robe of Saul (1 Samuel 24:4).

But the whole scheme fit the customs of the people of Israel at that time.

By lying at the feet of Boaz Ruth presented herself as a humble petitioner wanting his protection.

Boaz probably slept on a mat or some kind of animal skin.

Ruth would then lie down crosswise at his feet.

Custom would allow them the benefit of taking part of the coverings on the bed of their master.

People would rest in the same clothes they wore during the day.

It was a marriage proposal that still exists among some modern Arabs.

Boaz Accepts (3:8-15)

To spread the cloak over another was a metaphor to offer protection.

It represented the Lord spreading his protective wings over the person in need.

Boaz knew that Ruth had other options but she chose a marriage to benefit her family.

In his eyes this was an even greater kindness Ruth showed to Naomi than all the other things.

Ruth chose to do the one thing that would preserve the family into which she came.

Her unselfishness is emphasized by the fact that Boaz was more than likely a very old man.

Ruth placed Naomi on the very highest level of priority.

She recognized her own happiness as secondary to her intention to honor Naomi.

Boaz promised to accept the proposal provided that the nearer kinsman did not accept it as well.

Boaz arranged to marry her in a way that fulfilled the absolute letter of the levirate law.

Happy Dance (3:16-18)

Six measures of barley were about 75 pounds (a load carried on top of her head).

Wisdom of Naomi appeared in her advice to Ruth to be still until the matter was resolved.

Naomi again knew the nature of Boaz and he would not rest until the matter was settled.



Negotiations (4:1-6)

As Boaz told Ruth, there was another kinsman closer than he was to Elimelech. Boaz handled the man in a very clever way (as did Naomi with him). Other kinsman was eager to add to his real estate holdings by purchasing the land. However, he did not want to jeopardize his own estate by marrying Ruth. He gladly and freely gave up his rights as kinsman (redeemer).

Our Family History (4:7-12)

With the blessing of the city elders, Boaz was given permission to marry Ruth.

It was a three-fold blessing:

- 1) *May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah ... who together built the house of Israel.*

Rachel and Leah were the two wives of Jacob.

The children born to them and their maidens became the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rachel was listed before Leah (although she was the youngest and had the fewest children).

Jacob wanted her as his first wife.

Rachel was his more lawful wife and his most beloved one.

- 2) *May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem.*

Words were directed to Boaz who they hoped would continue to increase in wealth.

They wanted him to retain his name and his fame.

They wanted him to grow in his reputation among his fellow citizens.

- 3) *Through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.*

Tamar was of another nation as was Ruth.

Tamar married one of the five sons of Judah.

In Genesis 38 Tamar married the eldest son of Judah, Er.

Because of his wickedness, Er was killed by God.

Following the levirate law, Judah asked his second son, Onan, to provide a son to Tamar.

His sexual actions with Tamar were deemed wicked by God and he also died.

Judah was reluctant to give Tamar his youngest son, Shelah, so she waited.

Judah became a widower.

Still wanting a child, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and wore a veil over her face.

She approached Judah after the time of mourning was over.

She struck a deal with Judah (who did not recognize her) and conceived through him.

Three months later Tamar was accused of prostitution because of her pregnancy.

Judah ordered her to be burned to death but she sent him the things exchanged earlier.

Judah released her from her death sentence and she was restored to her place in the family.

She gave birth to twins, Perez (to breach, to burst forth) and Zerah (glowing).

A Child is Born (4:13-22)

Real issue of this story is not the legalities of marriage laws but it is about genealogy.

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and a child was conceived.

Up to this point the Lord has been working behind the scenes.

The Lord enabled Ruth to conceive and she gave birth to a son, Obed (worshipper, servant).

Remember that she was unable to conceive with her first husband.

The women in the city praised the Lord.

Naomi did not understand the depth of what was to come.

However, she knew that her emptiness was filled again.

Message of hope becomes messianic in the last words of the text.

Writer announces that the child born to Ruth will be the grandfather of David.

Book of Ruth tells the story of Israel's greatest king ...

Who came at a time when Israel was at its lowest ... like it was for Naomi

We can trust that the Lord is working behind the scenes to provide a redeemer to restore us.

Life Lessons

Life of Naomi moves from bitterness to pleasantness, living up to the meaning of her name.

Ruth found the security of a settled home.

Moabite woman who seemed such a liability for Naomi became the means of her redemption.

Naomi described both the good and the bad events of her life as being from the hand of God.

Narrator of the story attributed only one action to God – the Lord made Ruth conceive.

God intersects with the characters in the story as we experience God today.

God is not a divine, physical presence or a booming voice from heaven.

God is the one to whom we give credit in the midst of our own circumstances and in the world.

We may give thanks after our good fortune but where do we place God in our calamities?

Book of Ruth invites us to ask what it means for us to belong.

Ruth is willing to give up the land and life she knows to maintain her relationship with Naomi.

Naomi risks her diminished status by bringing Ruth with her.

Belonging requires mutual vulnerability.

Genealogy at the end of the book claims Ruth (the Moabite) as the great-grandmother of David.

We are to assess our understanding of insiders and outsiders and to be open to differences.

In the world of the Bible, the voices of women are largely unheard.

Story is extraordinary since the voices of Naomi and Ruth move the story forward.

Story is an example of their resourcefulness despite a patriarchal system that works against them.

Assignment for January 23

Read Esther 1-2