

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



BEAUTY FROM ASHES

RUTH

This is a small book, but a very powerful book. Named after the main character of the book, Ruth is about a gentile woman who found herself struck by tragedy, but in the end became blessed beyond measure; and as we move through this chapter, we'll see how. However, the point is, the story of Ruth is one that takes the reader from the ashes of one woman's life, and how God creates something completely beautiful out of it.

Further, it is important for the reader to understand that the events that took place in this book occurred directly in the time of the Judges. This is another "Beauty from Ashes" illustration. Even in the midst of the moral ash heap that described the whole of the nation at this time, God was still working in the lives of individuals. Truly, God created some of the most beautiful pieces of His handiwork from the ugliest of situations.

This should be a reminder to all of us. No God-fearing Christian likes to look around at the culture and see moral decay. But understand; God is not limited at all by the culture— this cannot be overstressed. And what we learn from Ruth is that God can, and God does, continue to work in the lives of those who choose to follow Him no matter what the rest of the world is doing.

How to think About Ruth

Because Ruth is such a short book, taking in the basic meaning of the book is quite simple. Your main thought of Ruth should be that even in the worst of times, God can still work out His best for His people.

Another way you can think about Ruth is to recognize it as a love story. So let's watch it unfold:

Tragedy and Traveling (Ruth 1): This narrative starts out with a tremendous amount of sadness. Tragedy had struck Naomi's family. Her husband, Elimelech, had moved his entire family (his wife and two sons) from Bethlehem because of a famine in the land, and had them move to Moab to see if a better life could be found there.

However, while they were in Moab, Elimelech died. As we continue in the story, we find that Naomi's two sons married women of Moab— one named Orpah and the other named Ruth.

Everything seemed to be going well until after about ten years, both of Naomi's sons died as well and this absolutely devastated her. And after Naomi decides that there was nothing left for her in Moab, she decides to go back to Bethlehem, but not before attempting to send both of her daughters-in-law away. Orpah takes this advice, but in verse 16, you see a moving scene where Ruth begs Naomi not to send her away and dedicates her life to Naomi.

The chapter ends with Naomi agreeing to Ruth's request; both of them travel back to Bethlehem together.

Gleaning and Giving (Ruth 2): In this chapter we find Naomi and Ruth starting out their life attempting to survive off of a process called "gleaning." Gleaning is a lot of work. If you were poor and needed to glean, you were usually restricted to small portions of a particular field and then, in this small area, you were forced to find the pieces that other people missed. Furthermore, you could be kicked out of a field at any time.

However, Naomi and Ruth were left with no choice. They had no husbands and work was very scarce for women at this time. But if there was something working in their favor, it was the fact that Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech, was related to a rich and powerful man named Boaz. That said, if you are in need, and are desperate and need to resort to glean a field, you want to get the best odds that you can and so you pick the field that would be the most favorable. Naomi and Ruth did what any of us would do— they picked the gleaning land of the man to whom they were related.

As chapter 2 unfolds, the next time we see Ruth, she is doing exactly what she had set out to do— she was gleaning in the field of Boaz. And as she is working, she catches Boaz's attention. Men usually are not known as good listeners, but they see really well. And as Boaz sees Ruth, he begins asking about her and gathering even more information that peaks his interest. Actually, Boaz is so intrigued that he approaches her in the field and completely takes Ruth off guard.

Chapter 2 ends with a tremendous blessing for these two women as Boaz gives Ruth food and permission to gather food with the rest of his handmaids and he tells her that she could keep what she gathered for the rest of the harvest season.

This meant that these poor women would be continually taken care of when they had no idea initially what they were going to do.

Bowing and Blessing (Ruth 3): This is the part of the story where you really begin to see the love story unfold. Here is the tender story about how Ruth pursues Boaz and announces herself as a "near kinsman" by way of her deceased husband and mother-in-law and humbly asks if Boaz would be willing to redeem her.

Boaz blesses Ruth for her request and the way she asked. However, Boaz also announces a problem— There was a kinsman that was closer in relationship than Boaz. So Boaz tells Ruth that he would confront this matter and see if this other man wanted to redeem her.

So chapter 3 ends with a suspenseful kind of waiting as Boaz goes out to meet this individual.

Requesting and Redeeming (Ruth 4): In this chapter, we find that Boaz goes to the gate of the city (where all of the business is conducted) and sits and simply waits for this kinsman of Ruth. When Boaz finally sees him, he calls out to get his attention and immediately requests a meeting and sets before him the prospect of owning property in the land of Moab that had been left behind by Elimelech. As Boaz is explaining this he also mentions that the individual who redeems this land would also need to redeem Ruth. The man refuses because he doesn't want to mar his own inheritance and leaves the decision to Boaz.

The story ends with Boaz officially redeeming Ruth, them getting married, and starting a family.

What to Look for in Ruth

Even though Ruth is four chapters long, the waters of its significance are very deep. Many people look at Ruth like a welcomed refreshment after reading the book of Judges or other Biblical narratives that are hard to understand. And in some ways, that is completely reasonable. We can look at this love story and smile and marvel at how God brought about a beautiful ending for two sweet ladies with a seemingly desperate future ahead of them. However, if this is as far as we go, then we really miss out on the bigger picture.

Key Purposes—

Historical Purpose: It is this book that begins to bridge Israel's history into the time of the kings. We'll talk about this in greater detail in a moment, and further in the chapters to come, but after a time, Israel demanded a king to rule over them as all of the other surrounding nations had and it is through the birth of a son to Ruth that the royal line of David begins to form.

Dispensational Purpose: Starting from the time of Rahab of Jericho, it begins to become more and more clear that where the Law was restrictive, as far as receiving the gentile people in terms of the covenant of Promise, grace was beginning to include them. Ruth was a Moabite, but through her redemption, became adopted and received the blessing God had promised to Israel.

Key Words—

Gleaning: Gleaning, as we mentioned before, is the process by which a person gathered together, or picked up various types of produce or items. This word is used 12 times in Ruth and it has to do with God's desire for His people to be a gracious people. This was a law given to Moses for the people to indicate that it was God's desire that if you had resources, to not guard and keep them all to yourself.

Virtuous: This word is only mentioned once in the book of Ruth, but it was important to Boaz and it should be important to us personally. What stood out to Boaz in terms of what made Ruth attractive to him, was her personal and observable virtue among the community.

Ruth 3:11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

Kinsman Redeemer: This is an individual who acted as a protector of the family rights. A Kinsman Redeemer had a wide range of tasks that he could accomplish:

- 1) Buy back property that the family had sold
- 2) Produce an heir for a brother who died. The Kinsman Redeemer would take his fallen brother's wife and have a child with her.
- 3) Avenge the murder of his brother by bringing the offender to justice.
- 4) Buy back a relative that had been sold into servitude.

Typology—

Boaz: In this narrative, Boaz serves as a picture of Christ after he redeems Ruth into the nation of Israel.

What to Gain from Ruth

The book of Ruth really comes to life when we look at two things:

First, we come to chapter 4, where we find the climax of the story. Ruth is redeemed by Boaz in a dramatic scene when, in front of the elders, he performs a public oath that seals forever the issue of the land that was owned by his relative and thus, secures Ruth to be his wife.

Then, later in the chapter the Lord blessed Ruth and Boaz with a child. Not only did this son represent present joy for this family, but by the time that you reach verse 22, you read these words:

"And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David."

What this is saying is that Obed was the grandfather of David, the king. Which means that Ruth, by being Redeemed, is directly in the line of Christ.

Furthermore, when we get to Matthew 1:5-6 we read,

'And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king...'

You see, the genealogy proves that Jesus is the only Jew who can prove His reign as Messiah. I mean, think about it, who would be able to come along and prove what Jesus is able to prove here? No one!

A second fact that needs to be considered is how the Kinsman Redeemer Boaz ties in with becoming a type of Christ.

In order to be a Kinsman Redeemer there were three qualifications that needed to be met:

- 1) The Kinsman Redeemer had to be near of kin.
- 2) The Kinsman Redeemer had to be able to redeem the requested party (they had to have the finances to be able to accomplish this task).
- 3) The Kinsman Redeemer had to be willing and make an agreement to redeem.

Boaz obviously met all three of these qualifications. But think about this, spiritually speaking, Jesus Christ met all of these qualifications:

- 1) Jesus was became near of kin to us by becoming a man
- 2) Because of His perfection and divinity, Jesus is the only one who could pay for our spiritual bank account and cover it forever
- 3) Jesus was willing to Redeem us

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." — John 10:17-18



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