

Title: **Introduction to the Book of Ruth**

Passage: **Ruth 1:1-2**

Theme: **Introduction to Ruth**

Number: **0912Ru1.1-2(1)**

Date: **September 9, 2012**

{Read Passage}

[i] Setting the stage . . .

As I've studied t/issues related to this book I've been surprised at how much is there.

At one level t/story of Ruth t/Moabites is fitting for children. Just about anyone who was raised in t/CH became familiar w/this short story (4 chapt) at an early age.

But there's another level to this book that really hits t/ball out of t/park.

Scholars view it as a masterful piece as far as literature is concerned. That's something that's evident not so much in English as it is in t/orig. lang. Heb. Poetic structures / fig. of speech / word-plays / inclusions . . .

We'll see that as we go through it.

[ii] When you study the Bible you need to be aware of what kind of literature you're studying

That's essential to good interpretation. Sev. diff. & related types of writing styles found w/i t/66 books of t/Bible. ("Bible as literature").

Historic Narrative. Recording of historic accounts (NT book of Acts)

Law (Leviticus & Deut.)

Gospel (Matt/Mark/Luke/John)

Epistles (letters)

==> Didactic (Theological exposition)

Wisdom Lit. (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and SOS)

Poetic (i.e. Psalms)

Prophetic

Not necessarily related to future events (forth-telling). Prophets of t/OT (Isaiah, Jer., Hosea, Micah)

Apocalyptic (Revelation "Apocalypse of John")

There are even more categories / sub-cat.

Not that these are rigid either. You may find parts of t/Bible that have several diff. lit. types – even in t/same book or chapter.

If it sounds complicated it really isn't. We learn to read & interp. what we read this way. Wander around a library sometime. Pull books off t/shelf at your leisure from different depts. You'll be surp. at how you naturally adapt to what you're reading. A book of poetry. Short stories. History of t/Civil War. Science fiction.

You don't interpret everything the same way. Just makes sense.

If you don't understand that you end up turning locusts in t/book of Rev. into Apache attack helicopters. You may do more serious theological damage than that.

[iii] What kind of literature is Ruth?

It's a narrative. Historic narrative. A story. There's a plot. There are characters. There's a crisis. There's a resolution.

Some scholars even call it a "novella" (short novel). But don't misunderstand. – it's not fiction. It's hist.

T/book begins and ends w/markers that tell us this is real. This really happened. [Cf. 1:1 w/the ending genealogy (gen. were imp. historic pieces of factual information derived from court records).

OT scholar Daniel Block writes ==>

. . . the picture of the lives of the characters is entirely realistic and in keeping with what is known of life in Palestine in the late second millennium B.C.: the famine and consequent migration of Elimelech and his family (1:1); the allusions to methods of burial (1:17); the geographic portrayal of outside the town; the scenes of workers harvesting the grain (chap. 2); emotions of the characters in the face of grief, anxiety, joy; the nature of the social relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, landowner and workers, citizen and the citizenry, husband and wife, grandmother and grandson; the legal process (4:1-12). . . . Like the Book of Judges the Book of Ruth should be interpreted as a historiographic document. It describes real experiences of real people in real times at real places. [Block, 602-03]

It's history w/a well-thought out structure. Very well written. Genius.

German poet Goethe ['gəʊt-ə] referred to the book of Ruth as "The loveliest, complete work on a small scale. What Venus is to statuary and the Mona Lisa is to paintings, Ruth is to literature." [MBC, 288]

[iv] Where is this book found?

Answer: In your Bible! Specifically – OT.

That a book of the Bible is in the Bible (OT or NT) is a matter related to what we call "canonicity." (canon = unit of measure).

Canon of Scripture = those writings that are part of our inspired Bible.

Bible didn't fall out of a cloud from heaven in one leather bound book.

God providentially supervised His people – Israel as it relates to t/OT Church as it relates to t/New – to recognize and collect those books that were to be part of t/inspired canon of Scripture.

Some books in t/OT were debated by t/Jews as to whether they really belonged. Examples: Esther (God's name nowhere appears) SOG (too racy); Ecclesiastes (too pessimistic). {these accusations aren't really true rightly understood}

All of that was settled before t/time of Christ.

What about Ruth? Never been an issue. Early on t/book of Ruth was received as one that "*defiles the hands*" (Ancient Jewish expression for touching t/Word of God – hands become ceremonially unclean for touching something holy. A person had to wash their hands after touching it, reinforcing the sacredness of the book).

[v] If you're wondering who wrote the book . . . It wasn't Ruth

Acc. to Jewish tradition = prophet Samuel.

Possible but there's no supporting evidence.

Like t/book of Esther, t/only other book in t/Bible named after a woman, only God knows for certain who the human author was.

[vi] As for when it was written

I'm going to argue for a date around 1000 BC.

Keep in mind – when something was written is diff. than when t/things happened that are being written about. Example: I could write about t/Civil War today. Date of writing would be early 21st c. Doesn't mean t/CW occurred in t/21st c. I'm writing about a past event. Same here.

There are some hints that t/BOR was written quite a few years after t/events described in it.

Look at 4:7 (author compelled to give an explanation of a cultural practice that he things they may not be familiar with).

Would be like an older author today writing about when her grandfather died when she was a child and how everyone came to stay at grandma's house where grandpa's body was laid out in the parlor.

Someone reading that today might be puzzled ?

So t/author might add, *"when I was a child it was a common practice to do this rather than have the body at a funeral home."*

Look at 1:1 ==>

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed . . .

Author is referring to a specific block of time, implication being that this block of time (period of the Judges of Israel) is past.

Add that t/book concludes w/a genealogical tree that ends w/David.

David was one king removed from t/time of the Judges.

Date of writing around 1000 BC during t/earlier part of David's reign seems approp.

[vii] Theme and Purpose

Genealogical

Ruth tells us about the genealogical history of King David & connects t/dots between King David of Judah who was born in Bethlehem & the King of Kings, t/Lion of Judah, JC, who was also born in Bethlehem.

Redemptive

The book shows us the personal side of Deut. 25:5-10 (law of levirate marriage) & establishes t/concept of t/Kinsman Redeemer as a prophetic type of JC.

Redeeming the genealogical line in Ruth required a kinsman redeemer (Boaz). Redeeming t/fallen race of men in t/world requires a Kinsman Redeemer, JC.

It's a book that foreshadows the Gospel – Sinners saved from God's wrath by grace apart from the works of the law.

Striking is the absence of any reference to Moses, the Exodus, or the Covt. at Sinai – even though those events weren't far removed from t/time of t/Judges.

Eugene Merrill, professor of OT studies at DTS & 2010 president of the ETS notes that ==>

The narrator [i.e. t/author of Ruth] is writing, among other reasons, to clarify the fact that the Davidic dynasty is not something which

sprang out of the conditional Mosaic Covenant but rather that it has its historical and theological roots in the promises to the patriarchs. Israel as the servant people of Yahweh might rise and fall, be blessed or cursed, but the Davidic dynasty would remain intact forever because God had pledged Himself to Abraham to produce through the patriarch a line of kings which might find its historical locus in Israel but which would have ramifications extending above and beyond Israel. [Eugene Merrill, Bib Sac, April-June 1985, p. 135-36]

Ramifications would find their complete fulfillment in JC.

It's a reminder that the Gospel is for all men, not just the Israelites. Ruth was a Gentile and her lineage is traced to the Redeemer of the World, Jesus Christ. Gentile blood links JC to the entire world.

Ruth has been customarily read by t/Jews during t/feast of Weeks (Shavout) or "First Fruits". Ruth was a Gentile. Gospel is for all nations.

When was that message most clearly driven home in t/NT? Acts 2. The Day of Pentecost when men from every nation under heaven were gathered together in Jer. And God birthed t/NT CH.

What Joel prophesied was being fulfilled, "Everyone who calls on t/name of the Lord shall be saved." [everyone = Jews and Gentiles]

Day of Pent. was another name for t/Feast of Weeks.

Covenant Faithfulness of God

The book answers the ? of how King David emerged out of the dark period of Israel's history known as "The Judges."

It's a reminder that God is always faithful to His church.

The book centers on the concept of Hebrew *chesed* - (word used 3x).

Strong relational word that wraps up in itself several concepts . . . love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness . . . [Block, 605]

No one in the book prays for a resolution of his own crisis. In each case a person prays that Yahweh would bless someone else. This is a mark of *hesed*. [Block, 612]

It's a commentary that out of t/darkest days God will keep a remnant alive. No matter how bad things become, no matter how unfaithful t/CH may appear to be at a given time in history, God will preserve His remnant. We are never alone.

Sometimes we feel like Elijah the prophet who in 1 Kings 19 compalins to God that all Israel has forsaken His covenant and killed His prophets. "Woe is me; I am all alone"

God reminds him ==>

"Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Similar thing in Ruth. The time of the Judges was a dark time. But after the darkness of t/Judges came the light of t/Davidic Dynasty (temporal rein of King David that foreshadowed t/eternal rein of his desc. JC).

After Judges the Davidic Dynasty.

Post Tenebras Lux.

After t/darkness of t/middle-ages t/light of t/Reformation

Post Tenebras Lux.

No matter how dark are the times, light is just around t/corner!

God's sovereign providential rule over all things

The continuing and often unseen activity of God in sustaining his universe, providing for the needs of every creature, and preparing for the completion of his eternal purposes. [Manser, M. H. (1999). Dictionary of Bible

Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. London: Martin Manser] —

No such thing as chance / coincidence in G's economy.

5x in t/BOR Naomi (a central character) refers explicitly to G. 3x she uses the covt. name of God (YHWH) and 2x she id's Him as Shaddai (abbrev. of El Shaddai) - The Almighty G.

T/O the story she affirms God's sovereignty and holy nature in His mercy and judgment.

Boaz refers to God 6x. 5 by His covt. name [YHWH]; once by His relationship to Israel ("God of Israel").

Time and time again we see God's sovereign providence.

1) Seen in what we often call "natural events" such as a famine in the land.

2) Seen in what men view as "coincidence" – Grammar of 2:3 emphasizes this - lit. "her chance chanced upon."

Cf. Prov. 16:33.

3) God's providential hand is seen in the seemingly free decisions of men – even when these decisions are questionable. Elimelech decides to leave Bethlehem (1:1); Ruth chooses to stay w/Naomi (1:16) and later in chapter 3 decides to lay at t/feet of Boaz.

4) God's hand is evident legal matters, something we see in chapter 4.

Isaiah 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power Not one of them is missing.

Psalms 135:6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

Isaiah 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

[viii] Structure

Some of you who are a little older might remember the name "Quinn Martin". If that doesn't ring a bell how about this: "A Quinn Martin Production".

QM was a very successful TV producer of the 60s and 70s. Some of his hits were "The Fugitive" / "The FBI" / "The Streets of San Francisco" and "Barnaby Jones."

A feature of many a "QM Production" was how he would organize each one hour episode by "Act 1" / "Act 2" etc. Show would usu. finish with an epilogue.

"4 act drama:" (each chapter serves as a sep. "Act")

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

A. Scene One: Ruth Reaping (vv. 1-7)

B. Scene Two: Ruth Rewarded - Part 1 (vv. 8-13)

C. Scene Three: Ruth Rewarded - Part 2 (vv. 14-17)

D. Scene Four: Ruth Reports (vv. 18-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)

B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)

C. Scene Three: Resting in Providence (vv. 16-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

A. Scene One: Resolving Legal Matters (vv. 1-12)

B. Scene Two: Romance and Redemption (vv. 13-17)

Epilogue - Royal Rights and The Resultant Redeemer (4:18-22)

The story encompasses about a dozen years.

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

1. The First Crisis: Famine

First of sev. crisis points in the story & this one sets t/stage for the rest.

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. . . .

a. Note the time

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed . . .

The story of Ruth is set during the time of the Judges, roughly 1375-1020 BC.

No indication as to exactly when over the course of this 350 year time-frame the events occurred.

May be during t/time of Jair or Samson.

Put that in perspective.

Abraham - 2100

Joseph - 1900

Exodus - 1450

Ruth - 1100

Just a few hundred years after t/Exodus from Egypt.

Judges of Israel were political, military, & spiritual leaders.

Book of Judges names 12: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson.

Sin Cycles - cf. Judges 2:10-14a; 18-19. Repeated over and over again.

In great distress, the people of Israel turned again to God, who in turn provided a deliverer for them (a judge).

T/Judge would die, they'd forsake God, the same pattern of events was repeated all over again.

The period of the judges has been and can be summarized with the statement from Judges 21:25 (last v. in t/entire book):

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Connection in our Bibles to t/book of Judges. Our English Bibles follow the LXX in placing TBOR after TBOJ.

Ancient Jewish historian Josephus did the same, even tho historically t/Jews organized Ruth as t/first of "The 5 Scrolls" - the *Megilloth*, – OT books read at Jewish festivals.

Interestingly, the Masoretes placed it right after Proverbs begging the question were these two women (Ruth and Naomi) being championed as prime examples of the type of woman described in Prov. 31?

The contrast between t/2 books is noteworthy.

In the book of Judges, every character is apostate at worst and spiritually compromised at best. Yet in Ruth, while there is at times a lack of maturity, there is no real lack of character among the main players.

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. . . .

There's a relationship between the period of the judges and famine. The famine isn't just a matter of bad luck. God had appt. the famine as a judgment. Cf. Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

2. The First Decision: Retreat from Bethlehem to Moab

First of many decisions in t/book.

... And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab ...

a. One man and two locations

(1) Man

Certain man (v. 1) is Elimelech (v. 2).

(2) First Location: Bethlehem = house of bread

Irony of the famine. No bread in the house of bread.

Located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

The famine was localized (not uncommon). The area was particularly susceptible to the climate as there was no spring. They relied on cisterns. A drought would devastate the local crops (wheat, barley, olives, grapes).

(3) Second Location: Moab

In contrast to Beth. water was plentiful in Moab which also had very rich soil.

(a) Moab was outside of Israel

Unfriendly territory.

Moab was the son of Lot by incest w/his eldest daughter (Gn. 19:37). Descendants & the land were known as Moab; t/people as Moabites.

(b) History of Israel and Moab was one of conflict

i. The Moabites were despised for at least 5 reasons:

- 1) They were the product of incest (Gen. 19);
- 2) they wouldn't allow the Israelites to pass through their land when they came out of Egypt - Balak and Balaam (Num. 22-24);
- 3) the Moabite women seduced the Israelite men and the Israelites were later punished (Num. 25);
- 4) Israel constitutionally excluded Moab from the Lord's assembly according to Deut. 23;
- 5) Eglon, the Moabite King, had recently oppressed Israel (Judges 3:15ff).

.. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab . . . "sojourn" = a temporary stay.

... with his wife and his two sons.

Elim. fam. would have trav. N. to t/area of Jer. and then taken te Jer. to Jericho road to cross the Jordan at the fords by Jericho.

From there the road E. up to Heshbon would connect them to the north-south King's Highway leading through Moab. Approx. 70-100 mi. and 1 week of travel.

3. The Bethlehem Players (v. 2)

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion...

a. Elimelech

My God the king. God is king.

b. Naomi

Pleasant; agreeable.

c. Mahlon

Uncertain origin. May be derived from a Heb. word meaning "to be sick."

d. Chilion

"to come to an end, mortality, frailty."

These names may be termed "*nomen omen*" (ominous names, cf. "Dracula"). Cf. v. 5.

Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah.

Ephrathite was someone who come from Beth.
(ancient name for Bethlehem in Judah).

4. Bethlehem Trilogy

Starwars trilogy. Here we have a/Beth. trilogy.

a. Judges 17-18

A young Levite from Bethlehem leaves his hometown and meets a man from Ephraim named Micah. Micah hires the Levite to be his private priest in idolatry. He was later hired by the tribe of Dan and relocated with the Danites to Laish in N. Galilee. It was there that the Levite est. a cult center that proved to be a stumbling block to God's people for the next 1000 years. [cf. Eugene Merrill, *Bib Sac*, April-June 1985, p. 131]

b. Judges 19-21

Again we have Bethlehem and Ephraim and a Levite. The Levite from Ephraim takes a concubine from among the young women in Bethlehem. She went out on her own and was taken captive by the men of Gibeah who assaulted her through the night and left her dead. Upon finding out her husband assembled all the elders of Israel at

Bethel where they determined to seek vengeance. The subsequent attack nearly exterminated the entire tribe of Benjamin.

c. The third part of the trilogy = The Book of Ruth

In contrast to the other two Bethlehem narratives, this one ends up good. Undoing the evil related to Bethlehem by bringing honor and a future redeemer.

Not only was David born in Beth. but so was Christ his descendent.

Verse 2 ends.

... Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

Ends the first scene of Act 1.

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

John Piper:

All the calamities [in the story of Ruth] seem to be designed to get a Moabite into the genealogy of Jesus. Ruth is one of the four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:5). God pursued her. He turned the world upside down, you might say, to include Ruth in the lineage of his Son.

Surely this is significant for us. Does it not mean that God's blessings are free and undeserved? Ruth was an idolatrous Moabite before God pursued her (1:15). She did not merit this pursuit. It was free. That is the way God pursues you and me. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

Not only that, but God moved the world in order to include a foreigner in the lineage of the Messiah. Ruth was not a Jew. Is not

God showing us that his heart is for the nations—all the nations? The glory of Christ is that he comes from the nations and dies for the nations. His blood was shed for the nations, and the nations' blood ran in his veins. The Jewish high priest prophesied better than he knew in John 11:51–52 “that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.” “You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

The redeeming work of Christ is free and undeserved. It is intended for every ethnic group on the planet. All ethnocentric and racist impulses are crucified in Christ. That too is what the story of Ruth is about. [John Piper, A Sweet and Bitter Providence]