

The Book of Ruth

Historical and Prophetic Truths



Don T. Phillips

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to five people who have played a special role in my religious maturity in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Terry Teykle A Man of Prayer

Dr. Bruce Wood.....A Mentor and Role Model

Dr. Robert Johnson..... A Man of Faith and Covenant
Keeper

Pastor Dan Cummins... A Biblical Scholar and Teacher of
the Word

And.....

Candyce J. Phillips.....Lifelong Companion and a
Woman of Faith

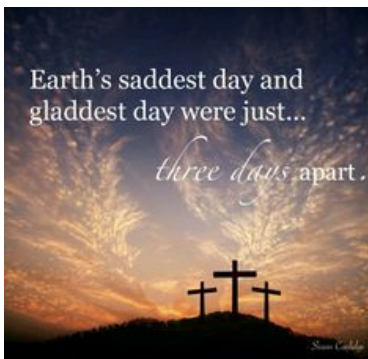


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[37] Then saith He unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few;

[38] Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. Matthew 9:37-38

Preface

The first time that I heard Ruth taught from the pulpit was in 1984 by Pastor Dan Cummins; a pastor, mentor, friend and biblical scholar. I can remember that the Book of Ruth was presented as a classical Jewish story of love, devotion and faith by a Gentile woman from Moab who converted to the Jewish faith. The story was interesting but I can remember that it impressed me as a historical account of how a Gentile woman became a Jewish proselyte; the name given by the Jews to foreigners who adopted the Jewish religion. An interesting message to me at that time was how a man of Israel named Boaz became a kinsman redeemer for both Ruth and her mother in law Naomi, saving both from a life of poverty and despair.

As the presentation unfolded, I became intrigued by the prophetic truths imbedded in the basic story. As time passed, I found myself drawn to the Book of Ruth and the hidden (to the Jewish community) message that the Nation of Israel would be *blinded in part* and fail to recognize Jesus Christ as their long awaited messiah until the *fullness of the Gentiles would come in*. In the fullness of God's time the Children of Israel would have the *scales removed from their eyes* and recognize Jesus Christ as their own *kinsman redeemer*..... and so all of *Israel will be saved*.

The story of Ruth contains important information about Jewish Customs of the time, and how land and possessions were to be perpetually passed down from generation to generation. As the Book of Ruth was intently studied and revealed through the work of the Holy Spirit, deeper prophetic truths in the Book of Ruth began to be unveiled. This book will attempt to accomplish two things: (1) Interpret and analyze the story of Ruth as written by a holy scribe verse by verse (Authorized King James Version) and (2) Attempt to fully explain and present the prophetic structure of the book.

The contents of this book have been taught in several bible studies over the course of the years, and expounded and expanded as the Holy Spirit granted me license to do so. It is hoped that this study will deepen your understanding of the historical narrative, and reveal prophetic truths not previously addressed in other classical books. It must be confessed that I do not claim to have full understanding of this great book, but perhaps the explanations and discussions contained herein will open the full body of scriptural truth to all who seek His wisdom and knowledge.

I fully admit that hundreds of hours were spent reading expositions and narratives from men and women of God who were also moved to address this great book. I have collected wisdom and truth from many, many sources over a long period of time; and in my personal notes I have failed to record or remember all sources. I ask those who might recognize their wisdom to please let me know so that I can give them full credit in a future edition as I learn and mature in Christ. I am told that the greatest act of flattery is

in having someone act and understand as you do. Let it be so; God knows the individuals and their contributions.

May God richly bless you as you study His Holy Word and pray for our Jewish brothers and sisters that they might turn to Jesus Christ as their redeemer and savior.

The Book of Ruth

BIBLICAL AND PROPHETIC TRUTHS



Part 1: The Story of Ruth

Introduction

The Book of Ruth is the eighth book of the Old Testament in the authorized King James Bible. It tells of how a man from Bethlehem called *Elimelech* left his land during a famine and went to the Land of Moab with his wife *Naomi* and his two sons: *Mahlon* and *Chilion*. Her sons marry Moabite women: one named *Orpah*, and the other named Ruth. Within a 10-year period of time, both Mahlon and

Chilion die, leaving both Ruth and Orpah childless widows. With no means of support, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah leave Moab for Bethlehem. On the way, Orpah turns back to Moab but Ruth decides to stay with Naomi. With Naomi's assistance, Ruth marries an older kinsman called *Boaz* who lives in the town of Bethlehem, thereby preserving her deceased husband's posterity and becoming an ancestor of King David. The story is primarily concerned with how Naomi is saved from a life of poverty and disgrace, and how Ruth is rescued by Boaz, who is a *kinsman redeemer*.

The narrative is poetically-constructed and tells a classic story of how God in His mercy turns ordinary events into extraordinary blessings. The story introduces an ancient Jewish custom concerning marriage of a family widow, called the *Leverite Law*. The story is revered by Jewish people, and is generally-recognized as containing important historical facts and prophetic truths. The Book of Ruth was originally a part of the Book of Judges, but it now forms one of the twenty-four separate books of the Hebrew Bible and is the 8th book in the Authorized King James Bible. It is composed of 4 chapters, 85 verses and 2,578 words.

According to Jewish tradition, the author of this book was probably Samuel. Although the Book of Ruth is not very long, it is remarkably rich in examples of cultural practices, faith, kindness and redemption. We will also see that it is also a book rich in prophecy, which in shadow and type reveals how Jesus Christ will ultimately redeem both Jews and Gentiles from sin and despair.

Historical Background

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled...

Ruth 1:1(a)

There is no reason to assume that the Book of Ruth was in any way a fictional account. It stands as a great story of how God is faithful and merciful to those who will follow after Him and obey His holy commandments. Although the Jewish perspective of the Book of Ruth is simply to provide a glimpse into the life of ordinary people, it is to the New-Testament believer much more than that. The story of Ruth is pregnant with prophetic truths, and it provides a rare glimpse for biblical scholars and practitioners of how the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would use the Gentiles to bring salvation to the nation of Israel.

The setting for this magnificent story is clearly identified as a time *when the judges ruled*. The period in which judges ruled over Israel was a dark period of time in which the Nation of Israel turned to idol worship, intermarried with forbidden women, and turned their back on God. Following the Exodus from Egypt (Spring, 1490 BC-Spring, 1450 BC), Israel was ruled by Joshua for a short period of time (25 years) until he died. Following his death, the elders ruled for another short period of time (20 years). The elders of Israel gave way to what has been called the *Period of the Judges*. The reign of Judges over Israel began with Othniel and ended with Samuel (379 years). It was during this period of time that the story of Ruth took place.

The Holy Scripture tells us in three different places that: *In those days, there was no King in Israel: Every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (Judges 18:1, 19:1 and 21:25). This period of time should have been one of great prosperity and peace for Israel, but they were constantly oppressed by the Assyrians, the Moabites, the Canaanites and the Ammonites. The judges ruled by divine appointment but this was a period of *theocracy*; God was the autocratic ruler over all the people and he ruled through the Judges. The Judges did not rule through one location, but they were like the old American west circuit riders; they travelled from town to town administering justice and presiding over important decisions. In an incredible act of disobedience and rebellion, the children of Israel rejected God as their sovereign King and sought to *do what was right in their own eyes*.

The apostasy and rebellion came to a head during the judgeship of Samuel. The people declared; *Give us a King like every other nation* (I Sam 8:6). Saul was chosen as King but he would not be a godly King. In a state of great remorse, Samuel declared *because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you* (I Sam 15:23). The Kingdom of Israel would now be ruled by *Saul*.

The story of Ruth actually *took place* between *when the Judges ruled* (Ruth 1:1) and the birth of a son called *Obed* (Ruth 4:27). Obed sired a son called *Jessie*, who was the father of *King David*. This places the story of Ruth likely somewhere near 1098 BC. The interested reader can read the details of this chronology in Phillips (1).

Although the events of Ruth can be determined with reasonable accuracy, it was not *written* until much later since Ruth 4:27 records the birth of David. This strongly suggests that the Book of Ruth might have been written during the reign of King David sometime between 1055-1015 BC. The author is unknown, but it has long been believed by Jewish historians that Samuel wrote the Book of Ruth. If written any later than 1016 BC, the genealogy of Ruth 4:27 would have undoubtedly included Solomon, who was the son of King David and the last King of the United Kingdom of Israel.

The Book of Ruth is short, containing only 4 chapters. Although it is not very long, we will see that it is worthy of intense investigation and provides many shadows and types of how the Jews would one day be brought back into a covenant relationship with God by Jesus Christ. It is also a book of prophecy that could not be fully understood until after the 3.5 year ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Ruth is divided into six main sections:

- **The Famine and Family of Ruth** (Ruth 1:1-5)
- **The Resolve and Return of Ruth** (Ruth 1:6-22)
- **The Ancestral Rights of Ruth** (Ruth 2:1-23)
- **The Requests of Ruth** (Ruth 3:1-18)
- **The Redemption of Ruth** (Ruth 4:1-12)
- **The Lineage and Legacy of Ruth** (Ruth 4:13-22)

The Famine and Family of Ruth

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of

Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. Ruth 1:1

Sometime during the reign of the Judges, the people of Judah and particularly the inhabitants of Bethlehem were stricken with a great *famine*. In the Holy Scriptures the word famine is used in several different contexts. A famine could be caused by lack of rain, destructive hail storms, insect infestations and a scarcity of food during a long siege. This is the only place in the Holy Scriptures that this particular famine is mentioned, but it must have been long and severe. According to the Jewish Targum, this was one of ten famines (or calamities) which came from God to chastise his people:

*“God has decreed ten grievous famines to take place in the world, to punish the inhabitants of the earth, before the coming of Messiah the king. The first (was) in the days of Adam; the second in the days of Lamech; the third in the days of Abraham; the fourth in the days of Isaac; the fifth in the days of Jacob; **the sixth in the days of Boaz**; the seventh in the days of David; the eighth in the days of Elijah the prophet; the ninth (was) in the days of Elisha in Samaria; and the tenth is yet to come. It will not be a famine of bread or of water, but of hearing a word of prophecy from the mouth of the Lord; and even now this (last) famine is grievous in the land of Israel.”* <http://www.heraldmag.org>

We are not told what type of famine actually struck the family of Ruth but it was severe enough to cause Ruth, her husband and their two sons to leave their land and home somewhere near Bethlehem (Ruth 1:1). Recall that a severe famine had once before afflicted the Land of Canaan in the time of Jacob. It was so severe that Jacob moved his entire

family to Egypt where he sought refuge. The famine of Ruth 1:1 was evidently just as severe, because otherwise Elimelech would never have left his inheritance in Judea with his wife Ruth and their two sons and journey to the



Land of Moab. The Land of Moab was the home of the *Moabites*. This land was south and east of Jerusalem across from the Dead Sea, and it stretched from the Kingdom of Ammon in the north to the Kingdom of Edom in the south.

The City of Bethlehem was very near Jerusalem which was not only the capital city of Israel, but it was a center of trade and commerce. The inhabitants of the lands around Jerusalem and Bethlehem grew wheat and barley, and maintained large herds of cattle and sheep. The name *Bethlehem* might have been prophetic in two different ways. First, Bethlehem means *House of Bread* in the Hebrew language. If the famine was a severe drought that occurred over a sufficiently long period of time, the wheat and barley crops would fail due to the lack of the former (Sept/Oct) and latter rains (March/April). There would be no grain to make bread. If the barley and wheat crops failed

for lack of rain, there would also be neither food nor water for both the people and their herds or flocks.

Note that the *latter and former rains* is a prophetic shadow and type of the eventual appearance of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who would emerge over 1000 years later as their long-awaited Messiah.

*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the **rain**, as the **latter and former** rain unto the earth. Hoshea 6:3*

During His 3.5-year earthly ministry, Christ used the symbolism of *bread* to describe his character and purpose.

*Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them **bread from heaven** to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that **bread from heaven**; but my Father giveth you the true **bread from heaven**. For the **bread** of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this **bread**. And Jesus said unto them, **I am the bread of life**: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. John 6:31-35*

Although not conclusive, we can assume that by the basic entomology of the word *famine*, the meaning of Bethlehem, and the prophetic linkage to the very words of Jesus Christ that this *famine* was an extended drought in which there was no bread to eat. It is also implied that this drought in Bethlehem was common to much of Israel (*there was a famine in the land*), but this is only supposition. In any case, the *famine* drove a *certain man* (Elimelech) to leave

Bethlehem with his wife (Naomi) and their two sons (Mahlon and Chilion).

The fact that Elimelech left Jerusalem because of a famine only touches the surface of what this departure actually meant. Elimelech was an Israelite, and each male Israelite had certain privileges under the law which were both unique and interesting. Any property (house or field) owned by a male Israelite was to be perpetually passed down from father to son. This was to be an inheritance from generation to generation. In the master plan of God, property was never intended to be sold or transferred out of the tribe of Israel to which it was given when Joshua distributed the land.

The Land of Canaan was distributed by Joshua to each tribe after a 7-year conquest of the land. Within each tribe, every family was given an inheritance. It is interesting that the land never actually belonged to each Israelite; it belonged to God. The children of Israel were only *temporary residents* of the land.

*The land shall not be sold for ever: for **the land is mine**; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.*
Leviticus 25:23

The Land of Promise was given as a perpetual, unconditional inheritance to the Tribes of Israel but this does not imply that the Israelites would prosper in the land if they were disobedient to God's word. It is also a historical fact that the land promised to Israel through Abraham was never fully conquered or dwelt upon by the children of Israel. The ultimate fulfillment of God's promises will not occur until the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom. This is because of disobedience and lack of faith.

For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day.

Deuteronomy 11: 31-32

Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time. Deuteronomy 4:40

Possession of the Promised Land is *unconditional*, but prosperity, safety and the protection of the children of Israel that live in the land is *conditional*. It is a terrible tragedy when man deliberately and willfully breaks any covenant relationship which God has placed before him. The land had been promised to Israel and the people would prosper as long as they obeyed the Lord and trusted in His word. Elimelech clearly lacked the faith to trust in God to deliver him and his family. Although we can criticize Elimelech for his actions, is it so difficult to believe? How many times have Christians today blamed God for trials and tribulations that are experienced? Have we not read and understood the words of the Apostle Paul?

*...confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much **tribulation** enter into the kingdom of God.* Acts 14:22

...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope. Romans 5:3-4

Recall that the name Elimelech means *my God is King*. Like many people today who claim that they are Christians but cannot be recognized as one, Elimelech supposedly

worshipped and recognized Jehovah God, but his actions spoke otherwise. The continued prosperity of each Israelite was conditioned upon how well they obeyed and trusted God.

If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:13-14

Although Elimelech left Israel to seek refuge in Moab, it was possible for him to retain his land of inheritance. He was perfectly within his rights to either lease or sell the land to another Israelite, and still have the inheritance remain in his family forever. In Ruth 4:3 we are told that he *sold* the land to another Israelite. If the land was sold, how could Elimelech still retain possession of the land?

It is important to understand that the land given to the tribes of Israel were never intended to permanently leave the tribe to which it was assigned. Whether leased or sold, the land *could* be reclaimed by the original landowner. All land reverted back to the original owner during the *Year of Jubilee*. If the land was either *leased* or *sold*, it could be redeemed by the original landowner by prorating the worth of the land based upon how close the current calendar year was from the next *Year of Jubilee*. In other words, land leased or sold would revert to its original owner every 50 years.

[11] *A Jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed.*

[12] *For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.*

[13] *In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession.*

[14] *And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbor's hand, ye shall not oppress one another:*

[15] *According to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbor, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee:*

[16] *According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee.*

[17] *Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God.*

Leviticus 25:11-17

This will later play a major role in how Naomi and Ruth were rescued by a *kinsman redeemer*.

We will shortly see that Elimelech perished in the Land of Moab and so did his two sons. The tragedy of *Elimelech* was prophetic of what was yet to be extracted upon the entire *Nation of Israel*. King Solomon was an antitype of Elimelech. King David died and left the United Kingdom of Israel in the hands of his son Solomon. Solomon started as a wise and righteous king, but he soon sunk into the depths of apostasy and adultery. Upon his death, the United Kingdom of Israel split into two parts: the Northern Kingdom (an antitype of Mahlon), and the Southern Kingdom (an antitype of Chilion). As time went by, both followed after foreign gods and worshipped idols. They both abandoned the Laws of Moses and all of Israel fell into a divided, rebellious and apostate nation. Finally, God could take no more. Although He would never completely

abandon His chosen people, He allowed the Northern Kingdom to be completely destroyed by the Assyrians in 932 BC. It would not take the Southern Kingdom of Judah much longer to also feel the Wrath of God. In 586 BC, the city of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire, and by 605 BC the entire Nation of Israel had been taken into captivity and Solomon's Temple completely ransacked and destroyed. It was at this time that the furniture and artifacts found in the Temple were either destroyed or removed to Babylon, and the Holy Ark of the Covenant completely disappeared. Jewish writings assert that at the end of the age, the Ark of the Covenant and a new Millennial Temple will be restored to the Promised Land.

The Land of Moab

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were an example of what can happen to a city or a nation that turns its back on God. Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed by God because of sexual immorality and complete disobedience to His commands. Recall that Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were told to flee the city before it was destroyed and not look back. As they fled, the fire and brimstone rained down upon the city. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt! Lot and his two daughters continued on and rested in a cave in the Mountains of Zoar. That night a terrible thing happened. His two daughters got Lot drunk and *lay with him* so that they could bear a male child. A male child was needed to inherit the promises to Lot. The oldest daughter conceived and birthed a son called *Moab*. Moab was not a child of promise, but a child born of an incestuous act. The youngest daughter also conceived, and bore a son called

Ben-ammi. When Moab became an adult, he travelled south and settled in what is now called the *Land of Moab*. This land is south and east of Jerusalem, directly east of the Dead Sea and bounded by the Arnon River on the north and the Zered River on the south. Moab was the progenitor of every Moabite in that land. It was to this land that Elimelech moved his family.

Even though Moab was born out of an unnatural act of passion, the law had not yet been given when this occurred, and there was no written commandment against this incestuous act. Although God was likely very displeased, His mercy is everlasting and in an incredible act of forgiveness He actually blessed Moab and the land he inhabited. As Moses marched toward the Land of Promise, he encountered the Moabites.

And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.

Deuteronomy 29:9

The Moabites lived in an area which was rich and fertile. The land consisted of high, rolling plains with an abundance of water. The choice of Moab as a new place to seek refuge would have been a good one from an agricultural viewpoint. The high, cool plains of Moab would have been ideal to grow wheat and barley, and it must have been spared from the drought which devastated the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ruth 1:22, 2:1-3).