

Day 260 - SUNDAY: October 15th

Ruth 1

Ruth 1:1-22 NKJV

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, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!" Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-

in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me." When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Introduction to the book: The UCG reading plan's introduction to this book states: "The book of Ruth chronologically overlaps the book of Judges. And, although not stated in the biblical text, Talmudic tradition names the same author for both—the prophet Samuel. But unlike the book of Judges, Ruth is not part of the second major division of the Old Testament, known as the Prophets. Instead, it actually belongs among the third division, the Writings (known in Greek as the Hagiographa, meaning "Sacred Writings," and sometimes referred to as the "Psalms," as the book of Psalms is the first book of the Writings in order of arrangement and makes up the largest portion of this section). The Beyond Today Bible Commentary covers some material from the Writings in commentary regarding the Prophets when that material has a clear timeliness and helps to further elucidate the historical material in the Prophets. Ruth does just that, giving more details about the period of

the judges and providing an important link in the family of Judah, from which the kings of Israel will eventually spring.

"The story is set in the difficult days of the Judges, which were marred by appalling spiritual, moral, and social decline. Yet, as the story unfolds, we discover that within the corrupt society there were still true believers: simple folk who tried honestly to love and serve God, and to live generously with their neighbors. The unveiling of Ruth, of her mother-in-law Naomi, and of her husband-to-be, Boaz, reminds us that true sacred history is not learned so much in the annals of heroes and kings, as in the daily lives of godly women and men. The Book of Ruth should be required reading for any who study the era of the Judges, for it brings much-needed balance to our impression of that age of spiritual disarray" (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, introductory notes on Ruth).

This heartwarming and encouraging book provides an example of the variety of instruction God has laid out in His Word. The entire book is a self-contained short story about a few central characters, similar in that regard to Esther. There is no direct instruction from God—no commands, no correction from a prophet, no expounding of God's law. There are, however, great themes and lessons in the book—one being that God blesses those who seek to obey Him, sometimes in very unexpected ways. This is the experience of the main character Ruth, after whom the book is named—making this book one of only two in the entire Bible named after women, the other being Esther. Remarkably, Ruth is not an Israelite but a foreigner, a Moabitess. Yet she will not remain so but will be grafted into Israel—and not just grafted in but honored by God with an important position in the lineage of David and his descendant the Messiah. Whether the book's author actually is Samuel or someone else, there is a clear sense of respect for a foreign-born woman wanting to submit herself in obedience to God and follow

His way of life, and in doing so to have such a major impact on Israel's future.

Ruth is one of the five books of the Writings known to the Jews as the Megilloth—the other four being the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther. While the word *megilloth* simply means "rolls" or "scrolls," this term is used specifically of the *festival scrolls*—that is, the books of the Writings read in the synagogues at feast times. One of the major threads running through the book of Ruth is that of harvest, specifically the smaller spring harvest—first of barley and then of wheat (see Ruth 1:22). For this reason Ruth is traditionally read in Jewish synagogues during the Feast of Harvest or Firstfruits (Pentecost)—which occurs during this agricultural period in May or June.

Interestingly, Jewish tradition says the first Pentecost for Israel was when God gave the law at Mount Sinai and Israel accepted it, thereby truly becoming His people. Ruth is the story of a woman who accepted the laws of God and thereby became part of God's people. It should be noted that the "harvest" of Israel as God's people typified the spiritual harvest of *spiritual* Israel, the New Testament Church of God—the members of which are God's "firstfruits" in this age, as there will be a greater harvest of mankind when Christ returns. The story of Ruth helps to illustrate the fact that all people will one day be given the opportunity to follow God—and that, even today, gentiles are grafted in among God's firstfruits to be part of His early harvest. Paul (Romans 11:24-25) and Peter (Acts 10:9-15) later showed that God intended all along for the gentiles to be grafted into Israel (Isaiah 56:3-7; Leviticus 19:33).

It was also at Pentecost that the nation of Israel entered into its covenant marriage with God. And this was symbolic of the marriage relationship Jesus Christ was to have with spiritual Israel, the Church. Clearly, love and marriage—as representative of God's relationship with His people—is also a theme of the book of Ruth. Boaz, picturing Christ, marries

Ruth, who represents the Church. He is the husbandman who protects, provides for and cares for his bride.

Finally, another overarching theme of the book is clearly that of the kinsman-redeemer. "The Hebrew word for kinsman (*goel*) appears thirteen times in Ruth and basically means 'one who redeems'" (*The New Open Bible*, 1990, introductory notes on Ruth). The need for redemption is made clear early in the story—and its accomplishment through buying back land, Levirate marriage and the perpetuation of the family is the grand conclusion. The book thus "provides a clear picture of the kinsman-redeemer, an individual who through relationship is able to intervene on a family member's behalf. In this role Boaz prefigures Jesus Christ, who became a real human being so that He might be our kinsman, and qualify as [that is, meet the conditions of becoming] our Redeemer" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, introductory notes on Ruth). What a wonderful picture!

It should be noted that the exact time of the story of Ruth within the period of the judges is not clear. Genealogies of Judah's family, as recorded at the end of the book and in other passages (see Ruth 4:18-21; Matthew 1), show the following progression: Salmon by Rahab (the Jericho prostitute of Joshua 6 fame) begets Boaz; Boaz and Ruth have a child named Obed; and Obed begets Jesse, the father of David. Yet there were around 360 years between the time that Salmon and Rahab met and the birth of David, and it seems unlikely that there were only three generations between them. Thus, it appears that generations may have been skipped in the genealogy—between Salmon and Boaz or between Obed and Jesse or both." [END]

Before we move into the daily reading, let's review a few themes in a bit more detail:

The Levirate Marriage: The word Levirate comes from two words: Levir meaning "a husband's brother" and "ate" meaning "with". Simply it

means “With a husband’s brother”. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10 we find the instructions regarding this law. Within this practice, a brother would bear a son with his brother’s widow, which would remain the heir of the dead brother so that the family could not easily die out. This practice was also combined with the land redemption rights found in Leviticus 25:25-31, 47-55). This again was a law established to maintain the land within a family after a member died. Both the land law and the levirate marriage were intended to preserve family and land in the case of difficult circumstances/crises. How great is God that He has such wonderful laws and practices!

Hesed (aka Khesed): A survey of the Old Testament (Hill & Walton) contains this to say: “Related most frequently to covenant loyalty, the Hebrew term hesed envelops all the far-reaching implications of Yahweh’s loyalty to his covenant. The KJV frequently translates the term “mercy,” while the New American Standard Bible chooses the compound term “lovingkindness.” These only begin to introduce all the varied ways whereby God demonstrates his covenant loyalty, and this variety is reflected in the decision by the translators of the New International Version to use an array of terms: kindness, love, loyalty, and more.

Ruth is a book of “hesed” on both the human and the divine levels. The most explicit statement of this is found in Ruth’s stirring expression of commitment to Naomi (1:16-17). It is this quality that gains her Boaz’s favor (2:12). Boaz is likewise praised for the “hesed” he shows to Naomi (2:20)...

...The Lord’s hesed is introduced in 1:8-9 as the factor that will eventually lead to the successful remarriage of Naomi’s daughters-in-law so that it cannot help but be recognized in the provision of the goel (kinsman-redeemer) for Ruth.”

For anyone interested, this Bible Project video explores this Hebrew word “hesed/khesed” and this theme in about a 5-minute video:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/>

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading program states: “As the story opens, we are introduced to the family of Elimelech. We later learn that he is a close relative of one of the story's main characters, Boaz—perhaps a cousin or uncle (a brother seems unlikely as that would probably be stated). As the genealogies show, Boaz was from an important family line of Judah, descended as he was from the tribal leader in Mosaic times. So Elimelech would also have been of that important family.

But famine drives Elimelech to relocate his family southeast to the land of Moab. While his action may have been borne out of a lack of faith in God to provide for them in Israel (abandoning their inheritance in the Promised Land and his responsibility to serve as a leader in Judah), it is also possible that he simply believed this was the right way to provide for his family in such a situation, perhaps taking cues from the patriarchs, who moved to Egypt in time of famine. (Moab may have seemed even more justifiable as it was closer to home and the Moabites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot.) In any event, the times must have been quite hard on the family already. For while Elimelech's name meant "God Is My King" and his wife Naomi's meant "My Delight" or "Pleasant," they named their sons Mahlon (meaning "Sickly") and Chilion (meaning "Pining," "Failing" or "Wasting Away"). It is not clear whether these names were given at birth or later (similar to Naomi later renaming herself Mara, verse 20). But it is clear that conditions must have been pretty bad.

Apparently Elimelech dies not too long after settling in Moab. His sons are wed to local Moabite women—Mahlon to Ruth and Chilion to Orpah (compare verse 4; Ruth 4:10). This was not forbidden in the law God gave Israel, as intermarriage with Canaanites was (see Deuteronomy 7:3), though there were prohibitions related to the offspring of intermarriage with Moabites (which we will address at the end of the book). But these particular marriages produce no children. That may be because the marriages were rather short-lived (depending on when the weddings took place). The sons, it turns out, were named appropriately, as they both died early deaths 10 years after their father.

With her husband and two sons dead, and thus no men to provide for the family needs, Naomi realizes that her prospects in Moab were bleak. Seeing herself as a further burden to her daughters-in-law, and hearing that agricultural conditions in Israel had improved (Ruth 1:6), she determines to return to her homeland and entreats Ruth and Orpah to return to their families and remarry. They, however, want to go with her. But she knows the hardships each of them would face in Israel, not only as widows, but especially as foreigners—they would be impoverished *and* outsiders. And she could be of no help. As an elderly widow, there was no hope of her being married again and having additional sons to give them in marriage (verses 11-13)—this according to the custom of levirate marriage that God gave Israel, wherein a man was to marry his childless dead brother's widow in order to continue his brother's lineage (see Deuteronomy 25:5).

Orpah then departs—going "back to her people and to her gods" (Ruth 1:15). The wording here is interesting. It implies that these Moabite women had actually *left* their pagan gods when they married Mahlon and Chilion. But this was simply the rule of the day, as a wife in ancient Middle Eastern society was supposed to adopt the religion of her husband. The real test was now. Orpah's name meant "Neck," perhaps

fitting for one who turned her head to look back—and then actually *went* back to her former paganism. Indeed, it is likely that she had made no true commitment to God in the first place. Apparently neither of them had—or Naomi would probably not have lightly told them to depart from it.

But Ruth was different than Orpah. It is interesting that her name may be a Moabite modification of the Hebrew word *reuit*, meaning friendship, association or companion. Ruth certainly was motivated by true friendship for Naomi. She was a faithful companion who would not leave her dear friend even when it meant personal difficulty. Since there was no one else to care for her mother-in-law, she would stand in the gap and do what she could. This was remarkable character and devotion. But there was apparently more to it than strong friendship. At the end of her courageous and loyal commitment of verses 16-17 (the focal point of the entire narrative), she invoked the Lord as one who sincerely believed in Him. She had before been part of a dark and evil pagan society. But light had dawned through her association with the family of Elimelech. She had no doubt heard all about Israel and its God. And though the way might be hard, she wanted to be as much a part of it as she could. She would embrace what it meant to be an Israelite in covenant with the true God. The remainder of the story concerns how this remarkable choice is rewarded in a remarkable way.

We might expect Naomi to be overwhelmed and ecstatic at this decision. But her reaction seems to simply be one of resignation to the fact of Ruth coming with her (verse 18). This is terribly sad. Perhaps she was not convinced of Ruth's commitment—or perhaps she was just too fixated on concern over how this could possibly work out well for Ruth, especially considering her own predicament. As can be expected to some extent, Naomi has let the events of her life since coming to the land of Moab weigh heavily on her. And going home made it even worse. As

excited as those in Bethlehem were to see her when she and Ruth arrived there, Naomi asks them to call her Mara, which means "Bitter." What had made her house in Israel a home was the presence of her loved ones, who were now gone. "For Naomi, who had left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons, the return brutally drove home the extent of her loss" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on 1:19-21).

Moreover, she views her circumstances as God's judgment on her (perhaps indicating some faithlessness in the initial decision to resettle in Moab). But she has now returned. "The theme of *return* is prominent in this chapter. The word is even used of Ruth—an unusual word for the narrator to use since there is no indication that Ruth had ever been to Israel" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 22). Perhaps what is important here is the symbolism. The Hebrew word for return is the expression used throughout the Old Testament for repentance—rejecting our former ways and turning our lives around to go the way God originally told mankind to go. Ultimately, returning to God always brings great reward." [END]

Verse 4 – It's worth noting that while the story moves very quickly along in these first few verses, these individuals are in Moab for approximately 10 years.

Verse 5 – Adam Clarke's commentary states: "It is imagined, and not without probability, that Mahlon and Chilion are the same with Joash and Saraph, mentioned 1Chronicles 4:22, where the Hebrew should be thus translated, and Joash and Saraph, who married in Moab, and dwelt in Lehem."

Verse 6 – John Gill's commentary believes this famine that drove them to Moab was caused by the Midianites who came yearly and

destroyed/carried off their produce (see Judges 6:3) until God through Gideon freed them of that oppression.

Another idea is that the judge that God used to free them of oppression here was Ibzan (Judges 12:8) – On this theory, John Gill states: “There were two Bethlehems, one in the tribe of Zebulun, Jos_19:15 of which some think this man was; and another in the tribe of Judah, the city of Jesse and David, and of the Messiah; and Josephus says, Ibzan was of the tribe of Judah, of the city of Bethlehem; and because Boaz was of the same place, and lived in the times of the judges, the Jewish Rabbins are of opinion that he is the same with Ibzan; so Jarchi and Ben Gersom.”

Verse 17 – In an attempt to end the debate, Ruth lays out terms and then takes an oath that she will not leave Naomi. Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “May he inflict any of those punishments on me, and any worse punishment, if I part from thee till death. And it appears that she was true to her engagement; for Naomi was nourished in the house of Boaz in her old age, and became the fosterer and nurse of their son Obed, Rth_4:15, Rth_4:16.” [END]

Verse 19 – John Gill’s commentary states: “as Aben Ezra observes, this shows that Elimelech and Naomi were great personages in Bethlehem formerly, people of rank and figure, or otherwise there would not have been such a concourse of people upon her coming, and such inquiries made and questions put, had she been formerly a poor woman.”

Verse 22 – This gives us the timing of the days of Unleavened Bread as no new grain (barley) could be eaten by Israel until after the Wave Sheaf offering was presented and that occurred on the Sunday during the days of Unleavened Bread and began the 50-day count to Pentecost.