

Ruth 2016 1A

- Our study though the book of Judges has come to an end, but our journey through the time of Judges continues
 - Today we begin the study of Ruth, a small but powerful story in the Bible
 - The book of Ruth has been called one of the most important and beautiful short stories ever written
 - The German poet Goethe said Ruth was “the loveliest complete work on a small scale” ever written
 - Another literary critic said that no poet in the world has ever written a more beautiful short story
 - W. F. Albright wrote that the delicacy of the story remains unsurpassed anywhere
 - Of course, Ruth is also a book of scripture, which means it was inspired by the Spirit of God
 - Not only is the writing divine, but the very events themselves were divinely appointed
 - The Lord orchestrated the many details of this historical event to create powerful pictures of his future plans for Israel and the Gentiles
- These pictures move outward in time, like the concentric circles of a bullseye
 - First, the story of Ruth presents a picture of God’s plan to provide a monarch
 - This monarch will deliver Israel from the anarchy and self-destruction of the time of Judges
 - He will lead the people beyond doing what is right in their own eyes and toward serving God
 - This picture is at the center of the bullseye, because it will be fulfilled closest to the events of the time of Ruth
 - In only a few generations, David will come to rule Israel

- Secondly, the story creates a picture of a coming Messiah Who will redeem sinners, both Jew and Gentile, from the curse of the Law
 - Just as we saw in the time of Judges, sin is the ever-present scourge that leads us to doing what's right in our eyes, but not God's eyes
 - So God tells a story through the characters Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Obed and others in this story to show how God will ultimately save sinners from condemnation
 - In fact, the story of Ruth reveals more clearly than perhaps any other Old Testament story, how the Lord will address our sin through a redeemer
 - The second story of Ruth is the next ring out in our bullseye comparison, because the fulfillment of these events are some distance away from the days of Ruth
- Lastly, the book of Ruth reveals how the Lord will bring our age to an end and fulfill all His promises to Israel and the nations of the earth
 - Just as in our second story, this prophetic story is told symbolically through the characters and circumstances of the book
 - And since this third story deals with distant events that take place at the end of our age, it sits on the farthest outer ring of our bullseye
- In all three stories, the central theme is God's faithfulness to redeem His people and give them rest
 - He will redeem Ruth by providing a husband leading her to rest in the security of his home
 - And through Ruth, the Lord will grant her mother-in-law, Naomi rest and security in a new son
 - And through that son the Lord will provide a king to grant the nation rest
 - And through that king's line, the Lord will provide a Redeemer and King to secure eternal rest for the nation
 - And through that nation, the whole world will find redemption

- Perhaps you're beginning to see just how amazing this one little story is in your Bible
 - So as we look at this account, we want to understand all three stories, and that's how I intend to teach it
 - The three stories are woven together, so we'll spend time in each thread
 - We'll begin each chapter looking at the primary story of Ruth and her life in the time of Judges
 - But at times, we'll move into our outer rings of the bullseye to contemplate how Ruth's story pictures Christ's redemption and the events of the last days
- Keeping track of these three storylines will require careful attention to detail
 - And it wouldn't hurt to take some notes as we move through the teaching
 - And if you miss a week, be sure to listen to the recordings you miss
- So with that background, let's begin our story by reading the opening verses of the book

Ruth 1:1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

Ruth 1:2 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, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

Ruth 1:3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.

Ruth 1:4 They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.

Ruth 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

- As I've mentioned repeatedly, the story of Ruth is set in the time of Judges
 - There is some disagreement over exactly when this story took place during the 300 years of judges ruling

- There is good evidence that it took place in the first half of those years
 - One of the main characters in this story, a man named Boaz, was the son of the harlot Rahab, who was a young girl when Joshua entered the land
 - We know Boaz was an older man by the time of this story, so perhaps this account happened 80-100 years into the period of Judges
- Regardless of the specific timing, the meaning of v.1 is clear
 - This account is our third summary of life during the this time
 - The other two summaries are attached to the end of the book of Judges
 - And this one follows immediately after as a final footnote on the time
 - The good news is that this story is nothing like the first two
 - While the first two accounts were tales of hatred, violence and treachery, this story is anything but
 - It's an account of love, faithfulness, self-sacrifice and upright behavior
 - It's a story that represents the hearts of God's people living in an age and among a people who do not follow God
 - So the backdrop of Ruth is a time when men were doing what was right in their own eyes
 - And as we saw in the book of Judges, the people's sin moves God to act against them
 - For as Jesus said

Luke 16:15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.

- Therefore, we need to understand the events of Ruth as part of the larger backdrop of God acting to judge the sin of Israel

- And the first events of the story reflect that environment with a Jewish family from Bethlehem fleeing the land due to a famine
 - A certain man takes his wife and two sons and “sojourns” in Moab
 - Notice he’s described as a “certain” man of Bethlehem
 - That’s exactly the way the last two stories of Judges began
 - All three center on a certain man from Bethlehem so we will understand that these stories are connected in time and theme
 - The man, Elimelech, takes his family and leaves Bethlehem because a famine has come across the land
 - As we’ve seen elsewhere in scripture, a famine is a dire circumstance for those who are dependent on the land for their livelihood
 - People can find ways to survive for a time, but at some point the famine will force migration in search of food
- And these circumstances are not chance of course, but they are ordained by God in response to the sin of Israel
 - Consider what God spoke beforehand to Israel in their Law

Deut. 11:13 “It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul,

Deut. 11:14 that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.

Deut. 11:15 “He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Deut. 11:16 “Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them.

Deut. 11:17 “Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.

- The Lord told Israel right before they entered the land that idolatry would result in famine, among other consequences
- And now we see famine in the land

- How do we know that this famine was a judgment from God?
 - We only need return to the book of Judges briefly to remember what was happening at the time of Ruth's story

[Judg. 2:11](#) Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, [Judg. 2:12](#) and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

[Judg. 2:13](#) So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.

[Judg. 2:14](#) The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

[Judg. 2:15](#) Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

- The times of Judges were times of idolatry
- And therefore, the Lord acted in various ways to judge Israel's disobedience to the Law
- And one of those ways was to bring famine as He promised He would do
- When it came time to seek for better land, this man goes to Moab
 - This is further evidence of a man doing what was right in his own eyes
 - Moab is the historical enemy of Israel
 - You may remember the story of Lot in Genesis
 - Lot was in Sodom when the Lord determined to judge the city for its extreme sin
 - And when the city was destroyed, Lot escaped with only his two daughters
 - These daughters were so desperate for children and apparently compromised by their years growing up in ungodly Sodom that they devised a terrible plan
 - In Genesis 19 we learn that they got their father drunk
 - And then they took advantage of him so as to become pregnant by him

- The two sons born to these daughters become the fathers of two of Israel's greatest enemies, Ammon and Moab
- So here we have a Jew suffering under God's judgment for sin, seeking refuge from Israel's enemies
 - He is responding to God's chastisement by running from God, not toward Him in repentance
 - Obviously, Elimelech wasn't personally responsible for all the sin in the land but he's certainly part of it
 - And his behavior gives additional evidence that men did what was right in their own eyes
 - There is no reason for us to assume that the Lord wanted Elimelech and his family to leave the land God gave them
- Instead, it's apparent they are running from God's discipline and seeking a human solution to a divine problem
 - And running from God never improves our situation
 - Whatever trials and tribulations we encounter with God, nothing gets better without God
 - Elimelech and his family were suffering in Bethlehem during the days of that famine certainly
 - But that suffering was the direct result of their disobedience to God's law, so the judgment was deserved
 - God intended it to motivate the people to set aside their idolatry and return to a faithful walk with Him
 - And it could have that effect if only they would allow it to work in their hearts
 - Consider the situation from the perspective of a parent with a rebellious child
 - If you ground that child, or remove certain privileges, you do so in the hope it will motivate the child to be more obedient in the future
 - Now imagine how you would feel if your child circumvented your restrictions to escape your discipline

- Are things going to be better or worse for that child?
- That's how we should understand Elimelech's choice to flee to Moab
- We begin to see the negative effects of his choice almost immediately in the verses that follow
 - Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons Mahlon and Chilion enter Moab
 - Soon thereafter the patriarch Elimelech dies while in the land of his enemies
 - How ironic
 - He fled Bethlehem to save his life
 - Only to die in the land of his enemies
 - This turn of events is even more ironic when you remember that the name Bethlehem means "place of bread"
 - So Elimelech leaves the place of bread seeking bread
 - And he fled from death only to find death
 - This is exactly what happens when we run from God's love
 - Discipline is a form of love, and God disciplines His children because that's what loving fathers do
 - When we run from God's love, we should expect to find less of what we are seeking
 - And in its place we will see only an increase in the sadness that our sin produced
- But the father's sin took an even greater toll in this family
 - Elimelech's choice to bring his family into the land of Moab resulted in his sons marrying Moabite women
 - Mahlon and Chilion married Orpah and Ruth
 - This decision was another act contrary to God's law

Deut. 23:3 "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord,

[Deut. 23:4](#) because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

[Deut. 23:5](#) “Nevertheless, the Lord your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you.

[Deut. 23:6](#) “You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days.

- Clearly, the Law precludes the people from seeking peace with Moabites
- And yet here we see the sons of Elimelech doing just that
- They were seeking a union with Moab through these women
- Furthermore, the Law precluded Jews from marrying the Gentile nations of Canaan

[Deut. 7:1](#) “When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,

[Deut. 7:2](#) and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

[Deut. 7:3](#) “Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.

[Deut. 7:4](#) “For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.

- This passage only lists seven of the surrounding nations, but these seven represent the whole of Israel’s neighbors
- And like Ammon, one of those neighbors was also Moab
- These sons have acted directly contrary to the word of God in marrying these women
- Obviously, the sons’ mistakes have roots in their father’s sinful choice to leave the land
 - Now that the boys are living in Moab, when it comes time for them to find a wife, they look around and only see Moabites
 - That doesn’t excuse their choice to marry outside Israel

- But we can see how the father's sin led to the sons' sin
- And as a result of all this bad decision-making, the family suffers yet more loss
 - After living with these women about ten years, the men die
 - And in their death, this "family" is now reduced to three very vulnerable widows
 - It's a remnant of a family
 - But it's a family where none of them are related to one another except by marriages which have now left them widows
- When we look at these circumstances from Naomi's perspective, it's all bad
 - She's been thrust out of her own land and destined to wander in the land of her enemies
 - While she's there, her family dwindles and weakens
 - The family seems destined to disappear altogether
 - But if we reverse the lens and look at these circumstances from the perspective of the Moabite women, things look a little different
 - By Law they were prohibited from ever entering the assembly of Israel
 - They could never join in the worship before the tabernacle or in a Jewish feast
 - Moreover, they could never marry into the family of God so as to become part of that family
 - Like all Moabites, they were strangers to the covenants God gave Israel, without a knowledge of the living God and without hope for His mercy
 - But what was impossible by Law became possible by grace
 - Even as God was working to discipline this Jewish family, He was prepared to use their sin to accomplish good for a Gentile woman
 - The Moabites could never have gone into Israel and found God

- They would never have been allowed to see the tabernacle or learn the word of God
- They would have remained on the east side of the Jordan and lived and died without coming to know God
- The Law of God was a barrier for them that they could never cross
- So God in His mercy and grace worked through a disobedient Jewish family to bring the knowledge of Himself into this corner of the Gentile world
 - And over those ten years this family, disobedient though they were, introduced these Moabite women to the living God
 - While God was holding a Jewish family accountable for their sin under a Jewish Law, He was also extending His grace to Gentiles
 - He was turning all things to good for those who loved Him and are called according to His purpose
- As you can probably sense already, this is the point where I introduce the second story of Ruth, of God working to provide a redeemer
 - The woman Naomi is a Jewish wife, while her widowed daughters-in-law are Gentiles
 - As such, they become pictures of two groups of people on earth
 - Naomi represents the Jewish people who are in covenant with the living God
 - While the two women represent the nations of Gentiles
 - The Jewish people are a people God created out of nothing beginning with Abraham's son, Isaac
 - They were established supernaturally by a promise that God gave Abraham
 - And they exist for one reason: to accomplish God's program of redemption
 - Through the Jewish people the Lord brings into existence everything required for our redemption

- Through the Jewish people came the covenants of promise on which our salvation is based
 - Through them He brought the Law and tabernacle service which picture and explain the need for redemption
 - Later He brought the word of God through Jewish prophets to foretell the solution God will provide
 - And eventually through Israel came the Messiah, the One foretold and promised
- But as God contemplated His plan, He determined to work through a people of His own making
 - He wanted to preclude the possibility any person or nation could claim they had something to offer God
 - Had God selected the Babylonians or Egyptians to bring these things into existence, we might assume these people were inherently better people and thereby diminish God's glory
 - So instead, the Lord made His own people, the Jewish nation, out of nothing
 - And He made sure no one could see Jews as inherently worthy for such a role

Deut. 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Deut. 7:7 "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Deut. 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Nevertheless, for many generations the Jewish people alone were able to know and receive the things of God
- Gentiles, like these Moabite women, were excluded from the things of God
- As Paul wrote:

[Eph. 2:11](#) Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands –

[Eph. 2:12](#) remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

[Eph. 2:13](#) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

- By the grace of God, we Gentiles were given an opportunity to know and follow the Living God
 - And we came to that awareness by means of the Jewish people
 - When we read the Bible, we're reading words delivered to us by Jewish men
 - And when we come to know our Savior, we are receiving a Jewish Messiah
 - And when we glory in God's forgiveness, we are rejoicing over a Jewish covenant into which we were grafted by faith
- That is the mercy we see beginning to work in the lives of these two Gentile women
 - They were strangers to the things of God
 - But they have been introduced to that God through a Jewish family
 - And they have become attached to that family through a covenant
 - Over the next chapter, we see what happens to the two women
 - And in the process we see this picture of Christ, the Redeemer of Jew and Gentile, building as well
 - And next week, we will also introduce our third story, the account of end times represented in these same details