

Ruth 2016 1B

- Last week we spent most of our time introducing the structure and character of this book by reading vs. 1-5
 - Let's re-read those verses to begin again this morning

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 we saw last week, this beautiful love story revolves around a single Jewish family in the time of judges
 - A man, his wife and two sons flee a famine in the land of Judah
 - The famine was the result of God's judgment on the land for their sin under the covenant
 - This family decides to try to escape God's judgment by fleeing east into the land of Israel's enemies
- But they can't run far enough to escape God's authority
 - And so during the years they spend in Moab, the father and his two sons die
 - Leaving behind the mother and two daughters-in-law who had married the sons while in Moab
 - All three women are now widowed and destitute
- During our introduction of the story, we also learned that the book of Ruth contains additional layers of meaning
 - Embedded in our story is another lesson picturing Jesus as Israel's redeemer

- As well as a third story of end times that tells how the Lord will bring this age to a conclusion
- A picture is a prophetic story that uses the characters and circumstances of a story to represent another set of characters and events in the future
 - One character stands for another future character
 - One situation represents other future circumstances
 - Scripture is literally filled with pictures like this
 - For example, Jesus told us that the story of Noah is a picture of how the world will come to an end
 - The story of Moses and holding the bronze serpent on a staff pictured Jesus on the cross
 - Abraham taking Isaac to the top of the mountain in Genesis 22 is also a picture of Jesus being sacrificed on the cross
 - And the Passover lamb is yet another picture of the same thing
 - In fact, all the Jewish feasts are pictures of events related to either Jesus' first coming or His second coming
 - So why does the Lord create these pictures in His word?
 - First, because they teach us about the meaning of certain events
 - When you see a picture behind events that happened long ago like the Passover, they help to shed understanding on why those events needed to happen
 - Ultimately, that meaning will always point us to the story of Christ
 - Secondly, pictures are evidence of the sovereignty of God as He moves all events of History toward achieving a common purpose
 - Just consider what it says about God's power when we see Him orchestrate the movements of people, kings, armies and nations in order to create these pictures
 - It tells us unequivocally that all things exist to serve Him
 - And it confirms for us the trustworthiness of the word of God and the power of the One who authored it

- So let's return to our story in chapter 1, but not to the story we started last week...
 - Instead, let's start a different story...
 - Like our first story, our second story also begins with a wife and her husband
 - But in this story, the wife's name is Israel and the Husband is Jehovah
 - But this husband is no ordinary man
 - In scripture, God often describes Himself as the Husband of Israel and Israel as His wife

Is. 54:4 "Fear not, for you will not be put to shame;
 And do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced;
 But you will forget the shame of your youth,
 And the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

Is. 54:5 "For your husband is your Maker,
 Whose name is the Lord of hosts;
 And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel,
 Who is called the God of all the earth.

Is. 54:6 "For the Lord has called you,
 Like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
 Even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected,"
 Says your God.

Is. 54:7 "For a brief moment I forsook you,
 But with great compassion I will gather you.

Is. 54:8 "In an outburst of anger
 I hid My face from you for a moment,
 But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,"
 Says the Lord your Redeemer.

- As we see in this passage, the Lord compares Israel to His wife and calls Himself her Husband
 - But interestingly, the Lord says Israel is like a wife who has rejected her Husband
 - He's referring to the way Israel rejected the Lord by the forsaking of the covenant, abandoning the Law and worshipping idols
 - This was the pattern in the time of judges, the time of Ruth

- Even more interesting, the Lord speaks about a time in Israel's history when the Lord disciplined Israel by making her a "widow"
 - The Lord forsook Israel because of her sin against her Husband
 - The Lord made Israel like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit
 - This is one of the classic ways in which the Bible describes disobedient Israel
 - The Lord placed Israel outside her land, so Israel finds herself grieving, alone and without the Lord's blessing
- So in Ruth, the second story is what the Lord does to His disobedient wife as a result of her sin against Him
 - Last week we learned that God promised to bring drought to the people of Israel if they sinned under the Old Covenant
 - But there is more to God's judgment than just famine

[Lev. 26:14](#) 'But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, **[Lev. 26:15](#)** if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, **[Lev. 26:16](#)** I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

[Lev. 26:19](#) 'I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze.

[Lev. 26:22](#) 'I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.

[Lev. 26:38](#) 'But you will perish among the nations, and your enemies' land will consume you.

[Lev. 26:39](#) 'So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them.

- The Lord told Israel that if they failed to keep all His commandments, then He would bring a number of devastating curses on His people
 - Specifically, the Lord says He will weaken them in several ways

- He says I will consume them, causing them to waste away, bringing wasting diseases, draining away their life
- He would make their sky like iron and earth like bronze, which is a reference to drought
- He would rob them of their children, making them fewer in number
- They would perish among the nations (Gentiles), rotting away in the land of your enemies
- Do you recognize this pattern?
 - Think back for a moment to the names of the characters from our opening lesson on Ruth
 - We had Elimelech, the husband
 - His name means God of the King
 - We had Naomi, the wife, whose name means lovely (as in the lovely Jewish wife)
- They lived in the times of Judges, a time marked by Israel's disobedience
 - And then the Lord brought drought and famine
 - And the famine scattered the family into the land of their enemies
- Then while they are in this land, the family begins to waste away and reduce in number
 - Soon Naomi is without a husband, made a widow
 - And soon her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, die as well
 - Interestingly, the name Mahlon means sick, weak or afflicted
 - And the name Chilion means pining, destruction, consumption, failing
 - Their names foreshadow their lives in Moab
 - They succumb to weaknesses and die while in the land of their enemies

- The circumstances of this family closely parallel the promises spoken concerning Israel
- Just as Leviticus promised, the sons of Israel (i.e., these sons of Elimelech) are wasting away during their exile
 - They would be reduced in number while they lived in the land of their enemies
 - We're learning that the events of Ruth are also telling the story of how God will deal with His disobedient wife, Israel
- The exile and death of Elimelech and his sons pictures the eventual exile and wasting away of generations of Israel to come
 - These events eventually came to pass when Israel suffered under the conquest of various Gentile nations
 - And in the story of Ruth the Lord is explaining that these events were necessary as a result of His wife's disobedience to her Husband
- Now it's one thing to draw a simple connection between a Jewish character in the story of Ruth and the Jewish people as a whole
 - But it's another thing altogether to suggest that even the smallest detail of their lives can hold important prophetic meaning
 - But that's exactly the case
 - The prophetic connections in the book of Ruth go far beyond the meaning of names or a character's identity
 - For example, I want to draw your attention to a little word at the end of verse 4
 - The word in Hebrew is *ke* – meaning *about*
 - Scripture is careful to tell us that Naomi was in the land of Moab for "about 10 years"
 - The Bible is never inexact
 - Every Hebrew and Greek word in the original manuscripts was carefully chosen by God for a specific purpose and meaning
 - So here when we see the author use the term "about 10 years" it's not because he didn't know the exact date

- But because the word “about” adds meaning that’s important to the story
- And because the phrase contributes to the picture being created concerning Israel
- As I’m sure many of you know, numbers in scripture are intentionally loaded with symbolic meaning
 - That is not to say that numbers don’t have a true literal meaning...they absolutely do
 - But God orchestrates events in the world to align with certain numbers (like seven days for Creation, etc.)
 - He does this to supply important clues concerning His purposes and His plans
 - By observing these patterns carefully, we can learn even more than what first meets the eye
 - For example, the first ten numbers have the following meanings in scripture:
 - The number 1 stands for God’s sovereignty
 - 2 means division
 - 3 means the Godhead
 - 4 means the Earth
 - 5 means grace
 - 6 is the number of fallen man
 - 7 is perfect completion
 - 8 is a new beginning
 - 9 is judgment
 - And 10 is the number of testimony
- Let’s take a close look at that verse in Ruth 1:4
 - Naomi and her family are living in Moab about 10 years
 - About means they have been there at least 9 years

- 9 is the number indicating judgment
- And saying “about” ten suggests that the tenth year approaches but as not yet arrived
- Therefore, saying “about 10 years” is a way of saying we’re leaving a period of judgment and entering a year of testimony
 - Naomi’s family has endured a time of judgment in Moab because they fled a famine during the time of the judges, a time of sinfulness
 - God left them there for 9 years to communicate His sovereign purposes in their exile – they were exiled in judgment for sin
- But now at about the tenth year, circumstances change and a transition is beginning
 - The period of God’s judgment is coming to an end for Naomi and what’s left of her family (a remnant)
 - And redemption, a new testimony, draws near
 - But the next year will be a year that testifies to God’s faithfulness to His people
- It also pictures a year of testimony in our second story about the Husband Jehovah and His wife Israel
 - Just as Naomi’s period of judgment gradually transitions to a new time of testimony
 - So will Israel’s time of exile eventually give way to a time of testimony
 - To understand that transition, we first need to understand a little of how Israel becomes a wife forsaken by her Husband, the Lord
 - As I mentioned earlier, the Lord tells Israel that disobedience to His Covenant will result in the nation being scattered into the nations of the world
 - The Lord promises this most specifically in Deuteronomy

Deut. 28:62 “Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, because you did not obey the Lord your God.

[Deut. 28:63](#) "It shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.

[Deut. 28:64](#) "Moreover, the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known.

[Deut. 28:65](#) "Among those nations you shall find no rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul.

[Deut. 28:66](#) "So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you will be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life.

- This promised scattering eventually takes place in several stages
 - Many of the tribes are scattered when the Assyrians capture them and take them out of their land
 - Later the rest of the tribes are scattered by the Babylonian invasion in 605 BC, which began a period called the Age of the Gentiles
 - Neither of these events accomplished the complete scattering of Israel though
 - The total and final dispersion of Israel takes place after Israel rejects their Messiah
 - So in AD 70 the nation is set outside their land in a final dramatic fashion when Rome conquered the city
 - Jesus warned believing Jews to escape before this judgment fell upon the city

[Luke 21:20](#) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

[Luke 21:21](#) "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;

[Luke 21:22](#) because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

[Luke 21:23](#) "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to this people;

[Luke 21:24](#) and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

- Jesus gave those who would listen the clues they needed to understand how to escape the coming destruction
 - When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then escape
 - Jesus says there will come the days when what is written will be fulfilled
 - The things to be fulfilled are the things we read in Deuteronomy 28
 - The time had come for Israel to be scattered as God promised, led captive into all the nations as Jesus said
 - And once they are scattered, the rest of the curses will follow; the wasting away, reducing in number, etc.
 - Jesus said that during this time of exile Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by Gentiles
 - And this scattering will continue until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled
 - The attack on Jerusalem in AD 70 initiated a period of judgment upon Israel in keeping with God's promises to His unfaithful wife
 - And so like Naomi in the story of Ruth, Israel has been wandering in the land of her enemies ever since
 - But also like Naomi, Israel's time of wandering in judgment must eventually transition to a period of regathering in preparation for a new testimony
 - God also spoke prophetically about not only a period of judgment but also a period of regathering

[Ezek. 20:33](#) "As I live," declares the Lord God, "surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.

[Ezek. 20:34](#) "I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out;

[Ezek. 20:35](#) and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

[Ezek. 20:36](#) "As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you," declares the Lord God.

[Ezek. 20:37](#) "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant;

[Ezek. 20:38](#) and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the Lord.

- The Lord declared that the time spent wandering outside the land was a time of judgment, a time when Israel was passing under the rod
 - And in that time God would purge out the rebels, those who had hearts to disobey and reject the Lord
 - He declares those rebels will not enter the land of Israel
 - He is speaking about the Kingdom to come
 - Those who have hearts to reject the Lord will not be permitted to enter the Kingdom
 - But the Lord will bring some in Israel into righteousness for His name's sake

[Ezek. 36:17](#) "Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.

[Ezek. 36:18](#) "Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols.

[Ezek. 36:19](#) "Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.

[Ezek. 36:20](#) "When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the Lord; yet they have come out of His land.'

[Ezek. 36:21](#) "But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.

[Ezek. 36:22](#) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

[Ezek. 36:23](#) "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

[Ezek. 36:24](#) "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

- If the Lord were to wait for someone in Israel to have a heart to follow Him, He would be waiting a very long time...an eternity

- So the Lord declares that He will reach out to restore disobedient Israel for His own name's sake
 - The Lord has promised to bring Israel into her kingdom
 - And He will keep that promise because His faithfulness is on the line
 - And He will be faithful to His promises
- Therefore, the people will be set outside their land as just punishment for their sins of idolatry under the Law
 - We can certainly understand the Lord's desire to scatter His people
 - Remember all the terrible things we've learned from the time of Judges alone, to say nothing of the things that follow
- But our Lord is merciful and loving so He will bring a remnant of Israel back into her land
 - And in that regathering the Lord prepares to bring His wife back into obedience
 - Ultimately, He will bring her into a period of testimony and redemption
 - Again, He does these things for His own name's sake, not because Israel has done anything to deserve it
- That's where our second story is headed
 - Israel has been in exile for the past two millennia
 - Less than 100 years ago, the nation began to regather in her land
 - That regathering is our sign to know that Israel is moving from a time of judgment to a time of testimony
 - That promise of Ezekiel 36 is being fulfilled in our very days
 - Speaking in the Bible's language of numbers, it's been about 10 years for Israel, figuratively speaking
 - She has seen much despair and misery during her years of wandering under judgment

- And yet judgment is giving way to testimony even before our eyes
- We've only scratched the surface of this second story, to say nothing of our first story
 - Next week we'll return to the story of Naomi and her daughters-in-law
 - And as we see where events take them, we'll continue to examine how that story reflects the story of Jehovah and Israel