

Ruth (Obedience) (The Will Of God) (Salvation)

The Book Of Ruth

The Basic Bible Truth #1

God gives us rules to live by. They are like a fence that keeps us inside a set of boundary lines. Fences work both ways, though. They also keep unwanted things out of our lives.

The Basic Bible Truth #2

God is sovereign. He can and will do whatever he desires. When God created the world, He did not just set things in place and give everything a little push and then step back and watch what happened next. God is described as ever involved in the affairs of men, lovingly steering some, guiding others, to accomplish His perfect will.

The Basic Bible Truth #3

The Old Testament has some fascinating pictures of New Testament theology hidden in the stories and laws. The law of the Kinsman-Redeemer is one of the least known, but most wonderful, shadows of salvation to be found. And the book of Ruth is the only place in Scripture that this law is played out completely. The details and parallels to salvation are stunning.

The Object

(None)

I usually do not try to cover the entire book of Ruth in one sitting. There is too much information here to do it justice. I generally split it up into three lessons. #1 covers Ruth 1, #2 covers Ruth 2, and #3 covers Ruth 3 and 4. If there is a “chick flick” in the Bible, this is it. A story of man meets woman, romance, and marriage.

The Lesson #1

The Prodigal Family

The setting of the book of Ruth is during the time of the judges in Israel. They had been given the Law many years previous, but everyone did as they saw fit in regards to religion. And that attitude cost them dearly. The book of Judges is an account of a vicious cycle of life for the nation. Things went well, they forgot God, God brought punishment, they remembered God and cried out to Him, He sent a deliverer, things went well again, they forgot God...on and on through the entire book we see the cycle replayed over and over.

And so, in the first few verses of Ruth, we find the nation at a low point—punishment from God was being doled out and life was difficult. Rather than obey God, Elimelech and Naomi took their tiny family away from the borders of Israel and into Moabite territory. That was expressly forbidden, because God knew that to intermix with the surrounding nations would only bring Israel down to their lowest level. Ignoring God's direct command, they went East into Moab to live while the famine raged in Israel. The people of Moab were a somewhat friendly sort to the Israelites at this juncture in history, though it had not always been so.

As the Israelites traveled through the desert, years previous, it was the Moabites, led by their king, Balak, who attempted to curse the people of Israel. They did not succeed in that effort but did eventually cause great harm to Israel by drawing many from Israel to indulge in mixing the worship of their god Chemosh with sexual promiscuity. What they did was detestable in God's eyes and He condemned them for their behavior. Chemosh had many similarities with Molech, the god of the Amalekites. Allow me to describe just one aspect of their worship experience, to give you a better understanding of why God despised them so much. Chemosh was a large, hollow, cast iron idol that stood with its arms held out as someone who might carry a log. A raging fire was built inside the idol until it was red hot. Then infants were laid on the glowing red arms and burned alive as the people watched in worship. This kind of act became known as "The Act of Grinning" because, as the child died, the facial muscles contracted and the child seemed to be smiling in death. It was gruesome, hideous, and all too common. This is the culture into which Elimelech and Naomi immersed their children, Mahlon and Kilgion. Elsewhere in Scripture God refers to Moab as His wash basin. (That is a gentlemanly reference to a toilet.)

The prodigal family stayed 10 years, and suffered greatly. Elimelech died, and without a spiritual leader and living in a darkened country, the two boys intermarried with the local residents. Marriage is difficult at best. Even more difficult across cultural barriers. And then the two young men died as well, leaving three grieving widows, destitute in a culture that did not respect widowhood. With nothing left, Naomi finally looked toward home, in Israel, and decided to go back. Her future there was as bleak as could be imagined. She would never have a job and a steady income. Her future looked to be a life of begging and asking for charity. Her two daughters-in-law were faced with a choice, either go along with Naomi or stay behind at home. Orpah stayed behind, but Ruth had caught a glimpse of the only true God, if even for a moment, and wanted that in her life. She told Naomi, in no uncertain terms, that she would go with her to her home and stay there with her in Israel. It is mentioned at least 7 times in this little book that Ruth was a Moabite. A nation so despised by God that he said that for 10 generations, no one from Moab should be allowed to be a part of Israel. And yet, here was Ruth, a dynamic personality, a beautiful woman with tremendous character, a Moabite, coming to live in Israel as an Israelite. And not just any Israelite. We find Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus later in Matthew.

The Lesson #2

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Behind the scenes of life is a God who is ever interested in our lives. He is lovingly guiding us towards what is for our best, completely often out of our sight and thoughts, and yet His hand is still evident if you look carefully. As I look back on my own life, I can clearly see that God put me where I am by His choice. Nothing just "happens" in God's world. He is influencing and leading lives constantly. Sometimes we forget just how big He is.

In the life of Ruth, we get to see first hand this loving concern play out. God's ultimate plan is that Ruth meet Boaz, they fall in love and get married and have children. It must happen, because the family line that will be used to bring Jesus into the world passes right through them both. A meeting like this, though, would be highly unlikely. Understand that Ruth, from the eyes of anyone in their culture who

might be watching, has everything going against her. Boaz is wealthy, Ruth has nothing. Boaz is well respected in the community, Ruth is a disdained Moabite. Boaz is an older man, along in years, Ruth is a young widow. Let's watch God work.

In the Law, God provided for the poor of the nation. In our culture, our government hands out free money to the poor in the form of welfare checks and food stamps, among other things. I firmly believe it is a disservice to the poor to simply give them things. God's method was better. He allowed them the dignity of working for what they got. That simple activity, to be able to look back and tell yourself that you provided for what you needed, is worth much more than we want to admit today. Dignity is an important character trait, and our system of taking care of the poor does not provide much of that. And the result is that we have generational poverty, where children grow up in the system, believing that that is the way life is and diving into the same poverty that their parents experienced. We have given and given to many of the poor, with few escaping the vicious cycle of living with their hand out and government providing.

Naomi and Ruth were facing dire poverty. They had no relatives to provide for them, especially Ruth, the Moabite. But the Law said that during harvest, the poor were to be allowed to enter the fields behind the harvesters and pick up anything left behind. It was actually quite specific. The harvest crews could go over the fields only once, anything that fell to the ground they were not allowed to pick up, and the poor were to be allowed to gain access to the field and spend as much time as needed to glean whatever was left behind. The implication for the wealthy, and for those who were considerate towards the poor, was to be less than careful with your harvesting, being sure to leave enough behind for the people gleaning behind you. God had said that He would bless those who took care of the poor in this way. So Naomi told Ruth to go and glean in a field somewhere so that they would at least have a meal or two.

Now you may ask yourself how did God accomplish the feat of getting Ruth into Boaz' field? If you find yourself thinking that God only moves in greatly visible ways, you may be sadly mistaken. Let me assure you that as Ruth walked down the road that day looking for a field, the clouds did not suddenly pull together and form the shape of a heart directly over the field of Boaz. God can move our hearts in ways that only He understands. Needless to say, He achieved His goal of getting Ruth into the field of Boaz that morning. I recall as a student in college I attended a roller skating party on a whim. As was the custom then, there came a time in the evening when the lights went down, the music slowed and the announcement came over the loud speaker, "Couples skate only." I was a typically shy guy and started towards a group of girls I recognized to ask one to skate. Just as I arrived on that side of the roller skating rink, the girl that I had my eye on was asked to skate by another person, and they took off. I was face to face with another girl I did not know at all and in an attempt to avoid the awkwardness, I asked her to skate. She said yes, and off we went around the rink. She asked me 4 times during the skate what my name was—she kept forgetting. I thought nothing more of it that night. I have been married to that young lady now for 42 years. How God brought us together still amazes me.

As we read the story, Boaz came to the field to check on harvest and noticed Ruth out in the field gleaning. We get the impression that Boaz had heard about her previously and had admired her character from afar. Notice how quickly things moved along. Harvesting of the grain began, Boaz noticed Ruth probably mid morning, and they had their first date at noon. Boaz asked her to come and eat lunch with him. He had definitely taken notice of her, and it became even more evident when he told his harvesters to be a little sloppy with their work and drop some extra when she was close behind them.

The gleaning and implied building of relationship continued for about 6 weeks. We find near the end of the chapter that Boaz was their kinsman-redeemer. That will become significant shortly. Was Boaz interested in marriage? Absolutely! But according to the Law, it was not his place to ask for her hand in marriage. Believe it or not, the proposal must originate from her.

Lesson #3

Will You Please Do What The Law Says, And Marry Me?

Naomi wanted the best for Ruth. She had enough knowledge of the Old Testament Law of Moses to understand that there was something there that she needed to explain to Ruth. The Law of the kinsman-redeemer seems odd to us from our cultural viewpoint. It is explained in detail in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Essentially, it stated that a widow who had not had a son, could ask the nearest of kin, the kinsman-redeemer, to marry her and the first son conceived would bear the deceased father's name. To deny this right of marriage to the widow could result in very public and humiliating disgrace.

This seemingly odd law is actually a very interesting picture of salvation in the New Testament. As Ruth takes this course in her life, we will stop at moments and look at the parallels to becoming a Christian.

1. The kinsman-redeemer must be a relative. Jesus took on human flesh to be our redeemer.
2. The kinsman-redeemer must be free of encumbrances that would keep him from doing his appointed responsibilities. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life.
3. The kinsman-redeemer must have the ability to pay or respond to the need. Jesus is God Almighty, the owner of everything that is.
4. The kinsman-redeemer must be willing to pay the cost. *For God so loved the world that He gave is only begotten Son.*

Naomi told Ruth to:

1. Wash herself—Titus 3:5—*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*
2. Anoint herself with perfume—I John 2:27-- *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit – just as it has taught you, remain in him.*
3. Dress in her best dress—Isaiah 61:10— *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*
4. Claim her redeemer—Revelation 3:20—*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

Having made all of the preparations for her proposal, Ruth ventured to the threshing floor. Take note that she could have done this in a very public way. She knew who she was in the eyes of Israel, a Moabite, and if Boaz refused her, she had every right to disgrace him publically, but she chose a thoughtful way to avoid possible humiliation for Boaz. Secretly at night, she made a simple gesture towards him and if he would have refused, she would have slipped off into the night and no one would have been the wiser. We as humans, are born with a sin nature, dead to spiritual things. We need a Savior and must take the initiative to choose our redeemer, Jesus. God will not force Himself upon us.

Ruth was nothing but a poor, Moabite widow. She deserved nothing from Boaz. But Boaz loved her and recognized that she needed him and did all of the work to make this marriage happen. We do not earn or produce our salvation. Jesus did all of the work. Moabites were despised people. Our sin puts us in the category of disgusting and vile. Note that Boaz mentioned a relative who was closer than he, who had first chance to do the honorable thing. The only key player in this story that is nameless, represents the Old Testament Law. The Law had the first opportunity to unite us with God, but it failed to do so. It required Jesus to step into the picture and do all that the Law was incapable of doing. Jesus said that he came to fulfill the Law, not do away with it.

J. Vernon McGee put it this way. The romance of redemption is a beautiful thing to see.