The Book of Ruth
“Whither thou goest, I will go”
Introduction

- Story of a little foreign girl who came out of paganism and idolatry in the land of Moab into knowledge of the religion of the Hebrew people of Israel
- Appears to be a work of fiction – a parable, an allegory
- Ruth, a Moabitess, marries an Israelite who dies; after his death she adopts his people, his land, and his God as her own
Just 4 chapters

I. In the land of Moab (Chapter 1)
II. In the fields of Boaz (Chapter 2)
III. On the threshing floor of Boaz (Chapter 3)
IV. In the heart and home of Boaz (Chapter 4)
Chapter 1: In the Land of Moab

Ruth 1:1
Sounds like a newspaper report

What the incident is, where it took place, and how it took place

“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 sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (Ruth 1:1).
Man of Bethlehem-judah

- Bethlehem means “House of Bread”
- Judah means “Praise”
- Story of Ruth begins and ends there – Bethlehem-judah
- Certain man leaves “House of Bread” and “Praise” to go live in Moab (described in Psalm 108:9 as a “Washpot” – i.e., a garbage can)
Interesting Family

- Name of man = Elimelech (means “my God is King”)
- Name of his wife = Naomi (means “pleasant”)
- Name of his sons = Mahlon (means “unhealthy”) and Chilion (means weakness)
Too long in Moab: Trouble Comes

- My God is King, Merry Sunshine, Unhealthy, and Puny
- The husband dies
- Sons take Moabite wives (Orpah and Ruth)
- Dwelled there ten years
- They broke the Mosaic Law and took wives of Moab and lived in apostasy (abandonment of one’s religious faith)
Orpah and Ruth

- Orpah means “deer” or “fawn”
- Ruth means “beauty,” “personality”
- Both sons die, leaving wives childless, but in their homeland
What does Naomi have left?

- She has lost her entire family
- All she has left is two daughters-in-law
- AND …
- The famine is over in Bethlehem (House of Bread and Praise)
- She wants to go home!
Naomi speaks to Orpah and Ruth

- She tells them what the situation will be like in Bethlehem
- Moabites and Israelites didn’t have anything to do with each other
- They will never be able to marry again
- It would mean perpetual widowhood and poverty because she (Naomi) had lost all of her property
What does Naomi do?

- She encourages them to return to their own mothers.
- She tells them if they stay in the land of Moab, they can remarry among their own people.
And if they don’t?

- They won’t have a chance
- Their first decision: “We’ll go with you”

Naomi reminds them, though, that she can give them no more husbands (per Mosaic Law)
“Let’s face facts”

If you go with me, you can never get married.

My people couldn’t identify themselves with you.

It’d be too costly, in too many ways.

You will be outcasts because we Israelites) just don’t have any dealings with the Moabites.
We come to the parting of the ways

- Orpah kisses Naomi and turns back (we never hear of her again)
- Ruth clings to Naomi
“Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my god: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16,17).

Important decision

“Whither thou goest, I will go.”
“And where thou lodgest, I will lodge.”
She will not only go with Naomi, she will also identify herself with Naomi.
“Thy people shall be my people.”
She knows she is forsaking her people, her religion, and she is identifying herself with Naomi’s people and with Naomi’s monotheistic religion.
“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem”

Prodigal family is coming home.

But ... it’s not a family now.

It’s a widow, Naomi, and a foreign daughter-in-law, Ruth, also a widow.
“Call me Mara”

Naomi tells her friends to call her “Mara,” which means “Bitter.”

“So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab; and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest” (Ruth 1:22).
Chapter 2: In the Field of Boaz

- Boaz introduced to reader
- Hero of the story
- The kinsman-redeemer (more later)
- Kinsman of Ruth’s husband
- Name *Boaz* means “strength”
- A man of wealth
- Also a man of law and a man of war
Strange laws

To take care of the poor, landowners, by law, could not clean the corners of their fields during reaping season.

Landowners could not go back to “fetch” forgotten sheaves in their fields, either.

These bits of wheat or barley were specifically for strangers, the fatherless, and the widows willing to pick them up for their families (by hand).

The process was called “gleaning.”
How much grain was there?

- Estimated: 30% was left in the field to be gleaned
- Excellent system to provide for the poor people of the day
- Not considered a system of charity
Where Did Ruth Glean?

- She happened to find her way to Boaz’s field.
- Boaz = represents capitalist of his day
- Reapers = represent labor of their day
“Whose damsel is this?”

Boaz asks (loosely translated), “Well. where in the world has she been that I haven’t met her before?”

Servant informs Boaz that Ruth came back with Naomi from Moab

Implication is that Boaz would not want to make Ruth’s acquaintance

Love at first sight?
Boaz Urges Ruth to Glean

- Goes out of his way to urge Ruth not to go to another field to glean, but to glean only in his field
- Give his “cloak of protection” to her as she gleans in his field
- Very fortunate for Ruth – she is, after all, a widow and a woman from Moab
Ruth’s Reaction

She “fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground”

She said, “Why have I found grace in thine eyes … seeing I am a stranger?” (Ruth 2:10).
“It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband” (Ruth 2:11).

Obviously the little community had been gossiping about how well Ruth had been treating Naomi (not deserting her, caring for her, gleaning for her).

Boaz realizes the sacrifices Ruth has made out of loyalty and love.
Boaz Instructs His Workmen

“Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not”

“And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not” (Ruth 2:15-16).
Naomi Knows Boaz

- Ruth takes the ephah (bushel) of barley home to Naomi, who asks her where she gleaned.
- Ruth tells her it was in the fields of Boaz.
- Naomi says that Boaz is “one of our next kinsman” (Ruth 2:20).
Second Strange Law: Kinsman Redeemer

- No corresponding modern law
- Nearest Male Blood Relative
- Duty of K-R to redeem property of any unable to redeem his inheritance due to poverty
- But, there was one closer than Boaz … wait and see …
Chapter 3: On the Threshingfloor

- Naomi, a regular “matchmaker”!
- Ruth continues to glean for the duration of the six week harvest, all under the protection of Boaz
Another Strange Law

“If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger; her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead” (Deut. 25: 5-9).
Childless Widow: Strange Position, Indeed

- Law intended to protect womanhood
- Nearest brother could help protect the farm, vineyard, flock of sheep
- Law intended to safeguard land inheritance rights (Israel given land of Palestine which was divided into sections called Tribes – each family given certain parcels of land)
Ruth Can Claim Boaz – How?

Keep these in mind:

- Threshingfloor was a unique situation
- Located on top of a hill to carry away chaff
- Clay soil was packed to a hard, smooth surface
- Area was circular with rocks placed around it
- Many people present
How Was Grain Threshed?

- Breeze comes up
- Grain is spread out on floor
- Oxen trample sheaves using a sled
- Then people take flails and throw grain up in the air so the chaff blows away and the good grain falls to the floor
- Families feast, then men sleep around the grain to protect against thieves
Tonight Is the Night

- Naomi urges Ruth to claim Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer.
- She tells Ruth to go up to the threshingfloor tonight and let him know
Wait Until Feast Is Over

Naomi gives Ruth specific instructions

- Wash yourself
- Anoint yourself
- Put your “raiment” on yourself
- And finally, go to the threshingfloor and let Boaz know that she wants to claim him as her kinsman-redeemer
Under Mosaic Law

- Ruth is entitled to and has a right to claim Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer
- But, she must claim him
- It’s obvious he wants to be her kinsman redeemer
- Naomi’s urging makes this event possible
What a Lovely Request

Ruth could have taken Boaz to court and forced her request as a legal matter.

Instead, she asks him to be her kinsman-redeemer in a very quiet, retiring place, and in a lovely, modest fashion.
“Thou Art a Virtuous Woman”

Even though Ruth is a Moabite woman, she has proven herself to be of good reputation.

Her loyalty to Naomi has caused the townspeople to view her favorably, not as an outcast.
“Howbeit there is a kinsman nearer”

- How did Boaz know about this?
- Had he already investigated?
- Was he ready to move the minute Ruth gave him the “green light”?
- The other kinsman must be dealt with first.
Are you Mrs. Boaz or not?

- Naomi wants to know if her plan worked.
- Boaz had given her six measures of barley to take to Naomi.
- Naomi tells Ruth to be patient while Boaz works out the details.
- “The work of redemption is his work” (Ruth 3:17-18).
Chapter 4: In the Heart and Home

- Boaz is ready to act.
- Ruth is to wait and let him be the one to make all the arrangements.
- He is the one who will step out into the open and claim her, actually jeopardizing everything that he has and everything that he is.
Boaz went to the gate and sat. Behold! The kinsman came by. “Ho! Such a one! Sit down here” (Ruth 4:1).
Why the Gate?

- Gate served as a courthouse.
- Towns were walled in order to protect the citizens from outside attacks.
- If you wanted to see someone, you went to the gate.
Boaz Calls Together the Elders

- Ten men act as impromptu judges
- Boaz begins by stating case of Elimelech, not Ruth
- Boaz expresses concern for property involved
- Property had to be redeemed before a person could be redeemed
“I will redeem it.”

Boaz makes his case for redeeming the property.

But, the nearer kinsman says HE will redeem it! What a generous man! Does he know Ruth is involved?
Boaz says, “What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead” (Ruth 4:5).
Did Boaz Cause Concern?

- Mosaic Law says very specifically (Deut. 23:3) that a Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Israelites.
- So, IF the nearer kinsman brought Ruth into his home, it might jeopardize his own property.
- Boaz, however, would not mind doing that.
- Why? He’s in love with Ruth.
“I cannot redeem it for myself”

- We can assume the other kinsman was already married.
- He may have had grown children.
- To marry this woman of Moab would jeopardize everything that he owned.
- “You go ahead and take my right of redemption to yourself if this is what you want to do.”
The Shoe Ceremony

- Archaic ceremony
- Already had to be explained, even in the time of the Judges

“Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s of the hand of Naomi.”

“Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place” (Ruth 4:8-10).
Boaz Claims Ruth

- Ruth and Boaz become man and wife
- Ruth bears a son, Obed, grandfather to David
- “And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel” (Ruth 4:12-14).
Reference