

LESSON TEXT: Ruth 1:1-22
Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Willard Winter in his commentary, *Studies In Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, pub. by College Press, says, "The book of Ruth is tucked into the Canon of the Old Testament in a spot where it is like a breath of fresh air in a room which has become heavy with strong odors. The spirit of the preceding book of Judges is one of violence and struggle, and although there are notes of sadness and conflict in the book of Ruth, it is overall a love story. Its message is one of beauty, setting the stage for the account of the tender love in the following book, of Hannah, the mother of Samuel."

The Hebrew word *ruth* is pronounced just like the English word. It means comrade, companion, or neighbor (Ex. 11:2 neighbor). The book is about a Moabitess who had married a Hebrew refugee. Moab was the grandson of Lot by incest with his elder daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). Not long after Ruth married, her husband died (along with her father-in-law and a brother-in-law). Choosing to leave her homeland and go to Judea with Naomi, her Hebrew mother-in-law, she eventually marries another Hebrew, Boaz, and becomes an ancestress of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

The author of the book was probably Samuel. It was written about 1015 B.C. It covers a period of about 10 years. It has only 4 chapters with 85 verses and takes about 15 minutes to read. It is one of only two books in the Bible bearing a woman's name and is the first in the Bible in which a whole book is devoted to the history of a woman (Esther is the other).

The purpose of the book is four-fold: (a) to trace the genealogy of David and David's Lord (4:18-22); (b) to demonstrate the power of pure love to overcome all difficulties (1:16-17); (c) to present a high ideal of marriage (4:11-17); (d) to furnish an intimation of the calling of the Gentiles with Boaz as a type of Christ (Kinsman-Redeemer) and Ruth, a type of the redeemed world (4:9-10).

It is one of the choicest idyls of all literature. It is a love story which has fascinated millions and lost none of its charm throughout the centuries. Near its opening we hear adults crying because of death, but near the end we hear a baby cooing---a baby in whose veins is running the blood of Israel's promised King---the One who will bring eternal life to all mankind.

QUESTIONS:

1. Where did Moabites come from---and what was their relationship to Israelites?
2. Why were these Israelites in Moab? Should they have been?
3. Why was Naomi so insistent that Ruth and Orpah remain in Moab?
4. Why was Ruth so determined to leave her home for a home among foreigners?
5. What moved the city about the return of Naomi?
6. Is Naomi right to express her bitterness? What is the proper Christian reaction to bitter circumstances? Is stoicism the same as contentment? Is it possible to be content with injustice and unfairness?

Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where 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. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you."
---Ruth 1:16-17

"To love is to place our happiness in the happiness of another" ---Gottfried Leibnitz

**"We are shaped and fashioned by what we love."
---Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

LESSON TEXT: Ruth 2:1-23
Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Here is an apocryphal story from a few decades back. A “flower-child” and his girl friend were strolling down the street in San Francisco and the fellow said to his companion: “I’m goin’ over and pick up my unemployment check. Then I’ll drop in at the university to see what’s holding up my Pell-Grant check. After that I’ll pick up our food-stamps. Meanwhile, you go over to the free clinic and check on our tests, pick up my new glasses at the health center, then go to the Welfare Office and apply for an increase in our eligibility limit. Then, I’ll meet you at 5 o’clock at the Federal Building for the mass demonstration against the rotten American Establishment.”

While many young people in modern society refuse to accept the advice of anyone over 30 (“the Establishment”), there was no “generation-gap” between the young widow Ruth and her aged mother-in-law, Naomi. Quite often today the counsel of wiser and more mature judgment is unheeded and ridiculed. Ruth did not take this attitude. She looked to Naomi for counsel and humbly followed it. Ruth could have scorned the advice of Naomi and the suggestions of Boaz as the “establishment old-foggies,” but she didn’t!

When Boaz met Ruth, she was engaged in hard, menial labor, humbly picking up the left-overs in the field. She was surprised that he noticed her and wanted to help her since she was a foreigner. Boaz replied that he had heard already how she had treated her mother-in-law kindly after the death of her husband. He knew how Ruth had left her father and mother and the land of her birth to come into the land of Judah. All of this spoke highly of Ruth’s character. The Bible repeatedly urges young people to respect their elders--to build a good reputation by hard work, and taking good advice (see Proverbs; 2 Timothy; Titus; 1 John, etc.). All Christian young men should look to marry a woman with Ruth’s character.

To “borrow” Proverbs 31:10, “A good daughter-in-law who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.”
---PTB

QUESTIONS:

1. What is gleaning? Wasn’t Ruth stealing from Boaz? (Lev. 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24:19).
2. Isn’t gleaning very hard work for a young girl? Isn’t it un-Christian to insist that people work hard? What if we had fewer conveniences today and more chores or youngsters to do?
3. Why did Boaz go beyond what was demanded in the Law in his treatment of Ruth?
4. Should we expect children and in-laws to be personal care-takers of their parents in our modern society?
5. Was Boaz being a sissy or a male chauvinist for favoring and protecting the feminine purity of Ruth?
6. What is the law of God concerning the nearest kinsman? (Lev. 25:25ff). Is that fair? Is it practical for a pluralistic society like America? Anything like it for Christians and the kingdom of God (Acts chs. 2 & 6; 1 Cor. 6).
7. Did you notice the kindness of Boaz toward his hired help? Is it possible to have a capitalistic society and refrain from exploitation of the worker? How?

“But we exhort you, brethren,...to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody.”
1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

“Labor disgraces no man, but occasionally men disgrace labor.”
---Ulysses S. Grant

LESSON TEXT: Ruth 3:1-18
Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

John Robinson, former Anglican Bishop of Woolwich and controversial author of the book, *Honest To God*, suggested a few years ago that children should legally be allowed to have sexual relations at age 14. The Church of England had no comment about the protests of Bishop Ronald Williams of Leicester against Dr. Robinson's suggestion. A Presbyterian minister, Rev. Gordon Clanton, writing in the *Christian Century* magazine argued that sexual intercourse outside of marriage should not be condemned by the church.

In 1974 the research firm of Daniel Yankelovich, Inc., surveyed 3500 young people, ages 16 to 25. The interviews sought to learn what these selected individuals felt about "very important values" in today's world. The study indicated that only 31% considered premarital sexual relations as morally wrong, compared with 52% in a 1969 survey. Opposition to abortion dropped from 58% to 45% in the same period. The proportion who considered "living a clean moral life a very important value" fell from 71% to 52%. Standards of morality in America are, for the most part, drastically different than the standards one finds in the Bible—today, decades later, they're even worse!

Why is this so? Is it because today's circumstances are more insecure and unstable? Are the temptations stronger today? Is it because people "have nothing to do"? Or, is it simply because people do not honor God's law and have no respect for other human beings? Yes, that's it! That's too simplistic for the sophisticated but it is God's truth, nevertheless!

Boaz and Ruth lived in a violent and unstable world (the time of the Judges). Life and property were insecure. Vulgarity, obscenity, drunkenness, poverty, affluence and general lawlessness surrounded them. Temptation was equally as strong then as now. The night Ruth went to the threshing floor could have ended in seduction, date-rape, fornication and illegitimate conception. **But it didn't!** Because Boaz and Ruth were God-fearing people with personal honor!

Character comes from one's victorious conquest of self
i.e., unselfishness—it is not a gift!PTB

QUESTIONS:

1. Is Naomi a meddling mother-in-law, match-maker, or a godly, caring woman? Maybe Ruth would have preferred to marry someone else. Should young people today allow their parents any "say-so" in choosing a mate?
2. Why did Naomi instruct Ruth to "put on her best clothes?" Do clothes make the person? How "fine" do you suppose Ruth's clothes were?
3. Was Boaz inebriated? It says, "...his heart was merry."
4. Why did Ruth "uncover his feet"?
5. When Ruth said, "...spread your skirt over your maidservant" why didn't Boaz do so? Do you think he was tempted?
6. Why was Boaz glad Ruth had not "gone after young men"? Why hadn't she?
7. What does it say about Boaz when he informed Ruth "there is a kinsman nearer than I"?
8. Why tell Ruth to slip away in the morning? Was Boaz ashamed or afraid?
9. What was Naomi's advice to Ruth? Why?

"Marriage is that relation between man and woman in which the independence is equal, the dependence mutual, and the obligation reciprocal." --Louis K. Anspacher

**"A successful marriage is an edifice that must be rebuilt every day."
--Andre Maurois**

"The sexes were made for each other, and only in the wise and loving union of the two is the fullness of health and duty and happiness to be expected." --William Hall

LESSON TEXT: Ruth 4:1-18
Prepared by Paul T. Butler, Th.D.

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Have you heard the one about the famous novelist who met an old friend? After they had talked for two hours, the novelist said, "Now we've talked about me long enough---let's talk about you! What did you think of my last novel?"

Then there's Dr. Hans Selve whose book, *Stress Without Distress*, incredibly prescribes "a strong dose of selfishness as the best way of achieving a happier, saner society." Unbridled idealism, he suggests, is a cancerous curse. He even dares to attack one of the Bible's most celebrated injunctions: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He brands this as biological heresy. Dr. Selve asserts that true self-interest covers the full range of biological drives, and this includes man's social nature and his need to get along with other people. His solution is "altruistic egotism" (a blatant oxymoron). This, he says, is simply a case of helping others for the selfish motive of deserving help in return. So, Dr. Selve says, instead of trying the impossible feat of loving your neighbor as yourself, you should content yourself with earning your neighbor's respect.

Many business people today would call Ruth's (un-named) nearest "next of kin" money-smart and socially-wise. At first, he was eager to "redeem" the land Naomi wanted to sell. But when he found it would involve taking Ruth (and probably her children-to-come) as his wife, his self-centeredness rose quickly to the surface. He said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance."

Only those extremely naive or ignorant are unaware that we live in a world of self-centeredness. Christians must realize that they are "pilgrims" in a society that is antagonistic to God's word. Christians are members of an eternal society which does not permit them to indulge in the sin of self-centeredness (Phil. 2:3-4). THERE WON'T BE ANY SELF-CENTERED PEOPLE IN HEAVEN! Boaz and Ruth personify the selfless character of the true children of God. Let us emulate them!

"What I gave, I have; what I spent, I had; what I kept, I lost."
Ancient epitaph

QUESTIONS:

1. Would Boaz be admired in most circles of the business world today for offering someone else a "good deal"? Was it a "good deal"?
2. Why did Boaz take 10 elders of the city with him on his private business venture?
3. Why did Ruth's *nearest* "kinsman" fear he would impair his own inheritance?
4. Where did the ritual of taking off the shoe originate? (Deut. 25:9) what did it symbolize?
5. Why did the people pray for Ruth to be like Rachel and Leah?
6. Why did the people wish Boaz to be like Perez? (See Gen. 38:29; 49:8-12; Matt. 1:2-6).
7. What is the significance of the closing verses of Ruth? (4:18-22)

"He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he *dies*."
--Tertullian

"Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race."
--William E. Gladstone

"Many men have been capable of doing a wise thing, more a cunning thing, but very few a generous thing."
--Alexander Pope