

## **Series Story of Naomi and Ruth**

### **This Message #6 Wrap up and Spiritual Application**

#### **Scripture Ruth 4: 18-22; Isaiah 54:4-8**

This is the final message in this series about the lives of Naomi and Ruth. The last five verses of the book are an epilogue giving the names of ten generations of descendents, beginning with Perez and ending with David. The list is printed on your handout but I will not read it because a message based exclusively on the genealogy would not be very interesting.

However, the epilogue gives us the opportunity to talk about this story in its context in Biblical history and, secondly, to explain how the story of Ruth helps us to understand the significance of the redemption of Jesus Christ.

The first five names in the genealogy cover the period from the time of the entry of the Israelites into Egypt until the time of Moses (*see Exodus 6:13, 20, 23 and Numbers 1:7 and 2:3*). Very late in his life, Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, had to take his extended family into Egypt in order to survive a time of famine. Perez, the first name on the list, was the grandson of Jacob. His mother was Tamar. (*The story about his birth is in Genesis 38; it is not a pretty story.*) He was among the 70 individuals in Jacob's family who moved to Egypt (*see Genesis 46:1-27, especially verse 12*).

Jacob and his descendents were in Egypt 430 years (*see Exodus 12:40-41*). Several generations of the Israelites died in Egypt, but in those 430 years, the overall number of Israelites increased substantially, so that at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, there were six hundred thousand men plus women and children (*Exodus 12:37*). God had announced to Abraham the number of years his descendents would be in Egypt several years before Abraham had any children (*Genesis 15:13-14*). I am giving you this bit of historical perspective so you will understand the connections between Abraham to David and, more importantly, recognize how God worked out His plans and purposes through the generations.

The last five names given in the genealogy belong to the period of the early settlement of the Israelites in Canaan up until the beginning of the reign of David. This would be the period of the Judges. Salmon would have been among those who followed Joshua into the land of Canaan.

Salmon was a prominent leader of the tribe of Judah at the time of the conquest of the city of Jericho (*I Chronicles 2:10-12*). Jericho was the barrier which stood in the way of the advance of the Israelites into the interior of their promised land. In preparations for the assault on Jericho, Joshua sent two spies to look over the land and especially the city. The spies were sheltered by a prostitute named Rahab, who kept them from being discovered by the people of Jericho and who asked that she be spared from the destruction that she knew was coming on her people.

After the armies of Israel marched around the city for seven days and the walls fell, Joshua instructed the two spies to go rescue Rahab and her family. We don't know if Salmon was one of the two spies or not. However, according to another genealogy in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Salmon married Rahab, and their son was Boaz (*Matthew 1:4-5*). My guess is that Boaz acquired his kind and gracious and compassionate ways from his mother, who had herself experienced the mercy and grace of God and been redeemed from destruction.

Let me make two more observations about the line of people that led to Jesus. First, there are three women who have significant places in the genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. All three women were gentiles. The cultural background of Jesus was 100 per cent Jewish, but the blood of gentiles was mixed with that of the Hebrews in Jesus' lineage, proving, I think, that He represented all humanity. It is surprising that the names of these women appear in the Matthew genealogical record because women were not normally included in Jewish records.

Secondly, a technical matter. The ten names listed at the end of the book of Ruth cannot represent all the generations between Jacob and David. It is likely that some unimportant names were omitted. The logic behind this thought is based on the number of years between Egypt and David — it was a period of 800 to 850 years. Ten generations would be too few to span those years. The fact that some names were omitted in the genealogy should not disturb us since it seems that all of the lists of genealogies in the Bible are representative, not comprehensive.

Now I want to shift gears a bit and explain why the Book of Ruth has an important place in the Old Testament. During the first message in this series, I mentioned that the story of Naomi and Ruth occurred during the period of the Judges. The first verse of the book established this fact. Judges was the period in Israel's history when there was no central government and no national leader to guide the Israelites as Moses and Joshua had done in prior years. The LORD had proclaimed Himself as the sovereign King over Israel. He had given, through Moses, the Law, which His people were expected to follow. He had declared that the land was His and that the people were occupying it as His tenants. He promised to bless the people if they obeyed Him and to punish them should they disobey.

Unfortunately, after the death of Joshua and the elders of his generation, the following generations began to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. We have talked previously about the cycles of apostasy of the people, God's punishment, repentance, the supernatural deliverances led by judges, the few years of peace, and then the falling away into the next cycle. The Book of Judges describes these cycles of spiritual rebellion and chaos of that terrible period, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (*Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25*).

At the end of the book of Judges there are two extended descriptions of the evil thinking and behavior among the Israelites. The first story tells about a member of the priestly tribe who hired himself out to an individual who had set up his personal shrine for worship. It was a kind of "priest for hire" arrangement. Later, this priest agreed to join a clan of 600 men, reasoning that there was more profit and prestige in serving a large group instead of the household of one man. The clan confiscated the idols of others, then sacked and burned an entire city of peaceful and helpless people in order to have a place of their own. After setting up the idols, the clan lived in isolation from the rest of Israel (*Judges 17-18*). This was one example of "everyone doing what was right in his own eyes."

The second story at the end of Judges is much more convoluted and tragic. Because of the evil behavior of some men of the tribe of Benjamin, a civil war broke out between Benjamin and the eleven other tribes. In the fighting, 25,000 fighting men of Benjamin, plus all the women and children of the tribe of Benjamin, were killed at the hands of the other tribes (*Judges 20:46-48*). Only 600 men escaped. In addition, 30,000 Israelites of other tribes were also killed.

After the battles were over, the people of Israel were suddenly filled with remorse. Only 600 men of their kinsmen, the Benjamites, remained. The nation of Israel had almost wiped out one of its tribes. This tribe needed to be rebuilt, but where were wives to be obtained for the 600 men? The problem was that the fathers of the Israelites had taken an oath, “Not one of us will give his daughter in marriage to a Benjamite” (*Judges 21:1*).

The solution was as bizarre as the battles had been. The fighting men of Israel went to the city of Jabesh Gilead, an Israelite city which was on the east side of the Jordan River. The fighting men had instructions to kill everyone living there except young women who were virgins. There were 400 of these women, and they were given to 400 of the men from Benjamin (*Judges 21:11-14*). What to do about the other 200 men who were still without wives? Permission was given for these 200 men to abduct girls at the time of a religious festival (*Judges 21:20-22*). In this way the Israelite fathers did not have to violate their oaths, and all the Benjamites obtained wives. I said this story was bizarre. The last verse in the book of Judges summed up the sad truth about conditions in Israel, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (*Judges 21:25*).

I have related these two stories for a purpose — I wanted you to get a sense of the foolish thinking and evil behavior that generally existed at times during the period of the Judges, and I want you to know that the book of Ruth is actually a third story in the sequence. What we have is two episodes which reveal the evil side of the Israelite people, immediately followed by the remarkable story of Boaz, an exceptional man who followed unselfishly the spirit of the Law of God.

And there is another important connection between the three stories: the key figures were all from Bethlehem (*see Judges 17:7-9; 19:2-18*). In our Bibles, the book of Ruth immediately follows after the book of Judges. However, many of the Jewish historians of the early centuries AD counted Judges and Ruth as one book.

The book of Ruth is a story which illustrated the blessings which come from obedience to the LORD. The other stories illustrated the curses which fall on people who refuse to follow the commands of the LORD. The story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, helps us to recognize the control and authority of God over history, and how He works out His purposes in the lives of His people from one generation to the next, so that His plan has continuity and forward direction.

The book of Ruth is ultimately a book about God, in particular about the grace of God given in response to the unselfish, loving concerns of the principle characters. This grace was acknowledged by Boaz to Ruth during their first meeting: "May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, ... under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (*Ruth 2:12*). The LORD graciously restored hope to Naomi where there was no hope; made full what was empty; gave joy when there was only bitterness; gave rest when there was no expectation of rest and security.

The grace and blessing experienced by Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, was made possible by the act of redemption. The key word, which is used repeatedly in the story, is "go'el," "kinsman-redeemer." Here I come to an important truth I want you to take away from our study of this book: What Boaz did for Ruth and Naomi is parallel to what Jesus did for us. The book of Ruth is a beautiful illustration of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me suggest some ways in which Jesus served as our Kinsman-Redeemer.

First, according to the Old Testament levirate law (*Leviticus 25:23 ff and Deuteronomy 25:5-6*) the redeemer had to be a near relative to the person in need of help. When this truth is compared to the teaching of the New Testament, we can understand the necessity of Jesus' incarnation. Hebrews 2:14-17 states, "Since [humans] have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, ... He had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might ... make atonement for the sins of the people." The Apostle John declared: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (*John 1:14*). God, in the Person of Jesus, had to be a man in order to redeem humanity.

Second, in the Old Testament, the kinsman-redeemer had the obligation to cover the debts of family members and to buy family members out of slavery. Adam and Eve sold the human race into bondage and sin, but Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer, bought us and brought us back into liberty, righteousness, and life. He paid the price that was required for our redemption by His death on the cross. Romans 3:22-24 states this truth this way: "Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe ... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ."

Third, in addition to concern about people, the Old Testament kinsman-redeemer had the obligation to buy back land that had been sold in order to keep the ownership in the family. Adam and Eve not only sold the human race into bondage and sin, but the earth, God's own creation, was usurped and corrupted by the devil. The redemption of Jesus extends to the physical creation. The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but ... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (*Romans 8:19-21*).

Fourth, in the story we learned that Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, was not motivated by self-interest. Rather he was motivated by his concern for the well-being of Naomi and Ruth. Jesus' motivation for redeeming us is His great love for us. Ephesians 5:2 explains that "Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Paul explained that this love of Christ "surpasses knowledge." Paul prayed that his readers "may have power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (*Ephesians 3:18-19*).

Fifth, Boaz took Ruth as his bride. He assumed the responsibility to provide all the resources that Ruth needed for full enjoyment of life, what was referred to as "rest" under the authority and protection of a guardian. Scripture declares that the people who are redeemed by Jesus are collectively called His bride. The church is referred to as the bride of Christ, and we know that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (*Ephesians 5:25-27*). These verses refer to life here on earth.

Furthermore, Christ, as husband to the church, pledged Himself to His bride for eternity. Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth and Naomi, provided a glorious destiny for them, a future that far exceeded their hopes and dreams, and a name that lived on after physical death. Jesus, as our Redeemer, has provided an even greater, more glorious destiny for us. The glories of heaven are beyond our imagination. In the new heaven, "the dwelling of God will be with mankind. He will live with them. They will be His people and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

As believers, every desire and hope that we have depends on the fact that Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer. There are several Old Testament passages which described prophetically Jesus as the Kinsman-Redeemer of His people. The verses which are printed in your handout are from Isaiah 54:

“Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name, the holy One of Israel is your (Kinsman-) Redeemer. He is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit, a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD your (Kinsman-) Redeemer (*Isaiah 54:4-8*).