

Thursday Morning Bible Study

The Book of Ruth Chapter 4

We come to the end of this short book, which some say is a romance story, but what we see is a story of extraordinary faith, and a story of God using all kinds of people for His own purposes and to His own honor and glory. WE have seen a Bethlehemite named Elimelech, go against the rules of Israel, and hightail it to a foreign country because of a major famine, taking his wife and two sons, and then die there. We then see his wife Naomi face her trials without Elimelech and her two sons who died in Moab shortly after Elimelech dies, with a bitter stoicism, and Ruth, her daughter-in-law, who had married one of Elimelech's sons, face her difficulties after Mahlon's death, with faith and obedience, and a spirit of true service. We have met Boaz and seen his kindness and real virtue, as he, a man of great wealth and position, humbles himself to protect a foreign-born girl and a sister-in-law who has fallen on hard times.

One of the neat things this story did, was to make us look a little deeper at a couple of obscure laws regarding keeping the family name going. Family surnames were very important, and as we see in today's lesson, where there is a family of all girls, the family name dies or if an only son dies unexpectedly the name can disappear. I remember years ago, as my little family was growing, I was the son of an only son, and my little family consisted of three daughters, until Sally finally gave birth to a boy, so the family name was able to continue. Happy to say, my son is the proud papa of two handsome boys. That all being said, carrying the surname in Israel was very important to these people and to God.

But as we finish this little history book, the question that is on everybody's mind, (well maybe just mine-----huh?) Why was this tiny piece of history included in the Tanakh to begin with? Well, the writer, and frankly, we do not know who wrote this piece of history, (Some scholars suggest that it might be Samuel the prophet/Judge) except that it was written during or after the time of the reign of King David, (Possibly even during the exile period during the 5th century) and does include a post-lude or an appendix, regarding the upshot of the central figures and the decisions made. It does help to tie the genealogies of the line of Jesus Christ all the way from Abram (Abraham) through King David down through His birth.

A] Ruth 4: 1 through 5; (read)

1] Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken of came by."

As we learned last week, the fields of barley and wheat and the threshing floor are down the hill from the city of Bethlehem. Bethlehem sits on a high plain, probably about 2000 ft above sea level, and as we had left Boaz and Ruth, Ruth had gone down to the threshing floor, at Naomi's direction and she and Boaz had a totally innocent discussion regarding the disposition of Naomi, herself, and the family name redemption, and in the morning carried approximately 5 bushels of grain given to her by Boaz, back up the hill, and then Boaz also a bit later on goes 'up' the hill to the city gates, which have benches for the elders of the city where they sit and discuss the days issues or adjudicate some case. So, I would guess, Boaz was accustomed to sitting there with the elders.

Let's remember why he is going there. His purported sister-in-law Naomi, is a widow and childless except for a daughter-in-law, and according to law, which we are beginning to understand, her husband's family name is about to be erased, but for the fact it can be redeemed by law through Ruth marrying a close relative of Elimelech and having a child by him, which Boaz is about to rectify one way or another.

So, we have the picture and now while he is sitting there, the particular kinsman Boaz has spoken about comes strolling by, minding his own business. His life almost changes radically. Also, as we read this there are probably other elders walking or sitting around drinking their coffees and discussion current events, and finding solutions to the world's problems. Seems some things never change.

2] "So Boaz said, "Come aside friend, sit down here." So, they sat down.

Now frankly, that is not what was said, what was said went more like "Hey you! Come over here and sit." There was probably a name but the writer chose not to use it and the actual Hebrew reads "Turn aside and sit down here, such a one" Apparently this kinsman had things to do, and Boaz snags him by the arm and bids him sit. And remember this guy must be a brother of his and Elimelech, that they are able to have a child with Ruth and legally be able to carry on the line of Elimelech.

3] "Then he said to the close relative, 'Naomi , who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. And I thought to inform you, saying buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people.'"

First, trying to make sense of the actual Hebrew is mystifying, but what this seems to say is that Naomi is about to sell Elimelech's property, which she has a right to do because she needs money to live on. This, by the way does include Ruth who inherits Mahlon's portion but Boaz doesn't want to let that cat out of the bag just yet. This will coincide with the law as written in Leviticus 25:25:

"If one of your brethren becomes poor and has sold some of his possessions and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold."

There is one important factor in ancient Israel and that is you can buy or sell your property but every 50 years, (called the year of Jubilee) all property regardless of debt, returns to its original owner or the inheritors, and all debts are cancelled. As God, Himself put it, "I actually own the land, you are merely the inhabitants of it."

So Boaz informs this brother that this brother has the responsibility to redeem the land of Elimelech, and to do so according to Leviticus 25:25.

4] "If you will redeem it, redeem it, but if you will not redeem it, then tell me that I may know, for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you. And he said, I will redeem it."

Boaz tells his brother, "Here is the situation, Elimelech's property is up for sale, and as the brother in line, it is up to you to redeem this property, but if you don't want to redeem the property, let me know as I am the next in line to redeem it. So the brother (Go'el= redeemer) says he will redeem it.

5] "Then Boaz said, ' On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance."

Here Boaz, throws in the kicker. Along with what Naomi has, the daughter-in-law Ruth also has Mahlon's land, and she is included in the deal.

B] Ruth 4: 6 through 12; (read)

1] "And the close relative said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.'"

This has to do with the fact taking on Ruth and having a son with her, that son would inherit Mahlon's inheritance, and the brother would not be the redeemer of said property but caretaker, and that was not to sit well with this unnamed brother. Another factor might be, she is a foreigner, and to some, marrying a foreigner was not proper in Jewish society. So this Go'el (or redeemer) was not up to the task of assuming responsibility for Naomi or Ruth, and providing an heir to Elimelech's line.

2] "Now, this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything, one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was confirmation in Israel."

The writer adds a little history regarding an event that took place when property was transferred or sold outright to another. This was not a law but a sense of confirmation of said actions. According to various historians and scholars, there might be a variety of opinions as to where this came from, but this one might make better sense, where removing the sandal might mean the seller will not walk his property again.

3] "Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself!' So he took off his sandal."

This would mean that he abdicates his right to all the properties and removing his sandal tells folk he will not walk on that property, that he has refused, both to absorb Elimelech's property and also the property of Chilion and Mahlon, which includes all their possessions including Ruth. He will not be responsible of redeeming the Name of Elimelech.

4] "And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'You are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's, and Mahlon's from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife to perpetuate the name of the dead through his

inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from his position at the gate. You are witnesses this day."

Therefore, Boaz accepts his brother's refusal and announces to the gathered assembly, that henceforth, since the other brother has refused to redeem the line of Elimelech, He will assume the redeeming of Elimelech and that of his dead sons, including their possessions, Naomi and Ruth the Moabitess. Ruth is then to be his wife and their first child will carry the sur-name of Elimelech, and now Elimelech's line will continue on.

5] "And all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, ' We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman who is coming to your house, like Rachel and Leah, the two who built up the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.'"

So the first part of the witness is that Boaz will take possession of all the house of Elimelech including the women. Now the law would stipulate that Naomi is his brother's wife, but she is well past child-bearing so it is the daughter-in-law who becomes the wife and the responsibility for bearing the continuing line of Elimelech, and in this culture, remember it is a different culture, this is what she is to do. The crowd does invoke the names of Rachel and Leah, and it makes me wonder why not the mothers of the other sons of Jacob. If we remember our history in Genesis, Leah was the first wife, but then Jacob had relations with two of the maid-servants, Bilhah and Zilpah, and had kids by them, and Rachel who was the favored wife finally had Joseph and Benjamin. Of course, Joseph had two sons that were included in the Tribal names.

6] "May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring which the Lord will give you from this young woman."

If we then, recall the story of Judah, who gave his son Er a wife named Tamar, but Er was evil and he died childless, so Judah gave Tamar to his second son Onan according to Levite law, and he refused to carry his brother's line so he died, and Judah had Tamar wait until the youngest son was old enough, but by that time she would be too old, so through subterfuge, realizing that she is the only one that can carry the line of Judah, she gets pregnant through Judah, and has twins Perez and Zerah. Perez was the line leading to Boaz.

C] Ruth 4: 13 through 17; (read)

1] "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and he went into her, the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. The women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord Who has not left you this day without a close relative, and may his name be famous in Israel."

Boaz becomes the "Go'el" the 'kinsman redeemer' and Ruth bears a son and Elimelech's line is saved. The women in the town rejoice and go to Naomi of all people, one would expect they might gather around Ruth, but Ruth is a proselyte or a converted Jewess but still a foreigner, and it was Naomi's line with Elimelech that was saved. What the gals were actually saying was, "Blessed are you of the Lord who has not left you without a 'Go'el' kinsman, and may his name be famous (or may he be important) in Israel.

2] "And may he be a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him"

Continuing their blessing on Naomi, they are recognizing her depression and gloom because her line failed, but they tell her that, 'By Golly!' this event should bring the spring back in your step, the git in your gitty-yup and the glint in your eye, your line has been saved by your daughter-in-law who has truly taken better care of you than all the sons you could have borne. There is the real love story, a filial love, daughter to mother. Notice they nor the writer seem able to say, 'RUTH'. They seem to be Ruth-less. (had to do it)

3] Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him.

Naomi accepts the child as her adopted thereby acknowledging that this is truly the continued line of Elimelech and her perceived failure is no more. Now after all this time, was she actually able to 'nurse the child? I doubt it but she does take over the raising of the child, more or less co-raising him with Ruth, but understand this is Ruth's child but Naomi's redeemer.

4] "Also the neighbor women gave him a name saying, 'There is a son born to Naomi.' And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David."

I don't know how the neighbors get so nosy and pushy here but they do and it seems they name the child and call him Obed. Then the writer starts a bit of a genealogy, pointing out that this Obed will be the father of Jesse who will be the father of David.

D] Ruth 4: 18 through 22; (read)

1] "Now this is the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron; Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; Amminadab begot Nashon and Nashon begot Salmon; Salmon begot Boaz and Boaz begot Obed, Obed begot Jesse and Jesse begot David."

I do note that Boaz is named here in lieu of Elimelech but that line was Salmon was the father of Elimelech, another brother and then Boaz, so the line remains correct.

It is believed that possibly another writer later on tacked on the verses 18 through 22, but it does stop at David. Now from David through to Jesus is recounted in Matthew and Luke.

end