

Sovereignty-3, RUTH, 3 pgs

It is a great joy for me to end this series on the sovereignty of God this way. From the first time I read Ruth since I became a Christian until now, I have not been able to read even parts of it without crying. And in this, I always feel peculiarly blessed. G

RUTH

1:1 In the days when the judges ruled in Israel [ie, before Israel had a king], a severe famine came upon the land. So an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in Judah (Elimelech) left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife (Naomi) and two sons with him ... ³Then Elimelech died, and ⁴the two sons married Moabite women [Moabites were related to Israel through Lot ¹]. About ten years later, ⁵both of Naomi's sons died.

Naomi was now an old barren widow in a foreign country with two childless daughters-in-law. She seems an unlikely prospect for any role in the Lord's covenantal history of redemption for she feels the weight of God's heavy hand upon her. Who sinned that her husband and sons died, this woman, or the men in her family? Remember how Jesus answered a similar question in the first article on sovereignty: *Neither. This happened to accomplish the purposes of God. ²*

⁶ Then Naomi heard that the LORD had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi set out from Moab with her two daughters-in-law and headed to Judah. ⁸ She urged her two daughters-in-law, Go back to your mothers' homes. ¹⁴ Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. ¹⁶ But Ruth replied, wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Naomi [tried to discourage Ruth saying] things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has raised his fist against me.

¹⁹ Well the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, Naomi said ²⁰ Don't call me Naomi [meaning pleasant], instead, call me Mara [meaning bitter]. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty. The LORD has caused me to suffer, the Almighty has sent tragedy upon me. ²² [Now it happened that] they arrived at Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

^{2:1} There was a wealthy influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech. One day ³ Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters and she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz. ⁶ The foreman explained her situation to Boaz, she is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. ⁷ She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters and has been hard at work ever since.

⁸ Boaz invited Ruth to stay with his people when she gathered grain so that she would not be molested and so he could give her preferential treatment. Stay right behind the young women working in my field and help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well. ¹¹ I know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. ¹² May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.

Blessings here are different from those we are used to. Ours are well-wishes like "good luck" or "have a

nice day.” Here they call upon the God of Israel under whose care Ruth had taken refuge in coming to Judah to show her favor. They are also predictive and hint of a greater fulfillment and blessing that begins to unfold when she later follows Naomi’s instruction and asks Boaz *Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer.*

4:1 Boaz went to the town gate, called out witnesses and offered the family redeemer who was a closer relative than he the opportunity to buy the land that belonged Elimelech, a purchase that also would require that he marry Ruth in order to raise children to carry on her husband’s name and keep the land in the family. The man refused and [in so doing lost his opportunity to be God’s instrument in bringing our redeemer into the world] Boaz bought the land and acquired Ruth as his wife.

11 Then the elders and all the people standing in the gate replied, may the LORD make Ruth like Rachel and Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! 12 May you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem [places associated with David are given special prominence]. 12 And may the LORD give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.

So the LORD enabled Ruth to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women of the town said to Naomi, Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. 15 May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons! [the highest praise for Ruth]

In the next book, Hannah prayed for a son and God had opened her womb. She named him Samuel. When the boy was weaned she dedicated him to the Lord *for his whole life*. In her song of praise she cites a series of examples derived from everyday life showing that God often works contrary to natural expectations and brings about surprising reversals. She refers to Ruth’s selfless devotion to Naomi as one example, *The childless woman now has seven children, and the woman with many children wastes away (1 Sam.2:5).*

Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own. 17 The neighbor women said, Now at last Naomi has a son again! And they named him Obed [meaning servant or servant of the Lord], who became the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David [ancestor of Jesus who was known as the son of David (Mt.9:27), born in Bethlehem, called the city of David (Lk.2:4)].

end notes

1.3 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the LORD [AN IDIOM DENOTING PERMANENT EXCLUSION FROM THE WORSHIPING COMMUNITY OF ISRAEL]. 4 These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they hired Balaam son of Beor ... to curse you (Dt.23:). [cf Neh.13:1-3] The OT looks forward to a new covenant in which the exclusions of this passage are transcended (Isa.56:3-8), an event prefigured by Ruth.

2. Remember the questions posed in the 2nd essay on sovereignty – How important was Joseph’s fidelity (1) in serving his masters, (2) in refusal to allow bitterness to infect his heart when falsely accused and jailed, and (3) in resisting temptations to the accomplishment of God’s plans? Ruth is known for those same kinds of virtues.

3. the two wives of Jacob (renamed Israel) who were the mothers naturally and through their maids of all the sons of Israel who became the heads of the twelve tribes.
4. Judah had become the father of Perez because his son Onan had refused to carry out his obligation to his brother (**Gen.38; Dt.25:5-10**) and God slew him. **Perez** (see family line, **Ruth 4:18-22**) became the symbol of the fruitful offspring. His descendants had raised the tribe of Judah to a prominent place in Israel. In the same way Boaz became the father of Obed because the closest relative refused to carry out a levirate obligation. Despite human failures, God preserved the messianic line. **The house of Israel was rebuilt by David, the descendant of Ruth and Boaz after it had been threatened with extinction (1 Sam.4).**