

Krapf Commentary Series

Ruth

1:1-5

The book of Ruth is set in the times of the Judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes (vs. 1). Elimelech was not personally to blame for the situation in Israel at this time. However, he could have been an example for good in an evil society and he should have risen above the culture and lived by faith in the God of Israel. But rather than become part of the solution, Elimelech fitted into the culture and became part of the problem.

Elimelech acted on the interest of his family, but he acted without faith in God. He took control of his own life and left Bethlehem (meaning "house of bread"), to find food outside of God's provision, in Moab. Later Naomi admitted that they "went out full" (vs. 21). These verses outline the slow decline of a family that is laid astray by a faithless or disobedient father, or the disastrous consequences

of leaving the Bread of life (John 6:48) for the empty husks of the world.

1:6-18

News of God's people has ways of spreading in the world. Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had visited Israel with bread. All that Naomi loved in this world lay in three graves in Moab. She recognised that the hand of the Lord had gone out against her (vs. 13), and was returning to the Lord grieved also, that others had gotten hurt as a result of her sin (vs. 13).

Ruth's expression of loyalty is remarkable (vss. 16-17). She was given no encouragement from her mother-in-law to follow the Lord, but it was a complete conversion to the living God of Israel and a rejection of Chemosh the god of the Moabites (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7). It was a statement of allegiance, not only to the God of Israel but to the people of Israel—to the grave. What a remarkable act of commitment and faith, not knowing how the Israelites would receive her as she returned with her backsliding mother-in-law to the land of Israel.

1:19-22

The emphasis of this chapter is on Naomi returning, summed up in the final verse "so Naomi returned" (see also vss. 6,7,8,10). Naomi had come face to face with the Almighty and he could not be resisted. Although it was a time of famine, Naomi recognised that she had gone out "full" (vs. 21). Lean times with the Lord are fullness compared to the green pastures of the world. The last line of the chapter shows that God was not her enemy, but that in her return at the "beginning of barley harvest," God had indeed provided a table for her return. Peter heard the same gracious invitation to "come and dine" (John 21:12). With Ruth her daughter-in-law and the ripe harvest, Mara (bitterness), would again be Naomi (pleasantness), and her faithful character revealed.

2:1-3

The author reminds us that Ruth was a Moabite (vs. 2), but she was an Israelite according to faith (vs. 12, see also Romans 9:6). She was also willing to learn and practice the customs of Israel and glean in the fields for her food, according to the laws for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22). Ruth was not lazy, and the Lord honoured her for her work. She had moved forward according to her needs and the laws of the nation and in God's providence, she found herself in the field of Boaz, an honourable

and wealth man with significant standing. But Boaz was also of the family of Elimelech—how mysterious are the ways of God. When we quietly, humbly and without fanfare for self-glory, follow the Lord, he opens the way up before us.

2:4-16

The spirituality of Ruth and Naomi as they laboured together for one another is only matched by the spirituality of Boaz. Boaz is both kind to his employees (vs. 4) and generous to Ruth (vss. 8-9). Boaz also recognised that this new girl in town had come to trust in the living God (vs. 12), and the fruits of her faith attracted him to her (vs. 11). She had put her trust in the God to protect her (under his wing, vs. 12), and under God, Boaz was going to be that protection. Growth in grace always displays itself in social graces—the Holy Spirit, working in us as we interact with those around us. The fruit of the Spirit are not private but social graces—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

2:17-23

Naomi has learned that "weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). The Lord had brought her into emptiness

and sorrow (1:21, Job 1:21, 2:9-10). She recognised God's hand in the whole event both for good and ill, and continued to trust the living God in the emptiness. Now the Lord has brought her into fulness, and she praised him for it (vs. 20). The blessing of God reaches beyond the immediate and temporal. Naomi's perception of the goodness of God, recognised also that Elimelech would be blessed even in his death—his memory would live on, for Boaz was a near relative, who could redeem them out of their situation, give them a name again, and future hope. Boaz, of course is a wonderful picture of Christ, who became our near relative (Hebrews 2:11), who has redeemed us out of our lost and sinful state of spiritual poverty, and who gives us a hope for the future and for eternity.

3:1-5

Like the Israelites who had come out of Egypt, Ruth had left Moab but had not fully entered into "rest" (vs. 1, see Hebrews 3:7-4:13, Matthew 11:28). But Naomi was eager that her daughter-in-law would find a "home," ("rest" or a "peaceful place," 1:9). Ruth had found it in the living God, in Israel, not back in Moab. By faith she entered in and it was well with her (vs. 1). The key to this story is that there was one to bring her in and to redeem her—

Boaz was a near kinsman, and it was his responsibility under the law (Deuteronomy 5:5-10).

Both Naomi, the matchmaker, and Ruth the Moabite, act in faith in preparing Ruth to go down to the threshing floor and throwing herself under the protection of Boaz. They had absolute confidence in the character of Boaz, that he would act honourably and "tell [Ruth] what to do" (vs. 5). We enter into Christ, only by faith, and rest with confidence on the character and work of Christ our redeemer. This is the place of rest—a peaceful place, and a home.

3:6-18

The author, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit continues to focus on the character of Boaz, the relative-Redeemer. The advice of Naomi to Ruth was given in faith, and Ruth acted by faith, for they know that Boaz is "a redeemer" (vs. 9). Boaz views Ruth's actions favourably, not as brash, bold or unprincipled. The focus is on redemption, and Naomi knows that Boaz "will not rest but will settle the matter today," (vs. 18). The references to Jesus Christ throughout this book are gloriously unmistakable. Jesus is presented by the prophet Isaiah as the Lord's Servant, who "will not grow faint or be discouraged," (Isaiah 42:4). Here, he is

presented as the Redeemer who will not rest until he settles the matter (Philippians 1:6).

4:1-6

Boaz has been introduced and presented to us as the relative-redeemer. No one else has been in the picture. He was determined to settle the matter promptly (3:18), publicly (vs. 1), and thoroughly (vs. 5). Neither Naomi nor Ruth was aware, it seems, that there was a closer kinsman. But Boaz makes sure that all hindrances to a successful redemption are removed. He will redeem all that belongs to Ruth, and her whole life will be wrapped up in Boaz, as ours is in Christ (Colossians 3:3). All that we have is in Christ, and he worked it out in a spectacularly public manner, that is embedded in history (Acts 26:26). Salvation is more than a spiritual reconciliation to the living God, it is the renovation of the life, the tenderising of the heart (Ezekiel 36:26), the renewal of the mind (Romans 12:2), and the ultimate redemption of the body in the resurrection (Romans 8:23). The story of Boaz teaches us that our salvation in Jesus Christ is full, free and final.

4:7-12

When Naomi and Ruth returned to Israel, they were destitute. They had both lost their husbands and Naomi had to sell her land (vs. 3)—no inheritance and no offspring. But God had provision for them in the law of the kinsman-redeemer (Leviticus 25:8-22, 25-31, 47-55, Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This law was designed to recover the destitute and prevent the alienation and extinction of a family within the nation. God cares for his people within the body of the Church, and by the members of the Church. We are to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

The practice of giving the sandal in the purchasing agreement (vs. 7) meant that Boaz had the right to walk on the land—he had redeemed it, it was his possession. God has purchased us in Christ by his grace, and we are his possession. But remember, the earth is the Lord's. He has, as it were, thrown his shoe over it and will one day conquer it, recreate it and reign over it (see Psalm 60:8).

4:13-22

Contrast these verses with those at the beginning of the book. God has brought this story from barrenness, death and destitution to fruitfulness and radiant joy. It's the story of redemption. But the

surprise of the book is in the end, because in the plan of God this terrible situation is part of the genealogy of the Messiah. Jesus came as a root out of dry ground (Isaiah 53:2), and corresponding to his rise out of barrenness, he lifts us up out of our sin and misery to sit with him in heavenly places, in the full enjoyment of life more abundant (John 10:10).

Remember, when Naomi was at her weakest and in her darkest moment, God was working in her and for her. He was working for her good and for his glory (Romans 8:28), although she could not see it. When Ruth was fulfilling her responsibilities to her mother-in-law, working in the midst of poverty, she was playing a part in God's story, and unknown to her, she was moving towards the solution. This is how God works with us and through us, as his people.