

“A Baby in Bethlehem”

November 22, 2015

Ruth 4:13-22

I. Introduction

As we have worked our way through this short Book of Ruth, we have seen God’s hand directing the actions of several God-fearing individuals; in particular, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. As followers and imitators of God, their actions were guided by their concern for others. But remember, all of this took place during the time recorded in the Book of Judges. The last verse of Judges summarizes the culture and attitudes of that time—**Judges 21:25** says, **“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.”** This was a time of self-absorbed and self-driven people. It was a promiscuous and violent society. I suspect that they had equivalent phrases to what we hear today: *“What’s in it for me?” “You only go around once.” “I deserve it.” “Who made you judge and jury?” “I’m offended by what you’re doing—so YOU must stop.”* People like Ruth and Boaz with a concern-love for others would have stuck out like a sore thumb or a sore toe.

The story of Ruth began when Naomi and her family fled to Moab from Bethlehem to escape a famine. It was here that Ruth married Naomi’s older son, Mahlon. Sadly, during Naomi’s 10-year stay in Moab, Naomi’s husband and then her two sons died, leaving Naomi and Ruth and Orpah as grieving widows. But during those same 10 years, Ruth the Moabitess had put her faith and trust in the God of Israel—she accepted God’s grace. God’s grace continued when Ruth accompanied her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem and He guided her to the field of Boaz where Boaz fell in love with her. God’s grace continued at the town gate where the nearer kinsman-redeemer rejected Ruth and Boaz was able to redeem her and the family property. And now as we have just read, after their marriage, God poured out His grace on Ruth and Boaz by causing her to become pregnant and giving birth to a son who was named Obed which, in Hebrew, means *“servant.”* This baby born in Bethlehem would be a source of blessing to many.

II. A Baby in Bethlehem

A. First, Obed was a blessing to Boaz and Ruth: Verse 14 says, “The LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.” During Ruth’s first marriage to Naomi’s son—perhaps a marriage of 10 years—she hadn’t had any children. But during the first year of marriage with Boaz, as He had done for Sarah and Rebekah and Leah and Rachel, God blessed Boaz and Ruth with a son. Obed was the answer to the prayers of those at the gate one year earlier (Ruth 4:11-12), and I suspect to the prayers of Ruth and Boaz. As Solomon wrote in Psalm 127:3-4 (NAS): “Behold, children are a gift of the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.” Obed was obviously a blessing to Boaz and Ruth.

B. Obed was also a blessing to Naomi. With the birth of Obed, it is interesting that congratulations went first to Naomi, the women of Bethlehem shared Naomi’s joy when they said, “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer.” The child, Obed, was a blessing to Naomi; he was her kinsman-redeemer not Boaz. Obed would be a blessing to Naomi as he would one day care for the family that brought him into the world, including his grandmother Naomi. Boaz had redeemed the family inheritance; now Obed, as a kinsman-redeemer, would continue the family line of Elimelech and Mahlon. He would protect the inheritance and use it to care for Naomi. He would live up to his name and be a “*servant*” to his grandmother.

When Naomi returned from Moab, she bitterly lamented in Ruth 1:21, “I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.” But now the women describe the baby as one who will “renew her life.” Obed would be a blessing as he filled up Naomi’s heart and life. Every grandparent can tell you that when the grandchildren come for a visit, the grandparents become young again. We do things that we wouldn’t do otherwise—like playing basketball for hours on end or playing

hopscotch until you can't walk the next day. Naomi's days would be full once again as she cared for her grandson.

Ruth's love and concern for Naomi was described by the town's women as **"better than seven sons."** Just as children watch and learn from those around them—especially their parents—Obed would learn to love his grandmother just as his mother did. This, too, would be a blessing to Naomi.

C. Obed would bring a blessing to Israel. Obed was the grandfather of King David, one of Israel's greatest rulers. Although he had his faults, David was a great man of faith whom God used to build the kingdom of Israel. In **Acts 13:22** God said, **"I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do."** Because of David's heart for God, which would go back to the influence of Obed and Ruth, God used David in overcoming Israel's enemies, expanding Israel's inheritance, and leading the people in worshiping the God of Jacob. Because of David's heart for God and because of God's providence, David was able to say in **1 Kings 5:4**, **"But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster."** David was a great servant of God who brought many blessings to Israel. Through David, as the women said in **verse 14**, Obed would become **"famous throughout Israel."**

D. Finally, Obed would bring blessing to the whole world. The greatest thing God did for David wasn't to give him victory over his enemies or wealth to build the temple. The greatest privilege God gave him was that of being the ancestor of the Messiah. Jacob had prophesied that the Messiah would come from the kingly tribe of Judah—**turn to Genesis 49:8-10**, but no one knew which family in Judah would be chosen. God chose David's family, and the Redeemer, the Messiah, would be known as **"the son of David"** (**Matthew 1:1**).

Little did those from Bethlehem know that God had great plans for Obed and his descendants. Obed would have a son named Jesse; Jesse would have eight sons, the youngest would be David the eventual king of Israel (**1 Samuel 16:6-13**). Without Ruth and Boaz, the line of Elimelech would have

disappeared and with that there would have been no David. But because of Ruth's and Boaz's obedience to God, the little baby Naomi held on her lap would bring blessing to the whole world through his descendant the Messiah.

III. Conclusion

One of the main purposes of the Book of Ruth is historical. It explains the ancestry of David; it fills the gap between the time of the judges and the time when God gave Israel a king. It also reminds us that in the days of the judges, when the national life of Israel was under constant threat and when at times it seemed as though the very covenant itself might be broken, God was preserving His people and developing His purposes—even when things seem to be their darkest, God is still there. In [Jeremiah 29:11](#) God said, “For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

The Book of Ruth also reveals the providence of God in the way He guided Ruth and Naomi. It should encourage us to know that God still cares for us even when we don't *sense* His presence or are even are bitter toward Him, as Naomi was. God directed Ruth, a “*new believer*,” and used her faith and her obedience to His laws to change what appeared to be defeat into a victory for Ruth and Naomi, for all of Israel, and for the whole world. God is concerned about the details of our lives, too—[turn to Luke 12:4-7](#). The Book of Ruth should give us courage and joy as we seek to live each day to please God. This doesn't mean every day will be without troubles—look at the lives of Naomi and Ruth. Turn to the Apostle Paul's last letter, written perhaps as he awaited his beheading—[turn to 2 Timothy 1:6-12](#). During his first imprisonment Paul wrote in [Philippians 3:13 & 14](#), “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” With these same thoughts in mind Peter wrote in [1 Peter 5:7](#), “Cast all your anxiety (or cares) on him because he cares for you.”

Third, the Book of Ruth also illustrates God’s work of salvation. In the beginning Ruth was an outsider, a stranger, an alien. But Ruth became a member of God’s people because she was redeemed by Boaz, Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer. He paid the price for her to be redeemed. This is what Jesus Christ did for each one of us—as we read last week in [Galatians 4:4-5](#), “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” This is why Peter was able to say in [Acts 4:12](#), “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” This is why another special baby, named Jesus, was born in Bethlehem 1200 years later—to be our kinsman-redeemer, to pay the price for our redemption and to bring us into the family of God.

Finally, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, the Book of Ruth also illustrates the believer’s deepening relationship with his or her Lord. In chapter 1, Ruth didn’t even know that Boaz existed. In chapter 2, Ruth is a poor laborer who gleaned in the field of Boaz and received his gifts. To her, Boaz was just a mighty man of wealth who showed kindness to an alien widow. The transformation happened in chapter 3 where Ruth submitted herself to Boaz as she lay at his feet and believed his promises. The result was recorded in chapter 4, Ruth was no longer a poor gleaner; she had Boaz and everything he owned belonged to her.

[Romans 8:17](#) says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” Sadly, too many Christians are content to live in chapter 2, picking up the leftovers and doing the best they can in their difficult situations. They want God’s gifts, but they don’t want a deeper relationship with God. Like Ruth, they need to submit themselves totally to God, as [Romans 12:1](#) says, “I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual or reasonable act of worship.” How different life would be, if every Christian would submit to the Lord and focus on the Giver instead of the gifts. As [2 Corinthians 5:7](#) says, “We need to ‘live by

faith, not by sight.” Instead of focusing on the evils of our day and becoming pessimistic and cynical, ask God what field He wants you to work in and then faithfully serve Him there and then you will experience His grace and love and joy and peace. Just as Ruth’s commitment made a difference in her life and in the lives of the people she loved, your commitment to God will make a difference in your life and in the lives of the people you love.

But one word of warning: Don’t judge God’s concern and involvement in terms of what you can actually see in the present. Just because things are not working out just as you would have chosen doesn’t mean God is no longer interested or that He has been offended or that He is no longer working all things together for your good. Ruth’s example encourages us to rely on the character of God, as revealed throughout His Word, and not depend on our feelings or our assessment of how we “see” things. **Turn to Isaiah 50:10.** Many Christians today have come to expect that if they fulfill the conditions in the first question—**“fearing the Lord and obeying His Word”**—that there will never be any darkness. There is no guarantee that our Christian discipleship will be easy and bright and that our obedience to the Lord will automatically protect us from dangers and difficulties—**2 Timothy 3:12** says, **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** The point of Ruth, along with many other verses, including this verse from **Isaiah 50:10**, is that when darkness comes, when troubles come—and they will come, we need to trust in the Lord. As we read earlier in **Jeremiah 29:11**, **“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”** Turn to a psalm of Ruth’s great-grandson, David—**turn to Psalm 37:1-7.** **“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”** (**Psalm 37:5-6**).