

Bible Study # 86
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The Writings Series—Ruth

This evening we **are getting into the second of the five Festival Scrolls—the books we commented upon last time.** Having gone through the Song of Solomon, this evening we **are getting into the book of Ruth.**

The book of Ruth is a part of what is called the Megillot or Festival Scrolls. Traditionally, the Jews read it at Pentecost. To briefly summarize, it is the story of a Gentile maiden that voluntarily forsook her own nation and her own gods and became a part of the commonwealth of Israel.

We will note, a little later, the way in which Ephesians 2 is very helpful as a New Testament parallel, explaining some of the spiritual implications of this book—its significance for Pentecost and for the Church. Through her marriage with Boaz, Ruth became an heir of the promises to Abraham. She was the ancestor of King David and, therefore, of the Messiah. The story of Ruth typifies the story of a Christian coming out of the world and offers parallels to the marriage of Christ to the Church.

In the actual account, it is a very beautiful, touching love story. According to tradition, Boaz was well advanced in years. In fact, some traditions say that he may have been upwards of about 80 years old. We will notice Ruth 3:10 as an indication of that. Boaz made reference to this.

Ruth 3:10, “Then he [Boaz] said, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich.’” The reference was that he was not young and evidently was well up in years. Undoubtedly, he was a widower by this time in his life. It’s interesting because there is a direct relationship in the life of Boaz with the period that covers a great deal of the period of Judges.

According to Matthew 1:5, Boaz’s mother was Rahab. Boaz’s life paralleled or covered many of the early periods of the book of Judges. Undoubtedly, he saw qualities in Ruth that must have reminded him of his mother Rahab and her example. You may note in Hebrew 11:31 that Rahab is listed in the men and women of faith.

Boaz fulfills, in this account in the book of Ruth, the role of a kinsman redeemer, which is certainly a type of the role of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a bit of background. I am going to read portions of the *Soncino Jewish Commentary* on the book of Ruth. It gives some background that can be helpful and beneficial.

They make reference, “The book of Ruth is prescribed for reading as part of the liturgy on Pentecost, the festival commemorating the revelation on Mount Sinai. The connection between the book and the festival is two-fold. The festival, as its name Feast of Firstfruits indicates, is primarily a harvest festival, and the harvest figures prominently in the area. The revelation [that is, God’s revelation on Sinai] marked, as it were, the formal acceptance by Israel of that religion and law of life, which were later to prove so irresistibly attractive to the heathen damsel from Moab. The bearing of the story on the festival is the moral one, which teaches that the Torah, the Law of God, can only be acquired by those who tread the road of hardship.”

It’s sort of an interesting point that even the Jews get out of this.

They go on to make the comment, “Unbiased scholars are almost unanimous in agreeing upon the historical accuracy of the facts presented in the book. Who can doubt them or why would they have been invented? There would surely be little point in inventing a foreign ancestry for the greatest and most dearly loved king of Israel.”

The time setting in the book is during the period of the Judges. As I mentioned, Boaz was the son of Rahab. That is mentioned specifically in Matthew where we have the genealogy.

Matthew 1:5-6, we are told, “Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king....”

We take note here that we have several very long generations in this family that come down in much of the period of the Judges. We find that the period of the Judges was a very turbulent time—a time when, as you go through the book of Judges, it’s the bloodiest book in the entire Bible. The reason is summarized in the last verse of the book.

Judges 21:25, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” In other words, people simply pursued their own selfish will, and the result was anarchy, confusion and every sort of problem and difficulty. It was a turbulent time, and God dealt with the people. There were punishments that were sent. This provides the setting, the background, of the book of Ruth.

Jewish tradition credits the authorship of the book of Ruth to Samuel. Samuel’s literary works

also include the books bearing his own name, as well as the book of Judges. It's not something that can be absolutely proven, but there isn't any reason to doubt it. That is the historic tradition that the Jews have maintained.

The commentary continues, and I think it's sort of an interesting summary in terms of their understanding. The commentary says, "What was the writer's aim and purpose in giving the book to the world? Jewish opinion declined to believe that his motive was that of mere entertainment. That's not why it was written. The books of the Torah are not in the habit of telling stories devoid of inner value. Yet the book contains no legal enactment, no decision on the questions of ritual or prohibition. What purpose then does it serve? Well, there are several things that they have gotten out of it. One is to teach us how great is the reward of those who perform deeds of kindness. The hallowing of the family is another distinct purpose in the Bible. The beautiful example, which this narrative provides of the elevating influence of domestic affection, entitled it, if nothing else did, to a place in the canon. Who can lay down the book after reading and not feel that still another of its objects is to set us upon the straight road from which we must not turn either to the right or to the left, lest we meet the fate that befell Elimelech...There's yet another purpose, a genealogical one, and on this point there's a general consensus of opinion, namely to trace the pedigree of David."

Another interesting comment that is brought out says, "It bears remarkable testimony to the meaning of the phrase 'religion and life.' It is in the words of a Gentile admirer, a monument to that ethical code, which could bring to perfection in the true Israelite, such heartfelt piety and self-sacrificing disposition as in a sense to attract and to be an example to others around."

Ruth 1:1-2, we find as we open, "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there." Bethlehem is the ancestral home of King David and the birthplace of the Messiah.

"Ephrathites" is sometimes confused with "Ephraimites," and that is not the situation. The Ephrathites traced their descent from Ephrath,

the wife of Caleb, who is mentioned in I Chronicles 2:19. This is to sort of clarify. It was a sub-group of the Jewish nation.

The period of the Judges was a turbulent time. There were various plagues, difficulties and problems that were sent by God upon the nation as a form of correction.

Here we come to a situation where the response of Elimelech and his family was to simply leave and go to Moab. They continued there.

Verses 3-5, "Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the women survived her two sons and her husband." Naomi was left with only her daughters-in-law.

Verse 6, she decided that she would return from Moab back to the land of Judah. Word had gotten back that the famine had broken in Judah and the situation had improved.

She did not wish to remain there in Moab. Consider the difficulty of being the only person trying to worship God in a completely pagan setting as the Moabites were. It was one thing as long as her husband and her two grown sons were alive, but now she was left with these two Moabite daughters-in-law. Naomi wanted to go back to her own people.

The daughters-in-law had outwardly conformed to the practiced religion of the household. When they married into the family, they took upon themselves to practice the religion of Judah. But now their husbands were dead, and Naomi felt that she wanted to be back with her own people. That was where she needed to be. She was going to go back and the daughters-in-law were going to go with her.

Verse 7, "...they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah."

Verses 8-9, "And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept."

She did not want to encourage them to leave Moab and come to Judah. She felt that they would be doing it sort of in the emotion of the moment after the recent death of their husbands and that a little while later they would regret it. By leaving Moab and going back to Bethlehem, they would sever the connection and the ties to

their own family. Because she recognized that this could create long-term problems, she encouraged them to go back, to return.

Verse 10, they both responded, "...Surely, we will return with you to your people."

Verses 11-13, "But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!'"

Naomi was telling them, 'Look, there isn't any way I can be of any benefit to you. I'm too old to remarry, and if I weren't and had a husband right now, it would be looking at years in the future before I could even possibly have grown sons. I don't have anything to give you. I can't provide for you. You need a husband to take care of you and to provide for you. So you need to go back to your family, to your people.'

Verses 14-15, "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, 'Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods....'" That is a very significant part of it. Orpah, at this point, went back to her people. When she went back to her people, she went back to her old culture. She went back to the old way of living. She went back into the world.

Verse 16, "But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.'" There certainly is a lot of parallel here to the calling of the individual Christian.

Most of the world's churches do everything they can to entice you to come down and join. They tell you how easy it's going to be and all you have to do is give your hand to the preacher and you are going to be saved. It's so simple and you have to do it right now. They will use various techniques. Any of you who have had a background in the Baptist Church, like I did, can remember some of the altar calls. They would play "Just as I Am" and would keep playing and replaying it, trying to get somebody to come down.

Notice the total contrast here. Naomi was not trying to entice them. Rather, she said, 'There are going to be difficulties and adversities. You'd better count the cost. You're looking at a very serious matter.'

With Orpah, it was simply the emotion of the moment. She had an emotional attachment to her mother-in-law and was devastated by the recent death of her husband. Her first inclination was to go, but there wasn't any depth to her commitment. With a little bit of encouragement to return, she did. In reality, she was not prepared to forsake her old way of life. It held out something of an attraction to her.

Ruth, on the other hand, wanted to go with Naomi, not because she expected Naomi to get her a husband, but because she desired to follow the way of life she had seen in the household of Naomi. She was attracted to God's ways, to God's law. She could see that there was something of substance there that she had never had. There was depth to her commitment.

The *Soncino Commentary* makes an interesting comment, "She [Orpah] is one, in a sad series, of those not far from the Kingdom of God who needed but a little more resolution at the critical moment, and for want of it, shut themselves out from the covenant and sank back to a world which they had half-renounced."

There is a lot of parallel if you think in terms of this book being read at Pentecost and in terms of what Pentecost symbolizes. There are many spiritual lessons that can be gleaned from this story. It is a story of events that transpired, but the events that transpired served to illustrate through the lives of different people different approaches, different attitudes and different results that people experience in their life as a result of what they did.

Verse 17, Ruth went on to say, "Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

Interestingly enough, Ruth's name in the Hebrew language is derived from a root word that means "friendship." Ruth certainly typifies, in her life and in her example, this matter of friendship.

Verse 18, "When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her." Once she realized her commitment was serious and there was depth to it, she didn't try to discourage her. It was not that she didn't want her to go. She didn't want her to make that trip, get down there, be dissatisfied and wind up as a misfit in Judah. There certainly could be difficulties in the circumstance.

Verse 19, “Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’”

Even though she had only been gone a little over ten years, those ten years had greatly aged her. She was hardly recognized by people when she came back.

Verse 20, “So she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara [Naomi means “sweetness” in Hebrew; Mara means “bitterness.”], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.’”

Verse 21, “‘I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?’” Having left at an earlier time with her husband and her two sons, now she has returned alone, other than her daughter-in-law.

Verse 22, “So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”

The barley harvest began during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It began with the wave sheaf being cut during the Days of Unleavened Bread. The barley harvest continued for a period of 50 days—from the time of the wave sheaf offering being cut, up until what we call the Day of Pentecost, more commonly called the Feast of Firstfruits or the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament.

Another connection that this book has to the Feast of Pentecost is that the events in it all occurred during the time of the firstfruit harvest.

We understand and have focused before on the fact that God used the physical harvest in the land of Israel as a type of the spiritual harvest. God is engaged in a great spiritual harvest. He uses various examples and illustrations that draw comparisons to that. The physical harvest season of ancient Israel served to illustrate God’s plan. God’s Holy Days are organized around that plan. Pentecost, originally, was the day on which the covenant was made with Israel at Mount Sinai. It was the time that marked the conclusion of the barley harvest. It was an occasion that celebrated the harvest of the firstfruits.

God is in the process of calling firstfruits out of the world. There were two harvests in ancient Israel. One was the early harvest, the firstfruits harvest. The other was the great harvest in the fall, the primary harvest. God uses that as an illustration of His plan of salvation. There is an

early harvest, a calling of spiritual firstfruits, to be followed by the great spiritual ingathering ultimately typified by the Feast of Tabernacles, the festival that celebrated the great gathering in of the physical harvest.

Pentecost celebrates the calling of the spiritual firstfruits and also is the commemoration of the covenant that God made with Israel. Later, of course, it was on the Day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. that is recorded in Acts 2 that God began to make the New Covenant and the pouring out of His Spirit.

The most significant difference between the Old and the New Covenant is that under the Old Covenant, the law of God was written with the finger of God on tables of stone. We are told that the Spirit of God wrote the New Covenant on the tables of our hearts and minds (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrew 8:10). It is internalized. There is a great deal of illustration in this book that we can tie in with God’s calling of His people—the calling of a spiritual firstfruits, the calling of a Church.

Ruth had returned with Naomi. They were here in Bethlehem; it was the beginning of the barley harvest during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Interestingly, they came out of sin at the Days of Unleavened Bread. That was the timing. They left Moab and returned into the land of Israel. It’s sort of an interesting parallel. It is not a parallel that’s dwelt on here, but it’s an interesting parallel that they left that area behind and returned during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

I think there is another thing to note, as we go through this. When you read the book of Judges, you read of all the turmoil, strife, warfare, bloodshed and all of the horrible sins that were being committed. It is important to realize that there were individuals who were quietly obeying God. Even in the midst of the worst turmoil, they were quietly going about their business. Naomi was, Ruth was, and Boaz clearly was a godly man. Even in the midst of problems, there are those with whom God is dealing. There are times when things are going better and times when things are going worse, but there are individuals who keep their eyes on God and continue to serve God. There are individuals who keep their eyes on man and their life has this sort of up and down to it because they are following people rather than following God.

That’s an important factor. If you were following people and were looking at some of the strife and problems going on (even the corruption in some of the judgeships that was going on as you read in the book of Judges), there

wouldn't be a whole lot to inspire confidence. But the individuals who were really spiritually successful looked beyond human beings; they saw God. That's an important lesson for all of God's people.

Ruth 2:1-3, "And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech." She didn't go out and intentionally try to do that.

Verses 4-5, "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, 'The Lord be with you!' And they answered him, 'The Lord bless you!' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'Whose young woman is this?'" He saw this young woman out there with whom he was not acquainted. Evidently there was something about her bearing and the way that she conducted herself that impressed him, and he wanted to know who she was.

Verses 6-9, "So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, 'It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.'" So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.' Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.'" "

Boaz was very impressed. He had undoubtedly heard of the situation of Naomi's return and this young lady who had returned from Moab with her—her young daughter-in-law who had been recently widowed. He had heard she had come back and had a commitment to serving the God of Israel.

Now, again, knowing Boaz's background, it must have had special significance to him. He must have thought back to his own mother and how she had forsaken her background, how she had stepped out in faith to believe and trust the

God of Israel and to cast her lot with the people of God and not with the people of Jericho. I am sure that the story had special significance to him when he heard it in terms of what it reminded him.

So he wants to take special note of her and to look after her. He wants to make sure that she is provided for and he gives strict instructions. You notice that human nature is not a whole lot different now than it was then. He said, "...Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you."

Some think that sexual harassment has only been invented in the last few years. There have been problems with people saying and doing things out of line and inappropriate as long as there have been human beings on the earth. Boaz took note of that and figured, particularly as she was a foreigner, that some of the young men might be tempted to get "fresh" with her or to say things and display inappropriate conduct. He called them over and gave them a stern warning that they had better leave her alone and had better not do anything out of line. He told her that she would be safe there—no one would bother her.

We find that there were a number of qualities that Ruth evidenced in a remarkable way. She was a young woman of great loyalty and determination. She was a person of great humility and evidenced great respect. She evidences that in many ways. She evidences characteristics that we, as the firstfruit harvest of God, certainly need to evidence.

Verses 10-12, "Then she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?' And Boaz answered and said to her, 'It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.'" "

When we leave the world, when we turn our backs on the old way, when we turn our backs on the society that has molded and shaped us, when we turn our backs on the world and come into the Church, we are coming to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. The symbolism is: If you've ever seen chickens in a barnyard, you have seen how a mother hen will gather her little chicks under her wings as a means of protection. If a chicken hawk is circling up in the

sky, she will run around fluffing, trying to get the little chickens to come and gather up under her wings. She is protective and that's the means of extending protection. That's the picture that is given here.

As a man of God, Boaz took his responsibility seriously. Boaz was also a man of substance and property. He took seriously his responsibility to show kindness and to do good as the opportunity presented itself. Clearly, he was a man who lived his religion. There are people who claim a religion, but there's a difference between those who claim a religion and those who live their religion. There's a lot of difference between the two.

One of the things that I think also comes out in the book of Ruth is the fact that Ruth was attracted to the example that she saw. Ruth's exposure to the truth had been in the lives of individuals who were practicing it. That's an important part. We are to be lights to the world (Matthew 5:14-16) and to seek to set an example of someone who is putting into practice the things that we claim to believe.

Verses 13-16, "Then she said, 'Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.' Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, 'Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her, and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, 'Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let some grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.'"

Boaz had seen her working hard. The crews were diligent and they were trying to gather up everything. Boaz saw her working hard and, evidently, it appeared to him that she had to work awfully hard and was getting awfully little. You sort of get the idea that he was already beginning to "tumble." He was really deeply impressed with this young woman and desired to make things easier for her.

It's interesting, even in the context of gleaning—God's system of helping people. God's system is a matter of helping people, but it is a system of helping people to help themselves. God lays great emphasis on the fact that kindness and charity were to be shown by His people, but He did not produce a situation that would simply create a welfare mentality in ancient Israel. The

system that was established by God was a system that allowed people to be productive and to maintain their self-respect. It was to help others help themselves. It was available at the harvest. Those who were poor, widowed or fatherless were allowed to come in after the reapers and to pick up what was dropped. In fact, there were even specific instructions in the law that they were not to harvest the corners of their fields. In other words, they sort of made a circle on it. When the reapers went through they didn't harvest the corners. They left that out. They put themselves in a position to do that.

To show how the mentality of people has changed—I remember a number of years ago when I was a pastor in south Texas. Down in the Rio Grande Valley is an area that produces a great deal of the nation's fresh fruits, vegetables and citrus. A lot of your winter vegetable crop comes from the Rio Grande Valley. There were some farmers down there who switched over to mechanical harvesters. One of the characteristics of the mechanical harvester was there were things that were left behind because they tended to pick up what was uniform as they went through the fields.

Whether the individuals had read it in the Bible or not, I don't know—perhaps they had. There were a couple of the big farmers down there who let the word out that after the mechanical pickers had gone through, the local residents would be free to come in and get anything that remained. They allowed a certain amount of time—I forget what time they allowed—then they would come back in and plow up the field. But there was a certain time period that they opened up the field. They announced that anybody was welcomed who wanted to come in and pick what was left after the harvest was completed. They got very, very few takers, and that is one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the country. It's sort of a sad commentary on human nature in a situation like that. Very, very few people actually availed themselves of going in and doing that.

That's unfortunate because God's way is to help the needy. God wants us to show kindness and mercy. That's an important part of God's character and nature. To be selfish, self-centered and greedy is certainly not characteristic of God. God's system of helping people was a system that allowed them to maintain some dignity. It was a system that allowed them to be productive, to maintain a healthy self-respect and to do something in a constructive manner. It's an unfortunate situation that these principles haven't been utilized.

Verse 19, “And her mother-in-law said to her, ‘Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, ‘The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.’”

When she saw the quantity of grain brought back, Naomi realized that somebody had given some special favor to Ruth because there wasn’t any way that she would have normally, in just one day’s gleaning, brought back this amount of barley. That wouldn’t have been very likely, so Naomi was impressed with that and wanted to know where she had gleaned. She told her it was Boaz.

Verses 20-23, “Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!’ And Naomi said to her, ‘The man is a relative of ours, one of our near kinsmen.’ Then Ruth the Moabitess said, ‘He also said to me, “You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.”’ And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field.’ So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.”

The barley harvest started first. That began during the Days of Unleavened Bread and continued on along. The wheat harvest came in during that seven-week period. The barley harvest took several weeks and then the wheat harvest began. Wheat comes in a little later than barley, so it was a very short difference. We are looking at a seven-week period, the period between the wave sheaf and Pentecost.

Naomi took note of the fact that God had smiled on her. She had come back very discouraged. She was feeling like God had somehow deserted her because she has had all these problems. This can be a typical human reaction when we encounter a number of problems or things go wrong for us, as it had for Naomi. She had lost her husband and her two children. She had started out at an earlier time as the wife of a relatively prosperous man and wound up pretty well destitute, returning back to family property. She was on up in years and her health was such that she was really concerned as to how she would even be able to provide for herself.

One of the things that we see is that first appearances aren’t always the reality. Sometimes we look at things and we think, ‘Well, where’s

God? Has God forgotten?’ God hasn’t forgotten. God was working out a great plan and a great purpose. How many times must Naomi have asked the question, ‘Why? Why Lord?’ Well, she began to sort of look up about this time.

Ruth 3:1-3, “Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our kinsman? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.’”

Naomi was playing a little bit of the matchmaker here. She had observed the way things had gone along and evidently knew that Boaz had taken more than just a casual interest in Ruth. She knew that Ruth certainly had a great affection, fondness and deep respect for Boaz. She decided that maybe she was going to have to step in on the matter.

We will note a little later the responsibilities of the kinsman redeemer. In Scripture, the kinsman redeemer had several responsibilities. One was that he was responsible for taking care of the widow and orphan children of his kinsman. If he was single, he would marry the widow and the child would inherit the father’s land and property. If a relative fell on hard times and had to sell the family property or was sold into slavery for debt, the kinsman redeemer was responsible to redeem that individual—to buy him back. He was responsible to prosecute crimes that involved his near kinsman. It was a responsibility that in many ways typified the role of Jesus Christ.

Naomi had already figured out that Ruth was attracted to Boaz and that Boaz was very much impressed with and attracted to Ruth. But she decided he was never going to propose because there was too much age difference. He was going to be self-conscious about that and figure that she’s better off with somebody young, so he wasn’t going to do it. Since her line of thought was that she didn’t think Ruth could find a better husband than Boaz, she needed to play matchmaker.

They were winnowing barley that evening at the threshing floor. Winnowing was separating the grain from the chaff. Normally, a threshing floor would be up on a hilltop where there would normally be a good breeze. They also used winnowing fans. After the grains had been threshed, it was beaten to separate it, but the

chaff and the grain were all intermingled. They would throw it up in the air and the breeze would blow from the winnowing fan. The chaff was light and it would blow away; the grain would settle back down. We do that in a much more sophisticated mechanized way today with some of the big harvesting equipment. It was much more of a slow tedious operation at this particular time.

So she told Ruth to clean up and to go down to the threshing floor.

Verse 4, “Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.” Ruth trusted Naomi. She knew that Naomi would not get her into trouble.

Verse 5, “And she said to her, ‘All that you say to me I will do.’” She told her that she would do that.

Verses 6-8, “So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet.”

You can imagine! This must have been quite a shock. All of a sudden he wakes up in the middle of the night, he looks, and here’s a woman down at his feet. Now that would be a rather startling thing.

Verse 9, “And he said, ‘Who are you?’ So she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing [KJV, “spread therefore your skirt over your handmaid”], for you are a near kinsman.” To spread the skirt or the garment was an outward symbol of taking her under his protection. In effect, Ruth proposed to him; that is what it amounts to. It doesn’t say it was leap year, but she nevertheless proposed to him. Naomi had told her to do that.

Verse 10, Boaz’s response was, “Then he said, ‘Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich.’”

He was impressed with her. After getting to know her, he felt that she certainly wouldn’t have any trouble attracting a husband. He was deeply impressed with the kind of young woman that she was. He was deeply touched by the fact that she would desire to marry him. He had felt

that was something that was not, let’s say, practical. It was not an issue that he would have pushed because he felt like, perhaps, it would have been unfair to put her on the spot. One of the things we see, just in that example, is that real love is self-sacrificing. It is not selfish. If Boaz had been a selfish individual—if his relationship and attachment to Ruth had been one of selfishness and lust—then he would certainly have taken the initiative. But rather, though he did love her, he was not selfish. He was selfless and did not try to push the claim.

Verses 11-13, he told her, “‘And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you a virtuous woman. Now it is true that I am your near kinsman; however, there is a kinsman nearer than I. Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the Lord lives! Lie down until morning.’”

He was prepared to put it in God’s hands. He knew that this other individual had first right to the property and to exercise the responsibilities of a near kinsman.

Verse 14, “So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he said, ‘Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.’” He didn’t want anything that would cast any shadow on her reputation. Again, that is indicative of someone who really loves, cares and respects someone and would not wish anything to tarnish that person’s reputation. Boaz was certainly concerned about Ruth in that way.

Verses 15-18, “Also he said, ‘Bring the shawl that is on you and hold it.’ And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley, and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. So when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, ‘Is that you, my daughter?’ Then she told her all that the man had done for her. And she said, ‘These six ephahs of barley her gave me; for he said to me, “Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.”’ Then she said, ‘Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.’”

Naomi knew that Boaz was not going to procrastinate on this. She knew he was going to go immediately because she had already figured the attachment that was there.

Ruth 4:1, “Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the near kinsman of

whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, 'Come aside, friend, sit down here.' So he came aside and sat down." You might note that this other near kinsman is not named. His name was actually blotted out of the genealogy. So he goes down in history as old "what's-his-name," KJV, "such a one," NKJV margin, "so and so." His name was blotted out because of his selfishness. Boaz probably knew the character of the man. There would be legal requirements to be fulfilled and there was going to be property obtained in this process as well.

Verses 2-4, "And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here.' So they sat down. Then he said to the near kinsman, '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 inhabitance and the elders of my people. 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 [Boaz his eyes lit up at that; he figured he was going to get a nice piece of land really cheap.]. And he said, 'I will redeem it.'"

Verse 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 raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance.'" Now that kind of cast a different light on it. On learning that the transaction would include marriage with Ruth and its attendant responsibilities, he withdrew. The property would not be in the kinsman's name. It would be in the name of the widow whom he was to marry. And if that was going to entangle the property, well, that was a little different story. He wasn't sure he wanted to do that.

Verse 6, the kinsman says, on second thought, that he can't redeem it for himself lest he ruin his own inheritance. 'You go ahead; I can't redeem it.'

Verse 7, "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 an attestation in Israel." That was the legal insignia of a formal indication of contract.

Verses 8-13, "Therefore the near kinsman said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.' So he took off his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and to 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 wife

of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day.' 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 the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. 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.' So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son."

One other factor: Ruth had been married for ten years and had not had any children. The indication is that God performed a miracle in allowing her to conceive and bear a child. God stepped in and gave her a child.

Verses 14-17, "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you 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.' Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. 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."

Then it goes into the genealogy of Pharez, one of the sons of Judah.

Verses 18-22, "Now this is the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron; Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon; Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David." The book culminates with the birth of King David, the royal line through whom the Messiah would ultimately come.

Let me go back to Ephesians because I would like to call your attention to it.

Ephesians 2:1, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins." That's all of us.

Verses 2-5, "in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the

desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ....”

Verses 11-12, “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

Now, this is certainly a description of Ruth. Though the Moabites were descendants of Lot (who was Abraham’s nephew) and they were a kindred people, they were outside God’s covenant relationship. They were Gentiles. A Gentile includes all ethnic groups except the descendants of Jacob. Every other ethnic group is lumped together as Gentiles. It just means those who are not descendants of Jacob. And this was Ruth’s situation.

Here is the parallel that is brought out. It certainly applies to us, in terms of our calling into God’s Church, whether or not we are of the physical descendants of Israel. The New Covenant is with spiritual Israel. So regardless of whether we are physically Gentile or Israelite, unless we become a part of spiritual Israel, we don’t have any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. The new birth that Jesus Christ spoke of in John 3 is one that does not have its origin in the flesh. It’s not those who are born of the flesh or of the will of the flesh. It’s not those whose birth is from below that are entitled to inherit the Kingdom of God. If the only claim we have is our earthly physical birth (our birth from below), it won’t do us any good because the only birth that will enable us to inherit the Kingdom of God is a birth from above—a birth that is not generated by the will of flesh and blood but is generated by God Himself.

Verses 12-14, “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us.”

Verses 19-20, “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the

household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

In Ephesians, it’s talking about the Church—the relationship that we have and the opportunity that we have as God’s people.

The book of Ruth is an account of a physical story that certainly illustrates a number of spiritual principles. We can, in that way, compare Ruth to the individual Christian who forsakes the world and follows after the way of God. Ultimately, of course, the Church is to marry Christ. Ruth married Boaz who was a prince of Israel of the line through which the Messiah would come. He was of that royal line of Judah through whom the Messiah would come. Ruth received an inheritance through marriage. In that sense, we are told that the Church will marry Jesus Christ. Our relationship is a relationship through marriage, if you will. There’s a very distinct spiritual parallel to the book.

It is certainly a very beautiful love story and is a story of true love. It is a story that illustrates their loyalty and commitment. It is a story of the selflessness and the willingness to put the other person and the interest of the other person first.

There are many lessons that can be gleaned out of the book of Ruth. It is, on the surface, a very beautiful love story and that certainly is an important thing. God is the Author of the relationship between a man and a woman. God is the Author of the family. God is the Author of the love relationship. That’s something that animals don’t have. Animals reproduce—they mate—but there is not a commitment and a loving relationship. You don’t see that with cattle, horses, dogs or cats. God designed that for human beings, and certain books of the Bible illustrate what a beautiful thing it is when it is done right.

This is a book that certainly illustrates the loyalty, commitment and selflessness that is a part of true love. It certainly illustrates the importance of taking care of our responsibilities—of being kind, considerate and willing to help, give and share.

It also teaches spiritual lessons and parallels with the relationship of the Church and Christ that can be applied to the spiritual meaning of Pentecost. There’s an awful lot in the little short book of Ruth, which is a book that is not all that frequently quoted and gone to. But there is a tremendous amount that is packed in there.

The next Bible study, we will be covering the book of Lamentations. Again, it is one of those

smaller books that we tend not to go to very often. Yet again I think we will see that there is an awful lot that God has inspired to be packed in there for our benefit—that can be there for our growth and our edification.