

THE BOOK OF RUTH – NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

PART TWO – THE SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION, AND THE FIRST MEETINGS

In chapter one we saw Naomi, who can picture us, in desperate trouble because she had ignored God's clear instruction to her and her sons, as the human race from Adam on, ignored God's plan and suffered accordingly. Eventually she realises that her only hope is to return to Bethlehem, as we begin to acknowledge our need to return to God. We followed her two daughters-in-law, Orpah – 'stubborn', and Ruth – 'friendship'. Both represent outsiders wondering about becoming one of God's people. The first declines and goes back to her old ways. The second has glimpsed something of God in Naomi and will not be separated from her.

When Jesus Christ shows in our lives, people will, at times, be drawn first to us. For the moment we should accept this always realizing, as Naomi does, that the plan will be to introduce them to the Redeemer, after which they will need us less and less. Bethlehem in the Old Testament is a place of death and new life, and is promised as the future birthplace of the Messiah, the Christ.(Mic.5:2) It is the only place to begin again. Naomi knows that, according to the scriptures, the only hope for Ruth is to find a redeemer, one of her late husband's family. A redeemer was someone identified in Deut.25:5,6 as able to pay off the debts of a needy widow and take her as a wife. Together Naomi and Ruth arrive at Bethlehem wondering what is in store. Naomi is grieving over the wasted years. For the moment she assumes that God is punishing her for her mistakes. The New Testament makes it clear that it is not God who sends trials and temptations.(Jas.1:12,13) The book of Job, chapters 1 and 2, give the same clear answer. The story of their salvation is about to unfold.

At last, in chapter two, we discover why Bethlehem is such a special place of hope for these needy women. We are introduced to Boaz, a rich relative of Elimelech, 'God is King'. Ruth is hungry and so Naomi encourages her to go out and find grain to feed them both. 'Gleaning' referred to the provision in the Law for some grain always to be left when a field was reaped so that the poor could find food.(Lev.19:9) It was part of the instruction in the same chapter to 'love your neighbour as yourself'.(19:18) Gleaning was what the disciples of Jesus were doing in Luke 6:1. On another occasion Jesus explained that grain is a picture of the word of God on which we need to feed.(Luke 8:11)

As she searches in different fields Ruth comes across the field of Boaz. He notices her and encourages his servants to give her every opportunity to gather grain, and orders protection for her as she does so. He instructs his workers to make sure her needs are met. She wonders why she is being favoured in this way. Boaz is aware of her good heart towards Naomi and the choice she has made to seek answers to life among God's people instead of in the heathen ways in which she had been brought up. She appreciates the love she is being shown but knows how totally undeserving she is.(2:1-13)

When it comes time for the other reapers to eat, Boaz makes her welcome and instructs his servants to make sure Ruth is fed, not just with the gleanings, the left-overs, but with the best of the harvest, well prepared. Ruth returns to her mother-in-law at night, to share what she has gleaned and to report on the care she has received from Boaz. Naomi explains more of who Boaz is. She describes him as one of their closest relatives, literally 'redeemers'. She now encourages Ruth to stick close to Boaz and to seek gleanings nowhere else but in his field.(2:14-23)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is gleaning grain in a field a picture of the process by which the Lord draws us to Himself? How do we also frequently try other 'fields' first before we start seriously to learn about Jesus?(v.1-3)
2. How does Naomi encourage Ruth in her search without forcing her ways upon her or pushing her to Boaz?(v.2) How does Ruth sharing her grain with Naomi illustrate how those whom we have encouraged to learn the gospel will share their discoveries with us?(v.18) How should we respond when they do?
3. In what way does Boaz welcome Ruth when they first meet?(v.4-12) How does the Lord Jesus do the same for us? What picture was being used when Boaz offered Ruth water as well as grain?
4. When the end of the morning comes what does Boaz do for Ruth?(v.4-16) What does he encourage his servants to do?(v.9) How does the Lord want us to do the same for the one who is searching? Boaz means 'quickness'. How is God both quick and slow?(II Pet.3:9; Jas.1:19)
5. What does Boaz warn his servants not to do when they meet Ruth? How can Jesus' servants today make the mistake he warns about?(v.15,16)
6. What final warning does Naomi give Ruth in this chapter which is also important advice to us to give those who are seeking today?(v.22-23)