

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

PART FOUR – I WILL BE HER REDEEMER! THE PUBLIC DECLARATION

Under Naomi's guidance Ruth moves from being a widow in chapter one with a seemingly hopeless future to winnowing in Boaz' field near Bethlehem in chapter two. We move from a life which is an uphill struggle in a godless world to our first contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ and our first meeting with Him and His servants. As we begin to be fed with truth which makes sense, and caring people who demonstrate how truth works, we are drawn to look to Jesus alone for answers to life.

In chapter three Naomi encourages Ruth towards commitment to Boaz as her future redeemer. Their meeting place is Boaz' threshing floor where the barley and the chaff from the harvest will have been separated. Harvesting in the New Testament illustrates how we are brought to Christ,(Matt.9:37,38) and threshing how the Holy Spirit separates in our understanding what is God's thinking from what belongs only to man.(Matt.3:12)

Ruth's commitment to Boaz is a process over a number of days, as our 'marriage' to Jesus often takes time before we are sure. They meet in secret in the dark of the threshing floor unknown to all around, as trusting ourselves to Jesus is in the end a very private matter between us and Him and no-one else.(Matt.6:5,6) Ruth lies at the feet of Boaz asking to be covered by his blanket. We submit ourselves to Jesus by placing ourselves at His feet in repentance and asking Him to do something even better than covering our sin. Covering is the Old Testament concept of atonement. We want to be cleansed which can only happen at the cross.(I Jn.1:7)

Boaz knows Ruth needs to be redeemed but there was a process to be followed according to the Old Testament law before that can happen. Boaz promises Ruth that she will be redeemed and taken care of. 'How?' will become clear on the following day. Meanwhile she is to keep quiet about her coming redemption until she understands it. Often Jesus told those whose lives He had blessed to say nothing until they really understood.(Matt.8:4; 9:30)

She returns to Naomi with a huge collection of barley which they share together. As we really get serious about our relationship with Jesus our understanding of the Bible grows greatly. We now have so much to share. We probably do this first with those who have encouraged our search.

The next day the problem of two possible redeemers needs to be settled for ever. This is to be done in public before the whole town. Both Boaz and the other man are close relatives of Elimelech, 'God is King'. The other man has the first opportunity to declare what he can do for Ruth before Boaz will explain his willingness to be the redeemer. The closer relative can buy Naomi's field which belonged to her late husband but he is not able to marry Ruth and produce children with her to be heirs of Elimelech, as required by the Law.(Deut.25:5-10) We are not told the reason for his unwillingness. It may simply

be that he was already married with children and knows that having two wives is not God's plan for men and women.(Gen.2:24)

In Romans chapter 7:1-6, Paul uses an extraordinary illustration. First he pictures us married to the Law, a demanding perfectionist whom we could never please. That marriage will not work. However hard we try to meet the Law's demands we will always fail and be frustrated. Who would want a marriage like that? Since divorce was never God's plan, Paul asks what hope there could be for us in such a situation? His solution is a remarkable one. The Law will not die, so we will have to! We die with Christ at the cross and are raised up with Him to a new life.(Rom.6:1-11) Now we are free from that failing 'marriage' to the Law, and can be married to Jesus. The marvelous difference is that though His demands are even higher than those of the Law, He, living in us, will fulfill them all. So Jesus, not the Law, is the only one who can truly redeem us. But God planned that the Law would have the first opportunity to teach us why we need His Son.(Gal.3:19-25; 4:1-7)

In Deut.25 when the closest relative refused to marry the widow, she could take off his sandal and spit in his face to humiliate him. Notice that in Ruth 4:8 he takes off his own sandal and there is no spitting. The Law is not to blame for being unable to redeem us, but we still need to be reminded that we did try keeping the Law before we really trusted Christ as the only one who could save us. Finally the scene is prepared for a beautiful wedding between a destitute young widow from Moab and the wealthy, mature man from Bethlehem. They celebrate it together in the company of the whole excited town who somehow recognize that this is not just the fulfillment of a lovely romance but an event of huge significance in history. Our coming to Christ is cause for a great party in heaven.(Luke 15:7,10,22-24)

The impact of our 'marriage' to Jesus Christ can be far reaching for us, our families, our societies and our world. The marriage of Boaz and Ruth produced Obed, the grandfather of David, future King of Israel. Another thousand years later the line of David produced both Joseph, the adopted father, and Mary, the birth mother of Jesus, the King of heaven.(Matt.1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38)

Naomi, who had done much to bring Boaz and Ruth together, became the nanny for the baby Obed when he arrived. Her own life had started well with Elimelech, 'God is King', and then struggled. Once she makes the decision to come back to Bethlehem, the place she should never have left, she can begin to draw Ruth with her. When as Christians we have wandered away from God's best in our lives, we will only begin to lead others to Christ when we are really committed to being with Him.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT ON THE BOOK OF RUTH

Compare the steps Ruth had to take to be united with Boaz to your own journey into really knowing Jesus Christ as your Redeemer. Describe how someone like Naomi walked beside you for some of that journey.