

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

PART THREE – WILL HE BE MY REDEEMER? THE SECRET MEETING.

In chapter two we saw Naomi and Ruth back in Bethlehem, which represents a place of death and new life throughout the Bible. It literally means ‘Beth’, a house, and ‘Lechem’, bread. For these two widows it was to be the place where they would be fed, and so brought from death to life.

Naomi’s hope was that Ruth would meet Boaz, a close relative of her late husband and therefore a potential redeemer. Like Naomi we hope to see someone who is searching for meaning to life, meet our Redeemer, Jesus. Naomi wisely does not push Ruth towards Boaz but encourages her in her gleaning. Gleaning in the Bible involved gathering the few heads of barley or wheat which were deliberately left after the harvest to meet the needs of the poor. Seed in scripture is the word of God,(Lk.8:11) so gleaning represents the way we search for answers to life. Like Ruth, most of us tried various religions and philosophies before we came to the Christian ‘field’ in our searching.

Like Boaz, Jesus gives us a warm welcome and encourages us to stay and keep searching with our questions about life. Again as Boaz did, Jesus urges His servants to care for us well, to show us how our spiritual thirst can begin to be satisfied. He recognizes the genuineness of our hearts. As the day moves on Boaz makes sure Ruth is fed not only with the scraps she has picked up but with the very best food, well prepared. By the end of the day she is overwhelmed by Boaz’ generous provision and cannot wait to get back with Naomi to share all the love she has received. We do the same as the Lord begins to shower His very best on us. Naomi is again wise as she explains to Ruth that Boaz is not just a kind man but that he could be the redeemer she desperately needs. Finally she urges Ruth not to wander off to any other fields and to stay close to Boaz’ servants. The person earnestly seeking Jesus can still be an easy prey to false teachers. Other Christians should be a great example of the value of our search for food for our souls, and an encouragement not to be distracted by other ‘answers’. Several times Boaz urges his servants to be gentle with Ruth as we need not put pressure on those who are seeking Christ.

Naomi begins in chapter three to play the role of the match-maker. Friendship with Jesus needs to lead to commitment, as people long for the security we can have of knowing we belong to the Lord. She looks for the ideal meeting place. At the end of a day of harvesting, the owner of the field and his workers would meet to share a meal and then to rest together. The threshing floor was the place of celebration and rest. But first the sheaves of grain need to be winnowed, in which the grain is separated from the chaff. As we gather ideas about Jesus, the Holy Spirit works in our understanding to distinguish what is valuable, and will feed us, and what is not. The word ‘merry’ in verse 7 is ‘yatab’ in Hebrew. It means ‘good, well, glad or pleasing’ – not drunk, which is quite a different word! Boaz does not welcome Ruth because he has had too much to drink. Jesus is glad to welcome us.

Naomi believes Ruth is now ready to indicate her willingness to be committed to Boaz. She encourages her to prepare herself with a bath, some perfume and her best clothes which would make her stand out from the sweaty labourers who would spend that night in Boaz' barn.

The next step was to be a daring one! After Boaz and his workers had eaten and drunk well and fallen asleep, Ruth is sent in to find Boaz in the dark, lift up the blanket which covered his feet and lie down under the blanket. Boaz awakens in the night to discover a young lady cuddled up at his feet. Ruth identifies herself and asks him to cover her and become her redeemer for the years to come. Boaz responds positively that he will make sure she is provided for but explains that under their law there is a process they must first follow.

Early in the morning before it is light, Boaz sends Ruth off home with an even more bountiful load of grain than on the previous occasion to share with Naomi. He promises that the matter of her redemption will be settled on the following day. He tells Ruth to keep their meeting a secret for the moment. It is very private matter between the two of them.

Ruth cannot wait to share with Naomi how her date with Boaz has gone. Naomi is quietly excited about the way the plan is working out. Something about the sparkle in Ruth's eyes tells her what is ahead...

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why does Naomi regard her match-making as so important to Ruth? Why should we also encourage those who have been impressed by Jesus to seek to be committed to Him? What do all of us long for which makes this so desirable?(II Tim.1:12)
2. What advice does Naomi give Ruth about how to prepare herself for her meeting with Boaz? How do these steps represent what happens when we commit ourselves to Jesus?(Acts 22:16; II Cor.2:14-16; Matt.22:12; Col.3:5-14)
3. Why is Ruth's growing relationship with Boaz to be, at this stage, developed in secret? In what way should we respect the privacy of those who are moving towards faith in Jesus?(Matt.6:5,6)
4. Why is it so significant that their meeting happened on the threshing floor where the barley was separated from the chaff? Why is Ruth to seek out Boaz rather than for him to be pursuing her?(Matt.11:28; Jn:7:37) How is this still true for us?
5. What important Old Testament picture of salvation is expressed in the idea of Boaz' covering being spread over Ruth?(Lev.16:30) How does this change in the New Testament?
6. Why does Boaz not immediately redeem Ruth? What lesson for today can we learn from his delay? What encouragement does Naomi give her when she returns with an even more bountiful gift than last time?