

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 32

Ruth Exposition

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 32, Ruth Exposition.

Greetings again. And now we're going to pick up where we left off in the introduction to the book of Ruth. And we're going to get into the book of Ruth itself, exposit through the four chapters. So, if you have your Bibles open to the first chapter.

And some ways we can see the book as sort of kind of an interplay between the ideas of emptying and filling. In the first chapter, we see what we might call a godly family emptied by the deaths of people. And then the godly family is filled toward the end by the union of Boaz and Ruth and the child that comes from them.

So anyway, the first part of the book, verses one to five, sets the stage very quickly. It does not give us the biography of Elimelech, the patriarch of the family, or Naomi or the sons. It just says Elimelech and Naomi were there.

They had two sons and then Elimelech died. And then the two sons marry two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, and the sons die. So, all of a sudden we have three women left.

We have Naomi, the mother-in-law, and the two daughters. She's from Judah, from Bethlehem, and they are from Moab. And this is a time of crisis in the land because there's a famine.

So, Naomi takes it upon herself to free her daughters from any obligations to her and tells them that they should go back to their own homes. In verse six, she tells them that because she's heard that there is food in the land of Moab, and tells her two daughters-in-law that to go back there. Both of the daughters-in-law refuse to leave.

They weep and they cling to her. And verse ten, well, verse nine, she says, May the Lord grant that you find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Go back and find husbands there.

And she kissed them. They lifted their voices and wept. And they said, verse ten, no, we will return with you.

And she insists, no, you should go back. Go because I am too old to have a husband. I couldn't have children that you could marry.

Even if so, it would be a long time. So go back. It is exceedingly bitter to me, for your sake, that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

Verse thirteen. That idea of bitterness is one that comes to play a few verses later. So, they all wept again.

And Orpah decides to take her leave. So, she kisses her mother-in-law, verse thirteen, but Ruth clings to her. And Naomi says, look, your sister-in-law is gone.

Why don't you go back with her? And then Ruth responds with this beautiful statement of loyalty. It's one of the most beautiful statements we find in the Bible. It's not sexual between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law, but it can serve as a model for lots of friendships and covenants and certainly marriages as well.

And she says, verse sixteen, no, don't send me away, because where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people.

Your God, my God. So right away we see this foreigner from Moab embracing her mother-in-law on a human relationship, but she's also said, Your God is going to be my God. Again, similar to what Rahab said to the Israelites, in not quite the same words, but basically, I'm going to embrace the God of your people and reject my God, Baal.

In Ruth's case, it's rejecting the Moabite system of religion with Chemosh as the head. When you die, I will die. There I will be buried.

May the Lord do so to me and more. If anything but death parts me from you. So that's just a beautiful thing.

So, they go back home, and when they get back to Bethlehem, people come out and greet Naomi, and they can hardly recognize her. They say, Is this Naomi? She suffered the deaths of three of her kin, her husband and her two sons, and abandonment by one of her daughter's daughters-in-law. So, she says in verse 20, Don't call me Naomi, call me Marah.

There's a wordplay there that most of your Bibles probably have a footnote or a marginal note that explains that. The word Marah means bitter, and the word Naomi is related to the word for beautiful or pleasant. So, a huge change in character and fortunes for Naomi.

She wants to leave behind a portion of her life that was beautiful, and she is entering a dark phase that she almost seems to want to wallow in. And the reason is because the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full.

He's brought me back empty. So, this is the idea of the emptying of a family in chapter one. So why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity to me? So, they get back to Bethlehem, and this is at the beginning of the barley harvest.

And that seems to portend good things. First of all, there's a famine in the land at the beginning of the chapter. But now, at the end of the chapter, they're coming back, and apparently, there's been a rain and there's been a harvest.

And that, of course, forms the background for the next couple of chapters. So, in chapter two, we have kind of the development of things, and Boaz and Naomi meet. Boaz and Ruth meet, the man who ultimately, she will marry.

So, we're introduced to Boaz right away in chapter two, verse one. Naomi had a relative of her husband's, so he's also an Israelite from the tribe of Judah, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And for whatever it's worth, Boaz's name means, in him is strength.

The text doesn't make any point of that, but it's a good name. It's a strong name. So Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him.

And this goes back to Pentateuchal legislation in Deuteronomy, where they're told to, when the ox is plowing the fields, let the tailings drop and the ox can eat, because it's worthy of its work. But also, the poor can follow along and glean what is left as well. So, it's a provision for the poor.

And so, Ruth says to Naomi, I want to do that. And I want to glean among the ears of grain after him, in whose field I shall find favor. She doesn't know who it is, but she'll go.

And so, she sets out, goes to the field after the reapers in verse three, and it says she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz. Just happened upon it. Coincidence.

Or maybe there's God's providence there as well. And so Boaz comes from Bethlehem and sees this, and he sees this young woman, and asks the reapers who it is. They tell him who it is.

And she's a young Moabite woman, verse six. And verse seven, she comes and makes a more bold claim. In verse two, she says, I want to go glean among the ears of grain, just sort of the droppings, the tailings.

But in verse seven, she says, let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers. Well, the sheaves are the bundles that are put together. She wants to be part of a more abundant thing, and it's a little bit more of a bold request, it seems to be here in chapter, in verse seven.

So, she's coming, she's doing that. And so, Boaz then confronts Ruth or engages Ruth, and tells her these wonderful words, and says, don't go anywhere else. Stay here, and my people will take care of you.

Go with the young women. My young men are not going to touch you. So, in verse ten, she falls on her face, bows to the ground, and says, why have I found favor in your eyes? That you should take notice of me because I am a foreigner.

So, she's aware of her outsider status, and even though she's embraced Naomi and embraced her God, she's still surprised, pleasantly surprised, that someone from Bethlehem, someone from Judah, would welcome her who is a foreigner and treat her so well. And in verse 12, or verses 11 and 12, Boaz answers her, and he says, because of your reputation, everything you've done to your mother-in-law, the loyalty you've shown, their reward should be given to you by the Lord. End of verse 12.

And look, it's beautiful wording at the end of verse 12. It says, a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. And the idea of the wings of an eagle, or the wings of a bird, or the wings of the Lord is a very picturesque imagery that we find in the Bible.

In Exodus 19, it talks about how God is going to bring them under their wings, his wings. Elsewhere, it talks about mounting up like the wings of an eagle, and the wings in this kind of context are giving shelter, and protection. So, she has come under the Lord's wings to take refuge.

And so, she realizes she's had favor, and she's grateful verse 13. And so, he invites her to his table, in verse 14, for a meal. And he instructs the young men, in verse 15, to let her lean among the sheaves.

Also, in verse 16, while you're at it, folks, pull out some of the sheaves and drop them and give her extra food. Just, let's do this for her. So, you see a spirit of generosity on Boaz's part.

He does not begrudge some extra tailings and extra part of the food, rather than just saying, well, she can pick up whatever she can pick up. So, all these characters are sympathetic. Naomi, the widow, and she's bereft of her children.

Ruth is certainly a sympathetic woman, Boaz as well. So, she finishes the harvest and brings the food back and shows her mother-in-law what she got. She got about an ephah of barley, which is about two-thirds of a bushel of the barley.

And comes back and tells her mother-in-law the story. And Naomi pronounces a blessing upon him. Verse 20, may he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

And somehow, she knows that he's a close relative of theirs. End of verse 20. So that's a good thing.

Naomi says, keep doing what you do. And Ruth then lives with her mother-in-law. There appears to be some passage of time between chapters 2 and 3. But now Naomi sets in motion another sort of plan.

And she feels an obligation to her daughter-in-law. Undoubtedly because her daughter-in-law has shown so much loyalty to her. So, in chapter 3, verse 1, she says, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Isn't Boaz a relative with whom women were there? There may be a future for you with Boaz.

And I, as your mother-in-law, feel a protective obligation to you. And so, I'm going to suggest some things that you should do. And it should be a place where you come to a place of rest there.

The chapter begins and ends with the idea of rest. Chapter 3, verse 1. My daughter, should I not seek rest for you? And then verse 18. Naomi is speaking to Ruth and says, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out.

Because the man will not rest except settle the matter today. So, Boaz is going to keep working until he settles the matter and has rest. And that will be rest for both him and Ruth.

So, Naomi tells Ruth in verse 3 to get washed up, and get ready to go. And go to the place where Boaz is and wait until he lies down. And then go uncover his feet and lie down there.

And he will tell you what to do. This idea of uncovering his feet, we're not completely clear about what exactly that was. Some have just said it's just uncovering the blanket and maybe getting under the blanket there.

Some have suggested it's actual sexual seduction. I'm not sure it's that. But certainly, there are some overtones of sexuality there.

I'm not sure I would have instructed my own teenage daughters to do that with a man anytime, anywhere. But anyway, so she does that. And Boaz in verse 7 has eaten and drunk and his heart was merry.

So, he's maybe had a cup or two more of wine than he should have. And he goes to lie down and she comes softly and covers his feet. And he wakes up and says, who are you? Verse 9. And she said I am Ruth, your servant.

And then she says, Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer. Some versions say spread your garment over your servant. But literally, it says spread your wings.

And I think it's a direct echo of the reference in chapter 2, verse 12, talking about the Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you come to take refuge. So, the Lord is going to provide refuge for Ruth. And here Ruth more specifically asks Boaz to be the source of protection for her and refuge.

And she says, you are a redeemer. You are a goel. You are this kinsman redeemer.

And he said, may you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or old. So, Boaz, the rather wealthy man is probably in middle age or later.

And she's a young woman. She could have had any of the young men. But she comes to him, an older man, and he's grateful for that.

And so, in verse 11, he says, I'll do everything that you ask for because everybody knows that you are a worthy woman. Verse 11. Eshet Chayil, we've mentioned before.

Erased it now, but we've talked about it in the introduction. This is the same word you find in the book of Proverbs, an excellent wife. But he said, yes, I'm a redeemer, verse 12.

But there's another redeemer who's closer in the marriage line than I am. So, we need to talk to him first. And if he's willing to do this, then you'll have to become his wife.

If not, then I will certainly do that. So, lie down till the morning, and I'll investigate things. And she comes back home and relates everything to Naomi.

And things are set and primed for a favorable ending. And they expect this. So, she waits.

She decides to wait. And then Boaz, in chapter 4, goes to try to settle the matter. So, in chapter 4, Boaz goes to the gate of the city.

And the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz says, Come over here. Let's sit down and have a chat.

So, he also calls ten elders of the city to witness this. Remember back in the book of Deuteronomy, in the redemption of the brother-in-law ceremony, the elders are part of that. And if the brother-in-law doesn't want to marry, then the woman is to take the sandals off and spit in his face.

This is not, strictly speaking, your brother-in-law. And things are a little different. We're talking about the property here, which echoes more Leviticus 25 than Deuteronomy 25.

But anyway, he brings the elders. The elders are obviously sort of the public custodians of the affairs of the city. And so, he tells the redeemer about Naomi, verse 3, and she's selling a parcel of land that belonged to Elimelech, a common relative.

And Boaz, in a straightforward and honest way, says I thought I should tell you about this. You should have the opportunity to buy this land. And so, the near relative said, Yes, that's great.

So, I will redeem it, end of verse 4. But then Boaz says, Well, there's a codicil that goes with this. There's an extra in the fine print here, or this extra document. There's something else you need to know.

Verse 5, The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance. That's verse 5. And as we said in the introduction to the book, that provision is not found anywhere in the Pentateuch. So it seems to be something that developed as a custom in the intervening years.

But the near relative seems to accept the validity of this. He doesn't say, No, no, no, you're wrong. That's not the deal.

In verse 6, he says, oh, well, I can't do that then, because that would impair my inheritance. So, again, those are parts of those that seem to be customs that have developed. They're not specifically mentioned back in Deuteronomy or Leviticus.

It tells now, the author of the book gives us a little bit more background information now. In verse 7 and following, he said, This is the custom back then. If somebody was

going to make this kind of transaction, he'd take his sandal off, give it to the other, and that's the manner of meeting, attesting this as a witness in Israel.

Which kind of contrasts to, in Deuteronomy, if the brother-in-law refused to do this, the wife, the widowed wife, should yank the sandals off the brother-in-law and then spit in his face. So this is a much more civilized kind of transaction. But exchanging the sandals seems to be sort of, you take the sandal off, you're more vulnerable to walking and stepping on bad things.

So, it's a sign of exchange of trust, and honor between the two. So, in verse 6, I'm sorry, verse 8, when the Redeemer said to Boaz, take it for yourself, he took his sandal off. And then Boaz said to the others, you are witnesses that this is taking place.

And everybody chimes in in verse 11, saying, yes, we are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. In other words, may she be fertile and have a godly influence and have children.

Rachel and Leah were the mothers of the 12 tribes, along with the concubines. And that's the prayer, that's the blessing that the people pray for Ruth. And so may you act worthily in Ephrathah, be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord would give you by this young woman.

So, Boaz took Ruth, verse 13, and she became his wife. He went into her, she conceived, bore a son. And the women said to Naomi, you're blessed because the Lord has not left you without a Redeemer.

By extension, Boaz becomes her son-in-law. And he will be to you a restorer of life. She thought her life was over, back in chapter 1. This offspring now will be a restorer of life to you and a nourisher in your old age.

And your daughter-in-law who loves you, who has more than seven sons, has given birth to him. So, Naomi takes him, and becomes his nursemaid. And they gave him a name, his name was Obed.

And he's the father of Jesse, father of David. So, there's the beautiful story ending in the ancestry of David. The genealogy then links back again Judah with David, as we've said in other contexts.

And it does end up as a beautiful story. Everything works out well for all the characters. There's really no villain in this story.

It's just sad circumstances of the death of the husbands back in chapter 1. This potentially complicated factor, this kinsman redeemer, this near relative, chapter 3. But he himself goes along with the program and allows Boaz to marry Ruth. And everyone lives happily ever after. Don't need to be flip about that.

But God is working in this book. And we see the leading into the life of the great godly king, King David.

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