

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER TEN

RUTH

Let us rejoice for the book of Ruth! Had we the book of Judges alone, as to the long period of Israel's history between Joshua and Samuel, we should be ready to conclude that all the gentler virtues had fled from the land, and lawlessness and crime were universal. But this book lifts up the curtain which veils the privacy of domestic life, and discloses to us most beautiful views of piety, integrity, self-sacrificing affection, gentleness and charity, growing up amidst the rude scenes of war and strife, and the abominations attendant upon the practice of idolatry.

There were still beautiful lives in those times, and bright examples of faith. If the enemy were busy in corrupting the people, God likewise secured the triumph of His love in the hearts of many.

The key word is *faith*; the key verses 1:16, 17.

Even a cursory reader must be impressed with the sublime beauty of this remarkable record. For pathos, sweetness, and unaffected naturalness, it is unsurpassed. So graphic is this "prose idyll," that picture after picture presents itself, and yet there is no confusion, no diminution of descriptive power, and the interest of the reader is held, increased from beginning to end. Its crystalline transparency, and inimitable simplicity stamp the narrative as true.

The book is not exactly a history; nor is it biography.

It is only a little biographical episode in a history. Just as there were real saints in the darkest periods in the Middle Ages, when popes and prelates vied in wickedness with kings and barons, saints who were hidden away in quiet nooks and corners of Christendom—so in the midnight of Hebrew history there were some who worshipped not Baal, who in wondrous simplicity of character and genuine fidelity, lived near to God, and kept the light of true religion burning brightly.

Such was the household of Elimelech, of Boaz and no doubt of many others.

1. *The principal figure in the book is Ruth.*

She was a Moabitess. Her nationality was particularly odious to the Jew. An Egyptian or an Edomite was not so abhorrent, for one from these people might, according to law, be incorporated into the congregation in the third generation, Deuteronomy 23:8. But a Moabite and an Ammonite seem to have been interdicted from entering Israel forever, Deuteronomy 23:3.

At least, they could not enter till the tenth generation. Moab and Ammon had their origin in one of the darkest crimes recorded in the Old Testament, Genesis 19. But grace triumphed over every barrier, and this book shows us its glorious victory in the presence of the most adverse circumstances.

2. Efforts to escape from trouble, 1:1-5.

Famine, the frequent attendant on war, came to Bethlehem and the inhabitants suffered want. “*The house of bread*” (Bethlehem so means) was without bread. It may have been that the famine was brought about by the incursion of the Midianites and Amalekites, Judges 6:1-6. Sure we may be that the affliction came in consequence of Israel’s disobedience and sin.

Elimelech and his family determined to seek support in the land of Moab. The name Elimelech signifies “*My God is King*.”

The faith which is imbedded in the name of this good man ought to have shone out more brightly in the time of trial than it appears to have done. It is bad enough when in the midst of difficulties the people of God come down into the world to find help and comfort; it is worse when they abide there.

And yet we should not condemn Elimelech and his household, for the inspired record gives no hint that the step taken was blamed. However, migration, flight, does not fly trouble.

New and worse afflictions fell upon the refugees.

First, the godly husband died, the two sons married Moabite women, and they too died, and Naomi was left a childless widow. Three widows in one house! If the Elimelech family were backsliders, they found as all such unfaithful professors of godliness must find, that distance from God is loss, disappointment and death. Nearness to God is rest, peace, blessedness, Psalm 16:11.

Naomi proved this to the uttermost. When she returned to Bethlehem, and the old neighbors gathered about her to ask, “**Is not this Naomi?**”—she answered out of a heart that had supped on sorrow, “**Call me not Naomi [pleasant], call me Mara [bitter]; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty,**” 1:20, 21.

People who fly from one sort of trouble are likely to encounter worse. We may escape from famine but we cannot escape death.

3. Faith and devotion, 1:8-18.

The Hebrew family had not held the relation to God in secret in the land of Moab. They were not ashamed of Israel's Saviour. Some one of them, perhaps all of them, must have taught the truth about the Lord God to the wives of Mahlon and Chilion. Most likely it was Naomi who did so. And the teaching was not fruitless. No witness for God ever is. How far it extended in this case we have no means of knowing; but we do know that it bore the richest fruit in one instance—that of Ruth.

Orpah was not so deeply impressed, 1:15, **“but Ruth clave unto her,”** vs. 14. All sincere souls are tested. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Peter were. So, too, was Ruth. **“Return thou after thy sister-in-law,”** Naomi said to her. But she stood the test. She had learned something, perhaps much, of the merciful Lord of Israel; she knew that to be with them was to share the blessings and promises which they enjoyed. The beauty and attractiveness of the people whose God is the Lord she had seen and felt in the Elimelech family; and part from them she could not.

Her reply to Naomi's dismissal is surpassingly fine.

**“Intreat me not to leave thee, or
To return from following after thee;
For whither thou goest, I will go;
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;
Thy people shall be my people,
And thy God my God;
Where thou diest, will I die,
And there will I be buried.
the Lord do so to me,
And more also,
If ought but death part thee and me,”** 1:16, 17.

“Nothing could be said more fine, more brave” (Matthew Henry).

“Her vow has stamped itself on the very heart of the world; and that not because of the beauty of its form simply, though even in our English version it sounds like a sweet and noble music, but because it expresses in a worthy form, and once for all, the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love” (S. Cox).

Let it be noted, that the devoted attachment of Ruth to Naomi springs out of a true and firm faith. Her choice of Naomi's God to be her own is the proof of it.

It was no doubt a glad companionship to Naomi.

“Thus God never forsaketh His; but when one comfort faileth, findeth them out another; as when Sarah died, Rebekah came in her room. Yea, God Himself stood by Paul when all men forsook him” (John Trapp).

4. *Salutations*, 2:4.

Boaz, “**a mighty man of wealth**,” 2:1, saluting his reapers with the devout benediction, “**The Lord be with you**,” and the hearty response of the workman, “**The Lord bless thee**,” is a pleasant picture of old-world life, and of the deep religious feeling which prevailed among this frank and guileless people.

With them it was no meaningless form, no mere custom out of which the life had flown. It was the expression of those who loved the Lord and hence loved one another, Psalm 119:8.

- Gideon was saluted thus: “**The Lord is with thee**,”
- Mary thus: “**Hail, thou art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee**”—the greetings of angels.
- Jesus was wont to greet His disciples saying, “**Peace be unto you**.”
- The apostles closed their letters with blessings— “**The Lord be with you all**.”

In the case of pious persons such salutations are prayers for those addressed. How many of our common greetings have their origin in prayer!

“Good-bye”—God be with you; “Farewell,” “Good night,” are prayers. Addio, say the Italians; To God I commend you! Once these expressions meant all that true hearts wished for each other. Now they are like old coins, of which the image and superscription are rubbed out.

5. *The Kinsman Redeemer*, 3, 4:1-16.

The duties of a Kinsman-redeemer were both varied and important. Leviticus 25:25-28, 47-50, treats of the redemption of the property and person of a “brother” who might be reduced to penury.

But there is another feature connected with the functions of the redeemer which is brought before us in this book, viz., the levirate law, as it is called, i. e., the law of the near of kin (brother-in-law), founded on Deuteronomy 25:5, 6.

There can be scarcely any doubt but that this law acted in the case of the kinsman-redeemer. At least, it is recognized in the transaction between Boaz, the kinsman nearer than Boaz, and Ruth. She is persistently faithful to her duty to her dead husband; Boaz to the Law of Moses; the “**near kinsman**” considerate only of his selfish interests. And Boaz buys both the alienated land, and redeems the person of Ruth. Neither of the two women could sell or restore the property. Ruth could glean, but she could neither buy herself nor the estate of her deceased husband. Boaz, the “**mighty man of wealth**,” is both able and willing to undertake and accomplish.

How like our Kinsman Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who buys us, and redeems our alienated heritage, I Corinthians 6:19, 20; I Peter K3-5. Let the reader note the three majestic adjectives in Peter: “**incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away**.” Of no inheritance in this world can so much be said. Ours is, in its nature incorruptible, in its possession without a stain, and in its enjoyment everlastingly fresh and satisfying.

6. *Genealogy of David, 4:17-22; genealogy of Christ, Matthew 1:5.*

And so David the king descends through two Gentile women, on the name of each of whom there rests a blot, Rahab and Ruth. The one was a harlot, the other was a Moabitess whose paternal ancestor, Moab, was the child of incest! And Jesus traces His human lineage through this same line. Marvelous grace and condescension! He links Himself, not with a race of righteous people, but with sinners. He claims kindred with the poorest and the worst of men, and He saves them, too, who will but trust Him. No more need Naomi call herself Mara, but the pleased and pleasant ancestress of Obed, Jesse, David, Jesus.

7. *Worldwide events often hinge upon a little incident, a trifling act, 2:3.*

“Her hap was to light on a part of the field of Boaz.”

Her hap! And yet that “hap” turned out to be her marriage, and the births, ultimately, of David and of Jesus. Out of insignificant trifles, as men name them, God weaves His mighty ends. An arrow is shot across a deep chasm through which a turbulent stream rushes. To the arrow a thread is attached, to the thread a cord, then a cable; and in due time a bridge spans the huge trench, and men pass and repass at their pleasure.

The sleepless night of a king turns out to be the salvation of a proscribed nation, Esther 6:1. A young widow happens to enter a harvest-field to gather a little food for herself and a dependent mother-in-law. There follow that simple act, a marriage, the birth of a son, a great king, and finally a mighty Saviour.

Our God is One whose providence is so special and minute that nothing escapes it, nothing is too small for it, and all things are bent to fulfill His wise and blessed ends. Let us trust Him; for He sees the end from the beginning

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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