

Introduction to Ruth

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[0:00] I have chosen to preach through the little jewel of a book in the Old Testament, and it is small, four chapters, and that is one of those books named after a woman, and it's Ruth.

I have chosen to preach through that book, so a sermon for each chapter of the book. Tonight, I'm not going to get into the book, so if you're turning to Ruth, we will be looking at some of it, but not really in depth.

I would have to admit to you that what you're going to get tonight is not some expository sermon from the book of Ruth. There was a gasp out here, I caught, but really an introduction to it, kind of a, oh, I don't know if you'd call it an introduction or maybe an overview of the book and some of the themes found in the book.

And we'll kind of develop some of those. And I want to first start with the author.

Who wrote it? Anybody? That was not a trick question. Actually, it was, because actually we don't know.

[1:32] We don't know who wrote it and, huh, what's that? Traditional Samuel. So you're looking at your study Bibles or maybe the introductions that you might, a little brief introduction to the book.

And so you're jumping ahead of me. Jewish tradition has Samuel as the author. And this is not going to be any big deal. And certainly the message of Ruth and theologically and some of the other wonderful parts of this great book are going to be much more important than coming to any conclusion about the author.

But I do mention it. Samuel is the traditional author and really more traditional from the Jewish perspective. The Hebrew Bible.

And there's really not any way to know. Now, those who hold to the Samuel authorship, I'll just go ahead and tell you, and this does tie in to one of the purposes of the book.

Those who hold to Samuel authorship say that he may have written this book shortly after anointing David to be king over Israel.

[2:44] Maybe at the very beginning. Maybe after anointing him. Maybe even after maybe the first year or so of his kingship. And that ties to one of the primary, they say, scholars say, one of the primary purposes for Ruth is not for our enjoyment necessarily because it's a beautiful love story.

And it is. And maybe not even necessarily for us to learn a tremendous doctrinal truth or a particular aspect of God's redeeming purposes.

It's not for that. It is primarily to validate David's kingship. That's why we have a genealogy at the end of the book. That Samuel's purpose, if Samuel wrote it or whoever wrote it, was to validate David's kingship to prove that his lineage goes back to Judah.

And that was very important to validate his kingship. Remember how David came to the throne. Saul was on the throne. And God ripped the throne from Saul because of his disobedience and so forth.

And then gave it to another. Gave it to David. And Samuel kind of very secretively, under the direction of God, went to Jesse and looked at all his sons.

[4:01] And you remember the story. You know, he looked at some of the big, tall, strapping, kingly-looking sons of Jesse. And God rejected all of them. But David. And so there may have been a question as to David's right to be on the throne.

And not only this, but the implications of that to the coming of Messiah, who would also be of the tribe of Judah, the Lion of Judah. And so the purpose of Ruth, then, was to validate that, David's kingship, that he is indeed linked to Judah.

And then Samuel's authorship, if it was Samuel, plausible, but the bottom line is we don't know.

And maybe I could add a line even under the bottom line and say it doesn't really matter. It doesn't really matter. Second, when was the book of Ruth written?

And this is kind of interesting to note from the book. And again, this is just kind of introductory material. I don't always do this when I preach through a book. In fact, I can't think of a time that I've done this.

[5:10] But I decided to do it tonight to give some of the historical background, some of the significant themes of the book. And so I've just asked that question. When was it written? Well, the story of Ruth, the actual story, clearly took place before it was written, long before it was written, very likely.

Many years before it was written. The story itself, we understand from the book, the opening words of the book, the story was during the time of the judges.

That's what the Bible says here. In chapter 1 of Ruth, in verse 1, look at it there. Now it came to pass, what? In the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land and so forth and so forth.

And the story goes on from there. So here's the beginning of it. It marks the timing of it when this took place, when Ruth lived, Naomi lived, Boaz lived, and the whole wonderful love story that unfolds, this took place during the time of the judges.

That's what the book itself testifies to. But it wasn't written then. It could not have been written until David was on the throne.

[6:29] Or at least during a time when he was the privately anointed king of Israel. And how do we know that?

Because of the genealogy at the end of the book. So you can look back over there at chapter 4 and verse 18. And you see a short little genealogy there.

Ending with who? With David. Alright, it ends with David. Alright, so the genealogy at the end of the book makes it clear that the story, the actual writing down of this wonderful, marvelous story could not have taken place until David was on the throne.

Certainly not after David because it ends with David. We don't have any mention of Solomon or any subsequent kings of Israel. And so it took place during the time of the judges.

It was written down. Indeed, Samuel wrote it sometime during the initial years of David's reign over Israel. Now, again, if Samuel is the author, then the date of Ruth would be somewhere around 1020 B.C.

[7:42] You can just write that down. That marks the date. I don't know what month. I don't really even know what year. And all that's based, of course, on whether or not Samuel wrote it.

The story itself may have taken place when Jair, or Jair, it depends on some of the pronunciation, was judge.

One of the judges. And that's in Judges 10.3. And so this is just kind of a scholarly speculation. Not me as the scholar, but scholars have speculated. Well, not only the author, but also the timing of when it was written.

Third, what can we say or can be said about Ruth's, the book Ruth, its placement in the Bible? And this is interesting, too.

And there's just kind of some interesting things to consider about Ruth. Its placement in the Bible, you know, where it occurs. Where is it, by the way? You looked it up.

[8:42] You know by now. Right after Judges and right before 1 Samuel.

All right, so here's this beautiful little book between Judges and 1 Samuel. And I think that the Holy Spirit instructed for the book to be placed right in that place.

Now, it's very logical as well. Because of the way the book begins and the way the book ends. It begins, during the period of the Judges, ends with the genealogy of King David, the king.

All right, so then it makes good sense for it to appear right there. But the Hebrew Bible has it in a different place.

In fact, the Hebrew Bible combines books, puts books in groupings that are not anywhere near the way we have them in our English Bibles.

[9:46] In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is grouped with a set of five books of the Bible that are in our Bibles, in our Old Testament. There are five of them, five writings known as the Megaloth, Megaloth, actually.

Megalothe. Now, that's not important. But here are the five books. The Song of Solomon. And in this order, we have the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and then Esther.

All right, so both of the books named after a woman are in the Megaloth, in the Jewish Hebrew Bible. And kind of interesting to note that Ruth is between the Song of Solomon and Lamentations. Kind of the reverse order. Ruth appears in our English Bibles, you know, right after or in between the Judges and 1 Samuel.

Judges, a time of lamentation for Israel, really. A very sad time for them. Under the Judges, God's judging them. And then we have 1 Samuel and the introduction to the great king and so forth.

[10:57] All right. And I would also add this, that for the Jews, the book of Ruth is read at Pentecost. Each of these books, by the way, that are in the Megaloth are written at different, or read, rather, at different times, different feasts, different celebrations within Judaism.

And Ruth is read at Pentecost. Now, on the one hand, that makes sense, in that Ruth is about harvest, you know, and so forth, and that's what Pentecost is about.

But on the other hand, it seems interesting, and I think suggestive. We'll say more about this a little bit later. That Ruth is perhaps a foreshadowing of the church.

The church. Pentecost, of course, was the birth of the church. Birth of, ultimately, the Gentile church. All right. We'll get back to that a little bit later.

Fourth, what might we learn about the structure of the book of Ruth? And here's where I might get a little bit technical. Guys, you can put this slide up there if I've got it ready to go.

[12:11] It's up there, and there it is right there. Some of you who are regular attenders on Wednesday night, I know many of you are involved in Iwana, so you're not necessarily downstairs during our Bible study on Wednesday nights.

But several times over the course of our various studies, I have mentioned a certain kind of pattern or form that was used by the Hebrews, by the Jews, and many other cultures in ancient times, a kind of format for writing that is called a chiasmic format, or the use of a chiasmus.

And let me put that word up there. Chiasmic format. There's a chiasmic format for Ruth. Now, what in the world is that? Well, it was named quite a bit later, you know, after certainly Old Testament times, because it's a Greek word, very popular among the Greek writers.

It's a literary technique. And it comes from the letter chi in the Greek alphabet. And you may or may not know the chi looks very much like an X for us.

And so, there it is. Now, that's not a very good chi, but it gives you the illusion of the X, all right?

And so, what the ancient writers would do, and you'll find a lot of these in the book of Psalms as well, and in many places throughout the Bible, even on into the New Testament, they would write in this kind of format where they would begin with a certain subject and then move to the next kind of logical next step and then move to the center with the main theme, the main thing they want you to get.

[14:06] And then, they'll go from there and work backwards. So, you kind of come in and then go back out. And so, it kind of follows the pattern of a chi. It's called a chiasmic format.

Now, let me show you how Ruth fits in there. In the beginning of the book, we have Ruth's bitterness. Ruth's bitterness is chapter 1.

And if you've read Ruth, you probably have a number of times, you know something about what happens in the first chapter of Ruth. Ruth's mother is chapter 2. And how Naomi, or Elimelech, moves his family out of Israel because of the famine, and he moves them to Moab, and very shortly, Elimelech dies.

His two sons, their two sons, marry Moabite women, and very soon after, both the sons die. And so, now we have Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws, and they're Moabites.

And you know how the story goes. It's a time of bitterness. In fact, Naomi said, don't call me Naomi when she finally returned to Israel. Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, bitter. And so in the first chapter, we have that story, part of the story unfolding.

[15:24] Then when we move to the second chapter, we have Ruth. Ruth is front and center, and she discovers a potential kinsman redeemer. Now, we're going to get into just what a kinsman redeemer is and the significance of that, not only for Ruth, but for us theologically.

And it's a great, wonderful truth. And so in chapter 2, it's all about Ruth discovering her kinsman redeemer or a potential kinsman redeemer, someone who could redeem her inheritance and, more importantly, carry on the family line through Ruth.

I mentioned that a little bit this morning in the genealogy. All right, so that's what you have in chapter 2. And then when you move to the dead center of the book, the theme, the central theme of the book, and that's the nature of a chiasmic format.

When you get to the middle, that's the main theme, the thing they want you to get, and that is Boaz agrees to be Ruth's kinsman redeemer. All right, so we go from Naomi's bitterness to Ruth discovering a potential redeemer to Boaz agreeing to be that redeemer, but we're not through yet. Now we're to the center, but then we work our way back out. Whoop, wrong way. And Boaz acquires the right to be Ruth's kinsman redeemer.

[16:46] That's actually chapter 4. I messed that up. Chapter 4. Forget the numbering there, okay? All right, so we're moving out from Boaz agrees to be the redeemer to Boaz actually acquires the right to be the redeemer.

And we're going to look through all of these particular verses, and then we end with Naomi's blessing. Her family line continues, and it's a wonderful lineage, wonderful heritage.

Through Ruth, her adopted, kind of adopted daughter-in-law, who's married by a near-kin redeemer, out of that comes the Messiah eventually.

Well, first King David, and then ultimately the Messiah. Now what I want you to see is that the central theme, the truth that the writer in telling the story wants us to focus on and concentrate on and worship as a result of, is this central truth, this event that took place, that Boaz agrees to be Ruth's redeemer, her kinsman redeemer.

And we're going to see how that fits in with believers, because Jesus Christ is our kinsman redeemer.

[18:08] All right, what value... You can turn that off now if you want. What value... What is the value of Ruth? Now I've already mentioned one thing, this thing about the kinsman redeemer.

But I mean the book as a whole. The various parts of it, various things that it offers to us that are of value to us.

First of all, even the unsaved world, many in the unsaved world who are familiar with the book would agree with this value, and that is its literary value.

It's a beautiful book. Beautifully written. In fact, one man has said that it is without a doubt the greatest short story ever written.

It's a beautiful piece of literature. The book of Ruth is a love story. Would you agree with that? It's a love story. And the way that it's written, it is just incredible.

[19:14] We have Ruth's love for Naomi. But that's just part of it. Primarily, what we have in this love story is Boaz, his love for Ruth.

Ruth for Boaz. And the beautiful part, that's the core of the story itself, this love story. So you have Ruth for Naomi, Boaz for Ruth, but also God for his people.

God for his people, both Jew and Gentile. This is a beautiful love story. And yet, did you know that the word love does not even appear in the book? Not even one time.

This is what makes the book of Ruth such an incredible book from a literary standpoint because could you write a love story without using the word love?

And yet, the writer of Ruth was able to tell an incredible love story without even having to use the word love.

[20:19] And yet, you can't read it without seeing it there. You can't read it without being touched by it, by the truth of it, by the existence of it, even though the word does not even appear.

It's a testimony to the genius of the writer of this book. If it was Samuel, I don't know. Whoever it was. Inspired of God, of course. So there's the literary value.

There's also the historical value. This book offers a historical value. The little town where this love story took place gives the book a really important significance, a historical significance.

What town was that? Where did this story take place? Bethlehem. Now, that's important, historically. This took place in Bethlehem.

The book of Ruth helps answer the question, perhaps you've had the question, why was Bethlehem chosen for the birthplace of Christ?

[21:25] Why Bethlehem? Consider, and we're not going to really look at all of the scriptural references to Bethlehem and the significance of it.

I'm not going to do that tonight, but consider some of the, of what the Bible says about this little insignificant town. And it was. We know that. Remember the prophecy of Micah?

Micah 5.2, but as for you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, as you're just too insignificant to really be any kind of significant place in the tribe of Judah. From you, one, will go forth for me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

And that's, of course, a Messianic prophecy, you know, of Jesus. And He would be born in Bethlehem. In significant town. What happened in Bethlehem that made it important?

[22 : 32] Genesis tells us that Rachel was buried there. You might remember some of that story. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, died while giving birth to Benjamin, one of their sons, and she was buried in Bethlehem.

And the Bible records how Jacob never forgot about that. And there are other references in the Bible where Jacob once again mentioned and reflected upon the fact that his lovely, beautiful wife was buried in Bethlehem.

Is that enough to explain why Jesus was born there? Not really, but it begins to lay the groundwork for the significance of this little town that, by all accounts, was an insignificant town.

Now think about it. If Ruth, and we, well let me, I skipped one thing. Next time that we have Bethlehem mentioned in the Bible is the book of Ruth.

Now that's not the last time. There'll be other times, but the next significant time is here in Ruth. A little bit later, David will shepherd his father's sheep there.

[23 : 46] And even later, not very much later from when this book was written, David would be anointed king in Bethlehem. Some significant things.

Now think about it. If Ruth had not returned with Naomi to Bethlehem so that her people would be her people, her God would be my God, her God.

If she had not done that, and if Boaz had not seen her that day out there gleaning in the fields, had not fallen in love with her, and Ruth in love with him, and if Boaz had not gone through the necessary steps to be her redeemer, her kinsman redeemer, and marry her, David, according to the genealogies given at the end of the book, David would have never been born in Bethlehem.

He would have been born at all. And Bethlehem would have not been then the birthplace of Jesus. See, what this points to is the workings of God, the providence of God, moving all things according to His purpose.

And then He's going to inspire a prophet 700 years before it actually happens to say that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem in the city, and this being the city of David.

[25 : 06] It's the providence of God. And then think of the providential power of God in having Jesus born there. And we kind of consider that as we move through that part of the book of Luke and the birth of Christ and all that God did in moving men and manipulating history so that His family, His holy family could get to Bethlehem so that Jesus could be born there.

The providence of God. Then also there is what I would call an eschatological value. Eschatological.

That's a big word that means last things. Last things. And I use that in kind of the broad sense of the word. And here's what I mean. Some see the Gentile church in the book of Ruth.

A glimpse of that. A foreshadowing of the Gentile church. Limelech and his family leaving Israel represents the rebellion and scattering of Israel among the nations.

Ruth, the Gentile, is then brought into a place of grace and blessing by a kinsman redeemer by the name of Boaz, a Jew, thus representing Christ and His bride, the church.

[26 : 41] And also the placing of the book of Ruth in the Bible between the judges, the failure of the theocracy. That's what judges points to, the failure of the theocracy.

Who was Israel's king? Or should it be? Should be still God. But judges are all about the failure of the theocracy.

And so God appointed judges and eventually He's going to bring kings to serve over Israel. All right, so judges represents the failure of the theocracy.

First Samuel, the beginning of the kings is representative of the monarchy, the kingdom. Both foreshadow a time that is yet future.

And so between the rejection of Israel as a theocracy, they didn't want to be a theocracy, and the establishment of the kingdom, what do we have?

[27 : 39] In the middle we have the Gentile Ruth. Between Israel, now we come forward in an eschatological view, in the last things view, we have between Israel's rejection of Christ and the

setting up of Christ's kingdom, what do we have in the middle?

We have the Gentile church. Then there's a genealogical value that I think is important, and this kind of ties in with what I was speaking about this morning.

Someone has said that one of the primary purposes of the Old Testament is to provide a reliable genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when you think about it, if you read much of the Old Testament, you're reading along and suddenly you come to another genealogy.

There are genealogies all throughout the book, all throughout the Old Testament, at various junctures, especially early on in the book of Genesis, but you have genealogies in many other places.

And so here's the idea that one of the purposes for the Old Testament is to establish a reliable genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the Messiah.

[28 : 56] And so the Bible provides then for us in the Old Testament an unbroken genealogy from Adam all the way to Jesus. And we have that put together for us in Matthew's Gospel and also in Ruth's Gospel.

Now think about this. We begin with Adam, right? And Adam had many sons, didn't he? In fact, we don't really know how many he had.

Some are mentioned in the Bible. Cain and Abel and then eventually Seth. But he had many, many other sons that we don't know anything about. All right, so he had many sons, sons, but Seth was chosen for the Messianic line.

It was Seth chosen for that, not Cain. Now the Bible deals with Cain for a short time, just so we'll know what happened. And then when Cain's over and we get to Seth, we don't hear any more about Cain.

From there on, it's about Seth and his lineage. Then that brings us eventually to Noah. And Noah had several sons, didn't he?

[30 : 08] Ham, Shem, Japheth. He had several sons there, but Shem was chosen for the Messianic line.

And so the biblical record then from Shem on follows his lineage. And then we come to Abraham ultimately, one of Shem's descendants.

And Abraham had other sons. Now initially he had Ishmael through a concubine. And then he had Isaac and after that had other sons. Alright, so he had other sons, but Isaac was chosen for the Messianic line.

Out of which the Messiah would come. And so the biblical record after Isaac follows Isaac and not Ishmael or any other son of Abraham, just Isaac.

You see how the Bible is bringing us through, through the Old Testament establishing the godly line, the Messianic line. And, you know, in between all of these genealogies and references to those who are chosen to be in line to the Messiah, we have stories about their lives and we even have some stories about how I think Satan is behind the scenes trying to cut off that line at several junctures in the Old Testament.

[31 : 29] All right, so we've got Adam who has Seth and Seth Noah and Noah Shem and Shem Abraham and Abraham Isaac.

And from that point on the biblical record or the genealogy follows Isaac. And then Isaac had other sons, didn't he? All right, he had Esau and Jacob.

Now we hear a little bit about Esau, but Jacob was the one chosen for the messianic line. And so from that point on the biblical record follows Jacob, not Esau.

And Jacob had many sons. The twelve tribes of Israel come out of Jacob and they are significant, significant parts to God's redemptive plan and future plan in the eternal state.

But it's only Judah who is chosen for the messianic line. Just Judah. And so that brings us to Ruth.

[32 : 39] Ruth includes then an important addition to the messianic genealogical record. One that appears, again, later in Matthew and also in Luke, but it links David, because now we're up to David.

That's how Ruth ends. Up to David, David, rather the genealogy of Ruth, links David with the messianic line. Links David, linking David, with the tribe of Judah.

And that's what you have in the genealogies at the close of the book. Look at it, verse 18. Now this is the genealogy of Perez. Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Abinadab, and Abinadab begot Nashon, and Nashon begat Salmon.

Salmon, who probably was one of the spies that went into the promised land and met, remember her? Rahab.

And Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed, and Obed begot Jesse, that's the father of David, and Jesse, of course, begot David.

[33:47] Now, Jesse had other sons, didn't he? He had a number of them, but only David was chosen. And so the genealogy here is very important.

The genealogical value of the book of Ruth, very important in linking David with Judah, and who would be making him of the line, the messianic line.

And then there is another value I would mention, doctrinal value. And we're not going to spend some time expanding on this because we're going to spend a lot of time on this when we get into the meat of the book.

But there is presented in this story a facet, very important facet of God's plan of redemption that is presented actually nowhere else in the Bible. And that is the doctrine of the kinsman redeemer. Very important doctrine that this book gives us. Again, that you won't find anywhere else in the Bible. The gaal, the kinsman redeemer.

[34:53] And we'll get to that when we get into the book. And finally, what are the major themes of the book? Let me just give you, oh, probably more than this, but I'll give you seven very quickly and not talk a lot about these.

These are some themes that we can glean from the book of Ruth. The very first one, and this is what we'll talk about next Sunday night, comes from chapter one, and it is this theme.

The cost of unbelief. The cost of unbelief and disobedience as revealed to us through a Elimelech's decision to leave Israel and not trust God.

So we'll talk about that next time. Another theme, a second theme I would mention to you would be, and this clearly runs throughout the book, that is the sovereignty and providence of God over all things, even insignificant people.

people. I mean, we're not talking about kings at this point. Elimelech was no king, and Ruth married Boaz, though Boaz was very likely a wealthy man, but we're still talking about just regular, common people in a very small and significant town in Bethlehem, and God is sovereign over all their affairs, the affairs of life.

[36:25] And in His sovereignty, He is moving them for His purposes, His providential purpose that really plays into the grand scheme of God's redemptive plan.

So that's the second theme that we see here. We'll develop some of these as we go along. Third, the grace of God in salvation for Gentiles. That God included the Gentiles in His redemptive purpose, His salvation.

And aren't you glad that He did? Okay? Amen. We'll talk about that. Fourth, the character and reward of true faith.

What true faith looks like, the character of it as revealed by Ruth. She really does put on display for us what true faith is, what it should look like.

And not only that, but also the reward of faith. fifth, the demonstration that women are co-heirs with men in God's saving grace.

[37:34] I mean, someone might get to thinking as they read through the Bible, and especially even these genealogies, and say, you know, this Bible doesn't really think very much of women. I mean, that's been one of the major criticisms leveled at the Bible and at Christianity, historic Christianity, that women are just, you know, not important.

They're insignificant. Well, Ruth surely dispels that. And the fact that Ruth is included in the genealogy in Matthew chapter 1, and not only Ruth, but you have Tamar and Rahab and Bathsheba, all of them Gentiles, but women with some issues, okay, except for Ruth.

And God includes them in the Messianic line, not just to include them in the genealogy. He said, well, it was nice that he mentioned them there. He mentioned them there because they are part of the lineage of the Messiah.

Number six, the revelation of the doctrine of the kinsman Redeemer. And I've already mentioned this. This is a major theme in the book that will just absolutely bless your life.

Boaz is a type of Christ, clearly. Type of Christ becoming Ruth, the Gentiles, the Moabitess, becoming her kinsman Redeemer.

[38 : 53] Just as Christ has become our kinsman, our near kin, so that he could redeem us. And then the last theme would be the establishment, and I've mentioned this already, the establishment of David's right.

And through him, Jesus' right to the throne of Israel, will be the lineage back to Judah. All right. Let me give you a four-point outline that we're going to use in the study of the book, so you can just go ahead and write it down. And it's alliterated. Who knew that would happen? First, next week, we'll see a famine. A famine. Second, a field. Third, a floor. The threshing floor. And then finally, the family. The family. And it culminates with, of course, this genealogy of King David.