

Prophetic and typical gleanings in the book of Ruth

Over the years and in recent weeks, the book of Ruth has proved its riches historically, devotionally, theologically, and practically. In this brief address we look at it *prophetically* and *typically*.¹ When reading this inspired account, we are drawn into its enchanting romance and drama, which have prompted some to refer to the book as “the romance of redemption.” However, as we shall observe, the fragrant narrative of the life of Ruth the Moabitess, stands in sweet relief against the bitter record of failure among God’s people. This failure was national, and it was also personal, as seen in the life of Elimelech.

In addition to the “romance of redemption,” there is also a “prophetic and typical revelation” imbedded in the narrative. Now it must be clearly noted, that there are two equally compelling lines of prophecy to be discerned within it, each associated with two lines of typical teaching. The first relates to God’s prophetic program for Israel. The second relates to the broader matter of God’s provision of a kinsman redeemer in Christ, where Boaz is seen as Christ and Ruth as His Gentile bride. Our interest on this occasion is confined to the former – the prophetic program for Israel.

The Levitical background

The prophetic and typical teaching in the book of Ruth is defined by the Levitical covenants, codes and customs. In chapter 1, we encounter the Levitical Feast of the Passover, which is associated with the time of the barley harvest. In chapter 2 we have the Feast of Pentecost and its association with the wheat harvest. There is, too, the law relating to gleaning during the harvest (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22). Of distinct importance is the Year of Jubilee and the laws relating to inheritance and the kinsman redeemer (Deut 25). This law is associated with a “levirate” (levir-ate) marriage, which refers to a brother marrying his dead brother’s widow.² The typical significance of these principles will become apparent as we proceed, particularly in regard to the preservation of property and posterity.

The historical and spiritual background

The departure

The book begins by documenting the sad state of affairs in Israel. The people were redeemed having been delivered out of Egypt. They had taken possession of the promised land of Canaan under Joshua and the land divided by lot. Each tribe was given an inheritance in the land according to their families (Josh 13 etc.). In this they had a portion, right and a memorial. However, despite God’s goodness, the nation persisted in a state of failure where each man did what was right in his own eyes. In judgment, God brought in a famine that His people might repent of their ways. It is against this background that we are introduced to a man and his family. Tainted with the failure of the day, he did what was right in his own eyes. He moved his family from the house of bread and praise to the spiritually barren fields of Moab to escape the famine and so escape the judgment of God.

¹ (1 Cor 10:6) and written aforetime “for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

² The term “levir-ate” comes from the Latin *levir*, meaning a “husband’s brother.”

This man was Elimelech; his wife was Naomi and their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem–Judah. Bethlehem was called Ephrathah, and its inhabitants Ephrathites. The OT heralds the grand hope for Israel connected with the posterity of Elimelech in the Ephrathites. “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). Who is that Ruler? He is Israel’s Kinsman Redeemer, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus of Nazareth presented to us prophetically and typically as Boaz in the book of Ruth.

The name Elimelech means “my God is King.” It typifies the spiritual devotion that God demanded from His firstborn nation. “For thou shalt worship no other god. for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex 34:14). The name Naomi means “my pleasant one.” It typifies the divine regard that God has for His firstborn nation. In their defection to Moab, Elimelech and Naomi – taken together, typify Israel’s breach of the divine principles that their names reflect. God was no longer sovereign. The nation had become “lo-ammi” – not my people! “I had planted thee [Israel] a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jer 2:21). In their departure to Moab, the family, through its misguided head, typified Israel forsaking its divinely allocated *portion, right and memorial*.

The despair and destitution

We know the family was content to stay in Moab for ten years. During this time Elimelech died. Our attention therefore focuses upon his surviving family. His sons married Moabite women – Orpah and Ruth. Their marriage was a breach of the law which prohibited an Israelite from marrying a heathen (Deut 7:3).³ This was especially grievous, because it involved marriage into the line of Lot, who in his sin chose the worldly plains of Moab over the provisions of God. Their departure from God thus deepened. Naomi made no apparent objection to these heathen marriages – perhaps a reflection of the worldly influences of Moab.

Sadly there was more despair – for we learn of the death of Naomi’s two sons. Naomi is now without any hope of *posterity or property*, two vital matters in regard to inheritance. In this she typifies Israel as a *widowed* nation. She represents the generations of Israel that have lost their portion, their possession and memorial. We recall the lament of the Lord in His earthly mission to the nation. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37).

As a widow in Moab, Naomi was deprived of an inheritance – she lacked posterity and a portion; she could never enjoy a right and never find a true memorial in the plains of Moabite. There were now three widows and three graves in a foreign land that stood as a solemn monument to departure and failure. And so, there is a failed and departed generation of Israel who are widowed, having no portion, right or memorial, for they crucified the Holy One and Just. Golgotha’s hill and the tomb outside the camp stand as solemn monuments to the nation’s widowhood and failure. Yet, in divine grace there is hope for a new generation

³ Though the Moabites are not specifically noted in this text, the principle against inter-marriage applies.

through a kinsman redeemer – a restoration of their portion, right and memorial, as we will see in the delightful events that follow according to grace.

The decisions

First, we have the decision of Naomi. In what would be a contradiction to her husband's determination over the past ten years, she decided to return to her homeland and sell her parcel of land (4:3). We cannot be certain what lay behind this desire. If one were to advance a view in the light of the circumstances, we may justly conclude that her decision would have been driven by her despair and destitution, which would only have become worse if she stayed in Moab. As far as Orpah and Ruth were concerned, she believed they would be better off among their own. Though misguided in this, we can understand her concern for her daughters in law. She knew what it was to be a stranger in a foreign land. Second, we have Orpah who heeded the pleas of Naomi and stayed in Moab. Third, we have the steadfast determination of Ruth to cleave to Naomi and depart with her to Judah, in spite of Naomi's insistence against it!

The declaration and the deliverer

Upon entering her homeland, Naomi acknowledged the judgment of God "I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" "Call me Mara [bitter]." Naomi as Mara, typifies the nation of Israel in its present sorry condition – in the land and widowed, effectively having no portion (for her land needed to be sold), no right nor memorial. The people were once rich and full in blessing, but now brought back under judgment. Yet, all is not lost, for Naomi "had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz" (2:1). Here then is hope for redemption.

This brings before us the law of the *kinsman redeemer*, and we come upon another set of typical and prophetic aspects of this sweet book in regard to Israel. First, we have Orpah who remained in Moab. She typifies the unfaithful of Israel in a day to come – those who choose to align themselves with the Gentiles and the Antichrist during the Tribulation (Daniel's 70th week). Second, we have Ruth with her avowed faith and subjection to Jehovah – "your God will be my God." She typifies the faithful remnant of Israel during the Tribulation, in whom faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is restored, who look for the kingdom ushered in by the coming Redeemer. The faithful remnant – typified by Ruth, will revive the name of Elimelech by declaring "my God is King." God, too, will revive the name of Naomi. He will declare Israel -- to be "my pleasant one." It will no longer be "lo-ammi" ("not my people", the once "strange vine"), but "my people." "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land" (Isa 14:1). There will be a watching for the Messiah, who is typified in Boaz. And, like Ruth, until the fulfilment of promised blessings, the faithful remnant will be strangers in the land. They will have no portion, right or memorial yet (typified in that Ruth as a Moabitess, was shut out of the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation). But, in virtuous devotion, like Ruth they are seen gleaning in the fields of the coming Messiah-King. There will be left for them as there was for Ruth, divinely ordained "handfuls of purpose." "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt

thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger [and widow, Deut 24:21]: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:9-10).⁴

We have a further intimation of these gracious Tribulation provision to the faithful remnant of Israel in Psalm 23. Ruth was to fear no evil and have the rod and staff of Boaz for comfort, for the "young men they shall not touch thee." Her cup runneth over, for her thirst was to be satisfied abundantly by "the vessels, and drink of that which the young men of Boaz have drawn." A table was prepared for her amongst strangers, for at mealtime she was to come and eat of the bread, and dip her morsel in the vinegar and eat her parched corn. Then there was the hope of abiding goodness and mercy, and that she would dwell in the house of her Lord forever.

The nearer kinsman

There are further things to note typically. Naomi had a nearer relative than Boaz. He was financially able to redeem her, but he defaulted in regard to the third requirement. He was *unwilling* to exercise the provisions of a kinsman under the law, lest he mar his own inheritance. The law was of little benefit to Naomi – because it penalised the nearer kinsman. He was willing to redeem the land by paying the current owner an amount in proportion to the yield up to the year of Jubilee. "And he said, I will redeem it" (4:4). This would keep the land in the "family" and at the same time enlarge his own inheritance. But he was not willing to marry Ruth. This is because the land in the year of Jubilee would revert to Naomi through the firstborn son to Ruth, who would have a claim upon it. He would be dipping into his capital for land that would not be his – and so his own inheritance would be financially marred.

Here then is the type. The law was the nearer kinsman to Israel after the flesh. At Horeb, the nation chose the law over grace. They received it "by the disposition of angels" and in the flesh declared, "all that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Acts 7:53; Ex 19:8). So God gave them the law. Their presence and inheritance in the land was to be on the ground of lawful obedience. The biblical record shows that they failed miserably under the law. It marred their inheritance, leaving them widowed, without a portion or posterity!

But, as in the case of the nearer kinsman, the law had to pass the right of redemption to another and so open the way for grace. Boaz graciously comes in to meet the need of Naomi and buy her portion and continue her posterity. We have in Boaz a wonderful picture of Christ Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. He who set aside the law will in grace restore the kingdom to the nation. He is the merchant man, "Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt 13:46). This is of

⁴ In this, some see Ruth as a type of the saved Gentiles in the Tribulation. This may be, but we should maintain consistency in the line of typical teaching. In our case we have in Naomi typified Israel as a widowed and failed nation who has reject its God. Ruth represents the faithful remnant of Israel, who say to that widowed nation – Jehovah is the God that you have rejected time and again; but now He will be our God. They take up what the nation gave up. Ruth also says to Naomi, "your people [Israel] will be my people." That is, the people – those who received the promises in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will again be our people. A Gentile can never say to a Jew in reality or typically – "your people will be my people." There will always be a distinction between Jew and Gentile – save in the Church. But, even then, it is not a case of a Gentile becoming a Jew and partaking of his peculiar covenant blessings; but of one new man in Christ where there is neither Gentile *nor* Jew. Some do take Ruth as a type of the Gentile bride – the limitations here must be acknowledged (as with all types). Let us avoid dogmatism!

course the larger national picture. We must also acknowledge the redemption of tribal inheritance, with each tribe having a portion as prophesied in Ezekiel (Eze 45:1, 48 etc.).⁵

In Acts 1, the disciples who stood as representative of the faithful remnant asked the risen Lord, “wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, “it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” And, we note in passing, the Lord here is not Boaz a kinsman redeemer *nationally*; but Boaz the kinsman redeemer *universally*. This is evident in His corrective answer and the universal commission He gave them. They are not asked to pray, “our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In that prayer, they stood as representatives of the faithful remnant in the Tribulation. It looked to that day when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. In Acts 1 however, it is “ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1). It is Boaz, a type of Christ as the kinsman redeemer of all men.

But before redemption comes there will be a dark time of trouble for the nation like there never was before. Where was Boaz at that time? Where is Israel’s Messiah now? We find Boaz in the night time winnowing barley in his threshing floor. “And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.” Israel under judgment is spoken of as the threshing floor of Jehovah, who is jealous for His firstborn nation. “I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (Zech 1:14).⁶ “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor [Israel], and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12).

We then read that Ruth “lay at his feet until the morning.” She was to “tarry this night” and “it shall be in the morning” that Boaz will seek to do his part as her kinsman redeemer. This he does. And, what are the blessings?” Naomi (the nation) is blessed in Ruth (the faithful remnant); and Ruth (the faithful remnant) is blessed in Boaz (the kinsman redeemer); she is now a wife and a possessor of great wealth through her husband Boaz.

After the night – the time of Orpah’s apostasy and Jacob’s trouble, there will be a morning glory. The nation’s kinsman Redeemer – even “the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star (Rev 22), will return and usher in a millennial jubilee. Like Boaz, the Lord of the harvest, He will restore above that which was her previous portion, right and memorial.⁷ “Thou hast multiplied the nation, and

⁵How wonderful, that our Kinsman Redeemer had no hesitation in redeeming us and, through that redemption we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17).

⁶The barley was integral to the jealousy offering. “Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance” (Num 5:15). This offering (like the sin offering), was without oil or frankincense. The coarseness reflected the debasing sin of which the woman was suspected, as well as reflecting the saddened condition of her family. It was not for atonement. It was an oblation for a memorial, which placed her case before God for judgment or pardon (and so blessing).

⁷ The provision for redemption by a kinsman was given to be exercised *before* the year of Jubilee, in which property that was sold automatically reverted to the original owner. (Maintaining the integrity of the tribal inheritance that was divinely ordained by lot). In this the type preserves the dispensational order. The redemption of Israel’s portion and posterity by the Lord is typified in Boaz.

increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil" (Isa 9:3). He will *enlarge* the portion and posterity of the nation, as the blessings were enlarged to Naomi, typifying the blessings to the nation coming through Ruth, the faithful remnant. "And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him." How precious will be that faithful remnant to the hopes and glory of God's chosen nation – even better than seven sons!

But what of Obed? His name means "servant" or "serving." How lovely! Naomi, typifying Israel, is restored in Boaz (typifying Christ) in regard to property and posterity. In Obed, Naomi – that is Israel, will serve the Lord in that millennial day. "For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me: there will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things" (Eze 20:40).⁸

It will be *after* the night – the Tribulation. It will be in the morning – the Second Advent, and *then* will come the millennial jubilee, when all and more reverts to Israel through the New Covenant, wrought by its Kinsman on the cross – Jesus of Nazareth.

⁸ Obed was born of Boaz of Ruth, a Moabitess. He comes into the line of Elimelech and into the line of Christ through pure *grace* (Matt 1:5), and so he avoids the ten year generational ban regarding the Moabite entering the congregation of the Lord. The Moabite was considered worse than the Edomite and Egyptian, whose ban was only three years (Deut 23). As others have noted, Ruth the *Moabite* was chosen to show the depth of grace that God would extend to the Gentiles in Christ. Grace is often the key where Scripture seems to confound us, especially in matters pertaining to the law.