

Ruth the Virtuous Woman

It is written concerning certain nations in relation to Israel: “an Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of Yahweh; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of Yahweh for ever ...” (Deut. 23:3). The Ammonites and Moabites, for particular given reasons, were excluded from the congregation of Yahweh. Yet in the story of Ruth, we find a Moabitess who not only became part of that congregation, but also became an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mat. 1:5). Here we have the Ways of Providence being worked out, in the way in which an excluded sinner of the Gentiles was taken to embrace Israel’s Hope, and be used as part of the means whereby Messiah was to be born.

The book of Ruth begins by describing how that there was a famine in the land of promise, and that due to the shortage of sustenance “a certain man of Beth-lehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there” (Ruth 1:1-2). In the course of time, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi with just her two sons. They took them wives from the Moabitish women, one named Orpah, the other Ruth. About 10 years later, Naomi’s two sons died, leaving her with just her two daughters-in-law.

Having heard that the famine was over, Naomi, and her two daughters-in-law set themselves on their journey back to Naomi’s land and people. The way in which the inspired narrator describes this is enlightening:

“then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that Yahweh had visited his people in giving them bread” (Ruth 1:6).

From this statement that the famine ended with Yahweh visiting his people in providing Bread, we have the implication that Yahweh had caused the famine in the first place. That is, it was not part of the natural weather patterns of the area, but was a famine with a specific purpose in view, ordained by the Creator of all things. The unseen Divine Hand brought about the famine, creating circumstances whereby a Moabitish woman would be visited, and brought out of her land to worship Naomi’s God. There are a number of other places where we are told that Yahweh “visited his people”. Luke chapter 1 recounts the prayer of Zecharias (John the Baptist’s father):

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for **he has visited** and redeemed his people” (Lu. 1:68).

Here, the visitation was in the form of a Son, given the title “Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is, God with us” (Mat. 1:23). John the Baptist spoke of he that was to come, and so also became part of that Divine Visitation.

Another use of the phrase relates to the future time of our Master’s return – and interestingly, in the context of Gentiles accepting the Truth:

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among **the Gentiles**: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God **in the day of visitation.**” (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

This provides us with an interesting insight as to what will happen among the Gentile nations when Messiah comes again – a second “day of visitation”. We ought to be living the spirit of the Kingdom now, so that when the time comes, folk will be more ready to accept the Lord when the Gospel of the Age is preached to them (see Rev. 14:6). Then, like Ruth, some Gentiles will glorify God, for the good works we have shown to them, and enter into the Kingdom as mortal inhabitants. This is perhaps an aspect of our preaching that is not often thought about. We know that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His Name” (Acts 15:14), in the first Century AD, and this work will continue until Messiah’s reappearing. But there is also the role of preparing unbelieving men and women to accept him when he comes. Psalm 72 (amongst other places) shows us that there will indeed be people and rulers who accept him, hence part of our preaching now, is making preparation for that time to come.

YAHWEH HATH AFFLICTED ME

When Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem, Naomi described her perception of what had taken place in Moab:

“all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi (which means Pleasant), call me Mara (which means Bitter): for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Yahweh hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing Yahweh hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:20-21).

In these words, Naomi intrinsically recognizes that her circumstances were due to the hand of Providence. “The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” was her perception of things – and sometimes we can exclaim the same lament during difficult times in our lives. But Naomi’s affliction was but the means to a greater end of good, and when our thoughts incorporate the wider view of the greater scheme of things, often our own troubles diminish in significance.

THE HOUSE OF PROMISE

It is written that “the wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand” (Prov. 12:7). Ultimately, “the house of the righteous” is the house of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, like the walls of Rahab’s abode, will stand tall when the antitypical walls of Jericho shall be cast down. This is the house later promised to King David, referred to in his prayer of thanksgiving:

“And now, O Yahweh Elohim, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said. And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, Yahweh of Hosts is the Elohim over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee. For thou, O Yahweh of Hosts, Elohim of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee” (2 Sam. 7:25-27).

The incorporation of Ruth into the congregation of Israel was an intrinsic part of the building of this household of faith. Matthew chapter 1 describes the position of Ruth in the lineage of our Master:

“... Salmon begat Booz of Rechab; and Booz begat Obed *of Ruth*; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king ...” (Mat. 1:5-6).

The house of Ruth then, became part of Messiah’s household: The House promised to David, and to our Lord Jesus Christ. This being so, it is interesting to consider the later words of the people to Naomi concerning Ruth:

“Yahweh make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-lehem. And let this house be like the house of Perez ...” (Ruth 4:11-12).

Ruth then, was able to enter into the congregation of Yahweh, and perpetuate the House established since times of old.

Returning to Ruth and chapter 2, we find that the Moabitess was sent out by Naomi to glean in the fields, to provide sustenance for them both. Then we read that:

“And she went and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz” (Ruth 2:3)

Notice how that there is dropped into the record this expression: “her hap was to light upon a part of the field ...”. It just happened that things worked out that way, as if it is all part of a natural coincidental order of things. There are other examples in Scripture of this type of thing: Esther 6:1-2 describes how that it just so happened that the king could not sleep, and he just happened to take out and read in the “book of records” about Mordecai’s role in securing the king against a rebellion. 2 Kings 8:5 shows how it just so happened that Gehazi was telling the king about a particular woman, when she arrived back in the land. 1 Kings 22:34 tells of how it just so happened that a soldier in the Syrian army randomly “drew a bow at a venture”, which just happened to smite the king of Israel between the joints of his armour. The list could continue: things seem to just happen according to the normal course of things – yet all these things were being guided by the unseen Hand of Providence. We wonder how many things in our daily lives ‘just happen’ to take place, yet which direct our lives towards destinations that we would not ordinarily choose!

THE HOUSE OF BOAZ

Being directed by Angelic hands to glean behind the reapers of Boaz’s field, Ruth was brought to his attention. Boaz asked his servant set over the reapers: “Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, it is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab” (Ruth 2:6). Notice the emphasis here: “the **Moabitish** damsel ... out of the country **of Moab**”. She was a Gentile woman, and not only so, but she was of a despised nation who were forbidden to enter into the congregation of Yahweh. But again, we see the all-sufficient Hand of Providence at work even here. Boaz was himself the son of Rahab the Canaanitish prostitute. He had seen the principles all before, in his own family: his mother was a Gentile – and a harlot as well – yet she was able to embrace Israel’s hope, and marry into the nation through her expression of faith, and become a mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Boaz himself being the son of a Gentile Harlot, was a man of principle, and he was generous in his approach to Ruth. The law required that the corners of the field were to be left for the poor to glean, yet he went beyond the law. He commanded that handfuls of grain were to be deliberately thrown down for her to reap, and benefit from his generosity:

“... and let fall also some of the handfuls on purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not ...” (Ruth 2:16).

Moreover, he also provided for Ruth in inviting her to eat with his reapers:

“Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left ...” (Ruth 2:14).

But notice that here, Boaz did not only permit her to eat with his reapers: he personally handed her the corn: “he reached her parched corn”. This was a token of fellowship: eating a meal together, being provided for by Boaz himself. The same pattern was followed later by the Master, in relation to Judas. In identifying his betrayer, “Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon” (Jno. 13:24). As an expression of love and fellowship, Jesus personally extended the sop to Judas – yet his mercy was spurned, and Judas betrayed the son of man with a kiss.

Recognising who Boaz was, Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz, to ask him to perform the rights of the next of kin, and take her as wife. So the record describes this and his response:

“And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou of Yahweh, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman’s part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as Yahweh liveth: lie down until the morning” (Ruth 3:9-13).

So it was that the nearer kinsman was invited to purchase the land of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband: “and he said, I will redeem it” (Ruth 4:4). However, Boaz then informed him that with the land would come Ruth the Moabitess. In his self-righteousness, the near kinsman then declined, not wanting to be associated with this gentile woman:

“And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself ...” (Ruth 4:6).

As we mentioned earlier, Boaz had seen this situation before in his own family circumstances, and he did not hesitate to perform the duty of a kinsman, and purchase both the land, and a bride for himself.

In many respects, Boaz typifies the role of the Lord Jesus Christ, our redeemer. Just as through his acceptance of Ruth, a Gentile woman was able to enter into the congregation of Israel, even so the Apostle describes our position in relation to Christ: “in whom also we have obtained an inheritance ...” (Eph. 1:11). Just as Boaz loved Ruth as his bride, so the Apostle commands: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the ecclesia, and gave himself for it ...” (Eph. 5:25). And again, as Gentiles we are brought near by the sacrificial giving of our redeemer: “... now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13) – just like Ruth.

In the book of Ruth therefore, we see the hand of Providence in bringing a Gentile sinner into the commonwealth of Israel, a *type*, or pattern of the future when her Seed, the Lord Messiah himself would take for himself a bride out of the people of the Gentiles. Let us therefore resolve to demonstrate the spirit of Ruth, the spirit of loyalty and devotion that she had to Naomi. Let us enter into the congregation of Yahweh by the acceptance of our Redeemer, even he who will provide for all of our needs. Then we will be among the great congregation of those who are redeemed from among all nations, and part of the inheritance promised to the faithful.

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