

An Essay of the position of Ruth in the Old Testament books

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We have always been told that God moves in mysterious ways, that our steps are always guided by Him. The book of Ruth comes out very clearly that God is guiding all the occurrences relating to us. That all the prayers have nothing to do with what is happening to them, but the one thing that is clear is you must have faith and you must put your trust in God.

The story in the book of Ruth starts during the days when the Israeli's had no kings. At the time they were ruled by judges. During this period, a man by the name Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, decided to leave their town of Bethlehem and go to Moab. The reason for their departure was because there was a great famine in Bethlehem and Elimelech decided to look for greener pastures for his family. The bible states that the Israelis had done evil in the eyes of God and therefore had given them over to the cruel hands of the Mediantes and Amalekites. These people were described as very brutal and caused tremendous damage to the Israelis. The bible states that they stole their food, including sheep, cattle and donkeys and that they invaded them like a swarm of locusts (1).

As indicated in the bible the move by Elimelech to move to Moab was not a wise one. This was because Israel and Moab had been known not to live in peace but at the time Elimelech had moved there they had arrived at some kind of peace accord. However, and conditions being the way they were in Bethlehem, Elimelech in his mind, thought that he could find employment

in Moab and escape the famine and the terrible conditions occurring Bethlehem. The said Moabites were a Semitic people and were actually related to the Hebrews. They were a tribe descended from Moab, the son of Lot, born of an incestuous relationship with the oldest daughter (2).

As the narrative continues, Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their sons did in fact settle in Moab. It is not indicated whether they found work or not, but being foreigners in such a country, one can assume, that they experienced some difficulties. The Bible says that consequently Elimelech died and left Naomi a widow and his two sons. Soon enough the two sons managed to find brides in Moab and got married to two Moabite women namely, Orpah and Ruth. The story continues and tells us that after a period of ten years, the two sons Mahlon and Kilion also died. Naomi was then left without a husband and two sons and now had to take care of two daughters-in-law who were now widows. The three women, as one would assume, were in a difficult position in finding food and fending for themselves. They would also find themselves in an extremely vulnerable situation as they are those who would wish to take advantage of them due to their prevailing conditions.

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

The Bible says that the three widows continued to remain in Moab and we are further informed that Naomi received information that the situation in Bethlehem and the prevailing famine had subsided. In view of this information Naomi and her two widowed daughters-in-law, decided to leave Moab and head for Bethlehem. While along the way, the Bible informs us that

Naomi stopped and perhaps was touched by thoughts of how they would all survive in Bethlehem. In her faithfulness and mercy she pleaded with her two daughters in law to remain Moab. She addressed them and told them, “Return home my daughters. Why would you want to come with me? I am not going to have any more sons who would become your husbands. Return home my daughters because I am also too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me and even if I have a husband tonight and gave birth to sons. You wouldn’t be able to wait for them to grow up and marry you (3).” The bible continues and informs us that the daughters refused to return back and still accompanied Naomi. Again in the narrative, Naomi continued to be bothered about the welfare of Orpah and Ruth. She knew that they were widows and foreigners so they would experience some difficulties in Bethlehem. Again Naomi decided to persuade the two daughters in law to return back to Moab. At this juncture, she informed them that still it was her wish for them to return back to Moab, she further added that it was bitterer for her than for the daughters in law because the Lord had turned against her. Through these pleadings of Naomi, one of the daughters in law, Orpah, kissed Naomi goodbye and decided to return back to Moab. However, God’s spirit was with Ruth who decided not to be parted from her mother in law, in confirmation with her will to remain with Naomi, she passionately informed her not to urge her to leave or to turn back from her. She added, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me be it ever so severely, if death separates you and me (4).” On hearing this, Naomi realized that Ruth was not going to be persuaded to turn back and both ladies headed for Bethlehem.

ARRIVAL IN BETHEHEM

On arrival in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred. This was because Naomi looked different from the time she had left. If you will recall, remember I indicated that she had left with her husband due to the hard times which were existing at the time. Their family might have had some money and that was why they were able to relocate to Moab. The problem was that even in Moab, Naomi and her family experienced more problems than those who were in Bethlehem and the two worlds, consequently, collapsed on her. Now on her return, the expectations were that perhaps, she would be better than the way she had left and her life may have considerably improved. The town now saw a dejected woman who looked weather beaten and desperate. Due to the reaction of people in Bethlehem, Naomi had no choice but to face the situation as it was. She confidently stated that she returned empty handed and had nothing to show (5). She said, “Don’t call me Naomi, and call me Mara. Because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The lord has afflicted me, the Almighty has misfortune upon me (6).” While God is guiding us and as I am pointing out, it is important that we are not bitter and we should never be bitter because of an adverse experience in life. We must know that when it is dark, it will be bright again. Even though Naomi is acknowledging God, she is unable to grasp the drama that is going on around her. It is a set up but she cannot see it. Naomi, at this time, thinks everything for her is over. It appears as if she thought that the end of the road had come. What she did not know however was that the plan of God was just about to be put in motion.

Settling in Bethlehem

As indicated in the book of Ruth, Naomi and Ruth have known arrived in Bethlehem during the time of berry harvest. In the book of Deuteronomy, this was the time of festivity because of the harvest. At this time, God had given a command to the Israelis that they must celebrate by giving a portion of the blessing the Lord has given them to their sons and daughters, male and female servants, the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows living among them. This was for them to remember that despite all that they had they were also slaves in Egypt (7). This was more like a call for the people to provide an opportunity for those who couldn't work to find work and be able to feed themselves. God had provided for them in the wilderness and had not discriminated strangers, orphans, and widows. They were also required to do the same. As we continue with the narrative, Ruth and Naomi fall into this bracket of those who were to be assisted as commanded by God. Again it is also important to note that nothing here is happening by chance. As it always said, everything is in the hands of the Lord. As we continue again by the story, it is pointed out by the bible that Naomi's husband, Elimelech, had a relative who was wealthy and his name was Boaz. While the two ladies are in Bethlehem, Ruth requested Naomi, to allow her to go to the fields and glean the left over berries that were being harvested. Naomi allowed her to go and as it turned out, she landed in the field of Boaz (8). The concept of gleaning had been advocated by God, when he gave the law to Moses for the Israelis to follow. It stated that when one reaped the harvest of the land, you were not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. The decree further stated that one should not also go over the vine yard a second time or pick up the grapes that had fallen. You were supposed to leave them for the poor and for the foreigners. So this was exactly what Ruth

was doing in the field of Boaz and as she started gleaning, Boaz arrived and greeted the harvesters by saying “The Lord be with you (10).”

BOAZ MEETS RUTH

As Boaz enters the scene of the narrative, we are introduced to a man who appears to be of good character and a man of God. If you may recall at this time in Bethlehem, they had problems pertaining to leadership. There was a spiritual decline and the Israelis were crying to God to come to their assistance. In a period like this, we are introduced to a man who greets his workers by saying “The lord be with you.” The workers of Boaz responded by saying “The Lord also be with you.” Then Boaz inquired as to who the young woman was. He was informed that she was a Moabite woman who had come back with Naomi. The overseer added that she had worked very hard since morning and had only rested a little bit. Then Boaz is said to have approached Ruth herself and advised her not to glean in any other field. He also instructed her to stay with the women who worked for him and when she got thirsty to go and drink water from the water jugs the men that worked for him had filled (11). Characteristically, Boaz also informed Ruth that he had been told that she had looked after her mother in law Naomi, since the death of her husband. He added that he had also noted that Ruth had left her father and her home land to come and live with people she did not know. Boaz further blessed Ruth and beseeched God to repay her for what she had done and to also richly bless her as she had sought refuge under the God of Israel (12). The kindness of Boaz overwhelmed Ruth, the bible states that he sat

and ate with her. He also offered her roasted grain and told her to eat all that she wanted. Boaz also gave orders to his men not to reprimand her and to also leave some stalls for her to pick we are told that she worked until evening and she gathered one ephod. This must have been a very significant amount. We are also told that she carried back these berries to Naomi and it also carried some of the food she had left over from sharing with Boaz. When Naomi asked Ruth where she was gleaning and told her it was in the field of Boaz. She revealed to Ruth that he was one of Ruth's relatives and was a guardian redeemer.

WHO WAS A GURADIAN REDEEMER?

The bible informs us that a Kingsman redeemer was a male relative who, according to the prevailing law as given to Moses by God, had the privilege to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble or in need. This concept of a Kingsman redeemer is very well illustrated where the Kingsman redeemer is Boaz (13.) As indicated in the bible, if a man died and left his wife childless, his nearest relative could be a guardian redeemer. He would therefore marry the childless widow and the first child they would have would be considered the heir of the dead man, this also included buying back the family land if it had been lost.

BOAZ MARRIES RUTH

In the narrative, Naomi consequently tells Ruth she has to find a home for her. Naomi then encouraged Ruth to go to Boaz at night and advised her, "Wash and put on perfume and dress in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor until he is finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do (14)." These words amazed me, because it is just like the preparation that we make if we are seeking to be in God's presence. We need to cleanse ourselves of sin and just like David said to God, "wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from sin for I know my transgressions and my sins are always before, against you only have I sinned." Everything moved just like Naomi had directed Ruth to do. The bible states that in the middle of the night, something startled Boaz and when he checked he found a woman lying at his feet and inquired as to who she was. The woman said that she was Ruth and requested Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her as he was her guardian redeemer (16). One of the human admirable characteristics is that of love which is displayed by Boaz. He again beseeched God to bless Ruth. He informed her that she had shown great kindness for choosing him instead of the young men whether rich or poor. He confirmed to her that she was a woman of noble character and advised her to leave in the morning before anyone could see her so that she could preserve her name. That was after he had confirmed that he was indeed a guardian redeemer of the family, but cautioned her that there was another relative that he would first consult. He added

that if that relative declined, he would be delighted to marry her (17). The bible continues and informs us that the following day Boaz did as he had indicated. He went to the town gate and summoned ten other elders of the town. He informed the other guardian redeemer about Naomi and Ruth. He informed him that Naomi was selling the piece of land that belonged to their relative Elimelech. Boaz then suggested to the unnamed relative that he should buy the land. He also told him that if he is to buy the land, he would also have to take Ruth in order to maintain the name of the dead husband (18).

The Kingsman redeemer relative declined the offer by claiming that he could endanger his own estate. To make it legal and to seal the deal, they both went under the ritual of removing one shoe and giving it to the other. This action concealed the marriage of Ruth to Boaz. In view of this, and later on, the Lord enabled Ruth to conceive and give birth to a son. The son was consequently named Obed and by the grace of God he eventually became the father of Jessie, the father of David, and this went all the way to our Lord Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, this story of Ruth presents to us the way God directs events from all sides with a view of achieving his purpose, we are shown and it is demonstrated to us that we should be faithful to God. The players in the book of Ruth work diligently and justly. They are generous and all of their actions are in accordance with Gods laws and they recognize the image of God in all human beings and they work together with compassion.

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NOTES

1. Judges 6: 2-6
2. Numbers 22: 3
3. Ruth 1: 11-14
4. Ruth 1: 16-18
5. Ruth 1: 11-15
6. Ruth 1: 15-17
7. Deuteronomy 16: 10-12
8. Ruth 2 : 2-3
9. Leviticus 19: 9-10
10. Ruth 2: 3-4
11. Ruth 2: 5-10
12. Ruth 2: 11-12
13. Leviticus 25: 47-55
14. Ruth 2: 3-4
15. Psalms 51: 2-3
16. Ruth 3-8

17. Ruth 3: 10-17

18. Ruth 4: 2-9