

An Introduction to Ruth

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – an introduction to the book of Ruth and its divine view of oppression and redemption
2. aim – to cause us to rejoice that God has sent a perfect kinsman-redeemer for our oppressions
3. passage – Ruth 4:18-22

b. outline

1. The Authorship of Ruth
2. The Context of Ruth
3. The Value of Ruth

c. opening

1. the **reasons** for choosing this book as a new series (like Esther after Ephesians)
 - a. a *narrative* book, one from the O.T., a *shorter* work, and a book I've *never preached* before
 - b. and, a book with a similar “feel” to Esther – a book with a female protagonist
2. the **purpose** of an introduction sermon
 - a. to establish a good sense of why this book is important
 1. **i.e.** Ruth is difficult to understand *without* a sense of the time in which it sits
 - b. so, we must start with *context* – because “a *text* without a *context* is a *pretext* for a *prooftext*”
 1. **i.e.** without a proper context, the content *can be* applied improperly

I. The Authorship of Ruth

Content

a. the intention of the authorship of the book

1. intention = the *reason* for the book itself, first *by its original author*, and then *for us reading it now*
 - a. we will start with its *original intent* and return to its *overarching intent* at the end
2. the intention of this book is gleaned from its final paragraph (**4:18-22**)
 - a. a short *genealogy* (one of the shortest in Scripture)
 - b. that documents the line of Perez, *a son of Judah*, down to David, the king of Israel
 1. **recall:** Perez was the firstborn of twin sons born to Judah through Tamar, his daughter-in-law
 - c. the main character of the story (then) is *David*, mentioned in both **v. 22** and **v. 17b**
 - d. this genealogy **parallels** the genealogy of **Matthew 1**
 1. included by a Jewish writer (to a Jewish audience) to show the lineage of Jesus
 2. that lineage *specifically* shown to come down from *David* – that Jesus was a Jew from the line of Judah and *specifically* from the line of David (thus authorized to sit on his throne)
 3. that Jesus of Nazareth was fully *authorized* (by his lineage) to come as the *fulfillment* of the messianic prophecies concerning David, to “take his place” as the *ultimate* king of Israel
 - e. **the original intention of this book is to show the providence of God in using the marriage of a faithful Moabite woman to a strong Jewish man to produce the lineage of King David**
 1. this paragraph is the *purpose* of the book: *what (and who) is David's lineage?*

b. the author of the book

1. **note:** like so many other O.T. books, the authorship is not *explicitly ascribed* within it (speculation)
2. there have been several *suggestions* as to who might have written it:
 - a. Boaz, as one *experiencing* the events firsthand (**i.e.** like Mordecai in Esther)
 - b. Ruth (or Naomi), particularly given that the book has a uniquely *feminine* quality
 1. **i.e.** it is written *largely* from a woman's perspective, deals with female issues within an ancient patriarchal society, and gives great insight into how women thought and felt at the time
 - c. Samuel (according to rabbinic tradition), explaining and defending the lineage of David as the successor to Saul – demonstrating why David *deserves* to be considered as king (and great!)
3. however, none of these suggestions seems suitable
 - a. no one from within the book would still be alive at the point David was born (3 generations later)
 1. **i.e.** if the *purpose* of the book is to explain David, they could not possibly have known of him
 2. and, **4:7** strongly suggests that the “*former*” customs of this book are no longer in place
 - b. Samuel also does not appear *likely*, given that he *died* before David rose to the throne

1. **true:** Samuel *may* have written it *in anticipation* of David's coronation, but the *emphasis* in the genealogy *could not have been fully known* by Samuel so far in advance
- c. **possibly:** David himself – paying tribute to his faithful great-grandmother and leaving a record; or Solomon – paying tribute to his father to show him as the completer of the Conquest (**see below**)
 1. in any case, like Hebrews, *only God knows who wrote this book*

c. the dating of the authorship of the book

1. dating = the dating of the *authorship*; **i.e.** when it was written (as distinct from when it *happened*)
2. an important date in the history of Israel: **1010bc** – the rise of David to the throne of Israel
 - a. working *backward* from **1 Kings 6:1** – the 4th year of Solomon's reign, 966bc
 - b. since David reigned 40 years in Israel, 966 + 4 + 40 = 1010bc
3. if the book was written *to highlight David as king*, it was *likely written after 1010*, **c. 1000-930bc**

II. The Context of Ruth

Content

a. the timeframe of the events of the book

1. timeframe = the timing of the events of the book *itself* (**i.e.** when did Ruth live?)
2. the first line of the book (**1:1**) tells us that the events occurred “*when the judges ruled*”
3. the period of the Judges is from the end of the *initial* Conquest under Joshua to the rise of Saul
 - a. **1 Kings 6:1** dates the Exodus 480 years before the 4th year of Solomon (**i.e.** 966 + 480 = 1446bc)
 1. **IMO:** a better date than the late 1200's put forward by modern scholars
 - b. adding 40 years for the “wilderness wandering” and 40 years under Joshua, the period of the Judges begins 1446 – 40 – 40 = c. 1346bc
 - c. 40 years of the reign of Saul means Judges ends 1010 + 40 = c. 1050bc
 - d. so, the period of the Judges in Israel is **c. 1350-1050bc** (~300 years)
4. however, given that **4:21-22** includes only three (3) generations from Ruth to David, the date of *these events* must be near the end of that time period (using 100 years = **c. 1150bc**)

b. the milieu of the events of the book

1. milieu = the *environment* or “world” surrounding the events of the book; or, what was life *like* during the period of the Judges? (see sermon series on *Judges* at sermons.thbg.org)
2. this is the period of the **theocracy** in Israel – the *direct* reign of God over the people of Israel
 - a. true, each tribe had its own “judges” (**note Exodus 18**), but there was *no* centralized government
 - b. the people were governed *directly* by God through the moral law mediated by the priests (no king)
 - c. although the theocracy was *intended* by God to be his “favored” form of government over his own people, the problem was *with the people themselves within that system*
 1. they had *accepted* the covenant of Yahweh, and *agreed* to keep his law (**Exodus 19**)
 2. but, they had *no natural ability* to do so – they were *not* regenerated people under the Spirit
 - a. **Judges 21:25** – “*there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*”
 3. **note:** the *ultimate* theocracy in the Kingdom of Christ *will be* a people governed directly by God himself *but with the full ability and desire to love this God perfectly without rebellion*
 - d. thus, during this period in Israel a clear “cycle” emerges, repeated (basically) with each Judge
3. **The Cycle of Sin and Oppression (draw a circle and divide into four [4] equal arcs)**
 - a. all outlined in **Judges 2:10-19** – I am “summarizing” the number of steps down from 7 to 4 (arcs)
 - b. **arc #1:** the people *rebel* against God by drifting away from keeping the law and worshipping him
 1. they fall into sin because they continue as *reprobate people* – they can do nothing else
 - c. **arc #2:** God sends an *oppressor* against them, typically in the form of an *external enemy*
 1. since the Conquest is not yet complete (and won't be completed until David), God raises up the various natives to attack and oppress the people, to drive them to repentance
 - d. **arc #3:** the people *cry out* for a deliverer – they seek *someone* to rise up on their behalf
 1. **note:** this arc is *directly across* from arc #1 – the people rebel, the people repent
 - e. **arc #4:** God sends a deliverer, who rescues them from their enemy and restores them to worship
 1. **note:** this arc is *directly across* from arc #2 – God oppresses, God delivers
4. the time of the Judges is a period in which God “pushes” his people towards a king (**Deut. 17:14ff**)
 - a. their constant struggle with sin and oppression would lead them (downwardly) to seek a king instead of a judge, one who would *finally* crush the enemies of Israel and give them peace
 - b. true, God's *desire* was for a theocracy, but he allowed them to seek a *human leader* who would act as a *theocratic-monarch* – one representing the will of God before the people
 1. **e.g.** David as a king “*after God's own heart*” – leading *in the will of God (unlike Saul)*
 - c. thus, Ruth sits in this period – a time of oppression *leading forward to a great king, now named*

III. The Value of Ruth

Content

a. the contemporary value of the book

1. true, the book *originally* had the purpose of outlining the lineage of David, but it serves another
2. **The Cycle of Sin and Oppression** is found in its pages (the very *outline* of the book):
 - a. **arc #1**: there is sin – Elimelech abandons Israel for Moab, where his sons marry Moabites
 - b. **arc #2**: there is oppression – Elimelech and his sons die, leaving Naomi and Ruth as widows
 - c. **arc #3**: there is a cry for deliverance – Naomi (through Ruth) seeks out Boaz as her redeemer
 - d. **arc #4**: there is redemption – Boaz marries Ruth and redeems the land of Elimelech in Obed
3. the story of Ruth is a *foreshadowing* of the *work* of this great king listed at its end
 - a. David would be the “completer” of the Conquest, started by Joshua and continued through the Judges – the *redeemer* of Israel, handing a kingdom of peace and prosperity and unity to his son
 - b. thus, the story of Ruth *foreshadows* this act of redemption **by a kinsman of Israel**

b. the redemptive-historical value of the book

1. but, the book also fits within a larger *redemptive-historical* reality
2. **The Cycle of Sin and Oppression** is characteristic of the whole of human history:
 - a. **arc #1**: there is sin – Adam fails to protect his wife who falls to temptation
 - b. **arc #2**: there is oppression – God sends oppression: disease, destruction, desperation, death
 - c. **arc #3**: there is a cry for deliverance – human beings seek for deliverance from these things
 1. but: they do not seek *God*, but turn away to that which *might* give them relief: money, power, status, fame, religion, and (yes!) even death itself (**e.g.** Alyssa Milano using abortion)
 - d. **arc #4**: there is redemption – God sends a *final deliverer*
 1. not an ordinary man or an earthly king, *but God himself* – who becomes a “kinsman” of fallen men by taking on their estate, completing the final “conquest” over sin and death for all who belong to *him*, and redeeming *their inheritance* into eternity
 2. the redeemer *of the elect*, who hands a kingdom of perfect peace and unity to his Father
- e. the story of Ruth is a *foreshadowing* of the **ultimate act of redemption in Christ Jesus**