

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Ruth

Book 8

Basic Questions behind the book:

Should the church seek internal purity or external generosity?

Summary of book:

When we first meet Ruth in this story, we find that she is a widow. She is a Moabitess which means she is a despised foreigner. Naomi is her mother-in-law and when she wants to return to Canaan, Ruth chooses to go with her and not live her on her own. So she travels with her mother-in-law and eventually after some drama, where she experiences vulnerability and the goodness of God, she marries the local hero Boaz. The Hebrews had a rule that when a woman was widowed and childless (like Ruth), the nearest relative had to marry her (even if he was married already) and have children to keep the family line going. As a result, she became the great grandmother of David and an ancestor in the line of the Messiah.

The book of Ruth is a story of God's grace in the midst of difficult circumstances. It took place in difficult times, but it shows that no matter how discouraging or antagonistic the world may seem there are always people who follow God. He will use anyone who is open to him to achieve his purposes.

The word 'redemption' occurs in this short book twice. This is a social redemption, rather than a spiritual one. Ruth and her mother-in-law are to be cared for and provided by Boaz, who is called the 'kinsman-redeemer'. However, many have seen a spiritual theme of redemption here as well.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To show how three people remained strong in character and true to God even when the society around them was collapsing.

Author: Unknown. Some think it was Samuel, but internal evidence suggests that it was written after Samuel's death, perhaps even in the post-exile period.

Recipients: To the people of Israel who tended to keep to themselves and see others as unclean. Seen in that light, it becomes a correcting message about God being a boundary-crossing, barrier-busting God who is at work beyond his people, in the world.

Dating: Some date the book as post exile around the same time as and to contrast with Nehemiah and Ezra, perhaps 480 – 450 BC.

Setting: An exciting time in Israel's history when they were trying to respond to the gracious covenant of God. Do you keep it to yourself? Or do you try to include others?

Important Reflections:

Ruth was a foreign woman and she is embraced by God's covenant. This is an important factor as it combated racism and any xenophobic ideas that the Israelites might have had. As Ruth was David's ancestor, it showed that foreign blood ran in David's veins. Also, Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, a former prostitute from Jericho.

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.'" (1:16)