

7. Ruth and Boaz: Firm Foundations

Biblical material: Ruth 1-4

Quotes

- A man who doesn't trust himself can never really trust anyone else. *Cardinal de Retz*
- You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you don't trust enough. *Frank Crane*
- To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved. *George Macdonald*
- You can't shake hands with a clenched fist. *Indira Gandhi*
- A good marriage is at least 80 percent good luck in finding the right person at the right time. The rest is trust. *Nanette Newman*

Questions

Why is this story included that seems to sanction the marriage between an Israelite and a Moabite? What of the past history? If counsel were given to this couple, what would it be? What is the basis for this relationship? Despite the cultural difference between then and now, how is this a model for marriage? What message is God conveying by placing this book in his Word?

Discussion/Comment

Instead of depicting an ideal marriage between an Israelite man and woman, one of Scripture's best representations of a trusting marriage relationship is between one of God's people and a "heathen" woman. God had specifically excluded Moabites from the congregation of Israel: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation." Deut. 23:3 NIV. (One wonders whether Ruth was aware of this prohibition before declaring loyalty to Naomi's people and God!)

While the culture and legal system is clearly very different to today, what shines through is the commitment of Ruth and Boaz to doing what is right. Ruth's dedication to her mother-in-law is commendable, as is Boaz' sense of responsibility. Throughout the story, and despite the difficulties faced on both sides, the recognition of each other as having dignity and value makes a seemingly impossible relationship actually succeed.

Many questions arise. What attracted Ruth to Naomi's people and God, when her sister-in-law eventually decided it would be better to stay in Moab. As Naomi makes clear, the hope for a better life is by remaining in the culture and place that is known. Orpah would have a much greater chance of remarriage if she remained in Moab. Ruth is venturing into the unknown, unsure of where she is headed or what kind of treatment she will receive in Israel.

Desperately poor, Ruth is left no option but to glean in the fields. One step above a beggar, she was vulnerable to mistreatment. But the "chance" meeting with Boaz proves the turning point. Notice how each preserves the proprieties of the day. Ruth admits her situation, and seeks no special attention. Boaz acts honorably and charitably. When Naomi suggests to Ruth a night meeting with Boaz, they both know the potential for disaster. But Boaz, no doubt surprised, still maintains his principles. He is even careful not to promise too much, because he is not the closest relative to be the kinsman-redeemer. But he will do all he can. And by acting wisely, there is the happy ending...

...to a very strange story. One wonders how those that read responded. Once again, like the book of Jonah, the expectations are turned upside-down. This is not a marriage that is

supposed to happen. Boaz would have been expected to consider a Moabite widow as beneath him. Naomi had no expectations that her plan would work, since it went well beyond what could have been expected. And Ruth, in her new country, with all the differences in customs, culture, and religion, does not play the role of a victim, but of a strong person who will act honorably and not take any easy way out. Her confident discussion with Boaz reflects a woman who does not feel herself disadvantaged despite her circumstance, and willing to do what was necessary to secure a future for both Naomi and herself.

Ruth asks Boaz, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” Ruth 2:10 NIV. The answer is beyond the human, though there is no doubt of the attraction here! The whole story is a parable of grace and redemption, for all concerned. One of the few “happy ending” stories, and a long way removed from the dysfunctional relationships so frequently observed in Scripture, the essential ingredients transcend the letter of the law and even divinely-given prescriptions. Because Ruth and Boaz operate from high principles and demonstrate they can be trusted even in the most challenging situations, God can endorse their relationship since it vividly reveals the true foundations of his kingdom. God is vindicated by those who demonstrate trust and trustworthiness.

A historical footnote that the concluding verses of Ruth makes clear is that Boaz is the grandfather of King David. So Ruth the Moabitess enters into the blood-line of Jesus himself... In fact the ancestors of Jesus make for interesting reading, and demonstrate a gracious acceptance by God of some characters that we might well challenge. Even in his lineage God in Christ is making a statement...

Ellen White Comments

The Bible is a revelation of the divine will and purpose of God. Those who follow its teachings are doers of the words of Christ, and by this means they bring solid timbers into their character building. Let us heed the words of inspiration, which exhort us to “be pitiful, be courteous.” Boaz represented the character of the Christian gentleman. Like Abraham, he commanded his household after him to keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment. He showed courtesy to all his servants, and as he passed among his workmen in the field, he said unto the reapers, “The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.” Here is a lesson for both masters and servants, for employers and the employed. The servants are strengthened in their hearts to do righteously, to be faithful to masters who manifest respectful kindness and courtesy towards them. Christians should be the most courteous people in the world. {HM, December 1, 1894}

All who, like Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God, were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.

God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven. He desires that the families below shall be a symbol of the great family above. {COL 290}

Mutual Trust Needed Between Husband and Wife—I was shown that although a couple were married, gave themselves to each other by a most solemn vow in the sight of heaven and holy angels, and the two were one, yet each had a separate identity which the marriage covenant could not destroy. {10MR 24-5}

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