

BIBLE BRIEFING

“Bread & Brides”

RUTH
Chapter 1

Introduction

God is romantic.

It might be more precise theologically to say that love is an attribute of God, and that God's love is sometimes expressed in the form of romance. While more *precise*, it would be less *passionate*. Most books on theology, while precise, are not passionate. They mention love as an attribute of God, but entirely fail to discuss the romantic aspect of His love. Yet God Himself goes to great lengths to portray the romantic aspect of His love in the Bible.

The Bible is full with metaphors and manuscripts that reveal God's love as romantic:

As for romantic metaphors, God often speaks of His love for you in terms of a husband's love for his wife:

- In the Old Testament God the Father speaks of the nation of Israel as His wife, and of Himself as her loving and faithful Husband...

Isaiah 62:5 "...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you."

Jeremiah 3:14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

Hosea 2:19 "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy..."

- In the New Testament the Church is called the bride of God the Son, Jesus Christ...

2 Corinthians 11:2 "...For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ."

Ephesians 5:25 & 32 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

The romantic manuscripts are two whole books of the inspired Word of God, the Song of Solomon and the Book of Ruth:

- The Song of Solomon is the romance of relationship. It is primarily a book celebrating romantic love in the relationship between husbands and wives. It also speaks, metaphorically, of the love of God for His beloved - of His love for *you*. Again please note the romantic context in which God reveals His love.
- The Book of Ruth is the romance of redemption. The book presents an important teaching in the biblical doctrine of redemption. When an Israelite was in financial distress he could sell his land or even himself. A redeemer bought back property and people who were sold under distress. Redemption was possible only through the work of a near kinsman, a relative, who exercised his responsibility to redeem his brother's property. The human race is seen by God as sold to slavery and sin, needing to be redeemed. Therefore, it was necessary for God to come as a man in order to redeem the human race **as your near kinsman**. God tells you this crucial doctrinal truth in the context of a romantic love story.

The Book of Ruth tells the story of a couple who love each other, but their love is a mirror in which we can see the divine love of Jesus for you and me. Boaz redeeming Ruth is a type of Jesus Christ redeeming the human race, and Ruth is a type of the redeemed believer whom He passionately loves.

Your redemption is not a cold, formal, matter-of-fact business transaction; it is a passionate act of everlasting love for you by Jesus Christ, your kinsman redeemer.

In the Book of Ruth, a citizen from Bethlehem named Elimilech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons move to Moab during a famine. The boys marry Moabite girls, but soon both father and sons die, leaving three widows. Naomi returns to Bethlehem, accompanied by one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth. Naomi has lost everything and is destitute. She sends Ruth out to glean behind the reapers during the barley harvest. In the providence of God, Ruth gleans barley in a field owned by Boaz - a near kinsman of Elimilech. At their first meeting Boaz falls in love with Ruth. Upon learning of this, Naomi begins planning for the wedding. She sends Ruth to Boaz to request of him to fulfill his responsibility as a kinsman redeemer. Boaz is thrilled with Ruth's request, but tells her there is a kinsman redeemer closer than he. Boaz arranges a meeting with the closer kinsman redeemer. Upon hearing the facts, this man steps aside and allows Boaz to fulfill the kinsman redeemer responsibilities, including marriage to Ruth. Ruth conceives a baby boy, Obed, who is the grandfather of King David.

Our love story opens against a dark background. Elimilech and his family turn from following God and go to live among the idolatrous Moabites. By chapters end, Naomi has re-turned to God from idolaters, and Ruth has turned to God from idolatry. While Ruth's love for Naomi should not be minimized, it is God's love for both of them that is most precious. His love acts behind the scenes of their life to pressure them to re-turn, and to prosper their re-turn.

God's love for you acts behind the scenes of your life in this same way.

#1 When You Turn From God To Idols,
His Love Acts To Pressure Your Return
(v1-5)

There was a famine in Israel:

Ruth 1:1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

Ruth 1:2 The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

The famine was a moment of decision for Elimilech. The Moabites were pagan idolaters and enemies of the Israelites. Nevertheless, they had bread to eat in Moab. Rather than stay in the house of bread ([Bethlehem](#)) and praise the Lord ([Judah](#)), even in the famine, Elimilech took his family to Moab. His decision led to a decade of disobedience with dire consequences.

Ruth 1:3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

Ruth 1:4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years.

Ruth 1:5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Moab was no place for an Israelite. The Moabites were the descendants of the son born to Lot and his daughter from their incest. Later, the Moabites hindered the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Twenty-four thousand Israelites died from a plague when the Jewish men consorted with Moabite women and were led into idolatry . During the time of the Judges, immediately preceding the events of Ruth, Moab had enslaved the people of Israel.

Having turned from God to idols by settling in Moab, God turned up the pressure of His love. Tragedy struck the family as the father died. It was a severe mercy, an act of love, as God was calling His people to return.

Their disobedience only increased. The sons took Moabite wives, contrary to God's law. As their disobedience increased, so did the pressure of God's love for them to return. [Mahlon and Chilion also died](#), leaving behind three widows.

Elimilech sought bread for his family; Naomi sought brides for her sons. Because of *bread* and *brides*, they turned from God to idols. It's not wrong for a father to seek bread for his family. But bread can become an idol if it is preferred over God. [Bread](#) represents anything that pertains to *sustaining* your physical life - food, clothing, and

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Numbers 25

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Judges 3:12-14

shelter. Jesus encouraged you to seek first the kingdom of God, then trust that necessary food, appropriate clothing, and adequate shelter will be provided by your heavenly Father. When you reverse the order, God takes second place and whatever it is you are seeking becomes an idol.

Don't let some slice of bread become an idol...

It's not wrong for a mother to seek brides for her sons. But brides can become an idol if preferred over God. **Brides** represent circumstances you believe are necessary to *satisfying* your physical life - education, marriage, career, position, etc. We look to certain circumstances to bring us contentment. The Apostle Paul told you, **I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.** When you look to circumstances to bring contentment rather than looking for God in your circumstances, your circumstances become an idol.

Don't let some bride become an idol...

God loves you too much not to intervene when you turn from Him to idols. Although His actions can seem severe, He is always acting from love. His love acts to pressure your return.

#2 When You Turn To God From Idols,
His Love Acts To Prosper Your Return
(v6-22)

Both Naomi and Ruth turn to God from idols. Naomi and Ruth return in poverty, but God's love is acting behind the scenes to prosper them. By the end of the story the women of Bethlehem can say of Naomi **your daughter-in-law, who loves you...is better to you than seven sons.** By the end of the story Ruth is the great grandmother of King David and in the line of the Jewish Messiah!

Ruth 1:6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

Ruth 1:7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

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Philippians 4:11 (NIV)

From God's point of view, the moment Naomi returned to God in her heart, the abundance of His blessings were once again showered out upon her. From her point of view, however, there was a difficult road to travel.

Someone once said, "Who can mind the journey when the road leads home?" We *do* mind the journey! Be reminded that God is always working behind the scenes of your journey to prosper you.

Ruth 1:8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me.

Ruth 1:9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud

Ruth 1:10 and [they] said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

Ruth 1:11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?

Ruth 1:12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me--even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons--

Ruth 1:13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!"

There was no hope that Orpah and Ruth would find husbands in Judah. Jews were commanded by Moses in Deuteronomy not to⁴ intermarry with Gentiles.⁵ Moabites were excluded from Israel. They had no future in Israel.

Ruth 1:14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

Ruth 1:15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

Naomi had decided to return to God from idolatry. Orpah and Ruth must decide if they would turn to God from idols. The mention of the gods of Moab indicates that this was a spiritual crisis. Moab meant

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Deuteronomy 7:3

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Deuteronomy 23:3

idolatry; Israel meant worship of the true God. This was a moment of faith.

Here are two pagan women, idolaters from wicked Moab, who have been enlightened by the knowledge of the true God. The text makes no distinction between them except their personal decision. Both stood on the threshold of eternal life.

Orpah failed to turn to God. Faced with the decision, she counted the cost and preferred a slice of bread and the prospect of being a bride in Moab. She loved this present world more than she loved God. Her idolatry kept her out of the kingdom of God.

Ruth 1:16 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.

Ruth 1:17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

No words could more beautifully express Ruth's conversion. As J. Vernon McGee says, "Ruth chose God, and He chose her in the greatest plan of the ages: namely, the bringing of Jesus Christ into the world."

An anonymous poet captures Orpah and Ruth in their moment of decision, writing,

One ship sails east
And another west,
By the selfsame winds that blow;
'Tis the set of the sails,
And not the gales,
That tells them the way to go!

Like the winds of the sea
Are the waves of Time,
As we voyage along through life;
'Tis the set of the soul
That determines the goal,⁷
And not the calm or strife.

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ibid., page 51.

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ibid., page 52.

Ruth chose the God of Israel and took her place of trust under His wings. Orpah went backward to darkness, superstition, and gloom. Ruth went onward to the light of glory.

Ruth 1:18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth 1:19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

A decade of disobedience had taken its toll on Naomi. She left with a husband and sons; she returned a childless widow, with only a Gentile girl to show for her ten years in Moab. She was a living parable of the cost of disobedience.

Ruth 1:20 "Don't call me Naomi, " she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

Ruth 1:21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Even though Naomi hasn't fully accepted her situation, she is willing to return to God and walk in obedience - even with great personal affliction and suffering. Hebrews 12:11 tells you, **Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.**

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Naomi left seeking bread during a famine; she returned to famine during a harvest of bread! God had blessed Bethlehem with bread, but Naomi had no part in it. Ruth would be forced to glean barley behind the harvesters along with the others who were poor and destitute.

Naomi *returned* to God from idolatry. She speaks to you of believers who return from their pursuit of bread and brides, realizing that God alone sustains and satisfies.

Ruth *turned* to God from idols. She speaks to you of unbelievers who choose Jesus Christ and then find that Jesus Christ has chosen them in the greatest plan of eternity!

Conclusion

This story becomes all the more precious when you see your own connection with Ruth. Ruth was a Gentile girl, cut off from Israel, who was brought into a place of blessing as a bride. In the New Testament book of Ephesians, you see that this was precisely your condition!

You are Gentiles who were cut off from Israel:

Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh...
Ephesians 2:12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

You have been brought into a place of blessing as a bride:

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...
Ephesians 5:32 ...This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ruth is a picture of God's dealings with Gentiles during the time of Jewish apostasy between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. The family of Elimilech, departing from the land of Israel, is a picture of Israel being scattered throughout the world after having rejected Jesus in His first coming. Ruth was brought into blessing during their scattering; so it is that the Church is brought into blessing during this interval, prior to the second coming of the Lord.

The position of the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament is important. It is not accidental that the Book of Ruth appears after Judges and before First Samuel. Judges tells of the failure of the Jews under the Law of Moses, and First Samuel tells of the setting up of Israel's kingdom under King David. Between the failure of the Jews under the Law and their great king, Ruth is blessed as the Gentile bride. Just so today, the Church is blessed as the bride of Christ between

the failure of Israel under the Law and the return of Jesus as their great King to establish His Kingdom on earth.

Salvation goes forth to Ruth, a Gentile, during a time of failure in Israel. This is typical of the age of grace in which we live. The Book of Acts ends with Israel rejecting Jesus and Paul saying, in Acts 28:28, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

Ruth was brought to Israel at the beginning of the barley harvest. This would be the time of Firstfruits, the celebration of the first of the harvest. We saw in Leviticus Twenty-three that Firstfruits spoke of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was the firstfruits of many who would be saved during this age in which we live. Just as Gentile Ruth was brought to the place of blessing at Firstfruits, so the Church is brought to the place of blessing thanks to the resurrection of Jesus as the firstfruits.

Commentators say that the Book of Ruth is read by the Jews at their Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was fulfilled in the New Testament when the Church was born. Thus even the Jews, without knowing it, celebrate the harvest of the Gentiles into the Church by reading Ruth during Pentecost.