

Lesson 16 Ruth

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- 1 *Our study has prepared us to appreciate the facets of this good story.*
 - a. *What is levirate marriage?*
 - b. *What is Moab's relationship to Israel?*
 - c. *What are the moral conditions around Bethlehem - remember Gibeah and the territory Samson judged?*
 - d. *What is the value of a male child to a widow?*
 - e. *What were the laws of Moses concerning the poor and alien?*
 - f. *What is the "kingly" lineage to this point in our history?*
 - g. *Who is it that God uses as instruments in His Salvation history?*
2. *This book comes from the hand of one inspired author. What are the differences between it and the many authored writings we have been reading?*
3. *This book was read by the Jews as part of the barley harvest festival. This feast was later called Pentecost. On that feast about 35 A.D. the Holy Spirit in the newborn Church began to extend salvation beyond the Jews. How will this story eventually flow into that event?*
4. *The book of Ruth has meditative value. Both Naomi and Ruth may be prayerfully seen to foreshadow the Blessed Mother. Do you see any parallels? Does the book contribute to your understanding of God's woman in anyway?*

108th psalm and prayer

Ruth is a sign of the woman. The Catholic overview of the book of Ruth sees Ruth and Naomi as forerunners or foreshadows of the Virgin Mary. We can expect, therefore, to find again the theme of woman as the key to Salvation History, "from woman's seed . . ." The three books of the Old Testament that are named for women give insight into the Authority Problem that Salvation History is in place to solve. Through this solution rebellious mankind may attain, personally and collectively, eternal life. Woman is the key to solving the problem

initiated by Eve. Woman's seed will overcome the tempter, even as the Lord said to the serpent in the third chapter of Genesis.

Ruth is a bridge between the chaos of the Judges and the God-blessed reign of David. In the Book of Ruth we find a woman who bridges the chaotic time of the Judges, when as the last verse of Judges says, "each man did what was right in his own eyes," and the establishment of the kingdom of David which will be the model for the final Kingdom. We have a statement much like, "if feels good do it" in the words, "each man did his own thing." Such ignorance and disobedience explains the grave breaches of the Law of God during the time of the Judges. This was because there was no godly king in authority. This license brings the community into near total disarray. We, too, seem to be living in a time when all authoritative claim is ignored, and the same disregard of God's law is the common and accepted mode. What role does woman have in these family, Church and social upheavals?

In one hundred years, the Kingdom of David will be established.

From that time on the Hebrews will look back upon David's rule as being the apex of their national history. Their influence in the world was felt under David who controlled all the lands from the Euphrates to the Sea. What or who is the intermedium between the chaos of Judges and this godly ordering of the People? Ruth is that God-centered span. She is the one least likely - a foreigner, a woman, and a poor one. She is one of the anawim. It is through her dedication to Yahweh that she becomes His instrument to bring his Chosen People to a peaceful state. It is in Ruth that the miracle takes place. In Genesis the truth of God's ordering of the sexes and their all important roles was established in primal law, in the prophetic promises, and in the external governance of the people through the action of God in collaboration with the man. But the prophecies and promises are fulfilled by a miracle of God *in* the woman. The kingly seed, the seed of promise, comes by God's intimate action in the submitted woman. With Ruth it is laid out for us in a real life story. A woman strikes out from her own land leaving behind all that is known and comfortable to make a place for herself in a new land among strange people, people who consider her a hated alien. She is willing to make this uncomfortable change because of what she has seen of God the Lord in the life of her mother-in-law, Naomi. The faith of the Jews, even in this troubled time of their history, is like a beacon

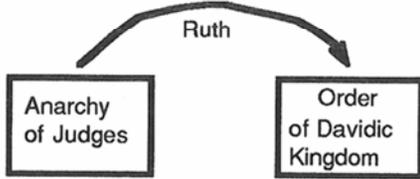
to this woman and she chooses to take her chances, which seem slim, for a fulfilled life as a Moabitess among the Hebrews. Who would marry a dependent, poor widow and a Moabite at that? She foregoes the comfort of home and family, choosing possible barrenness, for a greater good she sees in Naomi. The beautiful dedication of herself to God because of Naomi's witness is given in 1:8. Because of this faith and her character, which epitomizes the heart condition of the submitted woman, she is the woman God seeks in order to establish godly order over His People.

As Ruth Is to David, so will Mary be to David's greater son. In scripture's usual way of presenting the important without fanfare, we know neither David's mother's name or his grandmother's; the important woman whose influence formed the other two is his great-grandmother. Through Ruth and women like her God will create a miracle for His People. Even Ruth's willingness to be barren in a time when fruitfulness was the fulfillment of a woman, speaks of Mary who also willingly denied her own fruitfulness by dedicating herself virginally to God alone. She is a virgin betrothed to a man, but committed to virginity, which is seen in her reply to the angel, "I know not man" or "I am not knowing man." In the way of scripture, that never discards the truths laid down earlier, but builds on them, it is again in the barren woman, this time a barrenness willingly chosen, and therefore, a higher barrenness, that God brings the miracle to pass. (There are many other parallels of Ruth and Mary in the outline for this lesson.) The text from Ruth 4:13 reads, "The Lord gave her conception." A man and a woman and God: it takes three for the continuance of the lineage that will come to completion in the birth of Jesus.

There are a number of convergences of religious and spiritual meaning in this story. In a beautiful coming together of high points of great religious significance, this story is read in Jewish congregations on the Feast of Pentecost. This, in the Jewish year, was the feast of First Fruits, when offerings of the first harvest from the soil was brought to God in tithes of thanksgiving. It was also the anniversary of the great Theophany of the People of God with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai when God

bestowed on them the covenant with Himself. In that covenanting rests an image of marriage - the marriage of God the Lord and His People. From that marriage came all the fruits indicative of His holy people, all the fruitfulness of the People of God. On behalf of the Lord, the Prophet Hosea will make this marital and fruitful relationship more clear in time to come. As long as the covenant was held in honor, the land and the people would be abundantly fruitful as God's spouse. This was not limited to physical fruitfulness, but it began there. The same marital principles will hold true for spiritual fruitfulness. The Holy Spirit will impregnate the spouse/believer so that he "will be known by (his) fruits." To carry on this powerful convergence of meaning, the Church of Jesus Christ received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This was the great theophany of the believers in Jesus who waited for the promised Holy Spirit in the Upper Room. It is from that in-filling, a true marriage of the Holy Spirit with His people, that all the fruitfulness of the Church comes. The model is Mary, present at Pentecost, who was "overshadowed by the Spirit" in her conception of Jesus.

Lesson 16 Ruth



three O.T. books named for women
all three deal with the Authority Problem,
the rebellion of God's own bride (us)
to His loving and essential Headship,
and its solution.



Marries Boaz of tribe of Judah
in Bethlehem



Mary of Nazareth

Daughter of David, tribe of Judah.

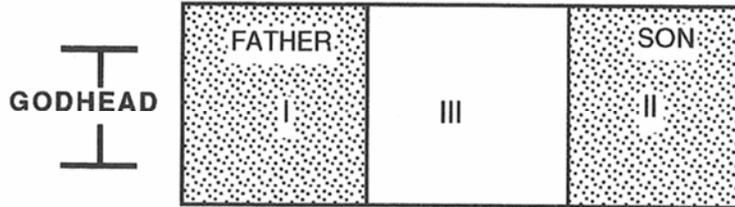
HOLY SPIRIT

given at Pentecost
to restore the Bride

Ruth is the Jewish
reading for Pentecost

- Symbolic names**
- Elimelech - My God is King
 - Naomi - sweetheart
 - Mara - sorrow
 - Ruth - friendship
 - Boaz - Yahweh is Strong
 - Chilion - consumption
 - Mahlon - sterility
 - Orpah - freshness

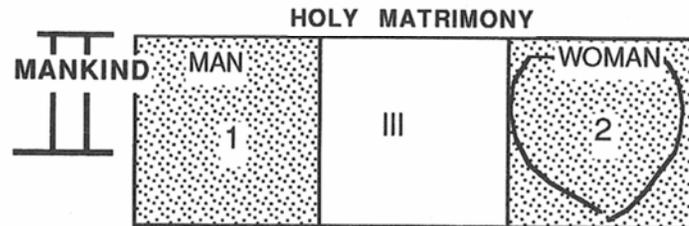
1. a visionary choice to follow Yahweh -
2. leaves all that is familiar -
3. chooses to refrain from marriage -
4. a chosen barrenness -
5. belongs to no man *virgin*
6. favored by God -
7. lives diligently for another -
8. an unknown person to many *JOHN 6:42*
9. her reward is from God *II JOHN*
10. she needs a redeemer *9:11-12,13*
11. she is obedient, submissive/assertive
12. decisions on the threshing floor - *LUKE 2:35*
13. a maidservant - *1:38 LUKE*
14. integrity is guarded by her husband - *3:14*
15. her son is given up for others - *4:17*
16. his conception is "by the Lord" *4:13*



ROLE OF THE SECOND PERSON

1. OBEDIENT
 2. SUBMISSIVE
 3. ACCEPTING
 4. RESPONDER
 5. SECONDARILY
 - a. assertive
 - b. initiator
- } more to be said of the First Person

The man receives the promises, and makes the covenant with God, all in actions exterior to himself.



Fulfillment of promise and covenant comes through the woman by the intimate action of God.

Lesson 16 Ruth Synopsis

1. in the days of the Judges
there was famine in Judah
the family of Elimelech immigrates
from Bethlehem to Moab
Elimelech, Naomi, and two sons
Mahlon and Chilion
father and sons sicken and die
the sons leave Moabite wives
Orpah and Ruth
the famine is over in Israel
Naomi starts home to Bethlehem
to her loyal daughters-in-law
who follow her, she says
"return home, the Lord grant
that you may find a home
in the house of a husband
would you refrain from marrying?"
Orpah sadly turns back
Ruth goes on with Naomi
"your people shall be my people
and your God my God"
they came to Bethlehem
at the beginning of barley harvest
2. Naomi has a kinsman, Boaz
Ruth goes to his field to glean
Boaz asks "whose maiden is
this? Boaz encourages her she
is to glean in his fields
while he gives her protection
"Why have I favor in your eyes?"
Boaz says, "The Lord recompense
for all you have done for Naomi"
she brought home to Naomi 2/3
bushel of grain
Naomi asks her why so much?
Ruth gleaned in a relative's field
who is a benefactor to them both
3. Naomi's plan is for Ruth to go back
to glean barley in Boaz' field
then to lie down at his feet
on the threshing floor at night
"all you say I will do"
Boaz discovers her at his feet
"I am Ruth your maidservant;
spread your skirt over me
for you are next of kin"
"now I know that you are
a woman of worth
not going after younger men"
Boaz as next of kin will do the part
of redeemer for Ruth and Naomi
concerned for her reputation
he shields her integrity
Ruth goes home to Naomi
with five measures of barley
Naomi is sure Boaz will act soon
4. Boaz goes to elders at the gate
and conducts his business
with another closer kinsman
who will not redeem the property
and does not want responsibility
for raising a family for Naomi
Boaz redeems Naomi's land
and takes Ruth for a wife
the elders witness and bless them
"The Lord make the woman
who is coming into your house
like Rachel and Leah
who together built up
the house of Israel"
Boaz took Ruth to be his wife
the Lord gave her conception
Naomi took the child
and laid him in her bosom
Boaz was the father of Obed
Obed the father of Jesse
and Jesse the father of David

Lesson 16 Ruth Outline

I. Background to the Book of Ruth

A. Historical background is about 1100 B.C. during the time of the Judges

1. the time of the Judges leaves us with an authority problem -
 - a. "every one did what he thought was best in his own eyes"
 - b. there was no king or seat of authority in Israel
 - c. immorality and dissolution of faith is evident everywhere

2. how are these authority problems to be solved in history?

- a. this is the existential question from the beginning of Scripture
- b. they are solved by the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit
- c. the answer is still being appropriated by the Church
- d. for the coming of God's kingdom, woman must appropriate the answer
 - 1) it is her heart condition that is to be imitated
 - 2) all must respond in obedience and submission - a feminine stance
 - 3) she demonstrates unflappable trust in God
 - 4) she epitomizes a total self-giving love

B. Geography has bearing on the story

1. Judah and Moab are on either side of the Dead

Sea a. they are chronic enemies

- 1) Ehud kills Eglon during this century
- 2) there is a massacre of Moabites at the Jordan
- 3) the Law prohibits Moabites from worship with Israel Dt 23:3

2. in the area around Bethlehem there is much history

- a. at Bethlehem Rachel is buried, Gn 25:19 "Rachel crying for her children" is mentioned in Jer 31:15, Matt 2:18,
- b. nearby, Gibeah and the territory under Samson are troublesome Jd 21:25, Ruth 2:9, 22

c. people in this story are people of integrity in a time when virtue is rare

C. The writing of Ruth

1. it is written in a polished way by one hand - could it be Samuel?

- a. the story flows, has consistency
- b. it is very poetic in places 1:6
- c, there are no contradictions as in some O.T. writing
- d. the life it depicts reflects a higher level of culture

2. when is it written ? Somewhat later than the events 4:7

3. it is infused by the Holy Spirit to hold at least three layers of meaning

- a. again, there is the historic level, concerning a real woman named Ruth
- b. there is a foreshadowing of Mary, the mother of Jesus

c. it also concerns the feminine response of you and ⁱⁱⁱmale and female) as God's chosen in Salvation History

4. it uses symbolic names (some replace historical ones for literary effect)

- a. Elimelech - "my God is King"
- b. Naomi - "sweetheart"
- c. Mahlon "sterility "
- d. Chilion - "consumption or sickness"
- e. Orpah - "youthful freshness"
- f. Ruth - "friendship"
- g. Boaz - "Yahweh is strong"

D. The Genealogy of the Promised Line is continued

1. the mothers in first generations of the People are chosen women
2. barrenness marks them all, and the understanding of this builds

- a. Abraham and Sarah ca. 1900
- b. Isaac and Rebekah
- c. Jacob and Rachel and Leah
- d. Judah and Tamar (barren because of circumstances)

3. 400 years in Egypt and following

- a. Joseph and his Egyptian wife ca. 1700
- b. Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nashon Matt 2:1-6

c. other women not in the lineage complete the story

- 1) Moses' mother, of the tribe of Levi
- 2) Moses and Zipporah ca 1300
- 3) Moses and Aaron's sister, Miriam

4. woman of faith, but not of the People - revelation adds new understanding

- a. the people now include not just those with racial ties, but those are among God's people who believe Yahweh
- b. Salmon and Rahab the Canaanite ca. 1200
- c. Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess ca. 1150

- 1) Obed is their son, Jesse is their grandson
- 2) David is their great-grandson

5. David and Bathsheba 1050

E. Laws of Moses have bearing on the story

1. levirate marriage 5

- a. Gn 38, Vt. 25": reserving the name and the inheritance of the dead
- b. the next of kin, brother of the deceased first of all, obligated to assume the land and the woman
- c. the children belong to the dead husband - regaining the inheritance
- d. the goeidrew off his shoe and renounced any inheritance of the dead

- 1) called "goel", meaning "redeemer"
- 2) he stands for surety for debts and rescue from plight
- 3) this originates the idea of the "redeemer" in a national sense
- 4) it lies behind the Christian confession of Christ as a personal redeemer and the world's Redeemer
- e. continuity of the family is a concern for the whole community
 - 1) childlessness considered a reproach and a shame
 - 2) bearing children was a great honor
 - a) for The People as seed of the future
 - b) for the promised seed of woman (Gn 3) and the "one who is to come,"
- 2. laws concerning the poor and the alien
 - a. Dt 24:19, 21 tells the kindness due to sojourners and aliens
 - b. some fruits of the fields are left for gleaners

II. Two women who will make a difference in Salvation History

A. Naomi

- 1. her despondency over widowhood and the death of her sons
 - a. nevertheless her life impressed her pagan daughters-in-law
 - b. they want to give up everything to worship her God, and to be close to her witness of faith
 - (1) one is encouraged to go back to a possible husband and home
 - (2) one goes on to embrace probable barrenness and a life alone
- 2. she recognizes her sinfulness
- 3. she accepts what has happened as just

B. Ruth

- 1. she dedicates herself to a new way
- a. she speaks words like Abraham's Gen 12:1
 - b. she steps out to follow God in an uncommon way
 - 1) with willingness to give up all she knew of home
 - 2) with no possibility of a husband and family, the usual fulfillment for a woman
 - c. her choice is not forced upon her, she chooses it
 - d. Orpah's choice is normal and good, Ruth's is exceptional and godly
- 2. she belongs to no man
 - a. her husband is dead, she has left her father
 - b. Mary too, belongs to herself
 - 1) she is a "virgin", Greek "parthenos" "belonging to one's self"
 - c. a woman cannot give what she does not have

- 1) to give, first a woman must belong to herself
- 2) then she can make a "sincere gift of self" - J.P.II
- d. "Whose maiden is this?" 2:5 answer - No one's, but God's.
- 3. she has courage and shows initiative
 - a. not beyond the bounds of propriety, but risky
 - b. she obeys her mother-in-law with fearless trust
 - c. she is resourceful
- 4. God accepts and blesses her voluntary barrenness
 - a. He overcomes it
 - b. He paves the way for godly governance of His people through her faithful obedience

III. Echoes of Ruth in the Blessed Virgin Mary

A. Both have total dedication to God

B. Mary, too, will move away from her people's custom

- 1. she has envisioned something better, and Joseph, too
- 2. she and Joseph agree to a celibate marriage
- 3. their fulfillment will be a fruitfulness for God in a higher way
 - a. she puts herself totally into God's hands
 - b. "let it be done unto me according to your word"

C. Mary belongs to herself and capably decides

- 1. her *fiat* is made freely and alone
- 2. only the free can give themselves to God and to husband
- 3. she was a virgin, see above, literally as well as figuratively
- 4. she goes off to Elizabeth's on her own, asking no one

D. Her humility is at the heart of her being

- 1. Ruth says, "You recognize me, and I, I am unknown." 2:10
- 2. Mary is unknown in her own time, who she was and her significance, and is certainly unknown today see John 6:42
- 3. for her self-giving to God she will have a full reward 2:12 (also II John 8)
 - a. in the Magnificat, Lu 1, He raises up the lowly
 - b. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" I Pet 5:5
 - c. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven" Mat 5:3

E. The role of Boaz is like the role of Joseph 1,

- he is her protector, provider, sharer
- 2. he shields her from reproach - Boaz is concerned for Ruth's good name, Joseph is concerned for Mary's
- 3. he is given oversight and governance of the family unit
- 4. he is kind and faithful to his duty