

### The Book of Ruth

#### Lesson 1 - Introduction

We begin our study of the Book of Ruth today and as is our usual format I will begin with an introduction to set the stage. Let's read just a few verses to get the flavor.

#### READ RUTH 1:1 -7

At times throughout this study we're going to take an extended look at several principles that are addressed in the book of Ruth, and examine them in depth. Those of you who are starting your study with Seed of Abraham Torah Class with the book of Ruth are going to be at a disadvantage unless you have received instruction elsewhere on the Hebrew Bible. Those who have studied with us beginning at Genesis will see several familiar topics woven into the story and so many loose ends will be tied up, other matters that we discussed long ago will be reviewed, and some topics discussed in more depth as we encounter them in Ruth; I think you're going to get a lot out of this study. In fact, Ruth ought to be at the top of our list to study before you tackle the New Testament Gospel accounts. I ask in advance for your attention and focus; if your mind wanders off for even a few minutes, you're liable to be lost. This study is going to be somewhat technical at times but also really interesting.

So today as part of this introduction to Ruth, I want to take a little time and pause to reaffirm a very basic principle of Seed of Abraham Ministries; one which is central and at the heart of the point of view of Torah Class and which is also in desperate need of revival (if not downright revolution) within the Church. And it is that what we call the Old Testament (it's called the Tanach among the Hebrews) is neither old (as in outdated) nor is it obsolete, nor has the New Testament somehow replaced it. Rather it is as much the needed and remaining foundation for the entire Bible and the understanding of the Salvation that we are offered in Christ, as a concrete slab and footings attached to bedrock are the needed and necessary foundation for any house that hopes to not be washed away at the first signs of a storm.

How is it then that the Body of Christ, nearly universally, has come to the conclusion that the Old Testament is as irrelevant to us today as is a horse and buggy? It is common today for a Pastor or Priest to caution his flock against even venturing into the OT, with the warning that it might be harmful for them or make them question their faith. Or even more, that the Covenant of Moses was destroyed and abolished, as though it were "nailed to the cross of Christ"? To a modern churchgoer this premise is rarely disputed; it probably seems as though the demise of the former testament has always been understood as fact. But as we have learned (especially from our study of the book of Judges), it is the natural way of our evil inclinations to replace the commands of God with similar sounding manmade doctrines that are more in step with our current agendas.

In our day we find ourselves sliding back, unaware, into the age-old enemy of Judeo-Christianity: Gnosticism. Gnosticism seeks to humanize God and to simultaneously naturalize

the mystical and super-natural. Gnosticism is like an ancient underground river that at times surfaces and so flows visibly, raging and redirecting the landscape it cuts through. But in other eras it stays burrowed under the surface, hiding just out of sight, going largely undetected except by those who know to watch for it. Gnosticism never dies; it merely assumes different forms in different seasons as does the archenemy of God, the master of deception himself, Satan. And this is because Gnosticism is one of The Evil One's greatest and most effective tools of keeping mankind separated from God.

The Gnosticism of today is called Liberal Theology and New Age and also goes by several other names such as The Emergent Church, the Interfaith Movement, or even Chrislam. It could be called the I'm OK, You're OK version of Christianity that says any meaning you attach to Scriptures is truth for you. Just like in the days of Paul, and Peter, and John Gnosticism is beginning to bubble up from its hiding place as a response to the return of Israel to its homeland, and to a growing group of Believers who are challenging tired old manmade church doctrines and rather are thirsty for the purity of God's Word. But the unsuspecting among the thirsty are too often drinking of Gnosticism's bitter wormwood that in time sours our souls all the time thinking that it looks like refreshing living water. So appealing is it that Believers are lining up at the bookstores for a gulp, and Pastors are preaching it because it is so well received. The New Age Christianity makes mankind more on the level of our beloved animals, and God more attractive and on our level; and how we love that thought. God is no longer The Almighty Father; he is our kindly grandfather who looks the other way at our indiscretions. Yeshua is no longer our master and savior; he is a combination good-buddy and powerful Liberator who is here to demolish all barriers that stand in the way of our personal hopes and dreams. Men are no longer made in the image of God; we are simply a branch of the animal kingdom that happened into opposable thumbs and a slightly higher functioning brain than all the other branches. This philosophy of existence is not at all new; it is considerably older than the so-called Old Testament.

I have explained before that the most recent cycle of Gnosticism can be traced to a period known among scholars as The Enlightenment; a period that brought us the likes of the philosophers Hume, and Kant, and Voltaire. Birthed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Enlightenment sought to rid Europe of any sense of being tied to a burdensome religion or intangible god. It was in response to the Enlightenment (and in lesser degree to the printing press and sudden availability of the Bible to the masses) that the new institution of Systematic Theology was born, theoretically to counter the Enlightenment. Systematic Theology is the Christian version of the Jewish Talmud so to speak; it is a written system of manmade answers and doctrines, brought about by our accepted and revered religious authorities and thought to properly dispense the mind of God to His followers. And while the intent may have seemed good, and although many passages of Scripture were invoked, it has brought much pain, confusion and distortion of truth to Believers of every branch of Christianity. It has weakened our faith and stunted our maturation process.

One of the underlying tenants of many Christian Systematic Theologies is that the Old Testament has been replaced by the New. And as secular humanism was the agenda that the Enlightenment sought to bring about, in a strange way the concept of a Systematic Theology has unknowingly aided it by replacing obedience to The Father with nearly unfettered liberty in

Jesus. The plan has been a rousing success to say the least.

So do not think that such a belief that the Old Testament is dead and gone comes from ancient times; in fact the notion is only about 250 years old and was unknown to our early church fathers.

Today in academic circles there are those scholars who are considered the founding fathers of their fields of study. They are rare men who are more than pioneers; they have a gift of being able to see things that other men overlooked. They have the ability to face a matter with a completely fresh approach. In Christian writings there are scholars whose works form the basis for the work of others who follow them. Commentaries in particular rely on the earlier works of these pioneering scholars as reference points, and thus the outstanding works of these rare men have become known as reference material.

The vast majority of the works Christian laymen and teachers read from today were created by modern academics who used these much earlier pioneering scholars as their reference point. So as a last offering before we get back on the road to Ruth from our short detour today, I would like to quote for you the Preface to the Commentary on the Old Testament written by the noted scholars C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. Virtually every Christian commentary written in the past century relies to some level or another on this work. Keil and Delitzsch were Germans; pioneering Christian Scholars who wrote in the early-middle part of the 1800's.

This is the word-by-word preface to their seminal work, the Commentary on the Old Testament. Pay close attention to what they are explaining to us, and I hope you will take it to heart and never forget it. Keep in mind that this was written more than 150 years ago; before Israel returned to its ancestral homeland and before this new brand of a self-oriented American Christianity became popular.

***“The Old Testament is the basis of the New. God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by His only-begotten Son.” The Church of Christ is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. For Christ came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil. As He said to the Jews, “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me;” so also, a short time before His ascension, He opened the understanding of His disciples, that they might understand the Scriptures, and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. With firm faith in the truth of this testimony of our Lord, the fathers and teachers of the Church in all ages have studied the Old Testament Scriptures, and have expounded the revelations of God under the Old Covenant in learned and edifying works, unfolding to the Christian community the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God which they contain, and impressing them upon the heart, for doctrine, for reproof, for improvement, for instruction in righteousness. It was reserved for the Deism, Naturalism, and Rationalism which became so prevalent in the closing quarter of the eighteenth century, to be the first to undermine the belief in the inspiration of the first covenant, and more and more to choke up this well of saving truth; so that at the present day depreciation of the Holy Scriptures of the Old***

***Testament is as widely spread as ignorance of what they really contain. At the same time, very much has been done during the last thirty years on the part of believers in divine revelation, to bring about a just appreciation and correct understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.***

***May the Lord grant His blessing upon our labours, and assist with His own Spirit and power a work designed to promote the knowledge of His holy Word."***

### **C. F. Keil**

A little more than 150 years ago Keil and Delitzsch were eyewitnesses to that moment in history that the institutional church sawed the Bible in half and threw the first part of it away. They chronicled it, fought against it, and even though they are still among the most esteemed Christian Scholars studied to this day, their caution and warning has been mostly ignored and the now nearly blind and deaf institutionalized Church of Jesus Christ gallops on convinced that they are finally and fully emancipated to live any life they choose and without fear of consequence from our fearsome God. Those who have fairly recently taken up the good fight to rediscover the formative part of our Bible, and to once again explore its truths found nowhere else in God's Word, are forced to endure the taunts and accusations of these blind spiritual advisors who lead our largest Christian organizations; they say that we are merely cults that desire to minimize Yeshua, or to lead people into Rabbinical Judaism, or even to entirely separate ourselves from Him when in fact the opposite is the truth. This was the same accusations hurled at the Puritans and the Pilgrims who fled the increasingly secular and warped European Christianity for a new start in a New World across the Atlantic.

But this should not surprise us. In many ways it follows the same pattern that we observe in the standard modern exegetical teaching of the New Testament, which is itself so dependent on Messiah's Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Book of Matthew. (And thus when we complete Ruth, we shall immediately begin to study that Gospel). Because at the center of Christ's teaching is a KEY admonition to all who would call him Lord and study his words; this admonition's purpose was to create an immutable context and uncompromising set of boundaries for understanding and applying Messiah's teaching. It was not an impulsive spewing of words spoken in the passion of sincere oratory, but rather a necessary one that because He was God He foreknew it would play a major role in the eventual apostasy of His followers if it went unheeded. And in the midst of that apostasy that was certain to come, in time these precious words would be re-discovered and taken to heart by a remnant as the spark to reignite a new love for God's Word and God's ways.

***<sup>CJB</sup> Matthew 5:17 "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. <sup>18</sup> Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. <sup>19</sup> So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

Let's talk about the book of Ruth, now, and I will begin by telling you that for a short little

4-chapter book it has an incredibly complex structure, theme, and theology that defy simplistic solutions. There is no monochromatic expression of its purpose neatly bundled within its passages; in fact after centuries of studying this book much academia is so confounded by it that most have avoided making commentary on it. It will take some time to explain what makes it so complex (and I will attempt that), but on the other hand I can tell you in a nutshell why Christian scholars practically avoid this little book: there is no way to make heads or tails of it if one knows little or nothing of ancient Hebrew culture or traditions, or if one knows nothing of the Torah, or if one seeks to understand the Ruth story in modern gentile terms utilizing western thinking.

Before we get into the complexities, let's get the basics out of the way. Ruth is in Hebrew ***rut*** or ***reut*** and it means friendship, or to befriend and it very well fits in with the tone of the story.

There is much debate about when Ruth was written, but virtually no argument about the time period the story is said to take place: the era of the Judges. One good time marker is that we're told that Ruth's father-in-law ***Elimelech*** left his home on the west bank of the Jordan to live in Moab because there was a famine in Canaan. We read in Judges 6:3-4 about a severe food shortage caused by the Midianites who came and stole Israel's food supply and destroyed what they couldn't carry off. These raids occurred for several years in a row and the effect was fairly widespread. Thus there is good reason to think that the events of the Ruth narrative occurred around the time that Gideon was judging.

We usually think of a famine as being weather or pestilence related; but in fact famine can be a manmade disaster caused by war. We see this over and over in our time in various places around Africa where a dominant tribe led by a vicious warlord will try to wipe out an opponent by destroying their livestock and crops, and even by blocking any food aide to them. Or as is most common today, where an Islamic tribe seeks to destroy a Christian tribe through starvation. This is by every definition a famine. Since there is no record (biblical or otherwise) of a weather or pestilence related regional famine in Canaan during the era of the Judges, very likely Elimelech moved his family to Moav to escape the ongoing food shortages caused by the marauding Midianites and their partners in crime, Amalek.

Now as for WHEN it was written down, the first verse helps us to know that it was certainly written AFTER the period when the ***Shofetim*** were judging Israel, as it clearly is looking back to that time. So that puts it in the era of King Saul or later. Further it gives the genealogy of King David so it had to be written at the earliest in the time of King David. No mention of Solomon or of his genealogy is given, so some stop there and say it is self-evident that it was written during David's reign. But that Solomon's name is not mentioned is hardly proof of the date of its authorship.

Others propose that it was written after the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylon, and the purpose of the book was to reestablish the right of the line of David to once again assume the throne of Israel (of which the majority that remained belonged to the tribe of Judah). Modern literary critics use a different method of dating and look to writing styles and the use of certain phrases and even cultural expressions to ascertain a date. Their main argument stems around whether the literary style of Ruth uses what they call Classical Biblical Hebrew or Late

Biblical Hebrew. We're certainly not going to delve deeply into that, but it doesn't hurt for us to understand the debate for there is validity to their reasoning.

The reality is that language changes over time. English was not an identifiable language until about the 1300's AD. But if you were to try and read it in that ancient form, while you would probably recognize it as English-like, many of the words would not be known to us and the sentences would make little sense. Even many of the alphabet characters in the early English alphabet would be unfamiliar to us. By the time of the King James Bible the English language had evolved closer to modern English, but even the King James style of English can be a challenge to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, expressions and sayings from an early era of English disappear to be replaced by later ones; and then those later ones are modified, or take on a different meaning, as time marches on. It works this way with all spoken and written languages, including Hebrew.

Biblical Hebrew is substantially different from modern conversational Hebrew; not so much so that communication could take place between an ancient and modern Jew, but it would be like a modern American trying to communicate with someone who speaks only 16<sup>th</sup> century King James English; understanding would be substantially limited. Today's Bible scholars have identified many phrases and words that were used at one point in Israel's history, but fell into disuse later; or alternately, phrases that were used later in Israel's history that never existed in earlier times (at least according to them). By looking for these words and phrases one can somewhat date when the author wrote the piece.

Another way to date a Bible book is to look for certain expressions that come from the influence of similar languages that made its way into the Hebrew vocabulary. Bible scholars today speak about Aramaisms (terms from the Aramaic language) that are found in the Old Testament, and indeed there is no doubt of their existence. When we think of Aramaic the tendency is to remember that Jesus spoke one his most famous sentences as he hung on the cross: ***Eli, Eli, lemana shabakthani***, meaning my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? So non-linguistic Christian scholars have taken it for granted that Aramaic was a rather late-evolved language. But in reality Aramaic can be dated to at least as far back as 1400 B.C., the early part of the period of the Judges (and there were several Aramaian dialects). So identifying an Aramaism in the book of Ruth doesn't help much. In fact, the name Eli-melech (Ruth's father-in-law) is probably itself an Aramaic form.

Not only that, but we find evidence of both Classical Hebrew and Late Hebrew in the book of Ruth. Bottom line: it was probably written sometime after King Solomon, but well before the exile of the Jews to Babylon, a range of around 300 years.

Some of you may have noticed by now that Ruth is not in the same place in our CJB's as it is in other Bible versions. In the CJB we find it just after The Song of Solomon and just before Lamentations. But in most Protestant Bibles it will immediately follow the book of Judges; what gives?

The answer is that the location of the book of Ruth can be used as a very quick way to determine whether your Bible has been translated from early Hebrew texts or the Greek or

Latin Bibles; or in more technical terms from the Tanach or from the Septuagint. The Hebrew Bible places Ruth as among the last of the 3 divisions the Hebrews assigns to the Tanach, the ***Ketuvim***. The Septuagint places Ruth immediately following the book of Judges. If your Bible has Ruth right after Judges, your Old Testament was translated from the Greek or Latin and not the Hebrew. Let me be very clear: the location of Ruth doesn't make your Bible a good one or a bad one, or a superior one or an inferior one. But it can explain why it may sound a little different especially from ones translated from the Hebrew.

The Hebrew Sages divided the Tanach into 3 parts: the ***Torah***, the ***Nevi'im***, and the ***Ketuvim*** (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) with Ruth as part of the Writings. But in later times the Hebrews also grouped certain books together for liturgical purposes; that is, how they might be used in Synagogue worship. So a group of 5 books was assembled called the ***Megillot*** (***Megillot*** means scrolls) and these consist (in order) of the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. Depending on the occasion, one of these books will be read at Synagogue service; for instance the book of Ruth is read during Shavuot (Pentecost) while Esther is read at Purim.

So thus far here is what we have learned today about the book of Ruth: it was written somewhere between 900 and 600 B.C., the story itself is set in the time of the Judges (probably the Judge Gideon), the book is located in your Bible depending on whether yours is translated from the Greek or the Hebrew, Ruth's father-in-law ***Elimelech*** is at least partially an Aramaic name, and Ruth means friendship.

Ruth was not a Hebrew; she was a Moabite, a gentile. ***Mo'av*** was Lot's son (or more correctly by our modern thinking, grandson) born of Lot's daughter and he founded the territory called by his name. Ruth's genealogy goes back through Lot to Abraham's brother Haran (Haran was Lot's father). So it is quite interesting that Ruth is one of but two gentiles who have a book of the Bible named after them, the other one being Job. That she was a gentile and a woman is all the more fascinating. The only other woman who had a book in the Bible named after her was Esther; but Ruth and Esther have some very interesting contrasts that are worth noting. In fact one of the many complexities that forms the book of Ruth (in addition to her being a gentile) is that it is a book of contrasts (and we'll talk about those as appropriate).

Let's compare Ruth and Esther; Ruth was a gentile, Esther was a Hebrew. Ruth was a gentile who lived among the Jews, and Esther was a Jew who lived among the gentiles. Ruth was a daughter of a foreign nation and brought to the Promised Land, Esther was a daughter of the Promised Land but brought forth within a foreign nation. Ruth eventually married a Jew, while Esther eventually married a gentile. God's name is mentioned a number of times in the book of the gentile Ruth, but it is not mentioned even once in the book of the Jewish Esther. However in both cases the women are characterized as having great faith and so are greatly blessed by the God of Israel, and both play pivotal roles in Israel's salvation history. Thus another of the great complexities of the book of Ruth is that it demonstrates this mysterious relationship of Israel to gentiles who trust in Yehoveh; a relationship that St. Paul did his best to try and explain, but for which there really are no sufficient words to describe it. Ironically it is a relationship that both Hebrew Israel and gentile Christians have sought to sever, but can never quite do so and that's because it is more spiritual than physical in its nature. A man said

to me not long ago: “I don’t quite know how to understand it but it seems to me that Christians are one inch from being Jews, and Jews are one inch from being Christians”. I’m not sure Paul could have been more eloquent. And thus in the same way that Ruth and Esther were such exact opposites, they were in a deeper sense but one inch from being identical.

Just as there is a great contrast between Ruth and Esther, so is there a great contrast between the book of Ruth and the book of Judges. Even though they occur at the same time, under the same circumstances, Ruth’s story is a pleasant tale of goodness, and friendship, and brotherly love, and kindness, and hope and of a greater purity of worship of the God of Israel. The book of Judges on the other hand tells of evil, rebellion, darkness, unfaithfulness, brother turning against brother, and apostasy from the God of Israel. So what we will see is that (just as in all times) even if the whole people of God are seemingly completely out of harmony with Him there will be a remnant that seeks to remain obedient and who are open to the moving of His Spirit upon them. Even in the darkest of times there will be small enclaves of divine light. Thus the book of Ruth gives us insight into the principle that with God, all is never lost and that hope remains even when it seems that none could be possible.

A good question right about now ought to be: what is the purpose for the book of Ruth being written? What did the human author intend to prove or demonstrate at God’s inspiration? Again, complex; and so much so that there is wide ranging opinion even as to something as seemingly simple as the purpose behind the book of Ruth. But because we could debate it ad infinitum (as has been the case among scholars) I’d rather simply share with you in summary form the 6 most likely purposes that are generally agreed upon. Let me say that the scholarly mind usually says we must choose from among these the ONE best purpose for the book; but I say to you that such rigidity is not at all necessary. Rather there can be, and are in my view, several legitimate purposes for the book of Ruth.

1. To provide a genealogical link between the tribe of Judah and David, so as to continue the Messianic line, since there is no genealogy given of David in the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel.
2. To show that there was faith and obedience even in that terrible time of apostasy (the time of the Judges), and so God still maintained a remnant to work through.
3. To illustrate the concept of the Kinsman Redeemer in action.
4. To show that God’s grace was not limited to Hebrews but also could be extended to gentiles thus fulfilling the promise to Abraham of his family blessing the whole world.
5. To establish the superiority of the House of David as a permanent successor to the House of Saul, and thereby defend the claims of David to the throne of Israel over the claims of ***Ishbosheth*** (Saul’s son). Very likely this was foremost in the writer’s mind, even if he couldn’t foresee the connection to the future Messiah. After King Saul was killed in battle, and his body hung on the walls of Beit-Shean, David did not immediately become king over all of Israel; at first he was only ruler over Judah. ***Ishbosheth*** ruled over the 10 northern tribes and the territory that was at that time called Ephraim. Thus in the writer’s eyes the book of Ruth is a kind of appendix to the book of the Judges (just as the final 5 chapters of the book of the Judges is called by scholars the appendices). The problem the writer was countering was that essentially the book of Judges is all about the Canaanization of Israel. That is, through syncretism the tribes of



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Israel absorbed and melded Canaan's culture and religion into their own until it was an unholy illicit mixture unsuitable for God's people. The book of Ruth is to demonstrate that the ancestors of David were godly and more pure, and were not part of that unholy mixture.

6. This is the one that most modern Christian commentators begin and end with: the book of Ruth was to show that the Kinsman Redeemer (Boaz) was a type of Messiah.

I think we'll close here for today and pick up next week.