

GATE OF BETHLEHEM

As Seen in the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is one of the greatest love stories ever. It is about the romance of redemption, bringing to mind our redemption through our own “kinsman-Redeemer” the Lord Jesus. My favorite outline of the book is by Chuck Missler: He titles the chapters: 1. Love’s Resolve; 2. Love’s Response; 3. Love’s Request; 4. Love’s Reward. *Open your Bibles to the book of Ruth, chapter one. We are going to read through the entire book this morning, with some explanatory comments...*

1:1 “In the days when the judges ruled,” This could well read “Once upon a time when the judges ruled...” These were days before Israel had a king. These were dark and bloody days with many wars and invasions from 1380-1050 BC. This is the setting for the Book of Ruth.

...there was famine in the land, ...Famine was often God’s judgment on sin. **and a man from Bethlehem...**Name means “house of food”. This is the town where Jesus would be born. (Micah 5:2, Luke 2)

1:2 The man’s name was Elimelech (God is King), **his wife’s name Naomi** (pleasant), **...two sons Mahlon and Kilion.** (Sickly and Failing). **And they went to Moab and lived there.**

Moab was Israel’s neighbor to the east of the Dead Sea. It was about 50 miles from Bethlehem. The story of the beginning of the Moabites is told in Genesis 19:36. Moab was the son by incest of one of Lot’s daughters. Ammon, also an enemy of Israel was the son by the other daughter. Jewish law required that an Ammonite or Moabite should not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the 10th generation (Deut. 23:3).

2:2 Ruth...said to Naomi, let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain Hebrew law was specific about gleaning. Leviticus 19:9 says “you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien.” A bit about barley: This was the spring barley harvest in mid-April (wheat was later). The reaping was done with wooden sickles that had sharpened pieces of flint embedded in them to make a blade. The men reapers were followed by women “binders” who tied the stalks into bundles (sheaves). Then came the gleaners who gathered the stray stalks missed by the binders. They gathered these into the folds of their long veils (outer cloaks).

2:17 “ephah”: this measure about a 5-gallon container (22 liters or a half bushel).

3:1-4 (levirate marriage) – Based on Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Boaz is conforming to a Mosaic law stipulating that a childless widow can claim her brother-in-law as a

husband. Boaz was not a brother-in-law, but was a “go-el” (one with the right to redeem). Such a close relative was required to take responsibility for a family that had lost its head of household by buying back property that had been sold. The first-born son would be heir of her first husband to continue his name.

3:7 Boaz...went over to lie down. The threshing floor was unenclosed and exposed to robbers. The proprietor or a trusted servant would keep watch. And now a bit more about the harvest methods: After the grain was harvested, it was brought in from the fields and dumped on the threshing floor, a leveled area of rock or hard-packed earth. Donkeys or oxen dragged sleds, weighted by the driver and perhaps a small passenger or two, over the harvest to loosen the kernels of grain and to break up the stalks. The poor did this with sticks and stones. Winnowers then tossed the grain into the air so the breeze could carry the chaff away. The remaining chaff was sifted out.

3:9 “spread the corner of your garment over me”. This was symbolic of protection. When marriages are solemnized among the Jews, the man throws the skirt of his “talith” or robe over his bride.

4:1-6 Boaz went up to the town gate...Remember, the life of an Israelite was concentrated at the main gate of the city. It was here that matters of law were brought for mitigation and discussion before the elders of the community. They also were the official witnesses for transactions such as the one in which Boaz agrees to marry Ruth. With no written contracts or legal binding papers, the presence of plenty of witnesses was important. Boaz called 10 elders.

4:8 ...and he removed his sandal... The shoe in their culture symbolized ownership and the right of the owner to set foot on the land. (See Psalm 60:8)

4:12 may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.

Genesis 38:27-30 recounts the story of the birth of Perez. Judah refused to fulfill his obligation to the levirate marriage law and provide an heir for Tamar so she posed as a prostitute and tricked him into fathering a son. But because Perez was illegitimate, he put a 10-generation “curse” on his line. Which actually takes the line to King David! (Deuteronomy 23:2).

4:21-22 This then is the family line of Perez... The son of Boaz and Ruth, Obed, is actually the grandfather of King David and is in the kingly line of Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Children’s Illustrated Bible (Hasting & Thomas); Everyday Life in the Bible Times (National Geographic); Who’s Who in the Bible (Readers Digest); Great People of the Bible and How they Lived (Readers Digest); Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times (Readers Digest); Eerdman’s Handbook of the Bible; Lion Encyclopedia of the Bible; International Bible Commentary (F.F. Bruce); Unger’s Bible Handbook; Manners and Customs of the Bible (J.M. Freeman); Zondervan’s Study Bible (NIV); Learn the Bible in 24 Hours (Chuck Missler).