

Rapture In the Book of Ruth

By T.W. Tramm

THE BOOK OF RUTH, affectionately nicknamed “The Romance of Redemption,” has been called the most beautiful short story ever written.

Set during the time of the judges, Ruth tells the story of how an impoverished Gentile widow and her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, find redemption by way of a beneficent kinsman named Boaz.

Typologically, the Book of Ruth illustrates God’s plan of redemption for Israel and the Church. For those not familiar with the story, here’s the Cliffs-Notes version:

FROM DESTITUTION TO RESTITUTION

During a time of famine in Israel, a Jewish family from Bethlehem—Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons—emigrate to nearby Moab.

The head of the household, Elimelech, dies in Moab, leaving Naomi a widow.

The two sons marry Moabite women but also, after a while, pass on.

Consequently, Naomi and her daughters-in-law are left penniless and alone.

As the situation improves in Israel, Naomi decides to return home. One of her daughters-in-law chooses to stay in Moab with her “familiar people and gods.” The other, Ruth, resolves to go to Bethlehem with Naomi where she will accept the God of the Israelites, and the people of Israel, as her own (Ruth 1:6-18).

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, at which time Ruth goes to work gleaning in the fields.

As it happens, the field in which Ruth is gleaning belongs to a close relative of Naomi’s, Boaz, a name that means “by strength.”

Appreciative of Ruth’s loyalty to her mother-in-law, Boaz invites Ruth to continue gleaning in his fields until the harvest is complete (Ruth 2:21-23).

To grasp the significance of what happens next, one need be aware of two aspects of biblical Law.

First, as prescribed in the Levitical statutes, when a person loses their land due to misfortune, as Naomi, a close relative, or “kinsman,” can purchase, or “redeem,” the land back to the one who lost it (Lev. 25:25).

Second, the Law stipulates that when a woman is widowed without having borne a son, as Ruth, a kinsman is obliged to marry the widow to produce an heir to the deceased (Deut. 25:5-10).

With the above statutes and Naomi and Ruth’s respective predicaments in view, we arrive at the key moment and climax of the story. Naomi is in need of a redeemer to repurchase her land, and Ruth is a widow who had no son to inherit the land. As a solution to both dilemmas, Naomi encourages Ruth to approach Boaz, who, as a close relative, qualifies to fulfill the role of “kinsman redeemer.”

Per Naomi’s advice, Ruth seeks out Boaz on the grain threshing floor, where he is sleeping, and lies down at his feet. Around midnight, Boaz is startled awake to find a woman at his feet. “Who are you?” Boaz asks. Ruth replies: “I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family” (Ruth 3:9).

Without getting into the particulars of how the rest of the saga plays out, Boaz is overjoyed at the prospect of becoming Ruth’s kinsman redeemer. After an early morning meeting with another near kinsman to get his blessing, Boaz immediately takes Ruth to be his wife (Ruth 4:10).

SYMBOLISM AND FULFILLMENT

The most striking aspect of Ruth’s story is how the characters model the key players in God’s plan of redemption: Naomi, the Jew who loses her land and becomes destitute, represents Israel. Ruth, a Gentile bride who willingly accepts the God of Israel, represents the Church. Boaz, the kinsman redeemer from Bethlehem, represents the Messiah, who is our close “blood relative.”

The story itself is a picture of God’s plan enacted: The redemption of Naomi’s land prefigures the latter-days restoration of the Land of Israel in accordance with the Lord’s promise in Genesis (17:8). The redemption of Ruth by way of marriage to Boaz prefigures the Rapture, the fulfillment of God’s promise to “redeem” the bereft/mortal bodies of the mostly Gentile believers who comprise the Church (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Cor. 15:50-52).

Finally, we come to the prominently featured seasonal backdrop of Ruth’s redemption story—the grain harvest—and the timing of the wedding. Scripture specifies that Ruth continued to live with her mother-in-law until the end of the wheat harvest (Ruth 2:23). The main wheat harvest in Israel, planted in autumn and harvested in spring, typically wraps up at the end of May or early June, around Pentecost.

Understanding that “there is an appointed season for everything” (Ecc. 3:1) and that God fulfills prophecy in accordance with Israel’s annual harvest cycle and festivals, the notion that Boaz married Ruth around the end of the wheat harvest begs the question: Is it possible, even probable, that the

Kinsman Redeemer Jesus will take His bride around the same time?

NOTES:

1. Grain harvest times in Israel:

<https://archive.gci.org/articles/harvest-seasons-of-ancient-israel/?fbclid=IwAR3Vma4cm8yFI98QeTvPlxaCdNKQKC9S-OJ3J5WzHV87FW08FOaY6FHx7pA>
https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/the-circle-of-a-year-603008?fbclid=IwAR1mK_Kpw1DfQBgYMvRI8g39NkebtDpbrFFmdnF5W66ZdmWjf-aOJO56LYg

2. Since ancient times, Jews have read the Book of Ruth during Pentecost. One reason given is that Ruth's story is set during the Pentecost harvest season. Another reason is that Ruth's acceptance into the Jewish faith is analogous to Israel's acceptance of God's Law, which occurred on the day that would later become Pentecost.

3. Prophetically, the wheat harvest represents the harvest of believers at the end of the age (Mark 4:26, 27, 29; Rev. 14:15; Matt. 13:39).

4. The final verses of Ruth reveal how the son born out of her marriage to Boaz, Obed, was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David (Ruth 4:13-22). The Gentile Ruth is thus the great-grandmother of David and an ancestress of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-6).

*For those who have never seen the classic 1960 film "The Story of Ruth," it's a great old film and available for free on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kW5WyJ1QNpM>