Bible in Five: Ruth
by Tim Mackie at Blackhawk Church, Wisconsin

Alright, welcome to the “Bible in Five.” You are going to be reading the book of Ruth this week. It is short little book made of four chapters. You can read it in one sitting, it’s not very long. This is one of the few short stories in the Old Testament. It is a very powerful narrative form that summarizes a whole bunch of themes going on in the Old Testament in this very short power packed story.

No detail is insignificant and all of the characters have real significant contributions to make to the story’s meaning. The book is made up just four chapters and really the first chapter sets up all the key plot themes. You are introduced to the two main characters and the timing of the story. So the first sentence of the book tells you that this takes place “in the days when the judges ruled.” This links you to the book that comes right before it, the book of Judges. If you finished the book of Judges you know, the time of the judges was a very dark time of deep apostasy, corruption and injustice in the people of Israel. So these are dark times.

We are told the story of a family in Israel that family because of the famine in the land has to leave the land. This family suffers number tragic deaths. The patriarch, the sons of the family die and so it’s the matriarch Naomi and her two daughters left, one of whom is the other main character, Ruth.

So Ruth is Moabite who is not Israeliite. It is one of Israel’s ancient enemies from the book of Judges. So they are left in the time of suffering and hardship. They decide to go back to the land and Ruth the Moabite woman says she wants to go to the land of Israel with her mother-in-law. She wants Yahweh, the God of Israel, to become her God. So this very dark scene kind of opens up here with all sorts of questions that will be very relevant to Israeliite readers. So given Israel’s apostasy, disobedience, and hardship that they are suffering because of that, where is God at work, amidst the suffering and hardship of his people.
So chapter 2 opens up and we are introduced to another main character in the story, the character of Boaz. Boaz is a Torah observant Israelite. He has compassion on the poor and he is a distant relative of Naomi’s. Every part of the story is from this point on is about how God works together behind the scenes to weave together the stories of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

Essentially what it comes down to is that Boaz is faithful to the Torah. He allows the poor of the land to glean his fields like the Torah says that the Israelites are supposed to. Who should happened to come into his field but the poor widow Ruth, who represents and is gathering food for her mother-in-law Naomi. So it’s Boaz’s courage, his integrity, his compassion, that gives Ruth a chance to work for herself and provide food for herself. It’s through that relationship that just happens to occur that Boaz finds out and Naomi finds out that Boaz is the family’s redeemer.

So this is not an institution we have in our culture here today, the kinsmen-redeemer. In ancient Israel if one of your kind of distant family member suffered hardship or misfortune, it was the responsibility of another family member, however distant, to take responsibility to help them out and so on.

So Boaz finds out this Ruth is a widow, and Naomi’s schemes a little plan in chapter 3 to put Ruth on his radar and Boaz ends up taking Ruth as his wife. The family is brought back together and Naomi who lost her sons in the tragedy of chapter 1, through Boaz’s integrity finds redemption and new child is born into the family. That’s the story, essentially.

It’s a story of suffering, the issues into redemption. God is not mentioned very much in the story, but the whole plotline is about God working behind the scenes through a Moabite woman who has the tenacity to say, “I want the Israeliite God to be my God.” Naomi’s patient suffering that issues in redemption and Boaz’s courage, his integrity to take Ruth as his wife even though this would bring stigma to it and the family is redeemed.

Now you might just say, “That’s a nice short story about how God works behind the scenes and so on” but the author has attached at the end of the book a genealogy. We
think as boring part of the Bible. But what the author’s done by sticking the genealogy at the end here is to show how the marriage of Boaz and Ruth creates a line of descendants that leads to King David. So, this is actually a very powerful theology work here in the story is that in the midst of normal everyday circumstances of family suffering tragedy and people moving around, of people getting married, having kids, it’s in the mundane day to day events, that God is weaving his story, his big picture story. This is what genealogy links us into. This is how this normal set of people would get woven into God’s big story of bringing King David, bring in the Messiah and accomplishing his salvation for the whole world.

So it’s a little story of how God weaves the stories in people lives into the big story of what he’s doing in the world. So it’s a very powerful little book, I encourage you to sit with a good cup of tea and pray. Read it reflectively and see what God will speak to you in this powerful story. So happy reading: Ruth.

Transcribed by Peter Bakhit