

The Book of Ruth 1 - Introduction

This Book can be read at many levels!

- 1) It is a good romantic story in its own right.
- 2) It reveals the sovereignty of the Lord God in historical events.
- 3) It gives background genealogy to the 'House of David' and thus to the family tree of the Lord Jesus.
- 4) It could be a political tract in favour of mixed marriages and presents a case for racial tolerance.
Compare with Ezra 10 verses 9 – 44 and Nehemiah 13, verses 23 – 31.
- 5) It could be a humanitarian plea in support of widows.
- 6) It gives a foreshadowing of the work of a 'Redeemer' in the lives of helpless destitute human beings.

Date: - The time of the events described in the Book is given in chapter 1, verse 1- "*In the days when the judges ruled . . .*" This period of the history of the People of Israel lasted some 300+ years, from Joshua to Samuel c.1380 – c.1065 B.C.

The date of writing is not so easy to define. It was possibly in the time of King David (point 3 above). The genealogy in Ruth 4, verses 18 – 22 only goes as far as David. One would have thought if it had been written later it would at least have included Solomon! However if we take it as an argument in favour of "mixed marriages" (point 4 above) it could date to the return from exile. (Ezra / Nehemiah).

Background to the story:-

Read Judges 2, verses 7 – 19 and Judges 3, verses 5 – 12. The story of this period is one of continual periods of deliverance and back-sliding. "*The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God . . . Therefore the hand of the Lord was kindled against Israel and He sold them into the hand of Cu'shan-rish-a-tha'im king of Mesopotamia*". (Judges 3, verses 7 – 8). This pattern of sin and judgement is repeated over and over again in the Book of Judges – e.g. chapter 3, verse 12: chapter 4, verse 1: chapter 6, verse 1, etc. This culminates in the comment right at the end of the Book, chapter 21, verse 25 - "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.*"

The truth was that there was a "King in Israel"! Read Joshua 24, verses 1 and 14 – 24. The people had renewed their covenant with the Lord God and acknowledged Him as sovereign over them - "*The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.*" (Joshua 24, verse 24).

It is in this background of sin, punishment and restoration that the story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz is acted out. A background of national opportunities lost: the failure of a series of "deliverers" to establish a lasting peace and a Lord God who is sovereign over peoples, nations and events.

Points and Questions raised:-

The background of the Book of Judges raises a number of questions that may be answered as we look at the story revealed in the Book of Ruth.

How far can the plan of the Lord God be frustrated by the sinfulness of His chosen leaders? Examples can be :- Gideon made a "gold ephod" weighing some 18 kilos. Probably an idol used for divination and "*all Israel played the harlot after it and it became a snare to Gideon and his family*" (Judges 8, verses 22 – 27) and the story of Jephthah who made a vow to the Lord and sacrificed his own daughter to fulfil it. His independent action led to civil war and the slaughter of 42,000 of the tribe of Ephraim. (see Judges chapter 11, verse 29 to chapter 12, verse 6).

In the Old Testament the People of God needed strong leadership in order to survive in a turbulent society. How far did the New Testament Church – The People of God need strong leadership?

Does this apply today?