

# Handfuls On Purpose

## Studies in the Book of Ruth

### Introduction and Overview

Please read the introduction before doing the lessons

Welcome to the study of the Book of Ruth. Great things sometimes come in small packages. Such is the case with this little book of Ruth. The time you spend in the book of Ruth may prove to be one of the greatest investments of your life. It is God's love story to mankind. The setting for the book of Ruth is "in the days when the judges ruled."

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons" (Ruth 1:1).

During this period the nation was intended to function as a Theocracy. God was to be their King and was to govern them through His Law and through various "Judges" who were raised up by Him to deliver Israel from the consequences of her rebellion against God's Law. It is apparent that these people did not want a heavenly King, but a king "like other nations."

<sup>4</sup> Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, <sup>5</sup> And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. <sup>6</sup> But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD" (I Samuel 8:4-6).

The days of the Judges were, in most part, very dark days for the nation of Israel. The sin cycle continued to repeat itself with each succeeding generation. With each generation there was a gradual and progressive movement away from obedience to the Word of God and of worship in truth.

Each new generation grew weaker and weaker; becoming more and more a nation of spiritual sickness and consumption (as pictured by the two sons of Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion). Israel was very much like the Church of today. They wanted God's blessing and provision for them, but not His authority over them, or any responsibility to Him. They wanted a distant God when it came to their unfaithful practices, but a near God when it came to their wants and needs.

We find the great contrast between all of this and what is represented by the name Elimelech in Ruth 1:1 and the last verse of the book of Judges. The name Elimelech means "God is my King."

"In those days *there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" (Judges 21:25).

In Ruth 1:1-5 we see the consequences of that attitude.

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. <sup>2</sup> And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. <sup>3</sup> And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. <sup>4</sup> And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. <sup>5</sup> And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband."

The fact that Elimelech left Bethlehem with the intention of finding food and staying for only a short time (“sojourn,” v 1) is really not a problem. The problem is that it was an attempt to escape the chastisement of the LORD. That is not possible. When a believer moves away from God’s absolutes, judgment and chastisement will come. They are inevitable because in suffering and hopelessness people will cry out to God. That is God’s purpose in chastisement. It is God’s goodness that leads sinners to repentance (Romans 2:4).

The days of the Judges were a history of failure through compromise and complacency. It is in this black, sinful historical setting that God records the story of Ruth; the story of His redeeming love. This is God’s love story for His creation written in white chalk on a blackboard of sin.

In Ruth 1:1, God draws our attention to the little town of Bethlehem in the land of the tribe of Judah. The name Bethlehem-Judah literally translated means the “house of bread” in the land of “Praise.” But in this day of Israel’s history, there was neither bread in the house of bread, nor praise in the land of praise.

To a people living for themselves and not for the LORD, God necessitates a famine to show the spiritual famine in the land and that the people were starving themselves spiritually. Instead of recognizing the problem and repenting, Elimelech and his family leave the “house of bread” in the land of praise and head for Moab. Moab was the sewer, the spiritual cesspool, of the area.

“Moab *is* my washpot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe; over Philistia will I triumph” (Psalms 108:9).

The word “washpot” in Psalm 108:9 means a boiling cauldron for cleansing. Moab was to be used of God as a cleansing place; a place where God would bring Israel (typified by Naomi) face to face with the cause of her chastisement.

What God wanted of Israel was for them to change the *way* they lived. Instead, they ran away from God’s chastisement and only changed the *place* they lived. Changing their place wouldn’t change their ways, because they hadn’t changed their relationship with the Lord or their attitude towards Him. They needed a change of heart, not just a change of place.

In the book of Ruth, Naomi represents the nation of Israel. Elimelech, her husband whose name means “God is my King,” represents the testimony of Israel to the world. However in the way Israel lived before the world and in the world, that testimony was a total contradiction. Therefore, the testimony was destroyed and Elimelech died.

What we fail to see so often in the typology of Ruth is that Naomi (Israel) was spiritually unfaithful to her husband and her testimony (God is my King). She proclaimed God to be her King, but yet the world was her lover. The attitude and actions of Israel, and the people they unfaithfully chose to inhabit the Land with, is summed up in Ezekiel 16:22-32:

“<sup>22</sup> And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, *and* wast polluted in thy blood. <sup>23</sup> And it came to pass after all thy wickedness, (woe, woe unto thee! saith the Lord GOD;) <sup>24</sup> *That* thou hast also built unto thee an eminent place, and hast made thee an high place in every street. <sup>25</sup> Thou hast built thy high place at every head of the way, and hast made thy beauty to be abhorred, and hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. <sup>26</sup> Thou hast also committed fornication with the Egyptians thy neighbours, great of flesh; and hast increased thy whoredoms, to provoke me to anger. <sup>27</sup> Behold, therefore I have stretched out my hand over thee, and have diminished thine ordinary *foo*], and delivered thee unto the will of them that hate thee, the daughters of the Philistines, which are ashamed of thy lewd way. <sup>28</sup> Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied. <sup>29</sup> Thou hast moreover multiplied thy fornication in the land of Canaan unto Chaldea; and yet thou wast not satisfied herewith. <sup>30</sup> How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord GOD, seeing thou doest all these *things*, the work of an imperious whorish woman; <sup>31</sup> In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; <sup>32</sup> *But as* a wife that committeth

adultery, *which* taketh strangers instead of her husband!”

In order to understand the book of Ruth it is necessary to understand the Biblical concept of the Kinsman Redeemer. Lewis Sperry Chafer’s **Systematic Theology**, Volume VII, Pages 263-264 says the following:

“. . . (c) a lost estate could be redeemed by a kinsman (Lev.25:25). This practice becomes a type of Christ’s redemption. There were four requirements in the type as likewise four antitype; (1) A redeemer must be a near kinsman. To fulfill this Christ took upon Himself the human form, entered the race. (2) He must be able to redeem. The price of redemption must needs be paid, which in antitype was the blood of the Son of God (Acts 20:28; I Peter 1:18-19). (3) He must be willing to redeem (cf. Heb. 10:4-10). (4) He must be free from the calamity which occasioned the need of redemption, that is to say, he could not redeem himself. This was true of Christ, for He needed no redemption. According to the type of the high priest on the Day of Atonement, then, Christ offered sacrifice but not for Himself (Luke 1:35; Heb. 4:15).”

In the Old Covenant, the concept of the Kinsman Redeemer related mostly to the care of widows or children that had lost a husband or sons and to insure that property designated to one tribe remained with that tribe. The women would not be able to care for themselves or take care of the land in such a hostile environment. When a Kinsman Redeemer redeemed his near kin’s property, he also redeemed his family and cared for them as his own. A man’s wife(s) and children were considered his possessions. The Levitical Law was specific about these matters.

“<sup>25</sup> If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away *some* of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. <sup>26</sup> And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; <sup>27</sup> Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. <sup>28</sup> But if he be not able to restore *it* to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession. <sup>29</sup> And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; *within* a full year may he redeem it. <sup>30</sup> And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that *is* in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile. <sup>31</sup> But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them shall be counted as the fields of the country: they may be redeemed, and they shall go out in the jubile. <sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, *and* the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. <sup>33</sup> And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in *the year of jubile*: for the houses of the cities of the Levites *are* their possession among the children of Israel. <sup>34</sup> But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for *it is* their perpetual possession. <sup>35</sup> And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: *yea, though he be* a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. <sup>36</sup> Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. <sup>37</sup> Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. <sup>38</sup> *I am* the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, *and* to be your God. <sup>39</sup> And if thy brother *that dwelleth* by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: <sup>40</sup> *But* as an hired servant, *and* as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, *and* shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: <sup>41</sup> And [then] shall he depart from thee, [both] he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. <sup>42</sup> For they *are* my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. <sup>43</sup> Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God. <sup>44</sup> Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, *shall be* of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. <sup>45</sup> Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them

shall ye buy, and of their families that *are* with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. <sup>46</sup> And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit *them* for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour. <sup>47</sup> And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother *that dwelleth* by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger *or* sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: <sup>48</sup> After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: <sup>49</sup> Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or *any* that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. <sup>50</sup> And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. <sup>51</sup> If *there be* yet many years *behind*, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. <sup>52</sup> And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubile, then he shall count with him, *and* according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. <sup>53</sup> *And* as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: *and the other* shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. <sup>54</sup> And if he be not redeemed in these *years*, then he shall go out in the year of jubile, *both* he, and his children with him. <sup>55</sup> For unto me the children of Israel *are* servants; they *are* my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God" (Leviticus 25:25-55).

Another responsibility of the Kinsman Redeemer was to marry the widow of a dead kinsman, that was without a son, to carry on his father's name. He was to marry her and raise up children to the dead man's name.

<sup>5</sup> If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. <sup>6</sup> And it shall be, *that* the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother *which is* dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. <sup>8</sup> Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and *if* he stand *to it*, and say, I like not to take her; <sup>9</sup> Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. <sup>10</sup> And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed" (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

This text of the Law would play a big part in the story of Ruth as detailed in Ruth 4:5:

"Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy *it* also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5).

The typology existing between Boaz and the Lord Jesus Christ is also significant to understanding the Book of Ruth. The Scofield Study Bible has the following note on Isaiah 59:20:

"Redemption: Kinsman type, summary. The goel, or Kinsman-Redeemer, is a beautiful type of Christ. (1) The kinsman redemption was of persons, and an inheritance (Lev. 25:48; 25:25; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:7,11,14). (2) The Redeemer must be a kinsman (Lev. 25:48-49; Ruth 3:12-13; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14-15). (3) The Redeemer must be able to redeem (Ruth 4:4-6; Jer. 50:34; John 10:11, 18). (4) Redemption is effected by the goel paying the just demand in full (Lev.25:27; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal. 3:13)."

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfills the spiritual reality of which Boaz is the type. As detailed in the Scofield notes, he fulfills each of the Law's demands of a Kinsman Redeemer. Yet there are aspects of the type in Boaz that go beyond the expectations of the Law. Those aspects are revealed in the love of

Boaz for Ruth and the grace by which he ministers the Law to her and to Naomi. Christ came in love and in grace to redeem lost sinners.

“<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

“<sup>8</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

In the Old Testament, poverty usually resulted in a bondage to someone that would require redemption from that bondage. In the New Testament the sinner is always portrayed in the sense of being bankrupt of righteousness and in bondage to the corruption of sin for which the Law cursed him. Christ redeemed mankind from the curse of the Law.

“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: . . .” (Galatians 3:13).

In doing so, He bought sinners out of the market place of the corruption of sin and brought them into His family declaring them to be adult children of God.

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14).

“To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:5).

Love is willing to pay any price necessary to redeem the person loved.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

The degree of Christ’s love for lost mankind is measured by the price He was willing to pay to redeem them.

“<sup>9</sup> And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; <sup>10</sup> And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The type represented in Boaz is temporal and physical in its ramifications while the reality in Christ is eternal and soteriological in its application.

“<sup>19</sup> What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Corinthians 6: 19-20).

“<sup>22</sup> For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ’s servant. <sup>23</sup> Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (I Corinthians 7:22-23).

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

“<sup>18</sup> Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; <sup>19</sup> But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: . . .” (I Peter 1:18-19).

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: . . .” (Romans 3:24).

Just as the “safe shelter” of the strength of Boaz’s household gave Ruth and Naomi security for the balance of their lives, so does the strength of Christ’s “household” give His redeemed eternal security.

“<sup>28</sup> And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *the*] out of my Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:28-30).

“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called:” (Jude 1:1).

The book of Ruth might be said to be like a play written in four acts. Act I begins with a man named Elimelech of the tribe of Judah in the city of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. There was famine in the land of Judah, so Elimelech takes his wife Naomi, their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to Moab with the intent of staying for a short time until the famine is over. While the family is in Moab, Elimelech dies. Shortly there after, his two sons take two Moabite women to be their wives. Mahlon marries Ruth and Chilion marries her sister Orpah. Then, after about ten years, the two sons die.

Naomi hears that the famine in Judah is over and decides to return home. Ruth and Orpah begin the journey with her. After Naomi considers the poverty waiting for her at Bethlehem, she attempts to encourage her daughters-in-law to return to their mother’s house. After considerable discussion of the matter, Orpah decides to return while Ruth vows to remain with Naomi regardless of the cost.

At the end of Act I they are in Bethlehem, where the women of the city gather around Naomi in amazement at her loss. Naomi publicly recognizes her loss and the chastisement of God. She reflects that her life is no longer “pleasant,” but now very “bitter.” Therefore, she instructs the women to call her “Mara” meaning “bitter,” rather than “Naomi,” which means “pleasant.” They arrive in Jerusalem at the beginning of “barley harvest,” which lasted about 7 to 10 days. Acts II and III take place during those few days of barley harvest.

In Act II we have the introduction of Boaz, a “kinsman” of Elimelech. He is a man with a strong house and considerable wealth. Ruth begins to glean in his field during the harvest of the barley, where she first makes his acquaintance. Boaz inquires of his servants who Ruth is. He apparently recognizes that she is part of his family and begins to make provision for her protection and care. Boaz invites Ruth to eat with his reapers where he personally passes her the “roasted grain” to eat, making her feel welcome. Boaz gives instruction to his “young men” to give Ruth special privileges, even to drop some “handfuls on purpose” for her to recover.

At the close of Act II, Ruth returns to the city of Bethlehem and to Naomi with her day’s bounty. She informs Naomi of her encounter with Boaz and his provision for her. Ruth continues to glean in the fields of Boaz under these conditions throughout the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.

In Act III we find Naomi and Ruth making provision to make claim of Boaz as Kinsman Redeemer. Boaz was “winnowing barley” at the “threshingfloor.” The “threshingfloor” was a hard parched clay circular on top of a hill. In the late afternoon a breeze would begin to blow and threshing and winnowing would begin. As long as the wind blew the threshing continued, often late into the night and early morning.

It would appear from Ruth 3:1-4 that Boaz was alone at the threshing floor. Of course that is not so. This was a time of feasting and all of the household would camp around the threshing floor. There were many people present. After the feast and work was over for the day, the men would sleep around the grain pile, using it at a back rest with their feet sticking out from it like spokes on a wagon wheel. They slept this way to keep thieves from stealing their grain.

Ruth was to wait until Boaz had finished feasting and to mark where he laid down at the grain pile to sleep. She then came quietly and laid down at his feet making her request of him to be her *goel*. At midnight, Boaz was startled out of his sleep by something and discovers Ruth at his feet.

Boaz commends her for choosing him rather than one of the younger men and promises her he will do everything he can. He also informs her that there was a “nearer kinsman” than he. She remains at his feet until just before sunrise, whereby Boaz informs the rest of his servants to remain silent about Ruth’s claim upon him.

Boaz fills her veil with as much barley as she can carry. She returns to the city of Bethlehem and Naomi. Naomi asks her (3:16) if Boaz had accepted her request of redemption. At the end of Act III, Ruth informs Naomi of what Boaz instructed her to do and she is sitting waiting until he calls for her that same day as he promised (v.18).

Act IV takes place at the city gates of Bethlehem. Boaz sees the nearer kinsman approaching and calls for him to come and do business. He then calls ten of the city elders to witness the transaction. Boaz lays out the desire of Naomi to sell a parcel of ground to a “redeemer.”

The “near kinsman” declares he will purchase the land. Then Boaz informs him that in the purchase of the land, he would also have the responsibility to Ruth, the wife of Mahlon, and raise up a son to Mahlon’s name. Upon this information, the nearer kinsman relinquishes his right of redemption to Boaz. The matter was sealed by the nearer kinsman publicly removing his shoe before the ten witnesses and giving it to Boaz. This signified he gave up his right of redemption for that property for ever to Boaz.

Boaz marries Ruth with the blessing of the people that were at the gate (4:11-12). Ruth bares a son, which the neighbors of Naomi name Obed, which means “worshipper.”