

Ruth - Commentaries by William John Hocking

Studies in the Book of Ruth, A. — Bethlehem Forsaken for Moab (Chapter 1:1-5) (1:1-15)

On account of famine Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem-Judah for the land of Moab. In the brief narrative no critical comment is made upon the change of residence. This silence indicates that the spiritual significance of the journey of this particular family must be traced by means of light afforded in other scriptures. To seek such enlightenment upon the instruction to be derived from this inspired booklet is the purpose of the present studies.

Famine in the Land of Israel

The reference in the opening sentence of the Book to famine in the land is itself suggestive of the degenerate state of the chosen people. In their case, famine was not a mere physical contingency, but a mark of divine displeasure. The land which Jehovah had bestowed upon the children of Israel was "a land that floweth with milk and honey"—milk from well-fed flocks and herds, and honey from luxuriant vegetation. A threat of starvation in such a fertile land implied that the chastisement of God had fallen upon the tribes because they had neglected His worship and transgressed His laws. And that for this reason God withheld rain from heaven they could have learned from the words of Moses (Deut. 11:8-15). At any rate, we read here, "And it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled (judged) that there was a famine in the land" (ver. 1). The physical fact is stated, but not its moral cause.

The exact date of this famine cannot be ascertained. It occurred during the long period when "the judges judged"; and this period extended from about the death of Joshua (Josh. 24:29-31) to the introduction of the monarchy, when Israel rejected Jehovah as their King and Saul was chosen by "the voice of the people" to reign over them (1 Sam. 8:7; Hos. 13:11).

The previous Book shows that under the judges the religious and civil states of the tribes of Israel became appallingly debased. So long as Joshua was with the people they served Jehovah, but when he and the generation that crossed the Jordan with him were gathered to their fathers "there arose another generation after them, which knew not Jehovah, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baals" (Judg. 2:10, 11). Throughout "the days when the judges" administered the laws the people departed further and further from the worship of Jehovah and from obedience to His statutes.

Before their entrance into the land, Jehovah by His servant Moses impressed upon the people that in the land itself they should render to Him their constant love and obedience lest the land, fertile though it was, should be stricken with famine (Deut. 11:1-17). In that picturesque passage, Moses described the land before them as a good land of plenty where they should "eat and be full"; Jehovah would in its season supply the indispensable rain, the "early" rain to prepare the soil for autumn sowings, and the "latter" or spring rain to swell the corn for ripening and harvest.

But this annual beneficence from heaven would depend upon their own behavior. They must hearken to Jehovah's commandments, and love and serve Him with all their heart and soul (vers. 13, 14; also Lev. 26:3, 4). In the wilderness, the daily supply of manna from heaven had never once failed in spite of their continual murmurings and disobedience but in the land across the Jordan a bountiful harvest would be, the reward of their worship, their love, and their obedience to God.

Therefore, said Moses, "Take heed to yourselves that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods... and Jehovah's wrath kindle against you, and He shut up the heavens that there be no rain, and that the ground yield not its produce, and ye perish quickly from off the good land which Jehovah is giving you" (vers. 16, 17).

From these and other scriptures we learn that in Canaan famine was an instrument of chastisement used by God for the correction of His people. When they, His elect nation, fell into idolatry and immorality, He shut up the heavens, as in the notable instance during Ahab's reign, when on account of His displeasure there was neither dew nor rain for three years and six months (1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17).

The Flight of the Family

Emigration to a more fruitful country is an obvious method of escape from the rigors of famine. It is, however, not always successful, nor always the right plan to adopt. Elimelech, however, with his wife and his two sons, left the temporarily barren fields of Bethlehem for the more productive fields of Moab (ver. 1).

Had Elimelech in his own conscience any justification for this serious step that he took? He may have thought that he had a precedent for it in the lives of his forefathers, who were men of faith. What did they do in like circumstances? When the first recorded famine arose in the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 26:1), it is written, "Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen. 12:10); and these words are echoed in Ruth 1:1. 'Again, Isaac sought refuge from famine in the land of the Philistines, a land not distant from Canaan like Egypt, but adjoining it like Moab (Gen. 26:1). Further, it was a long and grievous famine that caused Jacob and all his family to go down into Egypt for relief (Gen. 41:56; 47:4). And Elimelech might have thought that in these patriarchal instances there was surely a parallel to his own case, and a justification for his journey to Moab. Had he not scripture in support of his plan? What more was needed?

But surely a further consideration of the history would have taught Elimelech that these incidents were examples not of the integrity but of the laxity of the patriarchs. In these instances, their conduct was to be avoided, not imitated. For what sad effects upon their life of faith and testimony resulted from their ignominious flight from famine! They gained food, but lost their reputation. Both Abram and Isaac prevaricated

about their wives and respectively were put to public shame by the reproofs of Pharaoh and Abimelech who evidently regarded them as men whose word could not be trusted. What serious damage was thereby done to their testimony to the living and true God as opposed to the deceitful deities worshipped in the lands where they sought refuge! In Jacob's case, too, how terrible was the sequel to his departure from the land of promise His seed became bondmen in Egypt, and suffered long and bitterly under the iron hand of Pharaoh's oppression, while God seemed silent and supine.

No; the example of the fathers in this matter was not safe for Elimelech to follow. It was certainly an act of faith, pleasing to God, which brought the patriarchs into the land of promise, but it was an act of merely human sagacity or expediency to leave that land in search of food. In entering Canaan they obeyed the call of God; in leaving it they followed the dictates of their own self-interest, which was to their own discredit as believers in God.

Whether Elimelech observed these danger-signals in the lives of the fathers or not, he took the same risk as they did. He departed from the land upon which Jehovah had promised that His eyes would rest continually, "from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deut. 11:12). He removed from the land of Judah to the land of Moab; and there he and his two sons died without posterity, and in consequence his inheritance in the land of Israel lapsed.

The Meanings of the Names

Often in Old Testament history and prophecy proper names have an undoubted significance, which affords a key to the moral and spiritual instruction contained in the passages where they occur. In many cases, the meaning is not clearly defined and there is danger of being led astray by a lively imagination which chooses or invents something suitable to itself. In the Book of Ruth, however, the meaning of some names is unquestionable, and this adds clearness and emphasis to the significance of the narrative as a whole.

Elimelech means "God the King" or "God is King." This name is found in scripture only here. With this meaning in mind, it is striking to read in the last verse of the preceding Book (Judges), "In those days there was no king in Israel." Then in the very next verse (Ruth 1:1) we find a designed contrast: Elimelech was a man in Israel who carried about in his name the constant witness that "God is King," though the nation at large disowned the authority of Him Who dwelled between the cherubim in the tabernacle.

However cloudy and dark the day of apostasy may become, we may be sure that God has His torch-bearers. Elimelech was one who bore the light of truth in his name. When Israel denied God's sovereignty, and "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25), this man in Bethlehem silently reminded his townsmen that God was "King in Jeshurun" (Deut. 33:5). In the royal tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) he stood out as an honorable witness that God was the Sovereign Ruler of His redeemed people in spite of the idolatry, anarchy, and individualism that prevailed in their midst. "Elimelech" seemed to be a suitable name for this man in the land of Judah; in the land of Moab it certainly was a misnomer, for he who bore it had forsaken the people of God in order to be there.

Naomi. Elimelech's wife's name, like his own, does not occur elsewhere in scripture. Her name appears to mean "pleasantness" or "sweetness," especially that graciousness of manner which is associated with spiritual beauty the word is used by the psalmist when he writes of beholding the "beauty (pleasantness, graciousness) of Jehovah" (Psa. 27:4), and again, of his desire that this "beauty" may be upon His people (Psa. 90:17). See also Zech. 11:7, 10, where the word is again found. Naomi (pleasantness) is also connected with wisdom, for Solomon says, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness" (Prov. 3:17). By name therefore, the gracious, good, and wise Naomi must have been a fitting consort for Elimelech; united they would be a noble and goodly pair, powerful and pleasant in their joint lives.

Mahlon and Chilion. Here again are names occurring nowhere else in scripture. For this reason the exact meaning of both names is obscure; but it is sufficiently clear that a deterioration from the sterling qualities implied in the parental names is indicated. Mahlon has been variously translated; e.g., "great infirmity," "painful," "mild." Chilion may mean "consuming," or "consumption," or "pining." Evidently, the general sense of both names is that weakness and wasting characterized the two sons of Elimelech. There was a recognized declension in the family status.

In Judges (17:7; 19:1), two Levites of evil reputation are associated with Bethlehem-Judah; in Ruth, this place is the home of Elimelech, and afterward that of Boaz and Ruth. This small town or village in the south of Palestine is of exceptional interest throughout scripture, mainly because of its connection with the life of David (it is called "the city of David," Luke 2:4), and afterward with David's Son and Lord. It is here and in a few other passages named Bethlehem-Judah to distinguish it from another Bethlehem, situated in the north of Palestine, west of Nazareth, and belonging to another tribe, that of Zebulun (Josh. 19:15).

Micah used a different name for the town in Judah. He prophesied that out of "Bethlehem-Ephrath," though "little among the thousands of Judah," He should come forth Who should be the Judge and Ruler of Israel (Mic. 5:1, 2). Ephrath or Ephrathah was Bethlehem's ancient name (Gen. 35:16,19;48:7), which it bore when Rachel, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, died, both sons being types of our Lord in His sovereignty and rule.

Bethlehem lies about five or six miles south of Jerusalem, on a mountainous ridge some 2,500 feet high. The vicinity is noted for its productive corn-fields, oliveyards and vineyards, and also its rich pasturage for flocks and herds. This pastoral abundance is indicated by both its names: Ephrath or Ephrathah means "fertility," while Bethlehem means "the house of bread." In a land of general plenty, Bethlehem was known by all to be specially favored of God with a bountiful supply of food.

How then could Elimelech justify his step in leaving the fruitful fields of Bethlehem for the idol-worshipping land of Moab? If God had withheld His rain from heaven because He was not honored in Bethlehem, was He more honored in Moab? Surely, faith, instead of fleeing, would have said, As God has given to me and my seed an inheritance in Bethlehem forever, I will trust Him daily for the sustenance needed by my family, and I will remain here until He bids me depart. After all, the famine gave him an occasion to show by his "works" that he had faith in God (see James 2:17-26); but he was afraid, and his fear brought about his failure.

The Land of Moab

In the distress of famine, Elimelech from the heights of Bethlehem may have looked eastward across the Dead Sea and have seen thirty or forty miles away the mountains of Moab and among them the peak of Mount Nebo from which Moses not so long before viewed the promised land before his death (Deut. 34:1-5). At any rate, to this neighboring territory he took his family to find food and shelter, ignoring the evil origin and reputation of the Moabite people whose hospitality he was seeking. "And they came into the country of Moab and continued there" (ver. 2).

The two sister-nations, Moab and Ammon, are known as "the children of Lot" (Deut. 2:9), and are of incestuous origination (Gen. 19:37, 38). They have always been inveterate and implacable enemies of God's elect nation, and they are included in the coming great confederacy of nations which will be formed under the revived Assyrian power to destroy the children of Israel and blot out their very name from the earth (see the prophecy in Psa. 83:4-8).

Moab displayed this enmity against Israel on the way from Egypt to Canaan. When the traveling people reached the plains of Moab (Num. 22:1) Balak the king hired Balaam to effect their destruction by his curses (Josh. 24:9,10). This scheme failing through divine guardianship, other means of injury were adopted on the advice of the wicked prophet. The people were induced "to join themselves" to Baal-Peor and to indulge in the lascivious rites of the gods of Moab, thousands of the people dying from the plague that followed. This was a dark page in Israel's history, to which there are many allusions in the admonitions of scripture (Num. 31:16; 25:1-5; Deut. 4:3; Psa. 106:28-30; Hos. 9:10; 1 Cor. 10:8; Rev. 2:14).

Elimelech could not have been unacquainted with this terrible incident in the recent history of his people. Nevertheless because of famine he went to sojourn among the heathen Moabites who had even refused bread and water to his fathers when they were on their borders. Because of their flagrant enmity God had said to His people, "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever" (Deut. 23:4-6; Neh. 13:2); yet Elimelech went there to seek bread for the family.

Misery in Moab

Twice in the Book of Proverbs it is said, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). Following his own judgment, Elimelech chose the way which led to Moab to find the food which perisheth, but there he also found his grave. "And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left and her two sons" (ver. 3). The house of the Bethlehemites in Moab became the house of mourning. There Naomi lamented the loss of the husband she loved and revered. There Mahlon and Chilion lost forever the wisdom and strength a father's guardianship had hitherto afforded them.

To sojourn in Moab must have seemed to Elimelech the right course to take; but had he first sought to know the will of God? Did he wait to hear God's voice saying to him, "This is the way, walk ye in it?" He was seeking bread, but he should have remembered the newly-written words of Moses, "Man doth not live by bread alone, but by everything that goeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). He no doubt found bread in Moab, for, like Bethlehem, it was a place of fruitful fields (Jer. 48:31-33) and vineyards (Isa. 16:8-10), as well as of pasturage for flocks (2 Kings 3:4). But Elimelech had no word from God as his warrant for being in Moab; and he died there. In his independent act, he was a contrast with our Lord in the wilderness of Judaea, a hungry dependent Man, but One Who found sufficient food in the word and will of Him Who sent Him (Matt. 4:1-4; John 4:31-34).

Bereavement, however, did not drive the widowed Naomi and her sons back to Bethlehem. They settled down in Moab; and the sons "took them Moabitish wives; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the second Ruth; and they abode there about ten years" (ver. 4). Mahlon and Chilion acted as they pleased and on their own responsibility. If they had come to Moab at their father's bidding, they chose their wives of their own freewill. If their father's intention was to "sojourn" in Moab (ver. 1), they now decided to stay in the land of idolatry indefinitely. Those who take a downward path soon accelerate their pace almost unconsciously.

Marriage with idolatrous nations was forbidden by the Law of Moses (Deut. 7:3), and no Moabite was permitted to enter "the congregation of Jehovah forever" (Deut. 23:3, 4). But these two young men of weak piety and stubborn wills married Orpah and Ruth. They abode in Moab about ten years, and both died childless. By the death of the two sons the name and inheritance of Elimelech perished. In this family of Bethlehem the solemn warning was fulfilled which the apostle Paul wrote long afterward, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man shall sow, that also shall he reap" (Gal. 6:7). "And Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them, and the woman was left of her two children and of her husband" (ver. 5). Thus Naomi became a childless widow in a strange land!

Studies in the Book of Ruth, B. — Back to Bethlehem (Chapter 1:6-22) (1:6-22)

Naomi "heard in the fields of Moab how that Jehovah had visited His people to give them bread" (ver. 6). True to their respective names, Bethlehem had again become "the house of bread," and Judah "the land of plenty and of praise." Naomi, after so many years, resolved to retrace her steps, and she with her two widowed daughters-in-law "went on the way to return to the land of Judah" (ver. 7).

But there is no record that Naomi was repentant toward God concerning her original departure from Bethlehem. Her first thought like that of the miserable prodigal was to go where there was "bread enough and to spare."

The Three Widows

In leaving Moab, the elder widow felt that the case of her young companions greatly differed from her own. She was an Israelite, and was returning to the land of her birth, of her family inheritance, and of her God. But Orpah and Ruth had no such prospect in Judah. Indeed, they would leave behind in Moab their relatives, their own nation, and their idols. And Naomi felt she ought not to expect them to renounce their natural ties with Moab on her account; she would journey on alone to Bethlehem. Therefore, Naomi advised them each to return "to her mother's house," at the same time invoking the blessing of Jehovah upon both of them for their kindness to her and to the dead (vers. 8, 9).

The young widows were both deeply affected by Naomi's kind and considerate words, and they wept much as she kissed them, but strongly protested that they were prepared to accompany her to Bethlehem, saying, "We will certainly return with thee to thy people" (vers. 9, 10). But Naomi had learned wisdom out of her own experience. She no doubt remembered her late husband's rash decision to go away from "the house of bread" and to seek bread elsewhere, and she recalled its unhappy results. At any rate, she besought her daughters-in-law to make no such hasty choice. They would gain no earthly benefit by following a forlorn and forsaken woman as, alas, she was. They must not expect a second marriage into the house of Israel. Besides, added Naomi mournfully and rather peevishly, "I am in much more bitterness than you; for the hand of Jehovah is gone out against me" (vers. 11-13).

No doubt the saddened woman was speaking unselfishly, but viewed as the words of one professing faith in Jehovah, the God of Israel, her witness to the Moabite women of His unchanging providence and unfailing goodness was feeble, and even false. It was feeble for her after ten years still to be smarting under the bitterness of her own bereavement. It was false of her to declare that the hand of Jehovah was against her. His hand had not led the family to Moab; it was by their own choice that they turned away from the land where His hand would have preserved their souls alive through the days of famine (see Psa. 33:18, 19).

Naomi's discouraging words exercised and tested the hearts of the young women; "and they lifted up their voice and wept again," seeking some relief or resource in tears, as women will. But there they stood at the parting of the ways, and decide they must forthwith. Naomi's plain speaking was a stringent trial of their inward motives. Should they forsake their mother-in-law, or their own mothers? Should they leave the land of Moab for the land of Israel? Should they seek Jehovah, the God of Naomi and her fathers, or should they continue to serve the gods of their own people and of their own childhood? Each decided for herself what to do. "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth slave to her" (ver. 14).

Orpah's kiss was an affectionate farewell, coupled with a decent and sincere regard for her husband's mother, but nothing more. Ruth's embrace expressed similar affection and respect, but indicated also, what Orpah lacked, an entire surrender of herself to a future life of faith in the living God. Naomi, however, appeared to have some doubts of the latter's sincerity, and she again advised her to stay in her native land, for she said to Ruth, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back to her people and to her gods: return after thy sister-in-law" (ver. 15). But neither sisterly affection nor matronly advice could change her steadfastness. A divine power was secretly, but irresistibly working within her. As it has been said, "If Orpah shows us the feelings of nature, Ruth certainly displays the power of grace."

Ruth's Great Decision

Considering in the light of Ruth's subsequent history her resolute determination to accompany her mother-in-law, it seems certain that her conscience and heart must have been deeply exercised by something of the truth of God which she had seen and heard and believed to be true. Inward anxiety and unrest were now constraining her to forsake her idols and seek the favor of Jehovah, the living God of Israel. But she feared lest Naomi's repeated dissuasions might turn her from her purpose. Accordingly, Ruth's fervent outburst of devotion and determination came swiftly in reply.

"And Ruth said, 'Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried.' This emphatic declaration she confirmed by a solemn oath—"Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part me and thee." The piety, resolution, and enthusiasm of this speech convinced Naomi of the integrity and determination of Ruth. "And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking to her. And they two went until they came to Bethlehem" (vers. 16-19).

The bold and devout words of Ruth bespoke her career as a genuine disciple of truth. Already in her heart "faith was working through love" (Gal. 5:6). The "good fruit" of her lips was a clear indication that the tree was "good," not "corrupt" (cp. Matt. 7:16-20). Like Abram, the father of all who believe, Ruth was forsaking the land of idols for the land of Jehovah's promise. Indeed, the pious attachment of this young Gentile woman to a sorrow-stricken "mother in Israel" would have been an "ornament of grace" upon even a well-seasoned veteran, while her expressions of intense devotion to Naomi may well be compared with those of Ittai the Gittite to David (2 Sam. 15:21), of Elisha to Elijah (2 Kings 2:3-6), of Simon Peter to our Lord (Luke 22:33; John 13:37). Indeed, by leaving her father and mother for the truth's sake (2:11), Ruth bore one of the marks which, the Lord said, distinguished His true disciples (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26).

Let us, before passing on, glance again at verse 14, where we read that in contrast with the departure of Orpah, Ruth "slave unto her (Naomi)." The word, "slave," denotes Ruth's complete self-surrender in love and loyalty to her new calling. She was yielding herself wholeheartedly and unreservedly to share not merely the temporal fortunes of her mother-in-law, but the worship of Jehovah in the land of His chosen people.

To cleave is the term used by God at the beginning of human history to express the undivided and unchanging affection that a man should maintain for the wife of his choice (Gen. 2:24); this love is so intimate and unifying that by cleaving the "two shall be one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). Moreover, cleaving is expressive of the loving obedience and worshipping service which should mark the people of God, and six times the children of Israel were exhorted by Moses and by Joshua to cleave unto Jehovah their God (Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8). It is significant, therefore, that in recording Ruth's decisive step towards Bethlehem, it is said that she "clave" unto Naomi. Her choice sprang not from a mere whim of her friendly emotions, but from a rooted conviction of her soul. Her eye was upon the God of Israel rather than upon the mother of her dead husband.

Naomi's Tongue Bitter, Hands Empty, Soul Afflicted

After an absence of more than ten years, Naomi returned to Bethlehem, and her appearance there accompanied by Ruth, the Moabite stranger, stirred the interest and curiosity of the townspeople, many of whom probably knew her before the great famine, when her late husband was, as it seems, a person of eminence and influence in the city. Those who recognized Naomi were astonished at the change in her. "And it came to pass, when they came to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and the women said, Is this Naomi?" (ver. 19).

In her reply to the women, Naomi spoke as an unhappy woman, no longer to be known in Bethlehem as Naomi the pleasant but as Mara the bitter. She magnified her own sorrows and trials, and had not one word to say of the goodness of Jehovah in bringing her back safely to His own land and to her own kindred and city. Whatever her testimony for God may have been in the land of Moab, it was very weak when she stood once more on her own doorstep. Thinking still, no doubt, of her triple bereavement, as well as other grievances, she "foolishly" charged the Almighty with dealing bitterly with her, and Jehovah with bringing her home empty-handed and afflicted. She said to the women, "Call me not Naomi—call me Mara; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty. Why do ye call me Naomi, seeing Jehovah has brought me low, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (vers. 20, 21). Such were the strange words of complaint against God uttered by a woman of faith!

The Beginning of Barley-Harvest in Bethlehem

But if the heart of Naomi was somber and sad, there was a melody of gladness in the land where the Almighty was the Shield and Jehovah was the Sun. The fields of Bethlehem were rejoicing in the bounties of the early crops ripening for the harvesters: "For behold, the winter is past, The rain is over, it is gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come" (SoS. 2:11, 12). Jehovah was blessing with renewed fruitfulness the land He had chosen out of all other lands to be called His own land.

Barley ripened early, and well in advance of wheat, in Canaan as in Egypt (Ex. 9:31, 32). In the sheltered valleys of Bethlehem, barley would usually be ripe and ready for the reaper in the first weeks of Nisan (March-April), which was made the first month of the sacred year for the new-born nation of Israel (see Ex. 12:2). This, too, was the appointed season for the offering to God of the firstfruits of the harvest (Lev. 23:9-14). And in accordance with the law of Moses, godly Bethlehemites, about the time of Naomi's arrival, would have been bringing their sheaf of the firstfruits of the barley harvest to the priest as a wave offering unto Jehovah. But Naomi had no such offering to bring. She had come back, as she said, "Empty." She confessed that she was the poorest of the poor in Israel.

Nevertheless, backsliding Naomi had returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of a New Year. The month Nisan had its message of hope for her. The deadness of her winter was past; new life and fruitfulness were before her, did she but know it. Mara the bitter, the morose, impoverished, childless widow, was about to find the joy of plenty around her and within her, and once more she would be Naomi the pleasant, in Bethlehem, "the house of bread."

It is ever heaven's way to make glad returning, repentant prodigals; hence unexpected joys awaited Naomi in Bethlehem. Soon the heart of the bereaved wife and mother would sing for joy (Job 29:13), for Jehovah would give her one who had the right of redemption, so that her inheritance might not be forfeited after all (4:14, 15). Jehovah, blessed be His name, would also give the disconsolate widow a son (4:17), and his name would be famous in Israel. She who came back with empty heart and hands would have them filled with unexpected joys and undeserved blessings. Moreover, she was to find abiding comfort and reward in Ruth the Moabitess who "clave to her" on the borders of Moab, and who proved, as the women of Bethlehem afterward said (4:15), to be better to the childless widow than seven sons.

Studies in the Book of Ruth, E. — Boaz Becomes the Kinsman-Redeemer (Chapter 4:1-12) (4:1-12)

In the gate of Bethlehem, Boaz shows himself to be a man full of gracious consideration for the two widows but also of the utmost regard for the righteous requirements of Jehovah's law in the land of Israel. He arranged that the immediate redemption of Elimelech's inheritance should be undertaken in public and according to the approved customs of the people. There was, in fact, more involved in it than the provision of sustenance for the impoverished widows. The inheritance was Jehovah's gift to this family, and should be recovered and secured to them for this reason. In the days of Joshua, the parcel of ground had been bestowed by lot upon Elimelech's forbears to be held by them and their heirs in perpetuity. Jehovah was the landowner: "the land is Mine" (Lev. 25:23). Any question affecting the line of succession or a change of occupant should be made on a righteous basis in the eyes of Jehovah. Redemption was a sacred transaction, and not a mere matter of human bargaining.

With the double purpose of redemption and marriage in mind, Boaz betook himself to the "gate," which was recognized as an open court of justice where civil and criminal cases were investigated by the aged and wise men of reputation in the city. This form of local government was authorized by Moses and was embodied in his final instructions delivered to the children of Israel on the borders of the land of Canaan (cp. Deut. 16:18-29; 21:18-21; 25:7-9). The elders of the city were therefore its civil rulers and were "ordained of God" to be such, rewarding and protecting the good and punishing the evil with magisterial authority exercised according to His law (Josh. 20:4; Rom. 13:1-4).

Boaz and the Elders in the Gate

Boaz was aware that another man by reason of closer kinship possessed a greater claim than himself to the right of redemption from the leaseholder of the estate to whom presumably Elimelech and Naomi ceded it on their departure to the land of Moab. Unless redeemed the land would remain in possession of the leaseholder or mortgagee until the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:28). Up to the moment, however, the next of-kin had taken no steps to redeem the inheritance, neglecting the widows to that extent. But Boaz was for instant action, and he at once raised the question before the lawful authorities, whom he called together in the gate. "And Boaz went up to the gate, and sat down there. And behold, he that had the right of redemption, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. And he said, Thou, such an one, turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. And they sat down" (4:1, 2).

Bethlehem was situated on a hill, the cornfields being in the valleys and on the slopes. Hence we read that Ruth "went down" from Naomi's house to the threshing-floor (3:6), and that Boaz "went up" from the threshing-floor to the gate of Bethlehem (4:1). The gate was a place of public resort, roomy enough for twelve persons to be seated and many townspeople to stand around as spectators. In great cities ample space was provided at the gates for important public ceremonies. For instance, in a "void" or open space at the entrance of the gate of Samaria two kings were able to sit on their thrones in state, while all the prophets prophesied before them (1 Kings 22:10).

The Next-of-Kin Disclaims His Right of Redemption

In the presence of the elders in the gate, Boaz stated the case of the lapsed inheritance to the next-of-kin (goel). Naomi, the widow of their relative, was desirous that the allotment of land which was her husband's hereditary possession might be redeemed. Boaz pointed out to the goel that on account of his near blood-relationship in the family, the primary right of redemption belonged to him. Would he exercise this right? If not, Boaz himself would redeem the inheritance. "And he said to him that had the right of redemption: Naomi, who is come back out of the country of Moab, sells the allotment that was our brother (kinsman) Elimelech's. And I thought I would apprise thee of it and say, Buy it in the presence of the inhabitants, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem; but if thou wilt not redeem, tell me, that I may know; for there is none to redeem besides thee; and I am after thee" (vers. 3, 4).

The "nearer" kinsman-redeemer (goel) was ready to exercise his legal right and to purchase the property. By so doing he would add to his own estate. Altogether, the proposal seemed to him a good bargain. "And he said, I will redeem it" (ver. 4). But apparently he was unaware that the transfer of the allotment to him required that he should also marry Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, Elimelech's son. "And Boaz said, On the 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" (ver. 5). This compulsory marriage was in accordance with the provision made in Jehovah's law (Deut. 25:6), in order that the family name might continue with the family freehold, even though its head died without heir, as had been the case of both Elimelech and his two sons. And it was the will of Jehovah that the inheritance of each family of the righteous people should be its perpetual possession (Lev. 25:23).

The "nearer" goel, however, was not prepared to carry out the latter part of the bargain by taking Ruth to wife and preserving the name of the dead to the inheritance. He at once revoked his former decision. "And he that had the right of redemption said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance. Redeem thou for thyself what I should redeem, for I cannot redeem it" (ver. 6). By this declaration in the presence of the elders of Bethlehem he who had the prior right of redemption publicly surrendered this right to Boaz, and the way was opened for the latter to fulfill the generous purpose of his heart.

Boaz had stated clearly what was the position respectively of the two widows in regard to the inheritance. He said (1) that Naomi, in the eyes of the law, was the seller of the property, although it had, no doubt, been leased or mortgaged in the days of the famine to its present occupier. And as soon as the goel redeemed the inheritance, Naomi would receive its value for her own immediate use and enjoyment. He said also (2) that Ruth, not being a daughter of Elimelech, had no title to the property under the special "statute of judgment" applying to daughters (Num. 27:6-11). But as the widow of Mahlon, she had a recognized place in the family. Moreover, seeing that her sister Orpah, the wife of her husband's brother, Chilion, remained in her own country, Ruth was the only one from whom, by suitable marriage, an heir might be expected to Elimelech's inheritance. These two facts will be found to be of importance when the typical aspect of the narrative is being considered (see pp. 60-69).

The "nearer" goel had declined to marry Ruth, "lest," he said, "I mar mine own inheritance." He thought that by his marriage with the Moabitess, he would bring upon his family the stigma of a "stranger." Moreover, he would be taking money from his own inheritance to redeem another's, and so he would "mar" it to that extent. He suggested therefore that Boaz had better perform the part of a kinsman-redeemer (goel). In fact, the law in Israel had proved its own impotence to redeem the poor and the stranger, and it stood aside that grace and truth in the person of Boaz might act for the blessing of Naomi and Ruth.

This verbal refusal by the goel to redeem the inheritance was confirmed publicly and attested lawfully according to ancient custom by handing to Boaz one of his sandals, thereby signifying that he surrendered to Boaz his claim upon the whole of the inheritance and every part of it down to a foot's breadth. A foot-breadth was a figure of the minimum holding of land a man might possess as an inheritance (see Deut. 2:5; Acts 7:5). Also, receiving the sandal was an earnest of receiving the whole inheritance in due course. "Now this was the custom in former time in Israel concerning redemption and concerning exchange, to confirm the whole matter: a man drew off his sandal, and gave it to his neighbor, and this was the mode of attestation in Israel. And he that had had the right of redemption said to Boaz, Buy for thyself; and he drew off his sandal" (vers. 7, 8).

As the goel who had the legal right of redemption had decided not to make the proposed purchase and had formally renounced his right in favor of Boaz who had made no secret of his readiness to undertake the cause of Naomi and Ruth, everything was left in his willing hands. Neither of the two women appeared at the ceremony. They were persuaded that in Boaz God had raised up a redeemer (goel) for them. Both they and Boaz trusted in Jehovah Who "executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed" (Psa. 103:6). Acting in the fear of Jehovah and as His servant, Boaz thereupon redeemed the inheritance and married Ruth, for the two acts were inseparable in the circumstances of this twofold redemption.

Boaz Becomes the Redeemer for Naomi and Ruth

Accordingly, Boaz purchased all the property that had belonged to Elimelech and his two sons, and further he took Ruth to wife so that the inheritance might not become void and the name of the deceased disappear from among his family and his tribe. This beneficent act Boaz announced that day to the elders and people assembled in the gate. "And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi; moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place; ye are witnesses this day" (vers. 9, 10).

As will be seen from the narrative of the proceedings in the gate of Bethlehem, the redemption was twofold, comprehending (1) the purchase from Naomi of all that belonged to her husband and her two sons, the three men having died in the land of Moab, and (2) the "purchase" of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, to be his wife. Thus, both widows benefited by the transaction: (1) Naomi received from Boaz the value of the inheritance as a means of subsistence; she who had been dependent upon Ruth's gleanings in the barley-fields was now comparatively "rich and increased with goods"; while (2) Ruth the "stranger" became wife of Boaz the Bethlehemite, the "mighty man of wealth." Boaz had acknowledged himself to be "brother" in the broad sense of near relationship to the deceased Elimelech (ver. 3), and therefore he had accepted and fulfilled a brother's obligation under the law in Deut. 25:5-10 to marry the widowed Ruth and raise up seed for

the continuance of Elimelech's name and inheritance in the tribe of Judah and the land of Israel.

The elders and the people who witnessed the "act and deed" of Boaz showed neither envy nor jealousy, but rather expressed their congratulations and pious wishes that the special favor of Jehovah might crown the happy event. "And all the people that were in the gate and the elders said, We are witnesses. Jehovah make the woman that cometh into thy house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and acquire power in Ephratah, and make thyself a name in Bethlehem; and let thy house become like the house of Pherez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, of the seed which Jehovah shall give thee of this young woman" (vers. 11, 12).

The united desire of the assembly in the gate was that Jehovah would grant His blessing (1) to Ruth (2) to Boaz himself, and (3) to his house. Their desire (1) was for the childless young widow that she might now be fruitful like Rachel and Leah from whose sons came the eight principal tribes of the nation of Israel. Rachel, the much-loved wife of Jacob, and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, died in childbearing, and was buried near "Ephrath, which is Bethlehem" (Gen. 35:19). It may be for this reason that the citizens of Bethlehem mentioned her name before that of her elder sister, Leah.

They desired (2) for Boaz that he who was already a man of substance might through the redeemed inheritance acquire further power and possess a still more famous and illustrious name in Bethlehem. This prayerful hope was gloriously and supremely answered, for by this marriage Boaz became ancestor of Israel's Messiah Who in due time was born in Bethlehem, little though it was "among the thousands of Judah" (Mic. 5:2).

Further, their desire (3) was that the house or family of Boaz might be numerous and influential in the tribe of Judah, like the house of Pherez. Pherez (Pharez in the A. V.) was the second son of Judah, and twin-brother of Zerah or Zarah. His two sons and their families are mentioned in the census of the children of Israel taken in the plains of Moab near Jericho (Num. 26:20, 21). He was an ancestor of Boaz (4:18-21), and Jashobean, one of his descendants, was "chief of all the captains of the host," commanding 24,000 men selected for service in the court of King David during the month Nisan Chron. 27:2, 3).

Surely we cannot but admire the unjealous spirit and kindly grace that animated the townsmen of Bethlehem when they knew that Ruth the young Moabitess was entering the home of their respected elder, Boaz, as his wife. The law had said, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah; even their tenth generation shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah forever.... Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever" (Deut. 23:3-6).

But all the elders and the people in the gate rose above the austerities of the law of Sinai and sought the peace and the prosperity of the new household in their bridal blessing, naming first the poor Moabitess and then the wealthy Bethlehemite. It was indeed a glimmering of that true Light which, coming into the world, would lighten every man, Israelite and Gentile alike (John 1:9). The words of the Bethlehemites were of greater significance than they themselves knew, for they contained a latent prophecy of "Jesus Who is called Christ." His genealogy from Abraham appears at the beginning of the New Testament in forty-two generations, and the tenth of those recorded is "Boaz begat Obed of Ruth" (Matt. 1:1-17). And Ruth's name is thus written in the First Gospel because she by faith forsook the idols of Moab and sought sanctuary in Bethlehem where the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jehovah of Israel, was known and worshipped.

Studies in the Book of Ruth, F. — Joy for Naomi and Fame for Boaz (Chapter 4:13-22) (4:13-22)

The close of the brief narrative in the Book of Ruth records the joy that came to Bethlehem through the marriage of Boaz the goel and Ruth. The blessing of Jehovah upon this somewhat singular union was made manifest by the gift of a son to the elderly husband and the barren widow. The women of the town with pious neighborliness united to bless the God of Israel Who had raised up an heir to the inheritance, long lying in abeyance but now redeemed. By the birth of Obed, Naomi's sad heart was filled with joy, and Boaz acquired the fame of becoming a progenitor of Abraham's Seed of promise and of David's Son and Lord.

The Heir Born for Naomi

Naomi, the widow of Elimelech, being the "seller," had the primary interest in the redemption of her husband's inheritance in Bethlehem, as Boaz publicly acknowledged when negotiating its purchase (4:5). When the transfer of the property to Boaz had been completed, she then ardently desired to see with her own eyes an heir born to Boaz and Ruth, so that her husband's name might thereby be preserved in his tribe, and the main object of the redemption be attained (for the anxiety of wives and mothers in Israel on this score, cp. the words of the widow of Tekoah, 2 Sam. 14:5-7). Naomi's desire for a family heir was granted, and her faith in Jehovah rewarded by the gift of a grandson. "And Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in unto her, and Jehovah gave her conception, and she bore a son" (ver. 13).

The women of the neighborhood also recognized how signally Jehovah had wrought in the case, and with piety and intelligent insight they expressed their sympathy and delight to the elderly Naomi rather than to Ruth herself. "And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Jehovah Who hath not left thee this day without one that has the right of redemption (goel) and may his name be famous in Israel And he shall be to thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourishes of thine old age; for thy daughter-in-law who loves thee, who is better to thee than seven sons, has borne him" (vers. 14, 15).

Evidently, these women were not idle, curious, chattering gossips, but godly sober-minded matrons with the fear of God before their eyes. They were able to discern that Jehovah had a purpose before Him in which this exceptional marriage and birth was involved. They no doubt remembered the outstanding case of Abraham and Sarah, to whom Isaac, the child of Jehovah's promise and plan for blessing to all the nations of the earth, was marvelously given. Perhaps they also recalled Amram and Jochebed and their child Moses; and again, Manoah and his wife and their child Samson. What blessings those children were to their parents! What honor those parents subsequently received through their children whose names became "famous in Israel," because God had "raised them up" and chosen them from birth for His special service! At any rate, the women, consciously or unconsciously, framed their congratulations to Naomi in the spirit of Jehovah's past

dealings with the "fathers" of Israel. They told Naomi that in this baby boy Jehovah had given her the goel she had hitherto lacked, and He had thus made her inheritance secure, not only for the present but for the future also.

Moreover, the women seem to have had in mind Naomi's words of complaint on her return from Moab to Bethlehem (cp. 1:20-21); she then said that she went away full (with a husband and two sons), and had returned empty (with neither a husband nor a son). But Jehovah Whom she had blamed had regarded her "low estate," and had dealt not "bitterly" but bountifully with her. Ruth, the wife of the wealthy Boaz, had now become a mother, and in the newly-born infant Naomi saw the goel of her husband's inheritance for the coming years. The little grandson would be the "restorer of her life." In him, her dying family-possession was given a living hope again. Ruth's son had brought nourishment to Naomi's old age.

Further, the women reminded Naomi of the great treasure she had in the mother of the young child. In Ruth she had found "the comfort of love" in the loneliness of her treble bereavement. Ruth had loved her when she was Naomi the pleasant, and she still loved and clung to her when she was Mara the bitter widow. Was Naomi still grieving that she had lost her two sons in Moab? Why, they said, Ruth herself "is better to thee than seven sons." Has she not borne to thee a grandson, the son of Boaz? To be the mother of seven or more sons was esteemed a signal honor in family life (see Gen. 46:25; 1 Sam. 1:8; 2:5; Job 1:2; 42:13; 1 Chron. 3:24; Jer. 15:9). So the wise women of Bethlehem bade Naomi to be glad in the Lord and to rejoice; the hour of sorrow had passed, and "a man" had been born into the world, whose name should be famous among the posterity of Abraham.

The Motherly Grandmother

The long pent-up maternal emotions of Naomi were aroused towards the child of Ruth. She took an intense interest in the babe, and was ready to devote her energies and experience to its upbringing in the ways of the Lord, as "grandmother Lois" seems to have done with Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5). "And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse to it" (ver. 16). "Nurse" or "foster-parent" is used in the general sense of one who is "instructor" and "protector." Moses, speaking to Jehovah, uses it to describe his office of leadership of Israel in the wilderness: "... Thou sayest to me, Carry them in thy bosom, as the nursing-father beareth the suckling, unto the land..." (Num. 11:12). See also Isa. 49:23.

The interest of the neighboring women-folk was so effusive that, like the neighbors of Elisabeth in later days (Luke 1:58, 59), they undertook to select a name for the child, whom they regarded as Naomi's because of its connection with the redemption of the inheritance which stood in her name. "And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi. And they called his name Obed (that is, worshipper, or servant). He is the father of Jesse, the father of David" (ver. 17). The neighbors' choice of a name was accepted by Naomi and the parents of the child, and he was called Obed. Worship and service Godward seem both to be embodied in the meaning of this name, and the two qualities sum up the required attitude of man to God.

Our Lord referred to this essential combination when resisting the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. Quoting from Deut. 6:13, He said to the devil, "It is written, Thou shalt do homage to (worship) the Lord thy God, and Him alone shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). The Lord Jesus had taken "the form of a servant," and as such He glorified God to the uttermost; for He was Jehovah's Beloved Servant, of Whom the prophets of Israel bore ample witness.

Obed (servant), the son of wealthy Boaz, by his name, at any rate, and perhaps also by an obedient and dedicated life of piety bore a quiet witness, not only to his coming grandson David who "served his own generation by the will of God" (Acts 13:36), but to David's Son and David's Lord, Whose service to God is unequalled and incomparable. The scripture record shows that in Obed's posterity his name became "famous in Israel"; for besides this brief record in Ruth, his name occurs nowhere else but in 1 Chron. 2:12, as the grandfather of David, and in Matt. 1:5 and Luke 3:32 as the ancestor of the Messiah of Israel. But what illustrious honor for the son of a Moabitess is this association with the Anointed of Jehovah in His pedigree!

The Genealogical Appendix

The brief narrative in this Book shows how, through the providential over-ruling of Jehovah, Ruth the Moabitess became naturalized in Bethlehem-Judah in the land of Israel. The narrative ends with the statement that Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth, "is the father of Jesse, the father of David," this brief sentence expressing the main object of the record. But a fuller genealogy is added, which extends David's pedigree backwards as far as Pherez, the son of Judah. "Now these are the generations of Pherez. Pherez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab, and Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salma, and Salma begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed, and Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David" (vers. 18-22).

This table of lineage unaccompanied by comment is of importance, forming as it does plain proof of the descent of David from the tribe of Judah, to which tribe the scepter and the lawgiver in Israel belonged, according to the inspired promise and prophecy of Jacob on his deathbed (Gen. 49:10). The evidence afforded by this short list of names is sufficient in itself to invalidate all rival claims to royalty either by the tribe of Ephraim or by the tribe of Benjamin. It therefore connects the Book of Ruth with the histories of king Saul of Gibeah in Benjamin and king David of Bethlehem in Judah, which follow in the Books of Samuel. The period covered by the table extends from the calling of the Israelites out of Egypt to be Jehovah's people and nation to the time when Jehovah raised up David to reign over them as His king.

The list contains ten generations, and these may be divided into two groups of five. The first five names—Pherez to Nahshon—are connected mainly with Israel when in Egypt and in the wilderness; the second—Salmon to David—with Israel in the land up to the time when monarchy was established under God's chosen king. The pedigree shows the distinct line of constitutional royalty promised to the nation. The names given in it are not always those of the eldest in the family. David himself, for instance, was the seventh son of Jesse (1 Chron. 2:15). The line of descent from Pherez was decreed to end with the Messiah, and it was therefore continuously under the superintendence of Jehovah. Elimelech's name does not appear in the list, but that of Boaz, the son of Salmon. This selection shows the religious value attached to the marriage of Ruth and the redemption of the inheritance, of which perhaps the happy couple themselves were entirely unaware.

Some historical items connected with the names in this list may be noted. Perez (Perez), the son of Judah and Tamar is always given precedence over his twin-brother Zarah or Zerah, so that he possessed the right of primogeniture.

The family of Perez (Num. 26:20) held highest rank in the tribe of Judah in David's reign (1 Chron. 27:3), and seems to have been distinguished by its fertility and virility. This rapid increase of the family explains the allusion to "the house of Perez" by the people at the marriage of Boaz (4:12). The list in Ruth begins with Perez, and not with his father, Judah, who died prior to the time of the Exodus, which was the beginning of national life for the children of Israel. Hezron was the firstborn of Perez. Ram is sometimes called Aram (Matt. 1:3). Amminadab was the father of Elisheba, who became the wife of Aaron, brother of Moses, and first of the hereditary high-priests of Israel (Ex. 6:23). Nahshon (Naason) was brother-in-law of Aaron (Ex. 6:23), and prince or head of the tribe of Judah (Num. 1:7; 2:3; 1 Chron. 2:10). Salmon (Salma), son of Nahshon, married Rahab the harlot, and was the father of Boaz (Matt. 1:5). Salmon was probably one of the two men whom Joshua sent to Jericho and the neighborhood secretly, and who lodged in Rahab's house (Josh. 2). Obed has been already noticed. Jesse the Bethlehemite (1 Sam. 16:1, 18; 17:58) had eight sons (1 Sam. 16:10, 11; 17:12). Jesse is described as "that Ephrathite of Bethlehem-Judah," and "was old in the days of Saul, advanced in years among men" (1 Sam. 17:12). He was a wealthy man, but his great distinction in the nation seems to have been that he was the father of David, his youngest son, who rose to the throne of Israel, having been chosen by Jehovah to be the ruler of His people.

Studies in the Book of Ruth, G. — A Typical Outline of Israel's Final Restoration (4:18-22)

The brief and simple narrative in the Book of Ruth obviously contains many weighty lessons of that moral goodness in the personal life which in all ages has been inseparable from a fear of God in the heart. These profitable lessons rest upon the surface of the narrative and provide much spiritual food within easy reach of the diligent gleaner.

But besides the didactic value of the history as an object-lesson in piety for all time, there is evidence of its prophetic value as a brief sketch of a particular phase in the national history of the children of Israel as Jehovah's chosen people during the period of their future restoration.

The list of names from Perez to David at the end of the Book suggests that something more is involved in the narrative than the interest and instruction of a family episode. This period (4:18-22) covers the rise of the nation from the squalor of slavery in Egypt to the glory and riches of world-eminence in Canaan with David on the throne. Not that the universal fame of the Davidic kingdom is in any way indicated in the Book of Ruth, where we find only his name and not his title. Indeed, in the divine foreshadowings of scripture, principles are often foreshown, rather than the "very image" of the coming events in detail and sequence. Accordingly, while there seems to be no direct reference to the establishment of the millennial kingdom in power and glory on the earth, there are pointers to the moral features of the nation at the time of its final redemption and its full possession of its allotted inheritance, attached as this climax is to the name of David in so many well-known prophecies.

These historical analogies have their instructive value. And when viewed by the light of prophetic scripture it will be seen that the personal events recorded in this Book depict on a miniature scale (1) the nation's spiritual declension and moral departure from Jehovah and (2) its ultimate restoration to His favor and blessing through the intervention of a Kinsman-Redeemer (goel). These broad prophetic features, relating mainly to the falling away and to the ultimate uprising of the favored nation, may be traced in the historical notices given in this Book of four of the few persons mentioned by name, viz., Elimelech, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.

The Four Principal Persons

In the homely history of this Bethlehem family, the names of four of the persons stand out most conspicuously: (1) Elimelech; (2) Naomi; (3) Ruth; (4) Boaz. Each of these was closely connected with the family inheritance which was in peril of forfeiture until it was finally redeemed by Boaz the kinsman-redeemer (goel). In the events recorded of these persons striking resemblances may be discovered to certain outstanding characteristics of the national history taken as a whole. The chosen people and their inheritance have passed and will pass through similar stages of decline and revival until the day when their Goel will appear and their inheritance will be secured forever by His redemption. Soon after settlement in the land under Joshua, Israel, through lack of the faith which their father Abraham had, departed from the unique place of privilege and testimony bestowed upon them by the favor of Jehovah; and consequently the nation lost possession of the inheritance which by promise was theirs forever. At length, the inheritance of the sons of Jacob will be restored, not, however, until the people of Israel in the obedience of faith return to their own land, and find their Kinsman-Redeemer in the Messiah Whom they once guiltily despised, rejected, and crucified, but Who is waiting to be gracious unto them as Jehovah's exalted Servant.

(1) Elimelech by leaving Bethlehem-Judah to seek bread in the idolatrous land of Moab represents the nation of Israel who from the days of the judges showed their "evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God," and serving the false gods of other nations. For a temporal advantage, Elimelech, despising his birthright, forsook the inheritance divided by lot to his family by Eleazar the priest and by Joshua the captain of Jehovah's victorious hosts (Josh. 19:51). In thus turning his back upon the land of Israel, he was abandoning the worship of Jehovah at His tabernacle in Shiloh. In short, Elimelech's act was an open denial of his confidence in the faithfulness of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when a time of famine and hardship fell upon His people.

This act of religious disloyalty and declension by Elimelech and his family symbolized the more extensive and flagrant failure of Jehovah's chosen nation to worship and serve Jehovah only and, whatever the cost to themselves, to avoid all intercourse with the idol-worshipping nations around them. But at the beginning of their national career, the children of Israel disregarded the divine admonitions, and mingled again and again with other peoples to obtain some temporal benefit. In a time of famine they forgot Him Who in the barren desert "satisfied them with the bread of heaven" (Psa. 105:40). They "despised the pleasant land" even before they reached it (Psa. 106:24). Unmindful of the "spiritual Rock that followed them" in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:4), their unbelief angered Jehovah at the waters of strife (Psa. 106:32). Indeed, Jehovah's charge against the nation a thousand years later was "My people... have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, to hew

them out cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). What profit did backsliding Elimelech gain in the land of Moab? And Jehovah said of apostate Israel in that same prophecy, "My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit" (Jer. 2:11).

(2) Naomi by her condition of widowhood, childlessness, and poverty, represents the nation of Israel in the series of manifold desolations, afflictions, and infirmities which befell them because they persistently forsook God their Savior and disobeyed His holy laws and statutes. In the land of Moab, Naomi the pleasant became even in her own estimation Mara the bitter; her "coal was quenched"; her family name was "ready to perish"; she was bereft of all earthly hope.

What an impressive likeness there is between the nation of Israel homeless in Gentile lands and the widow Naomi friendless in the land of Moab! The figure of widowhood, that is, the loss of divine ownership, protection, and supporting care, is used by the Holy Spirit in the prophecies to depict the religious and moral destitution of the people of Israel because of their public association with the false gods of the nations. Thus, by one of the earliest of the prophets, Jehovah renounced all relationship with His people because of their unfaithfulness to Him, saying, "She is not My wife, neither am I her Husband" (Hos. 2:2). Jeremiah, in describing the desolation of Jerusalem when Jehovah permitted its destruction by the Chaldeans, begins his elegy by exclaiming, "How Both the city sit solitary that was full of people! She that was great among the nations is become as a widow" (Lam. 1:1).

The spiritual destitution which will continue for "many days" to be the lot of the nation because of its unfaithfulness to Jehovah is plainly declared by Hosea; for he says, "The children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without statute, and without ephod and teraphim" (Hos. 3:4). Again in prophetic language, the "widowed" people are declared to be "Forsaken," and their land "Desolate" (Isa. 62:4); but full deliverance of the nation from the Naomi-state will eventually come, and the ancient promise of redemption will be fulfilled: "Thy Maker is thy Husband: Jehovah of hosts is His name, and thy Redeemer (goel), the Holy One of Israel... Jehovah hath called thee as a woman (wife) forsaken and grieved in spirit, and as a wife of youth that hath been refused (or, when rejected), saith thy God" (Isa. 54:5, 6; 49:14). As it was with Naomi, so will it be in a coming day with the penitent daughter of Zion: Jehovah will give her beauty for ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3). And the prophetic words of the Psalmist will be fulfilled: "He maketh the barren woman keep house, as a joyful mother of sons. Hallelujah" (Psa. 113:9).

(3) Ruth by her condition of widowhood, childlessness, and poverty represents, like Naomi, the forlorn and forsaken state of the people of Israel, due to their incorrigible backsliding. But while there is a close resemblance in their widowed condition, there is also an obvious contrast between the two women. Unlike Naomi, Ruth was a Moabite stranger, and not an Israelite by birth like her mother-in-law. For this reason, many have assumed, somewhat hastily, that in Ruth's remarkable story there can be no designed allusion to the people of Israel. How can we expect, it is asked, that divine mercy to a Gentile widow should portray divine mercy to Israel, the chosen race?

The truth is, however, that this very difficulty due to Ruth's foreign nationality provides the clue to the correct understanding of the prophetic bearing of the history. Ruth represents Israel not as the nation distinguished from and elevated above all other nations by Jehovah's choice and calling and redemption, but Israel as the nation degraded from this position of eminence because of her religious and social apostasy, a degradation which became evident to the eyes of the whole world from the times of the Assyrian and Chaldean captivities. At this stage of its national history, Israel, by divine chastisement, lost its political primacy among the nations of the earth. It sank to the level of the Gentile nations, and is so regarded in God's present government of the world. Indeed, the first among the peoples of the earth has become the last and the least.

Here Ruth the Gentile rather than Naomi the Israelite more fittingly represents the chosen people. In their degraded status the resemblance between the Moabite damsel and the nation begins, and in her progress from Moab to Bethlehem and then to the house of Boaz may be seen a dim but discernible outline of the ultimate recovery of Israel from its present quasi-Gentile state and of its final possession of the inheritance through Jehovah of hosts, the Redeemer (Goel) of His people.

This lapse of Israel from its position of national nearness to Jehovah through its inveterate wickedness, followed by its consequent loss of this position through the judgment of Jehovah, is plainly indicated in the scriptures. The merging of the people among the mass of the Gentiles is, for instance, predicted by Hosea in a well-known passage. Because of their continual rebellion against Jehovah, He dissociated Himself from them, and gave them the name, "Lo-ammi," which signifies, "Ye are not My people, and I will not be for you" (Hos. 1:9). From their deliverance out of Egypt to their captivity under Gentile rule, the children of Israel had been distinctively His own peculiar people, but no longer were they so regarded by Him. Jehovah hid His face of favor from them and withdrew from them His protecting arm. They were cast back into the sea of nations out of which He had drawn them.

So applicable is this figure of Israel being a national castaway to the loss of religious relationship to Jehovah that when He bade a later prophet, Jeremiah, to take the cup of His wrath to all the Gentile nations, the one that heads the list is Judah, for by her sinful backsliding she had forfeited the special favor of God, and in His righteous government of the earth she was treated as one of the peoples that knew Him not (Jer. 25:15-18). And in Daniel's day the "times of the Gentiles" had begun, and heathen rulers were reigning in Jerusalem, where once the house of David held sway.

This judicial abandonment of the chosen people by their God became even more evident in the earth after they had wantonly rejected and crucified their Messiah, refusing, as they did, to own Him as Jehovah's promised Servant and King on earth and also as the risen and glorified Christ on high. Hence the "natural branches" of the olive tree of promise were broken off (Rom. 11). They had smitten "the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek... therefore," it was said, "will He give them up" (Mic. 5:1-3). This divine ban upon the nation, begun in the Old Testament and confirmed in the New, continues. God's earthly people are still disinherited, and are still wandering among the Gentiles, with no national nor political status owned upon earth, and with no religious worship owned in heaven.

Ruth in Moab, then, represents this anomalous religious and political state to which the nation of Israel has descended—which will continue until the repentant remnant of the dispersed people return in faith to their own land, and in like faith commit themselves to the kind offices of their Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel). Further, Ruth in Bethlehem-Judah, more than Naomi, represents in particular the pious remnant of the Jews, who in due course will be the first to seek the feet and then to see the face of their long-rejected Redeemer (Goel); they will be "bought from

men as first-fruits to God and the Lamb" (see Rev. 14:1-5). Also, Ruth corresponds in great measure with the figurative term, Ruhamah (meaning "having obtained mercy"), applied by the prophet Hosea to the restored remnant of Israel which will again become Jehovah's people (Ammi); (cp. Hos. 1:6-9; 2:1, 23).

(4) Boaz, the redeeming kinsman of Bethlehem, the city of David, is undoubtedly a typical representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel) of Jehovah's earthly people, Israel. In scripture, redemption has more than one phase. It may be, and often is, effected by blood, but in the Book of Ruth sacrifice is not even mentioned. It may be by destroying the foe that holds another in bondage, but neither is this phase to be found in the narrative. It may also be the deliverance effected by the goel's payment of the debt involved, which is what took place in this case. Boaz exercised his "right of redemption" by purchasing the inheritance, supplementing his generosity by marrying Ruth, the Gentile widow who had professed the faith of Abraham.

The nation of Israel was redeemed from Egypt both by purchase and by power (Ex. 15:6, 13, 16). As their Goel, Jehovah brought them out of bondage with His "stretched out arm and with great judgments" (Ex. 6:6). And when, centuries later, the nation was carried into captivity, first by Assyria and then by Chaldea, Jehovah repeatedly sent them promises of His deliverance by redemption, calling Himself, "Jehovah thy Redeemer (God)," with other titles added such as "the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16). In these and other prophecies, Jehovah reminds His earthly people that He possesses the sole "right of (their) redemption." At the appointed time, He will by His exalted Servant (Isa. 52:13-15) redeem the nation forever from their thralldom to Gentile supremacy, and restore them to "the mountain" of His inheritance, where He made His own dwelling and where He "planted" them at the first (Ex. 15:17).

The narrative records that the concern of Boaz the redeemer with Naomi's inheritance was (1) by purchase to free it from its encumbrance, and (2) by marrying Ruth the widow to ensure its continuance in the family through lawful heirs until the glorious days of the Davidic kingdom.

In these two particulars, Boaz dimly foreshadowed Christ Jesus and His redeeming work on behalf of the people of Israel, whereby He will (1) restore to them the land Jehovah gave them for a perpetual inheritance (Deut. 4:21; Psa. 105:11), and (2) provide a succession of undying heirs to that earthly kingdom by fulfilling Jehovah's promise, "I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah a possessor of My mountains" (Isa. 65:9; 54:1; 66:8). Then the Lord Jesus Himself "shall reign over the house of Jacob, and of His kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33). And when, as "the Lord God of Israel," He shall have "visited and redeemed His people" (Luke 1:68), He then will manifest Himself throughout the earth as the true Boaz, the Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel) of Israel and its inheritance.

Another feature in the typical character of Boaz should be observed: he foreshadows the Messiah in His exaltation rather than in His humiliation. In the scriptures, the sufferings of Christ are distinguished from His acquired glories, which come after the sufferings (Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 1:11). Now, Boaz, the strong and wealthy goel, represents Christ, not in His vicarious sufferings, but in His risen power and ascended glories, not in His death, but in His life beyond death.

In the Boaz character Christ Jesus is the Branch, the Son of man, Whom Jehovah made "strong" for Himself (Psa. 80:15, 17). He is the Mighty One upon Whom Jehovah has "laid help" for His people (Psa. 89:19). The Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel) of Israel and Judah is "strong; Jehovah of hosts is His name" (Jer. 1:34). He is the "Mighty One of Jacob" (Isa. 49:26; 60:16). And when "the year of His redeemed is come" He will appear "traveling in the greatness of His strength," "mighty to save". He will then vanquish the enemies of His people and "bring down their strength (blood) to the earth" (Isa. 63:1, 4, 6). Thus, the redemption of Israel's earthly inheritance will take place when, and not before, their Goel destroys every foe, and subdues all things to Himself.

Boaz, however, redeemed the inheritance by purchase, and not by destructive power. His wealth enabled him to pay what was demanded for its recovery. The price paid is not disclosed, but its amount amply met every righteous claim of the creditor. And, as the New Testament reveals, it was by the immeasurable value and efficacy of His sacrificial offering that Christ Jesus "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).

But another eloquent feature of the transaction is its finality. Boaz completed the redemption of the inheritance by marrying Ruth. In this act also, Boaz is a type of Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel); for in the prophecies, marriage occurs as a figure of Jehovah's final restoration of His earthly people to a state of perennial joy and prosperity. The "reproach of widowhood" is taken away from the nation, and she rejoices as a bride with the Bridegroom, then known as "Jehovah, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 54:4, 5).

By comparing, for instance, Isa. 53 with Isa. 54, it will be seen that the future confession of the remnant of Israel of their atrocious guilt in rejecting their Messiah is first foretold; and that this prophecy is immediately followed (chap. 54.) by one announcing the reception of the nation into the intimate favor of Jehovah. For a long span of centuries, Israel had languished in the widowed state of Naomi and Ruth, but now this mourning and privation should be exchanged for marriage felicities with Jehovah, her Goel. "Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thy Husband: Jehovah of hosts is His name, and thy Redeemer (Goel), the Holy One of Israel" (vers. 4, 5).

The blessedness of Zion in the day of her future redemption is portrayed under the impressive figure of marriage in another of Isaiah's prophecies. Israel will in a coming time be delivered from her forsaken and desolate condition. Jehovah-Messiah will then be her Bridegroom, and she will be His earthly bride. Even the land of her inheritance will be "married." The Spirit of Christ in the prophet says, "Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of Jehovah will name.... Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called, My delight is in her (Hephzibah), and thy land, Married (Beulah); for Jehovah delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married... with the joy of the bridegroom over the bride shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Isa. 62:2-5).

In this vivid language, Isaiah depicts the contrast between Israel's forsaken (Naomi) condition and the millennial joys which the Kinsman-Redeemer (Goel) will share with Zion and Jerusalem in Immanuel's land (as Boaz did with Ruth in Bethlehem).

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