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Ruth Overview (Part 2)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of the book of Ruth, Steve Gregg highlights its relevance for Christian theology. The inclusion of Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy challenges the idea of Jewish exclusivity and illustrates God's acceptance of non-Jewish individuals in Israel. Boaz, the kinsman redeemer in the book, is seen as a significant type of Christ who restores lost inheritance and redeems the childless widow. Moreover, the book foreshadows important themes in Christian theology, providing valuable insights for Christians.

Transcript

We went through a survey of the book itself, the story, and I just want to say a few things that aren't related directly to the story. I mean, they are. They grow out of it.

But having the knowledge of the story behind us, I just want to bring out some of the things that make this book have value to us as Christians. Some of them have more weight than others, but I just have made a list in your notes there of the things that I consider to be the value of the book of Ruth to us. One, it's an interesting incident in David's ancestry, which it means Christ's ancestry, too.

Interestingly, when Matthew gives the full genealogy of Christ, or the fullest one we have in Matthew 1, from Abraham to Joseph, the husband of Mary, he does what most Jewish genealogies do. He lists father to son, father to son, father to son. But in Matthew 1, there are four women.

That kind of interrupts the genealogy in a way. And that's okay. I mean, every man has a mother.

But it's not very common in Jewish genealogies to mention the mother's name, partly because a child, although he has two parents, he is carrying on the family name of his father, not of his mother. His mother's father hopefully has sons of his own to carry on his family name. But the mother of the child is not the one whose family name is carried on, so she's not usually mentioned in genealogies.

But if you look at Matthew 1, it says, catching it sort of in the midst of it, verse 5, Now, prior to that, it mentions in verse 2, Now, we've got Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba mentioned in this genealogy. Now, there's frankly scores of generations here, but only four women mentioned. There were more women than that.

There was a woman for every man in this genealogy. But why does Matthew select these four to mention, and only these four? One reason may be that they were all Gentiles. Tamar was a Gentile.

Rahab was a Gentile. And Ruth was a Gentile. Now, we don't know if Bathsheba was.

Her grandfather Ahithophel was one of the counselors of David, and it seemed like he'd be Jewish. But we're not sure because she married a Hittite, which is a Canaanite. And the Jews were not supposed to marry Canaanites.

But Bathsheba's first husband was Uriah the Hittite, and the Hittite was of the sons of Heth, one of the Canaanite nations. So it may be that she wasn't a Jewish. We don't know for sure.

She might have had some Jewish blood and some Gentile blood, too. In any case, at least three of the four women were Gentiles, possibly all four of them. All four of them were women, which is something they had in common.

And three of the four had something scandalous in their story. Tamar had played the harlot and become pregnant by her father-in-law, who did not know it was her. Of course, Bathsheba committed adultery with David, and Rahab was a prostitute.

So three of the women had something scandalous in their life. So why are these women mentioned? Why are they selected? It would seem that what Matthew's trying to point out is that in the genealogy of Christ, there are not only squeaky clean, pure-blooded Jewish ancestors. Jesus came into the world through a checkered past.

Some of his mothers were prostitutes, his ancestors at least. Now Ruth was not, but she was a Gentile, and many of these were Gentiles. So he didn't even have a pure Jewish bloodline.

But on the other hand, no one does, because the Israelites came from the twelve sons of Jacob. That's what made them Israel. Israel was their dad.

They were the sons of Israel. They married women who were not their sisters. That means they married Gentiles.

They didn't marry their own sisters. That's the only Israelites there were, was their family. So all the twelve tribes of Israel came from half Gentile.

All the sons of Jacob married Gentile women, and all the Jews born of them are part

Gentile. But the interesting thing is that the Gentile ancestresses of Jesus, possibly the only ones that were Gentiles, are named by Matthew. And, of course, scandalous people.

Jesus was not ashamed to be associated with the sinfulness of man. He didn't commit sin, but he was a friend of sinners. He said, it's not the righteous that I came to call, but sinners to repentance.

Just like a physician doesn't go to the well people, but to the sick people. And Matthew, who himself was one of the sick people, he was a publican. He was a tax collector.

These were among the most despised for their compromises in Israel in their day. Here's Matthew the publican pointing out that there are people whose lives were even more scandalous than his in the ancestry of Jesus. And then, of course, that they were women, showing that Jesus is not simply, nor anyone else for that matter, but it's underscored by the way the genealogy is written.

Jesus is not just associated with men, but with women. And we remember in the Jewish society, women were considered to have a lower rank than men. In fact, they weren't even supposed to talk to men in public.

When Jesus talked to the woman at the well in John chapter 4, it says the disciples came and found him talking to her. It says they were amazed that he was talking to a woman, but they didn't dare ask him why, it says. So, here Jesus is associated in his ancestry by Matthew's artistic arrangement of it, by including these women, with not only men, but women.

Not only good women, but bad women. Not only Jewish women, but Gentile women. And thus, three classes of people that were looked down upon by the devout Pharisees and Jewish leaders, women, sinners, and Gentiles, all are highlighted as belonging in Jesus' ancestry.

And Ruth is one of them. And we wouldn't know this about her if we didn't have the book of Ruth. So, this book points out something about one of the ancestresses of Jesus, especially the fact that she was a Gentile.

And that may be the second value of the book. It also shows us that it's an example of Gentiles being accepted into Israel. God always accepted Gentiles into Israel, not that a lot of them came, but some did.

When God made the covenant of circumcision with Abraham in Genesis 17, he said, Any stranger who's born in your house, anyone who's one of your servants, or anyone, they would be Gentiles, because Abraham wasn't their dad. They have to be circumcised. He says, and anyone who's not circumcised will be cut off from the people.

So that would mean these Gentile servants, he had 318 hired servants, or trained

servants, Abraham did, they were all Gentiles. He was a Gentile himself. Abraham wasn't a Jew.

Yet, they were all circumcised, and that made them part of his family. That made them part of the covenant people. And so, likewise, throughout the history of Israel, there were always Gentiles who were allowed to become Jews, if they wished.

And Ruth is an example of that. And that's something that the Jews sometimes lost sight of, because they frowned on Gentiles. In fact, Christians sometimes lose sight of that fact, too.

Sometimes they think the Jews, or the nation of Israel, is a racial thing. That racial Jews are somehow special in God's sight. But actually, many racial Jews are not believers, and are not God's people.

Jesus said to the Jews in John 8, 44, You're of your father the devil. He said, I know you're a descendant of Abraham, but if you're Abraham's children, you'd do the works of Abraham, and you're not doing that. So, he basically rejected some who were of Jewish birth, and accepted some who were of Gentile birth.

That's because, as in the Old Testament, so in the New, a Gentile could become part of that. A Gentile can become part of what the faithful Jews are. The faithful Jews of Jesus' day followed Jesus.

We call them disciples. Gentiles later were allowed to join them. Ruth is an example in the Old Testament of God allowing Gentiles to come in on the same terms as Jews, and to be accepted as God's people.

The book of Ruth also serves to give us an illustration of something we might not have known from reading the book of Judges. And that is that during the period of Judges, there were some godly people. The book of Judges is mostly capitalizing on the apostasy of Israel.

Most of the stories are about how the Jews, or the Israelites I should say, because they weren't called Jews back then, but how the Israelites, they followed other gods. They defected from God, then he had to punish them and bring them under oppression. When they cried out to God, he'd rescue them, but they kept going back into apostasy.

And the book of Judges is a very depressing book in many ways, because you don't ever see God's people staying faithful for very long, and they keep making the same mistakes over and over again. And you could get the impression there just wasn't anything good going on during that 325 years of the Judges. But this story tells us, well here's a whole community of people who are essentially godly.

Boaz is a godly man, he greets his servants the first thing in the morning and says, the

Lord be with you. And they say, the Lord bless you, and when they say the Lord, they're saying Yahweh. These people are faithful to Yahweh.

It's a community that's delighted to keep the law of God. That's why this Goel thing becomes important. Oh well, Boaz said, I can't marry you because there's another guy who according to the law of Moses is closer to you than I am, and I have to let him have the first chance.

There's a conviction to follow God's law, there's a conviction to honor God, and this is during the period of the Judges. And how many other communities like this there may have been during that period, we don't know. But it's a mistake to think that the period of Judges was devoid of true piety and true godliness.

We see in the book of Ruth a good example of certainly an exception, if not the rule. It may be that the defections were the exception. It also is, of course, a story that illustrates the sovereignty of God at work, and the providence of God at work in the lives of ordinary people.

Now we don't think of Ruth and Boaz as ordinary people, because they're famous. There's a whole book of the Bible written about them. In fact, their great-grandson was the greatest king Israel had.

So how can we call these ordinary people? Well, this is before David was anything, this is before David was born. These people were not special people. They were just ordinary people from Bethlehem, of which there were many.

And yet God was working, he's sovereignly bringing about these connections. Ruth was to be the ancestor of David and of Jesus. So God saw to it that her first husband died, and she became eligible to be married to the guy that's supposed to be the ancestor of David.

And he guided Ruth to the right field, to Glean. If she'd gone to another field, she might never have met Boaz at all. And so, I mean, the things that happened, we see God orchestrating the way they went, because it brought about a result that we find was God's plan from the beginning.

Another thing here is that the book may have value as a type and a shadow of Christ. And that's what I want to finish with tonight talking about. There's many Christian teachers believe that Boaz is a type of Christ.

We see him as the kinsman redeemer. That's what Goel is sometimes translated, the kinsman redeemer, the close relative who can redeem. Remember, there were three things the Bible said that they must do.

In Leviticus 25, verses 47 through 49, the kinsman redeemer was to redeem his relative

from slavery. If a man fell into a financial disaster to the point that he had to sell himself into slavery, if he happened to have a Goel who could afford to do it, that man could and should buy him out of slavery. That's buy his freedom for him.

That's what Jesus does for us. Jesus himself said that. He said, if you continue in my words, then you're my disciples indeed, and you'll know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

And when the Jews said, we're Abraham's descendants, we've never been in bondage to anyone. He said, well, if you commit sin, you're a slave of sin. He said, but if the Son sets you free, you're free indeed.

This is all in Matthew, or John 8, 31 and following. Now, Jesus is the one who sets us free from slavery to sin. And that's what a Goel, that's what a kinsman redeemer would do for a relative.

Now, he's also the one who redeems a lost inheritance. As I said, if a man fell on financial hard times, and he lost his ancestral property that he'd received from the days of Joshua, his family passed it down, and he had to sell it off because he couldn't live without the money, well, he'd lost it. But his Goel could and should buy it back, and buy it back into the family.

And we are those who have lost the inheritance that God gave to Adam and Eve through sin. But Jesus has come to restore the inheritance. That inheritance is our relationship with God.

That inheritance is eternal. It says in 1 Peter 1, verse 4, that God has redeemed us to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that's kept in heaven for you. And so, this inheritance that Jesus came to bring back to us, to buy for us back, because Adam and Eve had sold it off, and Jesus came and paid the price to get it back.

Jesus told the parable of a man who found a treasure in a field. It wasn't his field, and therefore it wasn't his treasure. But he hid the treasure back in the field, and he sold everything he had, and lawfully bought the field.

So he could own the treasure. And this is, I believe, like Christ who purchased the world so that he could redeem the church out of it as his treasure. And that's, he's the kinsman redeemer.

He's redeemed us out of the slavery and bondage and the loss of our inheritance. And finally, the goel redeems the childless widow. The Bible says that we were married to the law at one time, but we've died to the law so that we can be married to another.

That is Christ. That's in Romans 7, 4. And Christ is our new husband. We've been widowed because the law, our first husband, is dead.

But this is so that we'd be free to marry another, even he who is risen from the dead, is what Paul says in Romans 7, 4. And Isaiah speaks of Gentiles, people like Ruth, people like most of us, as a wife who's been barren, but who's going to be married and have a lot of children. In Isaiah 54, and let me just say that Isaiah 54 is about the church. How do I know that? Well, read Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53 is about Christ, his suffering, his resurrection, his redemption of his people. And chapter 54, a chapter division that Isaiah never saw because he never put chapter divisions in his book, goes on and says, as a result of what Christ accomplished through his sufferings, chapter 54 of Isaiah says, sing, O barren, you who have not born children. Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not labored with the child.

For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman, says the Lord. Now Paul quotes this verse, actually. In Galatians chapter 4, in verse 27, he quotes this verse as being about the church.

And he says, what this is talking about is that the church, he's thinking more in terms of the Gentile element in the church, especially, had never born children for God. It was a barren wife, a barren woman. And in the Old Testament, God didn't bring up his children through the Gentile nations, he brought them through the Israelites.

They were the married wife. Israel was married to God at Mount Sinai through a covenant that they had with God. But the married wife was not going to have as many children as the barren is going to.

That's what Isaiah says. The Gentiles have been barren and never produced fruit for God, but they're going to, Isaiah says. They've been barren, they've never born, they're childless, but they're going to because, by implication, God's going to marry them and produce children through them, more than he did through the first wife.

So Christ is the one who marries the barren widow, as it were, and produces fruit through us. So he's our bridegroom. We're the bride collectively as a church.

So this is this Goel, this kinsman redeemer parallels Christ in our life in many points. Now, a Goel had to have three qualifications. One, he had to have the right to redeem.

Because not everyone did. Remember, Boaz didn't have the right to do it. There's another man more in the position who had the right of first refusal.

Not everyone would have the right to redeem. Not everyone had the right to be the Goel in this case. But a close relative would, and that's why Jesus became a human being.

God didn't send an angel to redeem us. He didn't send an animal to redeem us or aliens from Mars. He sent a human, one of our own kinsmen.

He tapped into the root of the family tree that was polluted by sin and brought righteousness into that tree by becoming part of that family tree. He had to be a near kinsman in order to do that. He had to become one of us, and he did.

So, a kinsman had to, the redeemer had to have the right to redeem. He had to have it by near kinship. And Jesus has that right by being our near kin.

The son of man. He kept calling himself the son of man. Why? He was the son of God.

Why emphasize the son of man? Because we're sons of men. If he's the son of man too, then he's our relative. He's our kin.

He's the son of Adam like we are. And therefore, as a kinsman, he can have the right to redeem. The kinsman redeemer also had to have the ability to do so.

Because if the goel didn't have enough money to buy his brother out of slavery, well, it wouldn't happen. He had to have the resources. He had to have the ability.

And Christ does have the ability. He could redeem us because he was sinless himself. He was not a slave of sin.

And he had enough righteousness to share. We were slaves of sin because we didn't have any righteousness of our own. But he had righteousness enough to share with us.

He had the ability, therefore, to redeem us out of our slavery and to do the thing a goel is supposed to do. So there's a third thing too that the goel had to have. He had to have the willingness to do it.

He had to have the right to do it. He had to have the ability to do it. And he had to have the willingness to do it.

We see that the man who was the nearest to Elimelech in the story didn't have the willingness to do the whole job. He was willing to buy the property but not marry Ruth. Therefore, he didn't.

It would be a shame for him not to do it. He had to take off his shoe and give it to Boaz. And that parallels something kind of interesting in the Old Testament, by the way.

If you look at Deuteronomy 25, 5 through 10, if brothers dwell together and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother or of a goel to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up

to the gate of the elders and say, My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel. He will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him.

But if he stands firm and says, I do not want to take her, then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, the house of him who had his sandal removed. I wonder why not the man who had spit in his face.

There are two things. Now, see, this didn't happen quite like that way with Boaz and the other guy, because there was no... First of all, Ruth didn't go and approach the guy. Boaz did.

And Boaz didn't have a gripe with the guy. Ruth would have. But she's not the one who did this.

In the law, if the wife goes and confronts him and he says, I don't want to marry you, no one was made to marry somebody if they didn't want to. Sometimes when we think, well, they arranged marriages back then, they had all these different marriage customs back then, we sometimes think people ended up marrying a lot of people they didn't want to marry. Generally speaking, people didn't have to marry someone if they didn't want to.

It was his duty. But if he wasn't willing to do it, he wasn't stoned to death for it, but he was shamed for it. Having spit in his face was shame.

Handing over his sandal to the woman means that the inheritance that he should have claimed is now going to go to whoever she gives it to, whoever does marry her. But the point here is, the goel doesn't always have a mind to do the work, the duty of a goel. And therefore, in order to be in that role properly, you have to have the right and the ability and the willingness to do it.

Now, Jesus was willing. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was really struggling with it. He was sweating great drops of blood with his internal struggle over whether he wanted to go through it.

He even said, Father, if it's your will, let this cup pass from me, which means, let me not do this. But he followed by saying, nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. So Jesus was willing to surrender his own will and his own life and do the will of God and be the goel for the human race.

So Ruth is, it's the only story we really have in the Bible of somebody who did this duty and did it right. And Boaz is the one who did it. The name Boaz means in him is strength.

Actually, when Solomon built the temple many generations later, he put two major pillars in the front of the temple. One of them was named Boaz, which apparently was named after this man. He became a pillar in the house of God.

Just like Jesus said in Revelation, to him that overcomes, I'll make him a pillar in the house of my God. A permanent fixture, a prominent fixture. These two great pillars in front of the temple, one of them named after Boaz, were ornamental.

They were visible as soon as you approach the temple. Boaz became a very prominent, glorified man through this story. Honored because he did the duty.

He gave a go out. And that's what Jesus, because he has done what he did, is highly exalted. And has been given a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord.

So many people have seen Boaz in this story as a type of Christ. Ruth then would be a type of the church, especially of the Gentile element in the church, that did not have a natural claim by race as the Jews would. But she was converted to the God of Israel, and therefore she was redeemed by Boaz, just like Gentiles are when they come to Christ.

Some have felt that the man who refused to redeem Ruth might even be identified with the law, which came before Christ. The law had the first chance, as it were, to help humanity, but it couldn't. Like the man said, I cannot redeem her.

That's what the man said in the story. I cannot redeem her. Now the law can't redeem either.

And therefore, Boaz, or Christ, does so, has to do so, because the first person in a position of responsibility to do so, reneges. The law reneged. It was not able to bring about the redemption of humanity.

It just didn't have the horses. It didn't have what it takes. And so Christ is the only redeemer available left.

And so these are some of the things that the story is thought to perhaps teach by way of types and shadows. The Old Testament's full of types and shadows. The New Testament identifies some of the types in the Old Testament, but not all of them.

I have to say the ones we're talking about are not identified for us in the New Testament, which means a person would have the privilege of doubting that they are intended. But a little book like this, sure, it's an interesting little romance, an interesting little story about one of David's ancestors, but there must have been a lot of stories about David's ancestors that are not put in the Bible. Why is this one put here? I believe it's probable that it's included because its features do serve as a type and a shadow of Christ, just like David himself later did in his life.

Lots of famous people and stories in the Bible serve as types of Christ. And I think this is probably one of the main values of the book of Ruth to depict these concepts and help us understand and appreciate what Jesus has done.