

PART II

RUTH AND THE BIBLICAL STORY

The Biblical Story

While the story cannot be reviewed here in the full intensity required to deliver all the aspects necessary for the understanding of the Book of Ruth⁷, suffice it to say that God is moving to bring forth His Messiah, His Son, and put Him on the throne of the universe. This Son of God will, it will shortly be revealed in 2 Samuel 7, be seated in Jerusalem as the Son of David.

The (Prophetic) Genealogical Line of the Seed of the Woman

Since Genesis 3:15 the genealogical line has been traced. From Eve to Seth to Noah, through Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and finally as designated by Jacob in his final blessing in Genesis 49, Judah. Now the line is not traced specifically in the chronological historical books (Numbers—Judges) until David arrives in 1 Samuel, and then specifically occurs in 2 Samuel 7, God promises that His ultimate Son will come from David's line.

Thus as the story moves through the plot and follows the Seed of Messiah as it wends its way to Jesus of Nazareth, there are several things that are clear. The Seed of Messiah goes through the son who is designated by this Seed of Messiah. The elder son has the normal rights to the inheritance (double portion) and should, all things being equal, be the bearer of the Seed. However, sometimes it changes, due to the providence of God coupled with the expected rejection by the seeming heir.

For instance, Esau was the firstborn. However, at his birth God pronounced, “the elder would serve the younger.” Thus, it was according to God's choice that Jacob the younger sibling would bear Messiah and be the father of the nation, Israel. However, right on schedule Esau sold his birthright and Jacob deceived his father into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. So while these conniving brothers brought about their own destiny in some part, ultimately they performed according to God's choice.

Thus, as one moves through the text of Genesis it can be seen that it was Seth (third son) not Cain (eldest son), Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac (of Sarah) not Ishmael (of Hagar), Jacob not Esau. In the case of Judah, the deathbed blessings of Jacob on his sons in Genesis 49 indicate that Judah, the fourth-born, will be the heir of the promise of Messiah's Seed. This is due to not one, but two factors. One is the designation of Leah as the first wife. The second is the disobedience of the three eldest and their forfeiture to the fourth son.

⁷ Refer to www.theBiblicalStory.org for a 14 session series on the Biblical Story for a full development of the plot within which the story of Ruth fits.

First of all, Leah was Jacob's first wife, and thus her eldest would have normally been the one to bear Messiah. That one was Reuben. The second and third born sons of Leah were Simeon and Levi. The fourth then, ended up being the actual parent of Messiah, Judah. As the story moves through Genesis 34—35 Simeon and Levi blaspheme the covenant by the misuse of the covenant sign. Reuben goes in to his father's concubine, Bilhah, Rachel's maid. Of course, this was blasphemy toward Jacob, the Anointed One of God to bear the Messiah and the Nation of Israel. On Jacob's deathbed in Genesis 49, he proclaims exactly this. The Seed will now come through Judah due to the transgression of the elder three.

Genesis 2:24: "One Flesh" and the Mutual Right of the Woman to the Inheritance

In Genesis 1:26, 28, children would come forth through a father and mother who would produce seed and this seed will receive the inheritance of their father and mother. However, Genesis 2:24 pronounced that this seed (which received the inheritance of the father and mother) would come through the union of a man and a woman, designated as "one flesh" with respect to the seed and thus the inheritance. When a woman became one flesh with her husband (i.e., married), she would receive the inheritance of his father and mother exactly the same as he did. In other words, with respect to inheritance, "she was as he was."⁸ Thus, even though the husband might die, the wife was still "as he was" and would have the right to the inheritance, which was the "Seed."

The plot line of Genesis will follow this genealogical line of Messiah. It will pick up again in 1 Samuel with David and follow through 2 Kings, as it designates one Davidic King after another until they are removed and end in exile in Babylon.

Yet, this woman is a helper suitable for him." As one flesh, "she is as he is" with respect to the inheritance. So as God protects His anointed one in all cases, He will also protect the woman who is "one flesh" with him.

Thus God protects Sarah when Pharaoh takes her into the harem, since she is "one flesh" with Abraham. She is protected again in Genesis 20 when Abraham seeks to pass her off once more to protect "his" (Abraham's) promise. Yet for God it is not just "his" promise but the inheritance of his "one flesh" wife as well. When Isaac seeks to do the same thing with Rebekah, it is easily predicted that God will again protect the one whom He has joined together with Isaac, even though Isaac treats her as no more than a common woman.

Tamar, the Genesis 2:24 "One Flesh" with Er, Judah's eldest

The story of Joseph, beginning in Genesis 37 and ending in 50, is set in motion by the pronouncement by God (similar to His pronouncement on Jacob's birth) in Joseph's dream.

⁸ This is the statement of Adam when he saw Eve, "This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." She was "one flesh" with Adam. That is, she was as he was.

There, it had been clearly revealed to Joseph that He would be the ruler of the brothers, the father and the mother, the sons of Jacob, representing the promised nation of Israel.

As the story unfolds and Joseph is sent to Egypt, a break appears in the sequence wherein the last verse of chapter 37 matches up cleanly with the first verse of chapter 39. Thus it is clear by literary “insertion” or “interruption” chapter 39, Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, are to be contrasted with the story of Judah and Tamar in chapter 38.

The contrast is with the character of Joseph who is the one whom God has designated as the Messiah (i.e., “Deliverer”) for his generation. This chosen (Anointed) one will be given the position of the Genesis 3:15 “Seed.” As such, his life will move according to the promise, yet it will only be for his generation, and only to indicate a part of the promise. In this case that part is the issue of the rule over the nation (12 sons of Jacob) and this messianic figure would bless the Gentiles, Egypt, through that process. Joseph is faithful to the dream, believing that God would bring it about. Joseph’s part was simply to trust in the revelation and God would bring it to pass. Thus, in Genesis 39, Joseph refuses the queen’s advances even though it might mean certain death (and loss of the promise revealed in the dream).⁹ Thus faithful Joseph does not give into preserving himself at the cost of disobedience, like Abraham and like Isaac.

By contrast, in Genesis 38, Judah treats the hope of bringing forth his own tribe as a common thing. He had married a Canaanite to reproduce his seed, something he should have learned not to do from Uncle Esau’s example. In addition they were to be separate from the Gentiles in the land (both Isaac and Jacob were sent away to marry non-Canaanites). Even later in the story Judah quickly enters into a relationship with what he thinks is a prostitute on his way to join his friend, Hirah, the Adullamite. Thus, Judah’s faithfulness to be obedient to God is lacking as he treats his Seed, that of Messiah, as common.

The story begins and reaches a tension following the arrangement by Judah of a marriage with Tamar for his eldest son Er in order to provide Seed (in this case Messianic Seed). But God confronts Judah’s plan with the execution of Er. Genesis 2:24, the “one flesh,” required that Tamar be given the inheritance of her husband, Er, specifically that of the seed of the eldest. In this case, of course, it was the Seed of the Woman, Messiah. Thus in obedience to Genesis 2:24, since Tamar has the right to the inheritance of her deceased husband, Judah sends in the new “eldest,” Onan, to give her the Seed that she legally requires.

The Levirate marriage provision (given later, but inherent in Genesis 2:24) was not beneficial, financially nor physically. Should the widow not have seed, her portion of the inheritance would go to the remaining brothers, and thus they would gain a higher percentage than if she lost her portion through lack of children. So Onan spills his seed (intentionally over a

⁹ One should not miss the contrast to both Abraham and Isaac, who passed off their wives to another to preserve the promise. Here Joseph does the opposite, that is, he rejects taking one’s wife to preserve the promise, relying in God to provide.

period of time). So God kills him as well.¹⁰ Of course, one might wonder why God kills one for such a seemingly simple error, until one realizes that this Seed that Onan spilled and treated as common was the Seed of God's Son.

Finally, Judah decides to disregard this "one flesh" inheritance due Tamar, and sends her back to her father's house, essentially disinheriting her by not dealing with her. His excuse is that his last son, Shelah, is too young to cohabit with Tamar and so she should wait until he is older.

As Shelah comes of age, Tamar, realizes that Judah has no intention of giving her the Seed. She realized that she had the right to the eldest son's seed, and in this case, the Messianic Seed. Regarding it as great, she plots to get it by obtaining it from the father (since Shelah was out of the picture), Judah. Deceiving Judah by dressing up as a prostitute, she becomes impregnated and the story resolves itself in the birth of Perez. The text is pointing out that this Perez will bear the Seed of Messiah. Thus Tamar will become a mother of Messiah, and will be held up throughout the ages because of Genesis 2:24 and her knowledge and hope that it gave to her.

The Covenant of the Pentateuch

The Seed line is important, and of course, the obligation of Genesis 2:24 to women who might bear the Seed. However, the means by which characters will be judged is, not only their alignment with the hope of the Seed, but with the covenant that implemented the process of bringing forth the Seed (the Law).

The Levirate Marriage

The Levirate marriage, stated in Leviticus, was the encoding of what was originally stated in Genesis 2:24. In the Law, a man was to bring up children to his brother's childless widow so that he could pass on his inheritance. Should he refuse, his name would be erased from the annals of Israel as well as have some very negative implications made toward him from the widow.

The Care of Widows, Orphans, Aliens, the Poor

As part of the covenant, yea, even the foundation, was the love of YHWH toward the hopeless. This was clear in Deuteronomy 10:18. But the additional factor was that the Israelites, who were poor and hopeless in Egypt, were to pass on this great mercy that had been received by YHWH.

¹⁰ God honors His Son and that Son is potentially in the seed of Judah, and thus now in Onan. And Onan now has treated the Seed of Messiah as troublesome. It is blasphemy. He is executed.

Thus, any Israelite who had prospered physically or spiritually would recognize that it was his due to give to the needy as God had given him, and thus enabled him to give.

The Recognition of YHWH alone as the Source of All Good (“*tob*”)

Yet to go to other gods for any provision whatsoever, or to go to other gods for their source of truth, was abominable and would be met with a death sentence. In fact, to encourage anyone to go anywhere but YHWH was a death sentence (Deuteronomy 13:1-11).

The Days of the Judges

“In the days that the Judges judged . . .” begins the Book of Ruth. The events of Ruth appear to have occurred during the days of Gideon. Of course, when viewing Deuteronomy as above, one recognizes that there was very little going on that adhered to the covenant of Moses. Worship of other gods was a major part of the repeated cycle that rolls through the book as the nation pursued the gods and women of the other nations. They negated God’s instructions as to how these Canaanites were to be demolished. Instead they were embracing them, fearing them, and otherwise just operating according to “what was right in their own eyes.”

This short introduction puts this Book of Ruth with its limited knowledge into the context of the Biblical Story, into the very plot that is unfolding with the days of the Judges. The Book of Judges states very clearly, “In those days there was no king in Israel . . .” indicating the hope for the Righteous Ruler (of Genesis 3:15) had not come to pass as yet. In the meantime, these Judges would be the anointed ones who would interpret the Law for their generation for their tribe (Deuteronomy 16—17). Thus, the chronology locates the events of the Book of Ruth as on the way to the Righteous King.

An advance peek at the ending of the Book of Ruth confirms exactly that. This story is leading to King David. It is not a surprise that this would be where the book is going since that is where the Biblical story is going. Chronologically, the story itself precedes that of knowing David’s name. But the one who penned the book had the purpose of showing how God moved providentially, despite a disobedient husband and wife, to bring a Moabite widow to faith and through her to establish His Messiah.

Now the second thing that this “In the days that the Judges judged . . .” reveals is exactly how the times were going as to whether Israel was keeping God’s covenant revealed in the Pentateuch. It does not take much to realize that it was not going well. Disobedience to God’s instructions was massive and thorough. When one understands the Pentateuch (which contains the written Law), the Book of Judges is very slow reading as almost every line contains some violation of one of the statutes of the Law.

Thus as one approaches the Book of Ruth, the reader is ready . . . ready with fear. The story of the Judges is moving toward the revelation of the king, but the characters of the current

crop of appointees (the Judges) are anything but righteous. In fact, chaos ensues. Thus the reader is expecting that the characters in the Book of Ruth will, to some degree, exemplify the characteristics of the age. Those characteristics are; lack of covenant knowledge, and lack of covenant obedience. In its place will be found expediency based on human wisdom instead of God's revelation.

Thus the story is on the way to a king, God's king. But it doesn't look like he will be any different than the leaders of the day. God is going to put His Son on the throne of the universe. It has been that way since Genesis 1:1, specified in Genesis 3:15, and the Seed path begun in Genesis 4. The book's last word is "David." That is where this book is going!

The Book of Ruth

Internally the book flows through many difficulties and resolutions in typical narrative style. The two tensions, which are related, are food and seed. Of course, in an agrarian society these were directly related. One needed food for a man and his family to survive in this world and bring forth progeny. One also needed progeny to continue the ever-important line, but also to work the fields to bring forth food. Abram thought he had to have food to have the promise of seed in Genesis 3:15 and moved to Egypt to obtain it. These related needs pervade the book as they do the entire Bible.

The Initial Scene

The initial scene moves from a short setting that describes the family, the era of the Judges in which they appear.

The Tension – Food

Now it is very subtle when the author announces that there is famine. Since it is in the first sentence it almost appears incidental to the larger issue of the later story. Yet while it is quick, the astute student of Deuteronomy must ponder if this famine is reflected due to the curses of Deuteronomy 28 for disobedience. In Deuteronomy 28 there were only two choices, prosperity for obedience and ruin for disobedience. Leviticus 26 repeated over and over the persistence with which God would pursue Israel when they were disobedient.

Yet one wonders if it might be something else. Perhaps it is incidental. Yet it is only man that thinks things are incidental in Israel. God reveals several things that can bring famine, and none of them are sheer happenstance.¹¹ Deuteronomy 28, as already stated, poured dust on them

¹¹ Note that when an interpreter chooses to identify these as just random occurrences, he is not choosing a default, but is making an interpretive choice. This is a narrative and nothing occurs in a narrative without a purpose. Here the famine is the cause of the family leaving Israel, which is not a small thing. But happenstance is not one of the options found anywhere in the

instead of rain because of disobedience. Deuteronomy 8 stated that there were times when God let them go without food so that he could “test” them so He would know what was in their heart. And finally there was simply the unseen purpose of God where he would do things so that He could be glorified.

But the test for all of these was the word of God. If one were righteous according to the covenant, then they would know that it wasn’t for disobedience and was for testing. But regardless whether one was disobedient or not, the answer was always faith in YHWH to provide. If one were disobedient, they would repent. If they were righteous, then they would have faith in YHWH that He was simply delaying the fulfillment of what He had promised. If it was for the glory of God, and he was righteous, then he would still trust God for the ultimate realization of the promise.

So there is a famine. The Book of the Judges had just taken place and this story is somewhere in the midst of this era. So the reader suspects disobedience. In that case the answer is to “repent” according to Deuteronomy 4 and 30.

So the reader continues in vain to find repentance. What he does find confirms his thoughts that it might be disobedience as this Jewish family, whose heritage is Bethlehem and Israel, packs up and leaves to go to the land of another god, Chemosh. One was never to go the land of another god for provision. To do so would only come about when YHWH’s particularly instructed it, and thus it was His prerogative alone. YHWH’s blessing was always in the land, the Land of Canaan. To think that one could be blessed in another land, the land of the Gentiles, their women, their gods, was abominable. To leave this land was not only unthinkable, it was the very curse of God. Thus when one left the land he ignorantly self-incurred a curse of God.

narrative as a purpose of God (a seeming contradiction). Everything that happens to these people in Israel (and in the line of Messiah) happens for a large purpose and is controlled by God. To say that this is incidental and unrelated to the narrative is to make a choice that the narrative inserts something of insignificance, but larger than that, that God has allowed something that He cares nothing about. Of course, the next question must be, why would the author even include it. Why not just say they left Israel? When viewed in that perspective it is clear that there is a major difference in the covenant between the Land of Promise and everywhere else. Thus the Pentateuch lays out the cause for all these things happening to Israel.