

INTRODUCTION

SETTING

This short book falls within “the writings” *KETHUBIM* and internal evidence dates it to the period of the judges which ran from 1382 B.C. -the time of Othniel’s deliverance of the nation from Hittite oppression to the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines by Samson in 1065 B.C.-300 years in all according to J. B. Payne of Wheaton Illinois who wrote on the topic for the IVP New Bible Dictionary. Any calculation based on the internal evidence from the book of Judges gives the figure of 386 years of oppression and deliverance towards the end of which period a procession of 6 judges ruled during 73 years following Gideon’s time. The last 60 years when the judges judged feature Philistine over-lordship and Samson’s leadership. J.Rea of Moody reckoned Samson was Israel’s leader and judge between 1070-1050B.C. I would put the famine and emigration of Naomi in the period of the six minor judges and the development of the life of Obed and the early life of Jesse in the period of Samson.

RUTH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There are three references to Ruth in Matthew 1.3, 1.6, and 1.4-5 within the genealogy of the gospel writer and an allusion in the writing of Luke (Luke 3 31-33). Both references lean on the concluding short family tree of Ruth 4 18-22. The significance of the relationship between the kinsman - Goel of Ruth and the Messiah’s redemptive work is drawn out later in the introduction.

A FINE EXAMPLE OF REPORTED SPEECH

There are numerous conversations in this book. The very words *ipsissima verba* are recorded and the speakers identified in a manner which gives precise first hand information from those times stretching into the early-mid 11th century B.C. The conversations take us to the heart of a romance that is foundational to the establishment of the Davidic monarchy that is most precious to Israel and Christianity since from it Messiah arises. The number of conversations is 42 in total and they display intimacy and carry us back to the scene and situation in an absolutely authentic manner. This is history animated by the Spirit of God and behind the valiant widow Ruth we must be careful to mark the vital steps of the assured kinsman Boaz- the supreme illustration of our compassionate Messiah.

THE CONNECTION WITH KING DAVID AND CHRIST

Down some steps in that part of the Church of the Nativity administered by the Orthodox and Catholic Churches one enters a room with a star marking the very spot where it is thought our Saviour was born. The most ancient church in Christendom was once spared by the invaders because of the Persian figures etched on its walls. This lowly stable of earlier time is now a church. Before the days of the New Testament it was the inn of Chimham and originally the ancestral home of David according to long-standing tradition.

A ROMANCE

The closing paragraph of the Hebrew Romance under the title of Ruth records that Ruth’s son was the grandfather of King David. The material of the book must have originated with Boaz and Ruth. The narrative carries numerous details right out of the diaries of this couple. Derick Bingham, a fine preacher and excellent writer and

onetime fellow townsman of my own in Newcastle Co. Down, contrived the beautiful title “Amid alien corn” for this outstanding Romance.

You will find most felicitous detail in the translation and comments I make on the text which will lead you to see how simply and quickly Boaz and Ruth developed a deep affection for one another. In this matter Ruth can be seen as almost impatient as she awaits the next development of a whirlwind romance that can only be six weeks from start to finish. These two were made for one another just as you and I are made to trust in Christ and our hearts are restless till we find as Augustine said “our rest” in Him (Christ).

WHO WILL LEAVE THE WORLD’S SIDE

It is Ruth’s willingness to leave Moab-the territory from which God ultimately threw away a whole nation called in scripture “His wash-pot”. (*In Judges 3.30 Moab was subjugated by Israel under Othniel and 287 years later by the time of Jephthah the nation of Ammon had also overwhelmed the Moabites who still lived on as a subject people.*) Ruth’s willingness to put home and country behind her and follow the believing Naomi to Bethlehem defines the scope of her commitment of faith. It is Boaz who recognises her as a woman of prayer and valour. The women of Bethlehem in chorus tell out their conviction that with such a mother the future of Boaz’ family will reach the highest halls of fame.

BOAZ -TYPE OF CHRIST

Outside the immense character shown by Naomi and Ruth in face of brokenness and deep human loss there towers the kindness and unflinching purpose of Boaz-“in whom is strength”. Boaz is the perfect shadow of the Christ to come. His fan is in his hand. He sleeps and rises and becomes sovereign over the land Naomi (type of scattered Israel) forfeited and regained by his redemption. His grace brings Ruth to his feet. She may be understood as a foreign bride to be a picture of the church though she is generally taken as a sign of remnant Israel.

TURNING POINT

Try to immerse yourself in the narrative and pinpoint the moment when sweetness and hope returns to Naomi’s soul and enthusiasm and love begins to burn in the heart of Ruth like a fire and though it may be more diffuse trace the compassion of Boaz back till you find it is what really kindles the hope of Naomi and the love of Ruth. The Hero eclipses the tedious Goel who ran scared of what he would lose or what tradition he would breach. Boaz is not fazed by the pagan influence of Chemosh. He is not in the least concerned that his first infant might become a sacrifice to this pagan idol-but he could not possibly know that way down the line that great prince of the house of David-our Lord Jesus Christ-would be born in Bethlehem and die on a cross for the sin of the whole world.

CHRIST-THE LION OF THE COVENANT

This eighth book of the Bible with its covenant between two hearts and their God sets the style for the remaining 30 or so books that lead up to the coming of Christ. The promise of God to David institutes a search for Messiah which continues today in the form of the wait of Israel for the coming of her king and of the church for the coming of her LORD.

Bob Coffey

A Bible Companion