

Barnes Commentary on Ruth

THE BOOK OF RUTH NOTES ON THE OLD TESTAMENT Albert Barnes

Note from C H Spurgeon on Albert Barnes:

"Albert Barnes", say you, "what, do you think of Albert Barnes?" Albert Barnes is a learned and able divine, but his productions are unequal in value, the gospels are of comparatively little worth, but his other comments are extremely useful for Sunday School teachers and persons with a narrow range of reading, endowed with enough good sense to discriminate between good and evil. If a controversial eye had been turned upon Barnes's Notes years ago, and his inaccuracies shown up by some unsparing hand, he would never have had the popularity which at one time set rival publishers advertising him in every direction. His Old Testament volumes are to be greatly commended as learned and laborious, and the epistles are useful as a valuable collection of the various opinions of learned men. Placed by the side of the great masters, Barnes is a lesser light, but taking his work for what it is and professes to be, no minister can afford to be without it, and this is no small praise for works which were only intended for Sunday School teachers." (from Commenting and Commentaries) (Comment: Other sources classify Barnes as an Arminian. Still other sources note that Barnes does not believe in the doctrine of original sin. Keep these thoughts in mind as you review his comments. Remember that every commentary is a reflection of the writer's theological persuasion and like "leaven" this "persuasion" will tend to permeate all of their comments. It therefore behooves the discerning Bible student to determine as best one can what the author's beliefs are).

RUTH - INTRODUCTION

The Book of Ruth is historically important as giving the lineage of David through the whole period of the rule of the Judges (Ruth 1:1), i.e. from Salmon who fought under Joshua, to "Jesse the Bethlehemite" (1 Samuel 16:1); and as illustrating the ancestry of "Jesus Christ, the son of David," who "was born in Bethlehem of Judea" (Matthew 1:1; 2:1). The care with which this narrative was preserved through so many centuries before the birth of Christ is a striking evidence of the providence of God, that "known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." The genealogy with which the Book closes (Ruth 4:18), is also an important contribution to the chronology of Scripture history. We learn from it, with great distinctness, that Salmon, one of the conquering host of Joshua, was the grandfather of Obed, who was the grandfather of king David; in other words, that four generations, or about 200 years, span the "days when the Judges ruled."

But the Book of Ruth has another interest, from the charming view it gives us of the domestic life of pious Israelites even during the most troubled times. If we only had drawn our impressions from the records of violence and crime contained in the Book of Judges, we would have been ready to conclude that all the gentler virtues had fled from the land, while the children of Israel were alternately struggling for their lives and liberties with the tribes of Canaan, or yielding themselves to the seductions of Canaanite idolatry. But the Book of Ruth, lifting up the curtain which veiled the privacy of domestic life, discloses to us most beautiful views of piety, integrity, self-sacrificing affection, chastity, gentleness and charity, growing up amidst the rude scenes of war, discord, and strife.

Ruth, from its contents, as anciently by its place in the canon, belongs to the Book of Judges, and is a kind of appendix to it. In the present Hebrew Bible it is placed among the Kethubim (Hagiographa), in the group containing the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; but in the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate it occupies the same place as in our English Bibles, which was its ancient place in the Hebrew Bible.

The language of the Book of Ruth is generally pure Hebrew. But there are words of Aramaic form and origin.

(For example, the originals of the verbs "go," "abide fast" (Ruth 2:8), "lay thee down," "thou shalt do" (Ruth 3:4), "put," "get thee down" (Ruth 3:3), "confirm" (Ruth 4:7); the word translated twice "for them" but meaning "therefore" (Ruth 1:13), "Mara" (Ruth 1:20).)

EXPLANATORY NOTE - The references to Ruth are

active links which will take you to the specific commentary notes on that passage.

and other expressions unique to the later Hebrew. The inference would be that, the Book of Ruth was composed not before the later times of the Jewish monarchy; and this inference is somewhat strengthened by the way in which the writer speaks of the custom which prevailed in former times in Israel (Ruth 4:7). Other expressions, which the book has in common with the Books of Samuel and Kings, and a certain similarity of narrative, tend to place it upon about the same level of antiquity with those Books.

(For example, originals of "such a one" (Ruth 4:1); "the Lord do so to me, and more also" (Ruth 1:17); "the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22); "lifted up their voice and wept" (Ruth 1:9, Ruth 1:14); "blessed be he of the Lord" (Ruth 2:20)

The Books of the Old Testament, to the contents of which reference seems to be made in the Book of Ruth, are Judges, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, and perhaps Job. Ruth is not quoted or referred to in the New Testament, except that the generations from Hezron to David in our Lord's genealogy seem to be taken from it.

No mystical or allegorical sense can be assigned to the history; but Ruth, the Moabitess, was undoubtedly one of the first-fruits of the ingathering of Gentiles into the Church of Christ, and so an evidence of God's gracious purpose in Christ, "also to the Gentiles to grant repentance unto life;" and the important evangelical lesson is as plainly taught in her case, as in that of Cornelius, "that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him." The great doctrine of divine grace is also forcibly taught by the admission of Ruth, the Moabitess, among the ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES ON RUTH 1

Ruth 1:1. In the days when the Judges ruled "Judged." This note of time, like that in Ruth 4:7; Judges 18:1-note; Judges 17:6-note, indicates that this Book was written after the rule of the judges had ceased. The genealogy (Ruth 4:17-22) points to the time of David as the earliest when the Book of Ruth could have been written.

A famine Caused probably by one of the hostile invasions recorded in the Book of Judges. Most of the Jewish commentators, from the mention of Bethlehem, and the resemblance of the names Boaz and Ibzan, refer this history to the judge Ibzan (Judges 12:8-note), but without probability.

The country of Moab Here, and in Ruth 1:2, Ruth 1:22; Ruth 4:3, literally, "the field" or "fields." As the same word is elsewhere used of the territory of Moab, of the Amalekites, of Edom, and of the Philistines, it would seem to be a term pointedly used with reference to a foreign country, not the country of the speaker, or writer; and to have been specially applied to Moab.

Ruth 1:4. Marriages of Israelites with women of Ammon or Moab are nowhere in the Law expressly forbidden, as were marriages with the women of Canaan (Dt 7:1, 2, 3). In the days of Nehemiah the special law (Dt 23:3, 4, 5, 6) was interpreted as forbidding them, and as excluding the children of such marriages from the congregation of Israel (Neh 13:1, 2, 3). Probably the marriages of Mahlon and Chilion would be justified by necessity, living as they were in a foreign land. Ruth was the wife of the older brother, Mahlon (Ruth 4:10).

Ruth 1:8 Accompanying their mother-in-law to the borders of their own land would probably be an act of Oriental courtesy. Naomi with no less courtesy presses them to return. The mention of the mother's house, which the separation of the women's house or tent from that of the men facilitates, is natural in her mouth, and has more tenderness in it than father's house would have had; it does not imply the death of their fathers (Ruth 2:11).

Ruth 1:11-13. See marginal references and notes. The Levirate law probably existed among the Moabites, and in Israel extended beyond the brother in the strict sense, and applied to the nearest relations, since Boaz was only the kinsman of Elimelech (Ruth 3:12).

Ruth 1:14. The kiss at parting as well as at meeting is the customary friendly and respectful salutation in the East. The difference between mere kindness of manner and self-sacrificing love is most vividly depicted in the words and conduct of the two women. Ruth's determination is steadfast to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord (compare the marginal references and Matthew 15:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28).

Ruth 1:19. And they said i.e. the women of Bethlehem said. "They" in the Hebrew is feminine.

Ruth 1:20. See the margin. Similar allusions to the meaning of names are seen in Genesis 27:36; Jeremiah 20:3.

The Almighty Shaddai (see Genesis 17:1). The name “Almighty” is almost unique to the Pentateuch and to the Book of Job. It occurs twice in the Psalms, and four times in the Prophets.

Ruth 1:21. The LORD hath testified against me The phrase is very commonly applied to a man who gives witness concerning (usually against) another in a court of justice (Ex 20:16; 2Samuel 1:16; Isaiah 3:9). Naomi in the bitterness of her spirit complains that the Lord Himself turned against her, and was bringing her sins up for judgment.

NOTES ON RUTH 2

Ruth 2:1. A kinsman More literally “an acquaintance”; here (and in the feminine, Ruth 3:2) denoting the person with whom one is intimately acquainted, one’s near relation. The next kinsman of Ruth 2:20, etc. (goel)), is a wholly different word.

Boaz - Commonly taken to mean, “strength is in him” (compare 1Kings 7:21).

Ruth 2:7 The house The shed or booth where they took their meals, and were sheltered from the sun in the heat of the day (see Genesis 33:17).

Ruth 2:8 The grammatical forms of the verbs “go hence” and “abide,” are unique and Chaldaic. They are supposed to indicate the dialect used at Bethlehem in the time of Boaz.

Ruth 2:9. After them i.e. “after my maidens.” The fields not being divided by hedges, but only by unplowed ridges, it would be easy for her to pass off Boaz’s land without being aware of it, and so find herself among strangers where Boaz could not protect her.

Ruth 2:10. She fell on her face With Oriental reverence (compare Genesis 33:3, and the marginal reference).

Ruth 2:12. The similarity of expression here to Genesis 15:1, and in Ruth 2:11 to Genesis 12:1, makes it probable that Boaz had the case of Abraham in his mind.

The LORD God of Israel “Jehovah the God of Israel.” Compare Joshua 14:14, where, as here, the force of the addition, the God of Israel, lies in the person spoken of being a foreigner (see Judges 11:21).

Ruth 2:14. To dip the morsel, or sop, whether it were bread or meat, in the dish containing the vinegar (compare Matthew 26:23; Mark 14:20; Exodus 25:29; Numbers 7:13) was, and still is, the common custom in the East.

Parched or “roasted” corn Grain was the common food of the country then (compare 1Samuel 17:17, 25:18; 2Samuel 17:28) as it is now.

And left Or “reserved” (Ruth 2:18). Rather, “had some over” (compare Luke 15:17). Ruth 2:18 tells us that she took to her mother-in-law what she had left over.

Ruth 2:17. And beat out that she had gleaned Namely, with a stick, as the word implies (compare Deuteronomy 24:20; Isaiah 27:12). This method is still commonly practiced. Ruth gleaned enough to support herself and her mother-in-law for five days (Exodus 16:16).

Ruth 2:20. Blessed be he of the LORD... We may gather from Naomi’s allusion to the dead that both her husband and son had been faithful servants of Jehovah, the God of Israel. His kindness to the dead consisted in raising up (as Naomi hoped) an heir to perpetuate the name; and, in general, in His care for their widows.

One of our next kinsmen The word here is goel, the redeemer, who had the right:

(1) of redeeming the inheritance of the person;

(2) of marrying the widow;

(3) of avenging the death. (See Lev 25:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55; Dt 25:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 19:1-13.)

Since these rights belonged to the next of kin, goel came to mean the nearest kinsman.

NOTES ON RUTH 3

Ruth 3:2. Behold, he winnoweth barley ... The simple manners of Boaz and his times are here before us. This “mighty man of wealth” assists personally in the winnowing of his barley, which lies in a great heap on the floor (Ruth 3:15), and sleeps in the open threshing-floor to protect his grain from depredation.

Tonight For the sake of the breeze which springs up at sunset, and greatly facilitates the “cleansing” (separation) of the grain tossed up across the wind.

Ruth 3:4. Uncover his feet Rather, “the place of his feet;” the foot of his bed, as we should say. So also Ruth 3:7, 3:8.

Ruth 3:8. Turned himself Rather, “bent forward,” so as to feel what it was which was at his feet. The same word is translated “took hold of,” in Judges 16:29.

Ruth 3:9. Spread thy skirt ... The phrase indicates receiving and acknowledging her as a wife.

Ruth 3:10. Thou hast shewed more kindness ... Literally, “Thou hast made thy last kindness better than the first.” Her last kindness was her willingness to accept Boaz for her husband, advanced in years as he was.

Ruth 3:12 ; 3:13. By “kinsman,” understand the goel (see note above on Ruth 2:20).

Ruth 3:15. The vail Quite a different word from that rendered “vail,” in Genesis 38:14. It seems rather to mean a kind of loose cloak, worn over the ordinary dress (see the margin).

Six measures i.e. six seahs, in all two ephahs, twice as much as she gleaned (Ruth 3:17), and a heavy load to carry; for which reason he laid it on her, probably placed it on her head. It is well known that women can carry great weights when duly positioned on their heads.

And she went into the city The Hebrew has “he went,” namely, Boaz, where, accordingly, we find him (Ruth 4:1).

Ruth 3:16. Who art thou, my daughter? In the dim twilight (Ruth 3:14) her mother was not sure at first who the young woman was, who sought admittance into the house.

NOTES ON RUTH 4

Ruth 4:1. The gate is the place of concourse, of business, and of justice in Oriental cities (see Judges 19:15 note; Genesis 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:18). Ho, such a one! Indicating that the name of the kinsman was either unknown or purposely concealed (1 Samuel 21:2; 2 Kings 6:8).

Ruth 4:2. Every city was governed by elders (see Deuteronomy 19:12; Judges 8:14). For the number “ten,” compare Exodus 18:25. Probably the presence of, at least, ten elders was necessary to make a lawful public assembly, as among modern Jews ten (a minyon) are necessary to constitute a synagogue.

Ruth 4:3. According to the law (Leviticus 25:25, 26, 27, 28), if any Israelite, through poverty, would sell his possession, the next of kin (the goel had a right to redeem it by paying the value of the number of years remaining until the jubilee (see the marginal reference). This right Boaz advertises the goel of, so as to give him the option which the law secured to him of redeeming “our brother Elimelech’s” land, i.e. our kinsman’s, according to the common use of the term brother, for near relation (see Genesis 13:8; 24:27; Leviticus 25:25; Numbers 27:4; Judges 9:1).

Ruth 4:4. See the margin; a phrase explained by the act of removing the end of the turban, or the hair, in order to whisper in the ear (see 1 Samuel 9:15; 2 Samuel 7:27).

Ruth 4:5. Observe the action of the Levirate law. If there had been no one interested but Naomi, she would have sold the land unclogged by any condition, the law of Levirate having no existence in her case. But there was a young widow upon whom the possession of the land would devolve at Naomi’s death, and who already had a right of partnership in it, and the law of Levirate did apply in her case. It was, therefore, the duty of the goel to marry her and raise up seed to his brother, i.e. his kinsman. And he could not exercise his right of redeeming the land, unless he was willing at the same time to fulfill his obligations

Ruth 4:6. I mar mine own inheritance The meaning of these words is doubtful. Some explain them by saying that the goel had a wife and children already, and would not introduce strife into his family. Others think that there was a risk (which he would not incur) of the goel’s own name being blotted out from his inheritance (Ruth 4:10). Others take the word translated as “mar” in a sense of wasting or spending. If he had to find the purchase-money, and support Naomi and Ruth, his own fortune would be broken down, if,

as is likely, he was a man of slender means. Boaz, being “a mighty man of wealth,” could afford this.

Redeem thou my right ... Literally, redeem my redemption — perform that act of redemption which properly belongs to me, but which I cannot perform.

Ruth 4:7. In former time in Israel Showing that the custom was obsolete in the writer’s days. The letter of the law (see the marginal reference) was not strictly followed. It was thought sufficient for the man to pull off his own shoe and give it to the man to whom he ceded his right, in the presence of the elders of his city.

Ruth 4:11. See the margin. There is something of a poetical turn in this speech of the elders, and something prophetic in the blessing pronounced by them. It is unique and obscure. The Greek Version (LXX) is unintelligible. Jerome seems to have had a slightly different reading, since he applies both clauses to Ruth. “May she be a pattern of virtue in Ephratah, and have a name famous in Bethlehem.” The meaning of “be famous” seems to be, Get thyself a name which shall be celebrated in Bethlehem, as the head of a powerful and illustrious house: literally it is, “proclaim a name,” i.e. cause others to proclaim thy name, as in Ruth 4:14.

Ruth 4:14. Without a kinsman i.e. Boaz, not the infant Obed.

Ruth 4:17. Obed i.e. serving, with allusion to the service of love and duty which he would render to his grandmother Naomi.

Ruth 4:18. It is probable that there was a family book for the house of Pharez, in which their genealogies were preserved, and important bits of history were recorded; and that the Book of Ruth was compiled from it. (See the note at Genesis 2:4)

Ruth 4:21. Salmon begat Boaz Matthew has preserved the additional interesting information that the mother of Boaz was Rahab (Joshua 2; 6). It is possible that the circumstance that the mother of Boaz was a Canaanite may have made him less indisposed to marry Ruth the Moabitess. As regards the whole genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22, it should be remarked that it occurs four times in Scripture, namely, here, 1Chronicles 2:10, 11, 12; Matthew 1:3, 4, 5, 6; and Luke 3:32,33, and is of course of singular importance as being the genealogy of our Lord. One or two difficulties in it still remain unsolved.