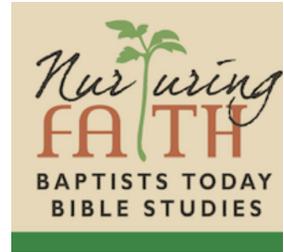


Adult Teaching Resources

November 8, 2015



A Time for Gratitude

You're All I Have — Ruth 1:1-2:23

An Odd Road to a Happy Ending — Ruth 3:1-4:21

Transformational Tears — 1 Samuel 1:1-28

Thanks for the Promises — 2 Samuel 23:1-7

Hope Waits

A Time for Anticipation — 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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An Odd Road to a Happy Ending

Ruth 3:1-4:21

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Cut 10 strips from the “Decisions, Decisions” handout to begin the Information session. Make lyric sheets and prepare an equipment to play the hymn, “God moves in a mysterious way,” for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

What is one traffic law you have broken recently – and what is your excuse?

If you’ve lived on a farm or planted a garden, what is your favorite thing to harvest and why?

Information

Black and white. If only life were so simple! If only rules were rules and laws had no loopholes. But for every law, we find we need to allow for exceptions. For example, you must come to a complete stop at a red traffic light and may not move until the light turns green. That is clear and understandable. Black and white (or in this case, red and green). Unless you live in a state that allows a turn on red if the traffic is clear.

Religious laws can be even more tricky. Terms must be defined, debated, and legislated. Do no work on a Sabbath. But when, exactly, is the Sabbath? And, what, exactly, is “work”?

In today’s lesson, we will see how Naomi and Ruth and Boaz bump into laws and mores and then ease themselves around them. It’s all part of doing God’s will — as uncomfortable as that may seem to us.

[Summarize last week’s text of Ruth 1 and 2 for those who did not attend last week’s lesson, including:

Naomi was a Jew from Bethlehem who moved with her husband to a pagan land because of a famine in Bethlehem. They had two sons who married women from the pagan land. Eventually, all three men died, leaving three widows. One remained in her homeland. Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem. Ruth insisted she would go with Naomi. In Bethlehem, Ruth gleaned the field of Boaz. Boaz was intrigued by Ruth’s fidelity to Naomi. He also had a growing affection for Ruth. The feeling was mutual.]

Information *continued*

We learned last week that the law provided for needy persons in the harvest fields. They were allowed to pick up what the first line of harvesters left behind or dropped. Not only were widows given some provision as gleaners, there were laws about how families were to provide for their widows.

[Have a class member read Deuteronomy 25:5-10.]

We can only imagine the trauma it was to become a widow in a society where women did not have the opportunity to provide for themselves. Naomi and Ruth were able to get some food as Ruth gleaned wheat fields, but a more permanent provision was on the way.

[Have a class member read Ruth 3:1-5.]

As THE BIBLE LESSON writer notes, “Naomi was not sending Ruth to a party but to the pallet where Boaz was sleeping in the field. Flirtation and sexual tension had begun to emerge in the previous chapter. Now it comes front and center.”

Ruth does not argue or protest. She is trusting Naomi’s instinct. Both have been married. Both know what bathing, perfuming, dressing nice and snuggling beside a sleeping man can lead to.

[Have class members read Ruth 3:6-13 and Ruth 3:14-18.]

Ruth does as Naomi instructs. Boaz is surprised. What seems to surprise him the most? (that she chose him) What would surprise you the most?

How do you feel about this situation? Ruth is using sex to gain security. Is that okay?

Frederick Buechner describes the situation this way:

Naomi was nobody’s fool and saw which way the wind was blowing long before Ruth did. She was dead set on Ruth’s making a good catch for herself, and since it was obvious she’d already hooked old Boaz whether she realized it or not, all she had to do was find the right way to reel him in. Naomi gave her instructions. As soon as Boaz had a good supper under his belt and had polished off a nightcap or two, he’d go to the barn and hit the sack. Around midnight, she said, Ruth should slip out to the barn and hit the sack too. If Boaz’s feet just happened to be uncovered somehow, and if she just happened to be close enough to keep them warm, that probably wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world either (Ruth 3:1-5). But she wasn’t to go too far. Back in Jericho, Boaz’s mother, Rahab, had had a rather seamy reputation for going too far professionally, and anything that reminded him of that might scare him off permanently.

Ruth followed her mother-in-law’s advice to the letter, and it worked like a charm. Boaz was so overwhelmed that she’d pay attention to an old crock like him when there were so many young bucks running around in tight-fitting jeans that he fell for her hook, line, and sinker and, after a few legal matters were taken care of, made her his lawful wedded wife. [Source: <http://frederickbuechner.com/content/ruth>]

Information *continued*

This is not the typical way we think of the Ruth story. We have beautiful classic paintings of Ruth as a gleaner, maybe even framed in our dining rooms. But portraits of Ruth as a schemer would not make it into any Bible's images or as a mural in the men's Sunday School class.

Why would we even have such a story told in the Bible? Why didn't it get "cleaned up" in some revision?

Jim Dant points out that in the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is not near the front of the Bible but in the last section. The first section deals with law, the black and white. Once that is mastered, a young person may move onto the next section, the prophets. The prophets often challenge and broaden the law. The last section in the faith developmental order of the Hebrew Bible is the Writings. Ruth is part of the Writings. Dant notes the faith formation progression as relates to Ruth.

"In Deuteronomy 23:1-5, the law makes it very clear that no eunuch or Moabite is allowed entrance into the faith community of Israel. This is the law — black and white, right and wrong. However, in Isaiah 56:3-7, the prophet argues that eunuchs and foreigners are welcomed into God's house — a house of prayer for all people — if they choose to keep Sabbath and hold fast to God's covenant... In Isaiah's mind and writings, the law simply can't be the last word. It is a part of faith development. It is the first step of faith development but not the last. And by the time we get to the Writings section of the Hebrew Scriptures, we read the story of Ruth. Ruth is a Moabite who marries an Israelite and becomes the great grandmother of King David!" (Jim Dant. *Finding Your Voice: How to Speak Your Heart's True Faith*. Faithlab. 2013. pp. 14-15.)

[Have a class member read Ruth 4:1-6 and Ruth 4:7-12.]

The law is fulfilled. It is not the letter of the law, from what we read in our prior passage, but the point was made — Boaz would redeem Naomi's property and take Ruth as his wife. It is interesting that there are differences in the actions between the legal reading in Deuteronomy and the narrative of this story. Over time, things changed.

Have you experienced this in your own spiritual pilgrimage? Was something "wrong" that now seems innocent? (For example, dancing, drinking wine, playing cards, etc.) Should there be times we "draw the line" with our culture and stick with our ethics? How is that determined?

[Have a class member read Ruth 4:13-22.]

[Here's a little joke, if you'd like to use it here: What was Boaz's life like before Naomi came back to town? (Ruth-less)]

So, everyone lives happily ever after. And, eventually, Boaz and Ruth become the ancestors of King David (and Jesus Christ).

Transformational Exercise

God can use anyone. Ruth was a Moabite — a non-Jew, a powerless woman, an immigrant. Consider how God could use you!

In his introduction to the book of Ruth, the translator of the Message Bible says this:

Introduction to Ruth By Eugene Peterson, *The Message*

As we read the broad, comprehensive biblical story of God at work in the world, most of us are entirely impressed: God speaking creation into being, God laying the foundations of the life of faith through great and definitive fathers and mothers, God saving a people out of a brutal slave existence and then forming them into lives of free and obedient love, God raising up leaders who direct and guide through the tangle of difficulties always involved in living joyfully and responsively before God.

Very impressive. So impressive, in fact, that many of us, while remaining impressed, feel left out. Our unimpressive, very ordinary lives make us feel like outsiders to such a star-studded cast. We disqualify ourselves. Guilt or willfulness or accident makes a loophole and we assume that what is true for everyone else is not true for us. We conclude that we are, somehow, “just not religious” and thus unfit to participate in the big story.

And then we turn a page and come on this small story of two widows and a farmer in their out-of-the-way village.

The outsider Ruth was not born into the faith and felt no natural part of it—like many of us. But she came to find herself gathered into the story and given a quiet and obscure part that proved critical to the way everything turned out.

Scripture is a vast tapestry of God’s creating, saving, and blessing ways in this world. The great names in the plot that climaxes at Sinai (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses) and the great names in the sequel (Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon) can be intimidating to ordinary, random individuals: “Surely there is no way that I can have any significant part on such a stage.” But the story of the widowed, impoverished, alien Ruth is proof to the contrary. She is the inconsequential outsider whose life turns out to be essential for telling the complete story of God’s ways among us. The unassuming ending carries the punch line: “Boaz married Ruth, she had a son Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.”

David! In its artful telling of this “outsider” widow, uprooted and obscure, who turns out to be the great-grandmother of David and the ancestor of Jesus, the Book of Ruth makes it possible for each of us to understand ourselves, however ordinary or “out of it,” as irreplaceable in the full telling of God’s story. We count—every last one of us—and what we do counts.

Transformational Exercise *continued*

[Distribute the bookmarks.]

Those last two sentences are found on this bookmark. Take this with you in this season of Thanksgiving. We can be thankful that God knows us and will use us in the big story of God's Kingdom.

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God, we thank you that you know us and love us. We are amazed that you could use Ruth and Naomi and Boaz. They were such nobodies. We offer ourselves to you — Use us as you will. Allow us to be a part of your story of love and redemption. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Which feet? — The text does not require us to read “feet” in 3:4 as a euphemism for genitals, but it allows it, and any Hebrew reader or listener would be aware of the optional meaning. The scene is highly charged: whether at his literal feet or a more intimate region, Ruth was to stealthily approach Boaz’s sleeping place, pull back his covers, and lie down beside him. One cannot escape the sexual tension in the scene.

Doing one’s duty — The custom described in Ruth 4 was called “Levirate Marriage.” If a man married but died before siring any sons, his nearest male relative (usually a brother) was supposed to marry his widow in hopes of conceiving together a son, who would have legal status as the son of his mother’s deceased husband, and who would inherit whatever portion of the family estate would have gone to his mother’s first husband. The overall intent was to perpetuate the name and heritage of the deceased while also providing for the widow and keeping her in the family (Deut. 25:5-10).

Since performing such duties could decrease one’s own inheritance, it was not uncommon for men to refuse to “do their duty.” For example, fulfilling the duties of a Levirate marriage — or not — also plays a key role in the story of Judah and Tamar that resulted in the birth of Perez (Genesis 38), who features prominently in Ruth 4 and is discussed further in “The Hardest Question.”

Whether Boaz was also widowed when he married Ruth is unstated. He could have been, though his elation seems to suggest he had been longing for company. When acting as a *go’el* for a young widow, a man was not only allowed to take her in addition to other wives, but compelled to do so as a means of perpetuating the dead husband’s line.

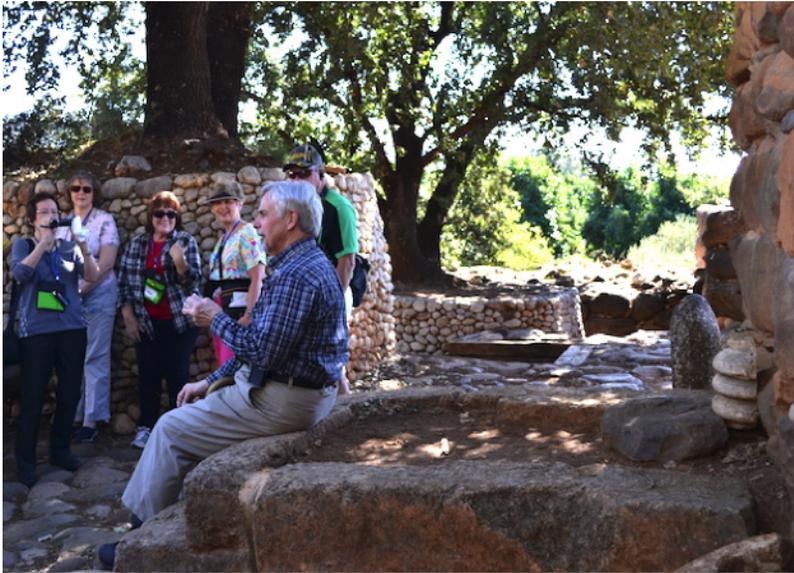
Six measures — How much grain did Boaz pour into Ruth’s shawl to carry home, instructing her to carry it on her back? The text says it was “six measures” — but which measure? An *ephah* of grain was probably about three-fifths of a bushel, and might have weighed 30-50 pounds. That’s how much Ruth collected on her first day of gleaning, but she could hardly have carried six *ephahs* (180-300 pounds) in any fashion. An *omer* was a tenth of an *ephah*, but six *omers* would be less than Ruth had gleaned on her first day, and seems too small. A *seah* was one-third of an *ephah*, which seems a more likely measure. Six *seahs* would have been about 60 pounds or more, a significant amount, but one she could carry on her back.

Bethlehem’s gate — Today Bethlehem is surrounded by a thick security wall and high fences constructed by the Israeli government, restricting most residents to remain in their city, which today has expanded to encompass the towns of Bayt Jala and Bayt Sahour, along with refugee camps containing many thousands of people.

Digging Deeper *continued*

During the Old Testament period, Bethlehem was a small village, not a walled city with a typical gate. Even so, there would have been a main road leading into the village, and a small plaza or gathering place at the edge of town would have been customary.

Elders of the city typically gathered at the city gate, where they or government officials decided legal cases, pronounced judgments, and witnessed business transactions.



The judge's seat inside the Israelite gate at Dan, where there were also stone benches for the elders. Judge Bill Self of Macon "held court" during a Nurturing Faith Experience trip to Israel and the West Bank in November 2014.

Mr. So and So — Since the nearest of kin decided not to redeem the land, marry Ruth, and carry on Elimelech's inheritance, the narrator chose not to honor (or embarrass?) him by calling his name. To preserve his anonymity, he had Boaz call him *peloni almoni*, a playful Hebrew way of saying "Mr. So and So." NRSV and NIV11 use the unhelpful translation "friend," while NET has Boaz call him "John Doe."

You, or I? — The *kethib* (written in the text) reading of 4:5 says "The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, I will acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance."

The *qere* reading (a marginal note suggesting a better reading) says "... you will also acquire Ruth ..."

In either case, the presence of Ruth complicates the matter. If the closer kinsman purchased the land, he would have use of it only until a male heir was born, who would inherit the land. This would be financially disadvantageous — especially if the son was born to Boaz and Ruth — and possibly disruptive to his family life. Boaz appears to have been rather wealthy to begin with. Since he wanted Ruth as part of his family, deeding over the field to the first son he had by Ruth would not have been a problem for him.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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What's the deal with Perez?

Perez is not a particularly familiar name, so why does he figure so prominently into the story of Ruth? Perez is first mentioned when the people at the gate celebrate the upcoming marriage of Ruth and Boaz, saying "...through the children that the LORD will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah" (4:12). After the birth of Obed and the resolution of Naomi's need, the book closes with a genealogy of Perez's family, from Perez to David (4:18-22).

On the one hand, then, Perez is mentioned because he is an ancestor of Boaz and thus of David. Of more interest, however, is that the births of Perez and Obed both occurred under unusual circumstances, and to a non-Hebrew mother.

The story of Perez's birth is found in Genesis 38, which appears to have been inserted into the longer Joseph narrative (Genesis 37-50) as a reminder that life continued in Canaan while Joseph was in Egypt.

According to Genesis 38, Judah, the oldest of Jacob's 12 sons, moved away from his father's compound to establish his own household near Adullam, about 10 miles northwest of the family camp in Hebron. There he married the daughter of a Canaanite named Shua (v. 2). His wife is not named, perhaps because her role, as far as the story is concerned, is limited to bearing three sons and later dying at a propitious time.

Judah is not criticized for marrying a Canaanite woman, even as there will be no criticism for Joseph when he marries the Egyptian woman Asenath (Gen. 41:45). A later ban on Hebrews marrying outside the clan (see Josh. 23:12-13, Ezra 9-10, Neh. 13:23-29) had not yet developed.

Judah's wife bore three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. When the sons reached marriageable age, Judah followed custom and arranged for his oldest to marry a local woman, whose name was Tamar. At some point afterward, Er died, the text says, because he "was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, who "caused him to die" (v. 7).

Since Er had no children, Judah instructed Onan to "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother" (v. 8). Onan, however, knowing that any son born to Tamar would get Er's share of the inheritance (and thereby reduce his own share), did not wish to impregnate Tamar. So, when engaged in intercourse, he practiced birth control by *coitus interruptus*, withdrawing before ejaculating (literally, "he wasted earthward"), so Tamar would not become pregnant (v. 9).

During this period, women were thought to be living seedbeds into which men planted

The Hardest Question *continued*

their “seed,” from which life grew. Onan’s practice of spilling his seed on the ground rather than planting it in Tamar was considered to be an intentional and rebellious act of failing to do his duty toward his dead brother. Yahweh regarded Onan’s behavior as evil, the text says, and caused him to die (v. 10).

Judah did not recognize the deaths of his sons as a divine punishment, but concluded that Tamar was poison. He did not want to take a chance on losing Shelah, only remaining son, so he told Tamar to go and live as a widow with her father’s family until Shelah was old enough to marry (v. 11). Judah’s deceit became obvious as Shelah grew older, but Judah kept him away from Tamar.

Now the plot thickens: what is a desperate woman to do? In her culture, Tamar’s future would be determined by whether she gave birth to sons. As a widow, with no children (like Naomi, several generations later), she would be doomed to a life of poverty, with limited rights. But Tamar was still bound to Judah’s house and could not marry another. How could she have a son?

The death of Judah’s wife (v. 13) gave Tamar an opportunity for a deceit of her own. Unwilling to accept a desolate future, Tamar disguised herself as a veiled harlot and set up a tent at a crossroads she knew Judah would pass on his way to oversee the shearing of his sheep, assuming that he would be anxious for a sexual diversion (vv. 13-14).

Judah did not recognize Tamar behind her veil (v. 15) and sought to obtain her services, as the text boldly portrays with the explicit phrase “let me come in to you” (v. 16a). Playing the part of the harlot, Tamar negotiated a price of one young goat for the trick (v. 16b-17). Judah did not have a goat in his pocket, but agreed to leave with her his personal seal with its neck cord and his recognizable walking stick as a guarantee that he would send payment later (v. 18a).

The deed is described matter-of-factly: “he went in to her, and she conceived by him” (v. 18b). Since she was no harlot, but only a woman seeking what was rightfully hers, Tamar changed back into her widow’s clothes and packed up her tent as soon as Judah was out of sight (v. 19).

Three months later, as Tamar’s pregnancy became obvious, it was reported to Judah that his daughter-in-law had “played the whore” and gotten pregnant (v. 24a). Judah, who remained in a position of authority over Tamar and apparently subscribed to a double standard that made extramarital sex permissible for a widower but not a widow — declared that she should be burned (v. 24b), a penalty not called for in the Bible.

When someone was sent to bring her out for execution, however, Tamar had someone carry Judah’s personal seal and walking stick to him with the message “It was the owner of these that made me pregnant ... take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff” (v. 25).

Judah responded with appropriate chagrin, announcing “She is more in the right than I,

The Hardest Question *continued*

since I did not give her to my son Shelah” (v. 26). The implication of the text is that Judah took responsibility for Tamar and accepted her back into the family, though the text is careful to point out that he did not have sex with her again (literally, he “did not know her again”).

The real significance of Judah’s soap opera story surfaces when the time comes for Tamar to give birth. Like Rebekah before her, she gives birth to twins, and the one officially born second becomes the most prominent. His name was Perez, and he became the ancestor of Boaz, as well as of David (Ruth 4:18) — and Jesus (Mat. 1:3).

The narrator reminds us that God works in mysterious ways. The story relies on legalistic elements (the requirement of levirate marriage, the penalty of death for harlotry) in some ways, but is surprisingly forgiving in others. Tamar is not criticized for her desperate act of pretending to be a harlot: indeed, Judah confesses his belief that “she is more in the right than I.”

As with Tamar, Naomi’s desperation led to a daring plan to have Ruth crawl into bed with Boaz in order to jumpstart a marriage so she could have sons.

The actions of both Tamar and Ruth suggest that sometimes one has to go beyond the law in order to fulfill the law, even as Lot’s daughters had done (Gen. 19:30-38).

By going beyond the expected and acting outside the norms, Tamar the Canaanite widow who was done wrong, Ruth the Moabite widow who played the seductress, and later Rahab the Canaanite harlot of Jericho all became ancestors of David — and in that sense, of Jesus.

Their actions are named and noted as unusual, but not condemned. Sometimes, the story implies, being true to one’s calling doesn’t fit in the box of accepted behavior ... and God has a way of bringing good even from the most messed up of circumstances. The connection between Boaz and Perez, then, is not just genealogical, but about the connection between Naomi/Ruth and Tamar: women who dared to do what needed to be done.

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