

Lesson 20 (Study Notes): “All the City ... Doth Know That Thou Art a Virtuous Woman”

Class Member Reading: Ruth 1, 2, 3, 4; 1 Samuel 1; 2:1-2, 20-21

Elimelech’s Family Goes to Moab

1In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband. This story is well-crafted to emphasize its theme of restoration—the book begins with Naomi losing all status and family connections, and ends with her restoration. There are other literary touches such as the irony of a famine taking place in the “house of bread” (the meaning of “Bethlehem”). This introduction marks the story as folklore, with characters dying as soon as they are introduced. Even their names point to their roles—Mahlon means “sickness”, Chilion may mean “consumptive” or “about to die”, Orpah is interpreted as “back of the neck” (I have also heard Oprah’s name is a mistaken version of this character’s), Ruth means “friend” or “companion”, Naomi is “pleasant”, and Boaz means “in him is strength”.

Naomi and Her Moabite Daughters-in-Law

6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that **the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food.** ⁷ So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you **to your mother's house.** (Unusual that Naomi refers to the *mother's* house rather than father's, but this is one more way the story is strongly female-centered) **May the LORD deal kindly with you,** as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰ They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' ¹¹ But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³ would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.' ¹⁴ Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth **clung** to her. (Same word as in Genesis 2:24 "a man should cling to his wife", emphasizing the close relationship between the women)

15 So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people **and to her gods;** return after your sister-in-law.' ¹⁶ But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die—

there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!

¹⁸When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. Beautiful, poetic demonstration of Ruth's loyalty. This is a theme of entering relationships of choice and covenant even when freed of legal obligation, a powerful theme. It also seems that John 20 parallels this wording as we will discuss.

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' ²⁰She said to them, 'Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?'

22 So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Ruth Meets Boaz

2 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.' She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. **As it happened,** (Theme of Divine providence) she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The LORD be

with you.' They answered, 'The LORD bless you.'⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?'⁶ The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.'⁷ She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.' (Ruth's diligence and hard work)

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.'⁹ Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.'¹⁰ Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?'¹¹ But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.'¹² May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, **under whose wings you have come for refuge!**¹³ Then she said, 'May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.' (Boaz goes beyond the legal requirements to care for Ruth)

14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.'¹⁵ When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, 'Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her.'¹⁶ You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.' (Now Boaz's actions prove even more generous)

17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley (2/3 of a bushel, about 21 quarts or 23 litres, a great deal for a day's work).¹⁸ She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied.¹⁹ Her mother-in-law said to her, 'Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, 'The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.'²⁰ Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!' Naomi also said to her, 'The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.' (Again, the theme of Providence)²¹ Then Ruth the Moabite said, 'He even said to me, "Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest."'²² Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, 'It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.'²³ So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing-Floor

3 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you.'² Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor.³ Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.⁴ When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.'⁵ She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.' This story is filled with sexual ambiguity and innuendo (see notes in Jewish Study Bible)

6 So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. ⁷When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. ⁸At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! ⁹He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; **spread your cloak over your servant**, for you are next-of-kin.' (This is a way of requesting that Boaz marry her, and it also parallels his earlier statement that God will give refuge under his wings [2:12]) ¹⁰He said, 'May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; this last instance of your **loyalty** is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. (This is the verse where Ruth is said to be "virtuous". The Hebrew word "cha'il" means "strength, power, ability, status" and in modern Hebrew means soldier among other things. Very different connotation than the KJV English! In Year of Biblical Womanhood Rachel Evans shares the translation "woman of valor") ¹²But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. ¹³Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the LORD lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.'

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' ¹⁵Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. ¹⁶She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, ¹⁷saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." ' ¹⁸She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will

settle the matter today.’ This portion of the story demonstrates Naomi’s foresight and Ruth’s initiative, to put it mildly. For his part Boaz responds graciously and generously.

The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth

4 No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, ‘Come over, friend; sit down here.’ And he went over and sat down. ²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here’; so they sat down. ³He then said to the next-of-kin, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.’ So he said, ‘I will redeem it.’ ⁵Then Boaz said, ‘The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance.’ ⁶At this, the next-of-kin said, ‘I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.’ **Some strange details here not mentioned earlier in the story. The “Redeemer” (Hebrew go’el) refers to a close male relative who bears responsibility to care for family members in need and even avenge. In short, the redeemer fulfils the duties of the head of the household when that man is unable to do so.**

7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, one party took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, ‘Acquire it for yourself’, he took off his sandal. ⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that

belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.' ¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹²and, 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.'

The Genealogy of David

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.' ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18 Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David. One of the main purposes of this story is to link Ruth to David, either to vindicate David's mixed ancestry (by showing how faithful his foreign grandmother was), or to vindicate marrying outside Jewish culture (by showing that the hero of Judaism resulted from such a mixed union).

Samuel's Birth and Dedication

1 There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ²He had two wives; the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3 Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. ⁴On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶Her rival (meaning her sisterwife!) used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb (I think it is important to push back against this idea, which is grounded in an ancient worldview, given how sensitive an issue infertility is). ⁷So it went on year after year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?' (Touching depiction of romantic love and loyalty)

9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ¹⁰She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. ¹¹She made this vow: 'O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a **nazirite** until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.' (A Nazirite was an individual who was dedicated (Heb: Nazir) to special sacred service to the Lord. Rules governing this vow are found in Numbers

6 and include avoiding intoxicants, never touching a dead body, and the most memorable, avoiding cutting one's hair. The most famous Nazirite, Samson, was a very poor example. Dedicating a child to God has a dark background of human sacrifice, as hinted at in Ex. 34:19 and elsewhere.

12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth.¹³ Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk.¹⁴ So Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.'¹⁵ But Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.'¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.'¹⁷ Then Eli answered, 'Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.'¹⁸ And she said, 'Let your servant find favour in your sight.' Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

19 They rose early in the morning and worshipped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.²⁰ In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the LORD.'

21 The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow.²² But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time.'²³ Her husband Elkanah said to her, 'Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the LORD establish his word.' So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him.²⁴ When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the

child was young. ²⁵Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. ²⁷For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. ²⁸Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD.'

She left him there for the LORD. This level of sacrifice is difficult to imagine. Of course, Samuel proves a deeply important figure in the Biblical narrative.

2 Hannah prayed and said,
'My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.'

² 'There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God. ²⁰Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, 'May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the gift that she made to the LORD'; and then they would return to their home.

21 And the LORD took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD. Hannah is a powerful example of faith. Luke seems to have been inspired by this story as he wrote his account of Jesus' birth.

Additional Reading: