The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

Ruth

2026 Week 14

The History Books ~ *Eugene Peterson*

...twelve biblical books stretching from Joshua to Esther are conventionally designated "the history books." But the word "history" doesn't tell the whole story, for this is history attentive to the conditions in which people have encountered and experienced God. The Hebrew people were intent on observing and participating in what happened in and around them because they believed that God was personally alive and active in the world, in their community, and in them. Life could not be accounted for by something less than the life of God, no matter how impressive and mysterious an experience was—whether an eclipse of the sun, spots on the liver of a goat, or the hiss of steam from a fissure in the earth. God could not be reduced to astronomical, physiological, geological, or psychological phenomena; God was alive, always and everywhere working his will, challenging people with his call, evoking faith and obedience, shaping a worshiping community, showing his love and compassion, and working out judgments on sin. And none of this was "in general" or "at large," but at particular times, in specific places, with named persons: history.

For biblical people, God is not an idea for philosophers to discuss or a force for priests to manipulate. God is not a part of creation that can be studied and observed and managed. God is a person—a person to be worshiped or defied, believed or rejected, loved or hated, in time and place. That is why these books immerse us in dates and events, in persons and circumstances—in history. God meets us in the ordinary and extraordinary occurrences that make up the stuff of our daily lives. It never seemed to have occurred to our biblical ancestors that they could deal better with God by escaping from history, "getting away
from it all," as we say. History is the medium in which God works salvation, just as paint and canvas is the medium in which Rembrandt made works of art. We cannot get closer to God by distancing ourselves
from the mess of history.

~ *Peterson*

But for the Hebrews there simply was no secular history. None. Everything that happened was happening in a world penetrated by God. Since [the Hebrew people] do not talk a lot about God in their storytelling, it is easy to forget that God is always the invisible and mostly silent presence in everything that is taking place. But if we forget for very long, we will understand neither what is written nor the way it is written. God is never absent from these narratives and never peripheral to them. As far as these writers were concerned, the only reason for paying attention to people and events was to stay alert to God.

~ *Peterson*

This is a difficult mind-set for us to acquire, for we are used to getting our history from so-called historians, scholars, and journalists for whom God is not seen as involved or present in what they study and write. We are thoroughly trained to read history solely in terms of politics and economics, human interest and environmental conditions. If we have a mind for it, we can go ahead and fit God in somewhere or other. The historical books—Joshua through Esther—are radically and refreshingly different. They pull us into a way of reading history that involves us and everyone around us in all the operations of God.

~ *Peterson*

The Wesley Study Bible ~ Ruth Introduction

The Book of Ruth exhibits a vision of an ideal society. This beautifully crafted little story concentrates on the fortunes of a family within a small, agrarian community. The dialog is concise and dramatic, key terms are repeated throughout, and there are numerous word plays. Yet its concern is radical, for at its center are two women making deep commitments to each other. As childless widows in foreign lands, they represent the poorest of the poor. A primary theme is faithful living with one another, showing the same loyal compassion that God has for humankind. In this type of community, the marginalized are included, the elderly are cared for, and the children are valued. The story ultimately provides a vision of redemption. All of the characters are redeemed in one way or another, from emptiness to fullness, from death to life. Naomi's situation especially follows the typical trajectory of Old Testament lamentation: feelings of abandonment and anger shift to hope and joy.

The book provides an exquisite example of the Wesleyan concept of practical divinity, that is, practical theology. This theology is practical and pragmatic, not academic, and is necessarily interwoven with human experience and demonstrated through daily life. John Wesley exhibits such a perspective when he advises, "It is a good question to ask ourselves in the evening, 'Where have I gleaned today? What improvements have I made in grace or knowledge? What have I learned or done?' " (*Notes*, Ruth 2:19).Reading the book of Ruth challenges us to consider how we might replicate its examples of faithful living, To indeed ask ourselves how well our daily laborers have contributed to creating an ideal society.

The Wesley Study Bible ~ *Wesley Core Term: Poverty*

Understanding poverty in all its dimensions (economic, political, cultural, physical, and spiritual), Wesley took the command of Jesus, to minister to and live with the poor, with utter seriousness. For Wesleyans, aiding the poor means making them more capable to fulfill their God given-gifts; it does not mean making them dependent. Simply giving money, however important, will not release people from poverty unless the other dimensions of poverty are addressed. This means, of course, that the systems causing impoverished conditions must be changed. But it also means that disciples of Christ must be intimately related to the poor so that the poor can be fully brought into life-giving community. One of the most distinctive aspects of Wesley's teaching was that, while one cannot earn one's salvation, one's experience of the joy of salvation is to be found in the midst of what God is doing in and with the poor.

Ruth 1:1-5 ~ *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

1 In 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. 2 The 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. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and
she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the
one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there
about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was
left without her two sons and her husband.

Ruth 1:1-5 ~ a series of ironies as seen in the names

Elimelech & Naomi ~ natives of Ephraim, Bethlehem, Judah

- Ephrathites ~ from Ephraim which comes from the root meaning "fertile"
  ~ leave their land because of famine
- Elimelech ~ "my God is king"
- Naomi ~ "sweetness" ~ later laments for a name change to Mara "bitterness"
  ~ is an alien/immigrant who returns to native land

Orpah ~ root verb "to drip or drop", noun "neck" ~ combined meaning
"to droop or hang the head

Ruth ~ "friendship/neighbor" ~ is a native who becomes an alien/immigrant

- Moabite: negative connotation ~ see Genesis 19 ~ Moab's incestuous beginnings ~ negative moral and emotional connotations

Naomie's sons:

- Mahlon ~ sounds like the disease that hit the Egyptians before the exodus
  see Exodus 15:26
- Kilion ~ comes from the root, *kala*, meaning "to perish"

~ **NIB Vol. II, pp. 900-901**

Ruth 1:15-22 ~ *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

15 So she said, “Look, 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,
    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,
    and there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus to me,
    and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”

18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

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?” 20 She 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.

Deuteronomy 24:19-20 ~ *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

19 “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you
shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the
widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your
undertakings. 20 When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall
be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

John 5:17

"*But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working*."

~ consider N.T verses that show that God is always at work redeeming human suffering

RUTH

"IN THE DAY THE JUDGES RULED"

CURIOUS FACT: GOD IS HARDLY MENTIONED

NAOMI THE WIDOW | RUTH THE MOABITE | BOAZ THE FARMER

INTERPLAY OF GOD'S PURPOSE AND HUMAN DECISIONS

TRAGEDY | BOLDNESS LOYALTY | GENEROSITY LOYALTY

1 2 3 4