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## THE BOOK OF RUTH

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Greetings! The conference call hook up is not working today, so we will have the computer live streaming and the audio tape backups. Pentecost occurs in the month of Sivan which was a little over two weeks ago, but we are still in the Pentecost season, so today will be a special study of the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth has so much to teach us, yet it is a very small book in the Bible (KJV) consisting of four chapters in length. Ruth is located just after the book of **Judges** and right before the book of **1 Samuel**. In the Hebrew Bible it is located after the book of Job in the section of the *Writings* which comes after the five books of the **Law (Torah)**, and the **Prophets**—then you come to the **Writings**.

Some may wonder why is this little book in the Bible. Why did God put it there, and what does it have to teach us? The book of Ruth emphasizes two things: *Torah knowledge* and *deeds* – “acts of kindness”. God put it in the Bible so that we will learn his ways more perfectly. The book of Ruth emphasizes two things: Torah knowledge and deeds (acts of kindness). This is where we often fall down in understanding that God’s word is written to us in a way that it combines instruction and laws, statutes, commandments and judgments; but it is also written to us in short profiles and biographies of the actual lives of people and what they have been through as examples for the rest of us. **1 Corinthians 10:1-11**—Paul says, “I do not want you to be ignorant of these facts: Now all these things happened unto them for examples and they are written for our admonition (counsel against error), upon whom the end of the world (fulfillment of the ages) has come.”

In the book *Celebrate!* Author Lesli Koppelman Ross does not have much to say about the book of Ruth, but he does connect it with the festival of Weeks (Shavuot/Pentecost), page 123. “Of the five scrolls in the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible, the one assigned to Shavuot is Ruth. It tells the story of a Moabite princess who, after the death of her Jewish husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law, pledges her allegiance to her Jewish mother-in-law, adopts Judaism, and because of her virtue, merits becoming the matriarch of the Davidic-messianic line. In its few short verses of scripture: ‘For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people and your God my God’.” The Sages explain that Ruth was written to teach us that those who act kindly to others will be rewarded. The main figures in the story—*Ruth*, who did not want her widowed, childless, mother-in-law to have to return to Bethlehem stripped of all honor with which she had left. *Naomi*, the loving mother-in-law who embraced her Moabite daughter-in-law and guided her into a suitable redeeming marriage, and *Boaz*, the judge and kinsman who provided the poor stranger Ruth with all the sustenance she and Naomi needed, and accepted his responsibility to marry her—are exemplars (model) of *gemillutp khasadim (acts of loving kindness)*, one of the pillars of the world. Learning from Torah so we can act in similarly righteous ways is one of the messages of Shavuot.”

We are to learn to live and act with kindness toward others. That is the fundamental message of the Torah. The laws of God are to incline us to be merciful, generous, and kind-spirited toward other people. –“love one another as you love yourself”. Ross says that it is generally believed that the book of *Ruth* was chosen to be read at Shavuot, because her story takes place against the backdrop of the barley and wheat harvests (Ruth 2:23—*Hebrew Bible*), tying in with the agricultural nature of the festival. Especially significant is its illustration of the laws of *pe’ah* (leaving the corners of a field unharvested and *leket* (leaving behind individual stalks that fall from the bundles that have been reaped), which allow the needy

to also reap and which are commanded immediately following the instructions to observe the festival of Shavuot (**Leviticus 23:23**).”

This is a lesson for farmers today who have no inkling of understanding and observing this instruction of God. Today’s farms are giant, mega agricultural corporations with few personal farms left in America. The corner edges of the fields are not left un-harvested for the sake of the poor and crops are money driven, mechanized profit machines. There is no concern for the poor in modern agriculture which has become a perversion of the food crops themselves. Genetic engineering also called genetic modification is the direct manipulation of an organism’s genome using biotechnology to cross genetic species which God created to be separate, not cross-bred. These GMO’s (genetically modified organisms such as a plant, animal or human) are damaging to the body and human health. Maimonides pointed out that prior to the giving of the Torah, all human beings on Earth were bound to the **seven Laws of Noah** called the *Noahide Laws* (dating from the righteous Gentile Noah whose family was the only one of his generation to survive the great flood [**Genesis 6:13;—8:14**], and delineated in Talmud).”

After the flood, God gave Noah the Laws for mankind. “Adherence to them constitutes morality in non-Jewish society (do not deny God, do not blaspheme God, do not murder, do not engage in adultery and other sexual abominations, do not steal, do not eat the limb torn from a living animal, and establish courts to enforce the other laws).” From Mount Sinai, God revealed the rest of his Law, the Torah, to Moses and the children of Israel. From the time of Moses Israel committed to accept of the remaining Laws which add up to 606 regulations plus the seven which add up to 613 laws which is the numerical number of the fringes worn our garment (prayer shawl).

*Reference: The Essence of the Holy Days by Avraham Yaakov Finkel, the *Book of Ruth*, page 209. In this book Finkel says that “various reasons are offered for this reading of Ruth. One reason the Book of Ruth is in the Bible is because it shows that Ruth is an ancestress of King David, who was born and died on Shavuot (Pentecost--a springtime harvest festival). Another reason is mentioned in *Sefer Matamim*. The numeric value of the name Ruth equals 606 (*resh + vav + tav* (*Hebrew alphabet*; 200 + 6 + 400 = 606. Adding the 606 *mitzvot* (good deeds) in addition to the seven Noahide *mitzvot* yields 613, the total number of *mitzvot* that were given at Sinai. The most touching passage in the Book of Ruth contains Ruth’s **declaration of kindness toward Naomi and loyalty toward God and the people of Israel** found in **Ruth 1:16, 17**. Ruth said, “*Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge I will lodge; your people are my people, and your God is my God, where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus may God do to me—and more—if anything but death separates me from you.*”*

Brethren, this is something that I think is worth knowing and thinking about. It occurs to me that we often allow things to slip through the cracks, so to speak. We can get so involved in the big cares of daily living that we fail to notice the “little things”. It is the little things that make the difference and it’s the little things that tell one’s real character. Christ said to his disciples in **Luke 16:10** (NKJV)—“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much: and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” So it is important *to be faithful in little things*. **Matthew 23:23**--Christ said to the Pharisees, “Woe to you teachers of the Law and Pharisees—you hypocrites! You are careful to tithe (giving a tenth of your income) spices--mint, anise and cumin (even the tiniest part of your income). But you have omitted the more important matters of the Law—judgment, mercy and faith!” However, Christ did credit them for paying attention to the *little* things.

The book, The Three Festivals, page 211, also discusses the Book of Ruth and its meanings at greater length. “The custom of reading the Book of Ruth—the moving story of a Moabite woman’s odyssey to Judaism—on Shavuot (Pentecost) is first mentioned in *Mesechtas Sofrim*, a source dating back to the era

of the *Gaonim*. Numerous reasons have been offered for this practice. *Ruth* reminds the would-be Torah scholar that achieving greatness in Torah that learning is not a simple matter. Torah can be acquired only through constant struggle to overcome challenges. *Yalkut Shimoni* says that in order, to reach the pinnacle of spiritual elevation, one must be prepared to face the obstacles of poverty, deprivation and humiliation, as Ruth herself did.” How many of us are willing to go through poverty, deprivation and humiliation for the kingdom of heaven’s sake, and take what God gives us and be thankful for what we have been given? **Philippians 4:11**—Paul says, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry whether living in plenty or living in want. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Are we willing to serve despite a bad economy, or when we are stricken down jobless, homeless or persecuted? Regardless of circumstances, cry out to God. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ and remain faithful to him.

The book of Ruth teaches faithfulness and fidelity. *Ruth* dramatizes the theme, “Not study but practice is the main thing. In particular, we must learn from the deeds of *tzaddikim* (righteous individuals), often preformed of their own initiative without precedent (*having teachings of rabbis and others to spell it out for them*), as well as their reactions to situations not explicitly mentioned in the Torah. The true role models of Torah do not just practice Judaism or righteous living, they personify God’s commandments. Their every action is guided by Torah principles, and is worthy of study as much as actual Torah commandments. In fact, the practices of *tzaddikim* (the righteous) are deemed to be a living supplement to the Torah.”

Study the lives of the mighty (righteous) men of God in the scriptures —Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, and David—who are examples. Their biographies are written in the scriptures to show us the practical application of God’s Law (Torah) in our own lives—examples for us to follow. Every action of these righteous men and women is guided by Torah principles and worthy to reflect upon. As a child, I read a lot of biographies about mighty men of ancient America and the world—Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, inventors/scientists—Eli Whitney, George Washington Carver, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers. These were men who had accomplished new ways to think and made a real contribution in life. One way to learn how to be successful in life is to study the lives of successful people who have made a true success in life.

**Psalm 97:11**—“Torah is compared to an inner light; the light is sown for the righteous. The light of Torah is sown in the soul of the *tzaddik* (righteous individual).” **Psalm 119:105**—“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path.” **Proverbs 4:22**—“the teachings of the Torah are life to those who find them.” “For those who harness their soul to the study of Torah will merit that all of their actions be in accord with Torah.” This will be a blessing to themselves and the world. “The conduct of Boaz, as depicted in the book of *Ruth*, is a classic example of the personification of Torah through the actions of *tzaddikim*. The very name Boaz can be seen as an amalgam of the Hebrew words meaning *strength is within him*. He was a man of innate strength and courage, someone well equipped to focus the searchlight of Torah on situations not previously clarified.” The lives of Ruth and Boaz became living Torah (Torah personified) through the actions of love shown in their lives to others. Boaz treated Ruth and Naomi with kindness and decency.

“Boaz agreed to marry Ruth despite his relative’s unfounded contention that marriage with a Moabite woman was forbidden by Jewish law. He was content to rely on the Biblical interpretation and collective wisdom of the Sages of his generation, who ruled that the prohibition against marrying Moabites applied only to males from that nation.” In the time of Moses the Moabite men (not the women) had denied the Israelites food, drink and passage through their land on their way to the Promised Land. “When Boaz

announced his intention of marrying Ruth, he intuitively anticipated the ruling of the Sanhedrin before an official decision permitting unions with Moabite women was rendered which indicated the behavior of a *tzaddikim* is inherently correct. Boaz intuitively anticipated the ruling of the Sanhedrin, because his own identification with Torah law was complete.” Boaz took a leap of faith by agreeing to marry Ruth, because a lot of people thought it would be wrong to marry a Moabite princess, but he married Ruth as her nearest kinsman to raise up the lineage (seed) of Elimelech as provided in the law. Boaz was a man of courage, conviction and inner strength that reaffirmed his faith and interpreted God’s law with an attitude of love and service not just strict righteousness. It is important to be concerned with what God thinks and not what people will think, seeking to exalt or protect self-interest and image. God says love one another and that includes treating all people with kindness and decency.

Reading the Book of *Ruth* underscores two values closely related to Torah. The two concepts that define study of the Torah are **prayer** and **charity (love/loving kindness-Chesed)**. The Book of *Ruth* ends with the birth of King David, Ruth’s great-grandson, who described himself as the personification of prayer. **Psalm 109:4 (Hebrew Bible)**—“I am (my) prayer.” David defined his life by constant prayer to God as he went about his daily activities, as well as, specifically three definite times during the day (morning, noon and evening time). King David’s last words to his son Solomon also reflect the close relationship between Torah and prayer —“know the God of your father and serve Him”. *Before one can properly serve God, one must first come to know Him through Torah study.* Repeated study of Torah leads to prayer which in turn leads to service. Without prayer, there is no service to God. I do not think people realize the connection. Serving God is a matter of prayer—communicating with God. As we go about our daily lives, we are to be asking for his guidance, direction and insight to the meaning of what we are doing and what we are supposed to be doing. **Exodus 3:1**—Israel, by accepting the covenant of God (Torah) given them at Mount Sinai, they would be able to perform another level of service, that of prayer.

This week we flew down to Southern California and spent 2 ½ days with our son, his wife and their two sons and then stayed 2 ½ days with our daughter, her husband and two sons. We had not yet met our youngest grandson who will be one year old tomorrow. A family unit is of God, and what joy it was to be able to spend time in person with both families and strengthen our bond with children and grandchildren. While we were at our daughter’s home, a mockingbird kept flitting about in the trees while keeping a constant, but varied stream of notes and sounds all day long. What an amazing bird God has created that continually praises Him all day! How marvelous that we can see and hear (witness) the miracles in nature surrounding us and receive the messages of God through his Creation by internalizing and adsorbing its beauty and wonders.

Beside all our playing, talking and eating together Cappy assisted Cenzo (5 ½) in planting “his size” vegetable garden in the back yard. In the evening we watched “Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.” In this episode, Luke Skywalker who is training to become a Jedi Knight, escapes from the attack of the Evil Empire on the Rebel base and meets his newly assigned Jedi Master, Yoda, on Dagobah. One scene showed Luke using concerted focus of mind to raise his submerged flight ship from the swamp where he had landed without success. Finally exhausted in his effort, Luke said to Yoda, “*I can’t do it!*” Yoda replied, “**DO IT, or don’t do it. There is no TRY. Do it! Your choice.**” Then Yoda closed his eyes and demonstrated using “the force” of his mind to successfully lift the submerged space ship to dryer ground. Luke persisted in his training until he mastered the skill in using the good “force” that would overcome the “dark side” (evil) epitomized by Darth Vader. The “force” (using total concentration of the mind resulting in supernatural ability) brought to my mind what the Bible tells us about the power of God’s Holy Spirit. This analogy can be compared to the use of the power of prayer and God’s Spirit to do His work.

**Philippians 4:13**—Paul says, “I CAN do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” It is the Holy Spirit of Christ in him that strengthened him. This is the same kind of faith that we have to have (with conviction)—“I CAN DO” with the help of the Spirit of Christ in me (not just “try”). Try is not enough. DO IT! **Philippians 1:6; 2:5, 12-13**—“Be confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus;” “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

God said to Moses at the burning bush, “*When you bring the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain* (Mt. Sinai).” “Torah study is required in order to offer the highest form of prayer. At Mount Sinai, ancient Israel agreed (committed themselves) to listen and follow the commands God spoke and said at Mount Sinai. By accepting the Divine service of learning Torah at Mount Sinai, they will come to the level of being able to perform another form of service, that of prayer. Thus, this verse makes a clear connection between Torah and prayer. **Psalm 145:18** calls our attention to the linkage between Torah and prayer.” If we accept God’s covenant and keep His commandments based on the true principles of the Torah, then He will in turn accept our prayers. He is close to all who call upon Him in truth. We can become dynamic living prayer. **James 5:16** —“the effectual (unceasing) fervent prayer of a righteous man avails (accomplishes/benefits) much.” Our God is a God of power, of miracles and He is able.

The covenant God made with us is two-fold—a covenant of study and prayer. We are to study his word in the Bible and pray. Daily prayer – contact with God – is our service to God which leads a pathway to our deeds. **Joel 2:32**—“It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered. For in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call.” Call upon God in faith according to the scriptures and truth—according to God’s promises and will. Those whose call to God is based on the principles of Torah will be answered readily. God hears the prayers of the righteous.

The Three Festivals, pages 215 and 216. “The reading of Ruth also reminds us of the intimate relationship between Torah and *tzedakah* (charity). It shows us the example of magnanimous individuals like Boaz. In fact, the son of Boaz and Ruth was named Oved, suggesting the word *avodah* (service). It is God’s intention that we be both his servants and his children. Elimelech was severely punished precisely because, as a community leader, a descendant of Yehudah and forerunner of the Royal House of King David, he should not have abandoned his people at a time when the need for charitable deeds was greatest” He fled to Moab with his family and his sons, Malon and Chillon, married Moabite princesses. He and both sons died leaving his wife Naomi alone with these two Moabite princess daughter-in-laws. “The Royal House of David owed its very existence to many instances of Divine kindness.”

“Not only David’s survival in his struggle with Goliath and his selection to be king over his brothers, point to this. His lineage goes back to Perez the son born to Tamar.” **Genesis 38: 6-29** – Perez and his twin brother were conceived only because Tamar played the prostitute and deceived her father-in-law Judah into having relations with her. She made him leave her his signet ring, bracelet and staff as security until he brought back payment. He came back to pay, but she was gone and he could not find her. She had been married to one of his sons, who died because of his wickedness. Then, she was married off to the second son and he died because of his wickedness. Judah did not give her his last son after he was grown, even though it was the law. Then when Judah heard Tamar was pregnant he said to burn her at the stake. Everyone thought Tamar who was pregnant and had no husband was a harlot. However, Tamar brought forth the pledge left with her—Judah’s signet ring, bracelet and staff and stated that these things belonged to the man who is the father of this child. Judah acknowledged them as his and said, “She has been more righteous than I; because I did not give her Shelah my son.” If it had not been for God’s kindness, Tamar

would have been burned. “Only God’s kindness in saving Lot from the destruction of Sodom made the existence of his descendant Ruth possible. One’s whose existence is so dependent on God’s kindness (as we all are, though we do not always remember it) must make especially sure to be kind to other people.” This includes the young and the old.

“We read the book of *Ruth*, with its underlying theme of kindness, to remind ourselves that Torah and *Chesed* (loving kindness) should not be seen as two separate entities, but rather as interdependent elements of one broad concept. In **Proverbs 31**, King Solomon praises the “virtuous woman”. **Verse 26**—“She opens her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” The Sages interpret this passage as a reference to the study of Torah *lishmah* – for its own sake, without expectation of reward.” Just because, it is right to be reading the Bible. Not for our own reward, but because we want to read the Bible for its own sake and because it is of God—like eating honey.

“*Ruth* has many examples of great personalities performing acts of *chesed* for purely altruistic reasons: *chesed lishmah*. Consider the kindness on Ruth’s behalf by Boaz. When Ruth arrived in Israel as a destitute and famished émigré from Moab, she was treated very solicitously by Boaz. She came to his field to partake of the leavings reserved for the poor, and was urged by him to keep all grain not harvested by his own workers. Boaz invited her to join his workers in a meal and he gave her parched grain to eat. He was totally uninterested in the prestige that might have come from public notice of his generosity. Rather, Boaz offered Ruth a meal of parched grain that was sufficient (appropriate) for her needs, rather than a more elaborate but unnecessary repast. This concern for the needs of the individual, rather than pursuit of honor or fame, is one of the hallmarks of a true *tzaddik* (righteous man). How sadly lacking is this in contemporary society.” It appears that many people today are seeking fame and fortune, self praise and acclaim, and wanting to glorify themselves.

Give for giving’s sake, not for what you are going to get back—give out of charity (love) for the sake of loving your neighbor. “The book of *Ruth* also illustrates the dual nature of our relationship with God. On the one hand, God is like a father and we are His children, as it says in **Deuteronomy 14:1**—“You are the children of the Lord your God.” On the other hand the book of *Ruth* ends with the birth of King David, who was known as the “servant of God.” In a larger sense, then we must relate to our heavenly Father in a double role as children and servants. The transition from the status of servant to that of child is particularly appropriate to *Shavuot* (Pentecost). At Pesach (Passover), we first entered into the role of God’s servants, as signified by the lowly barley offering brought at the start of the counting of the Omer. Only at *Shavuot* is the more refined wheat offering of the Two Loaves brought, befitting the elevated status as children earned by accepting the Torah. The prophet Isaiah alludes to this change in status. **Isaiah 49:3**—“*You are my servant, Israel, in you I will glory.* Starting out as servants, we rise to become God’s children, in whom He will glory.” In God’s kingdom we will be his Divine children partakers of his holiness and His Divine character. **Isaiah 52:13**—“*Behold, My servant will be raised up and lifted and very elevated.*”

God has called us to be partakers of His holiness as witnesses to all mankind. Our mission is to proclaim His ruler-ship to the whole world. This mission does not preclude us from accepting into our ranks enlightened individuals from other backgrounds. God actively (expectantly) waits for strangers (**Psalm 146:9**) scattered throughout the world to emerge from the clutches of the Gentile (unconverted) world just as Ruth emerged. This ingathering can be a long and difficult process to reach out to the nations in order that all humanity might embrace Torah voluntarily (**Isaiah 16:19**) and join the ranks of God’s people. **Mark 16:15**—Christ commissioned his disciples to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel (the good news) to every creature.” **Jeremiah 16:19**—“O Lord, my strength and my fortress, My refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, surely our fathers

have inherited lies, worthless idols and false gods that did them no good.” **Zachariah 8:23**—“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘in those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a of him that is a Jew saying,’ ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’.” They want to learn the ways of God. **Isaiah 2:2**—“It shall come to pass in the last (latter) days, the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations shall flow into it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people.”

The Book of Ruth encapsulates the plan of God to reach out to the nations through acts of loving kindness, charity and good deeds according to the perfect loving laws of God in our daily living seasoned with prayerfulness that we might be an effectual, fervent and profitable servant of the Most High God. Let’s study the Book of Ruth with renewed zeal, gaining perception and insight. Loving Father, help us to realize that the lessons to be learned from the story of Ruth are there for our admonition—training and teaching, and inspiration that we might become pillars of strength and kindness.

Almighty God we come before you in prayer this Sabbath afternoon thanking you for the story of Ruth in the Bible and the example that is there for us to learn from and follow. Help us to learn these lessons and write them on the tables of our hearts that we might be men and women of virtue, love, compassion and moral courage. Strengthen us to stand out and stand forth in your ways and to be men and women of prayer and diligent Bible study; learning your ways so that we may walk with you and prosper in your path. In the name of Yeshua, we pray for your blessing upon us as we go about the rest of this day and week to come, doing the work you have given us to do with insight, discernment and understanding. We desire to be obedient to you and thank you Lord for teaching us your ways and giving us your blessings. We worship you in Yeshua’s holy name. Amen.