Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Ruth

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

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Summary

Ruth, a stranger, and the grace of God in the midst of evil

The Book of Ruth tells us also of the days of the judges, when there was no king in Israel; but it shews us the fair side of those days, in the operations of the grace of God, who (blessed be His name!) never failed to work in the midst of the evil, as also in the steady progress of events towards the fulfilment of His promises in the Messiah, whatever may have been the simultaneous progress of the general evil.

Ruth, a stranger seeking shelter by faith under the wings of the God of Israel, is received in grace, and the genealogy of David, king over Israel according to grace, is linked with her. It is the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Himself after the flesh.

The typical character of the book

This book appears to me to set before us in type, the reception in grace of the remnant of Israel in the last days, their Redeemer (the kinsman, who has the right of redemption) having taken their cause in hand.

Eli-Melech (which signifies God the King) being dead, Naomi (my delight, my pleasure) becomes a widow, and eventually loses her children also. She typifies the Jewish nation, who, having lost her God, is like a widow and has no heir. Yet there shall be a remnant, destitute of all right to the promises (and therefore prefigured historically by a stranger), who will be received in grace (similarly to the Gentiles and the assembly*) — who will faithfully and heartily identify itself with desolate Israel; for Ruth clave to her and to her God (see chap. 1:16). God will own this remnant, which, poor and afflicted itself, will in heart obey the commands given to the people. {*Compare Micah 5:3, last part.}

Naomi, who in her destitution is a type of the nation, acknowledges her condition: she calls herself Mara (bitterness).

He who was nearest of kin, who would willingly have redeemed the inheritance, refuses to do so, if Ruth must be taken with it. The law was never able (nor the assembly either) to re-establish Israel in their inheritance, nor to raise up in grace the name of the dead.

Boaz, the Kinsman-Redeemer

Boaz (in him is strength), upon whom the remnant had no direct claim (and who typifies Christ risen, in whom are the sure mercies of David), undertakes to raise up the name of the dead, and to re-establish the heritage of Israel. Acting in grace and in kindness, and encouraging the patient humble faith of the remnant, the meek of the earth, he shews himself faithful to fulfil the purpose and the will of God with respect to this poor desolate family. Nothing can be more touching and exquisite than the details given here. The character of Ruth, this poor woman of the Gentiles, has great beauty.

"Naomi took the child that was born to her, and laid it in her bosom"; and they said, "There is a son born to Naomi." In fact the heir of the promises will be born unto Israel as a nation, although the fulfilment of the promise affects the remnant only, which, fully identifying itself with the interests of God's people, has sought neither the rich nor the poor, but, in faith and obedience, has kept the testimony of God amongst the people in the path appointed by Him.

The contrast between the books of Ruth and Judges

Thus, if on one side the Book of Judges shews us the falling away of the people of Israel, and their failure under responsibility, even when God was their helper, on the other side this touching and precious book sets before us, as the dawn of better things, grace acting in the midst of difficulties, securing the fulfilment of promise, and embellishing this scene of misery and sin by lovely and beautiful instances of faith, precious fruits of grace, whether in weakness and devotedness, or in strength and kindness, and always in accordance with the perfect will of God, and assuring by this touching history, as a type, the full restoration of Israel to blessing according to promise. It is a refreshing and lovely picture in the midst of the hard-mindedness and sorrows of Israel.

Ruth as the intermediate link between Israel's fall and prophecy

In the succeeding books we shall see prophecy, and the history of God's dealings, developing the body of events which tended to the fulfilment of His designs, the first principles, the elements, of which are laid down in that which is shewn us in this. For Ruth furnishes a kind of intermediate link between the fall of Israel under God's immediate government, and the future fulfilment of His purposes.

Prophecy, which unfolds these purposes and gives moral proof of this fall, begins with Samuel: we learn this from the apostle Peter, and that Christ is the object of prophecy (see Acts 3:24).

Eli, the last judge and priest, departs; his family is to be cut off; the ark of the covenant is taken by the Philistines; and Samuel, consecrated to God in a new and extraordinary manner, comes in with the special testimony of the Lord.