

Naomi and Ruth
November 13, 2011

1. Background

According to Katharine Doob Sakenfeld in her Interpretation Commentary on Ruth, “Ruth is set by its opening line in the era of the Judges and concludes with the mention of King David. The composition therefore must be from the time of David or later”(pg. 1). Scholars, however, have debated the dating of the book of Ruth and while the date may seem like a minor point, the introduction to Ruth in The New Oxford Annotated Bible: NRSV points out that an understanding of when Ruth was written helps one to understand why the book was written. “A date before the Exile leads to the view that the book intended to establish David’s ancestry, to affirm the practice of levirate marriage (see Deut 25:5-10), or to commend the virtues of the book’s protagonists to ancient Israel. A date after the Exile supports the conviction that the author wished to show that a non-Israelite could become a faithful worshiper of the Lord. This would counter the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, both of which consider intermarriage wrong (see Ezra chs 9 and 10; Neh 10.30)”(pg. 332). Obviously, we will not resolve this question this morning, but the two views can inform our interpretation of these remarkable women.

2. Exploring the Text

Ruth 1:1-18

- As the story begins Naomi has moved from her home with her family, have you ever moved far from family to a new place? What was that experience like? How do you think Naomi felt in her new home?
- Are you surprised by the way Naomi handles her grief? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that Naomi’s daughters-in-law go with her?
- After Orpah turns back, Ruth gives her impassioned speech in verse 16 and 17 and she makes five promises to Naomi. What are the five and what are the implications of each promise?

Ruth 2:1-7

- Ruth goes out to glean, to pick up the leftovers in the field, and she encounters Boaz. What is the modern day equivalent of gleaning?
- What is your impression of Boaz from the text?

Ruth 3:6-13

- Ruth sends Naomi to encounter Boaz in hopes that a relationship will grow. What do you think of Naomi’s idea? How do you view Boaz’s response?