

SERMON NOTES
"Your People Will Be My People:"
The Church's Responsibility to Israel

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a beautiful picture of the kind of relationship that should exist between the Church and Israel.

A. The Challenge

As we look at this story my intention is to challenge Gentile Christians to become a Ruth to Naomi and to commit ourselves to an unbreakable covenant of love with the people of Israel.

B. The Historical Context

The story takes place in the time of the judges. The Bible says that it was a time when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Ruth 1:1-17.

Ruth's difficult decision to leave her pagan roots in Moab and join herself to Israel ended up being the best decision she ever made. Ruth ended up marrying Boaz, a prosperous Jewish farmer. Then Ruth, who had never borne children before, would not only bear a son, but eventually through this son this Gentile woman would become the great-grandmother of King David and a key personage in the line of the Messiah Himself--who would one day be born in this same town of Bethlehem.

C. The Parallels

1. Naomi and the Jewish people

Like Naomi, the Jewish people have been in a kind of Moabite exile. The land of Israel until recent decades has been a place of famine.

2. Orpah's relationship to Naomi as a picture of the way much of the Church has often related to the Jewish people

Orpah, like Ruth, was also a Gentile who had married a Jew. Unlike her sister-in-law Ruth, she decided to stay in her Gentile world in Moab and abandon her Jewish mother-in-law at her greatest time of need.

Orpah is a picture of much of the Gentile segment of the Church that has not been able to understand and appreciate the inseparable bond between the Church and Israel. Instead of identifying herself with the Jews, the Orpah Church has turned her back on Israel and maintains a religious culture that is virtually cut off from its Hebrew roots.

Orpah *at first* intended to go forward with Naomi. Verse 10.

In the end, the Orpah Church decides to leave Naomi to fend for herself. Much of the Church, like Orpah, is more talk than walk. Although the church owes its very salvation to the Jews (John 4:22), too often, abandons the very same Jews in their time of need.

3. The history of the "Orpah" Church and the Jews

At first, the Church, like well-intentioned Orpah, had a desire to stick with the Jews. At the beginning of the Church, Gentile believers worshiped and worked alongside Messianic Jews. They kept the Jewish feasts and had no intention of ever cutting themselves off from the nourishing sap of the olive tree of Israel (Romans 11:17). Like Orpah, who in the end preferred to abandon Naomi and go her own way, most of the Gentile Church has done the same thing.

Within a generation of the crucifixion of Jesus, the Roman army had ransacked the city of Jerusalem and totally destroyed the Temple and, eventually, much of the indigenous Jewish culture of Israel. Like Naomi in Moab, the Jews found themselves in foreign lands.

Within a few hundred years, the Church, for the most part, came to disregard the significance of the Jewish people.

There arose a number of Christian theologians who saw the involvement of the Jews in cooperation with the Romans in the crucifixion of Jesus and the subsequent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as a sign that God was finished with Israel. God has rejected Israel once and for all. God would now form a new chosen people. The Church has become the new Israel of God.

Anti-Semitism was justified—all done in the name of good theology. John Chrysostom, a Christian theologian who lived in the fourth century, had this to say about the Jews in one of his sermons: “[They are]...murderers, destroyers, men possessed by the devil....They know only one thing, to satisfy their gullets, get drunk, to kill and maim one another....” And to think that John Chrysostom is now called a saint!

Six centuries later, an even more hideous hatred for the Jews by so-called Christians would be revealed. The Crusaders are often remembered for their chivalry, faith, and zeal. But in reality, many of the Crusaders were cruel men who hated the Jews with a passion. As punishment for the Jews' role in the murder of Christ, the Crusaders took revenge on the Jewish people living in the Holy Land. In the year 1000, when the Crusaders first arrived in the Holy Land, there were 300,000 Jewish residents. But by the time the Crusaders left the scene less than 200 years later, only 1,000 Jewish families still remained.

Anti-Semitism is even evident in the writings of the Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther was at first sympathetic to the Jews, believing that they would gladly receive his new-found gospel of justification by faith. But when they didn't accept the message, he became deeply embittered against the Jewish people. As a consequence, Luther became just as severe as the Roman Church in his contempt for the Jews. He called for the expulsion of the Jews from Germany and the destruction of their synagogues and books.

It should come as no surprise that when the Nazis came to power in Germany, they used the writings of theologians such as Luther to justify their policies. The result was a Holocaust in which six million Jews were exterminated. Unfortunately, much of the Church stood idly by, unwillingly to lend a hand to the Jewish people.

Paul taught us in Romans 11:11, “...salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.” However, the reality is the Jews don't envy our religion.

Will we be like Orpah and turn our backs on Israel in her time of need? Or will we be like Ruth and cling to Israel, always ready to give her support and encouragement, especially as God is bringing her back to her homeland and, ultimately, to her God?

4. Ruth as a picture of what the Gentile part of the Church should be in relation to Israel.

Now in contrast to Orpah, let's look at Ruth and discover how the Church could become more and more like her in relationship to the Jewish people.

a. To be a Ruth means loving the Jewish people unconditionally

Ruth 1:8, 14-16.

“Entreat me not,” in the margins of some Bibles, reads, “Be not against me.” Naomi was not very open at first to the idea of Ruth coming with her back to Israel. But Ruth was determined to come anyway. Ruth's love for Naomi would not be stopped by rejection. She would stick by Naomi through thick and thin, even if she wasn't wanted.

Verse 14: “Ruth clung to her (Naomi).” It's interesting to read the prophecy given about Gentiles clinging to the Jews in the last days. Isaiah 14:1,2.

Verse 16. When we take Israel's God for our God, we must take His people for our people—even if they at first would rather we not cling too closely. To abandon God's chosen people Israel is to abandon a people that He loves with an *everlasting* love. How can any Christian who is called to conform to God's character ever love His people conditionally, when He loves them unconditionally and according to an everlasting covenant (Jeremiah 31:3).

Are you ready to hold on to Israel at Israel's moment of greatest need? Or will you walk away when Israel is universally condemned by the nations?

Some define a true friend as the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out. I hope you will be that kind of friend.

Three times Naomi insisted that Ruth return to Moab (verses 11, 12, 15). Ruth was serious about her love for Naomi. Her love was like God's love for Israel—an unbreakable covenant of love. As Christians, our love for the Jewish people must not be conditional love.

What we need is God's love for Israel—which is an *unconditional* love for His people Israel. We see what kind of love this is in Psalm 89:30-34. Here God refers to His covenant with the sons of David—the Jewish people.

True love is God's kind of love—unconditional love.

Romans 11:28 reveals the kind of love demanded of the Christian for the Jew. Paul understood the difficulty that Christians have loving the Jewish people. Historically, very few Jewish people have accepted the gospel message, and many times it has been violently opposed.

True love keeps on loving even when the one we love spurns us. But the kind of love that God pours into our hearts is a love that demands nothing in return.

b. To be a Ruth means being willing to stand with the Jews even if it means making a sacrifice.

Ruth 1:11-13, and 16.

In verse 9 Naomi had asked that God would give each of them a place of rest with another husband. This became a key issue in the book. Marriage meant security for a woman. In the ancient Near East a woman without a husband was in a serious situation because she lacked security. And widows were especially needy; Naomi referred to the levirate custom in Israel in which a brother was responsible to marry his deceased brother's wife in order to conceive a son and perpetuate his brother's name and inheritance (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Naomi pointed out that this would not be possible in their case since she had no more sons.

Ruth knew that by going with Naomi she was giving up opportunities to remarry someone in Moab. Few Jews in Judah would ever consider marrying a Gentile woman.

Ruth 1:16. How many of us would have risked going with the Jews into the gas chambers by hiding Jews 50 years ago? Will we really be ready to go with the Jewish people in their greatest time of need? If we've got the heart of Ruth, we will.

Those who commit themselves to Israel are a small part of what Isaiah prophesied (14:1,2). How many of us are ready to serve sacrificially by holding up and supporting the Jewish people?

5. The Ruth Blessing

Any sacrifice we make on behalf of Israel is far outweighed by the blessing given in return. Ruth sacrificed much, but she was rewarded richly for her humble service to Naomi. (Proverbs 15:33).

After many years of barrenness she was given a son. Ruth (4:16, 17).

We know that from Obed's loins the Messiah will come. Here I believe we see a foreshadow of the day when Naomi (Israel) will finally embrace the Messiah.

The Word of God tells us that the Jewish people will one day receive the Messiah and His forgiveness. (Romans 11:26,27)

Like Ruth, we as the Church have a central role to play in the salvation and deliverance of Naomi (the Jewish people). But it will require more than nice words and kisses on the cheek—even more than preaching the gospel. It means being willing to love the Jews unconditionally. And it will mean demonstrating a sacrificial love.

D. Scriptural Promises that have never been rescinded

- Leviticus 25:23 – The land is the Lord’s land, and it is His to assign and dispose of: *“The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine...”*
- Deuteronomy 32:43 – *“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people...He will provide atonement for His land and His people.”*
- 2 Chronicles 7:20 – God says if the people violate Me *“...I will uproot them from My land which I have given them...”*
- Psalm 85:1-2 – *“Lord, you have been favorable to Your land, You have brought back the captivity of Jacob. You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin.”*
- Isaiah 8:8 – This land belongs to Father God and it is the land of His Messiah: *“...and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel.”*
- Jeremiah 2:7 – The Lord tells the people why there will come the loss, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. *“I brought you into a bountiful country...but when you entered, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.”*
- Ezekiel 38:16 – God is speaking to people in the end times who rise up against Israel. God is speaking of a confrontation that will take place in His land. *“You will come up against My people Israel...I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you...”*
- Joel 1:6, 2:18, 3:2 – Three times in this book, the land is referred to as belonging to the Lord. *“For a nation has come up against My land...”* (1:6) *“Then the Lord will be zealous for His land...”* (2:18) *“I will gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.”* (3:2)
- Hosea 9:3 – This refers to the scattering of Israel: *“They shall not dwell in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and shall eat unclean things in Assyria.”*
- Zechariah 9:16 – *“The Lord their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people, for they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land...”*

When we talk about Israel, we are dealing with: 1) a piece of property that God has made pronouncements about and 2) God’s people to whom He’s given the land. It is a major issue with the Creator of all things, and it is non-negotiable. **Things that God has said, uniquely, about Israel have never been rescinded.**

- Not only does the land belong to God, but also God has committed the land to Abraham and his offspring via Isaac forever. (Genesis 17:7-8)
- *“With a little wrath I hid My face from you...but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed...”* (Isaiah 54:8-10)
- The loss of governance by Israel through sin and dispersion has not altered God’s announced commitment to make it theirs forever. (Read Ezekiel 37:1-28)

E. Conclusion – Action Points

1. **Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem**
2. **Seek to understand the Jewish roots of your faith**
3. **Express solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people**
4. **Make a prayer journey to Israel**

Sermon notes have been compiled from a variety of sources, including teachings that have been published by Rev. Wayne Hildsen & Dr. Jack Hayford. A special thanks to them for sharing these insights!