

Living in Covenant: Ruth & 1 Samuel

When the angel Gabriel came to Mary the mother of Jesus, she sang a song of praise to God, which is recorded in Luke 1:46-55. Some of the thoughts she expressed were very similar to the song that Moses and Miriam sang, according to Exodus 15, and to the song that Hannah sang in 1 Samuel 2. Mary said, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” Notice the exaltation of God and the recognition of God’s dealings with the humble. She goes on to say that “He has filled the hungry with good things He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.” Mary sang a covenantal song tying God’s promises to God’s providential faithfulness. Some of these mothers understood the message well and expressed it well, too.

Let’s pray.

Lord, our God, we thank You again that You are the God of fathers and mothers, of families, and that through the ages, You have been very mindful of families and have worked through them. You have had unique ways of employing mothers as well as fathers, training up sons and daughters and preparing men as well as women for service in Your kingdom. May we be faithful today; inspire us in Jesus’ name, Amen.

We will first turn briefly to Ruth and make a few introductory comments here. The story of Ruth reflects another episode during the period of the judges. This was the time when there was no king, but there was a type of government because the elders were doing their duty. They sat in the gate. Evidently each city has its own representation of the ruling office through the elders, but the Book of Ruth indicates that there is definitely an awareness of the Messianic aspect within the Mosaic legislation and the Mosaic teaching. Ruth served as a good connector between Moses and what comes next. This book surely sets forth God’s always-constant faithfulness. The book keeps the individual seed line very definitely in mind, but it starts with a disregard for the inheritance that God had given His people. Elimelech left his inheritance because it was tough living. The interesting thing is that he left it right there in Judea, right in the area of the tribe of Judah. We know that Dan had done the same thing; if you read Judges 18, the tribe of Dan did not seek to conquer the enemy as it should have, and then they moved north. But here we have a case of an individual family picking up and leaving and going to a country where the people were distantly related to them. The Moabites were given their land, but, according to Mosaic legislation, no Moabite through the fifth generation was permitted to enter into the sanctuary and Elimelech goes to Moab. This is not really an act of obedience and in that context, it is especially interesting to see how God works providentially. The males died. That was under God’s providence. Had the men continued to live, Ruth and Naomi might never have left the land of the Moabites. Thus, a tragedy in the family proved to be a providential way for the Lord to carry out His covenantal action, particularly in regard to the seed line and that promise to Abraham that other nations were to be included.

Why did Orpah decide to go back? Why did Ruth choose to go along with her mother-in-law? This can only be explained, from my point of view, by God’s guiding providence. God led her to do that. She had everything to gain by staying in Moab with her family, including the possibility there of having a family, but she made her choice to go with Naomi. I see this as evidence of God’s providence. God’s providence works through Boaz, also, and Boaz is indeed within the covenant line, specifically the line of Judah, the ancestry line of the Christ to come. Boaz reflects, in a typical way, what one would expect of the Judah line—his generosity, his willingness to serve, his readiness to give up his claim if the man who had first right to the inheritance, according to chapter 3, had claimed it. There is something about Boaz that stands tall and clean and excellent in the midst of that Judges situation, where we read of so much

conniving and irresponsibility. God had His heroes under His providence. Even in those difficult times, Boaz was there.

We want to bring out especially three ideas related to specific covenantal action in the Book of Ruth. First, the Moabitess is included in the ancestry. All nations were to be blessed, but God was also to use the various nations. We had not referred to Rahab before, but Rahab the Canaanite was an ancestress of Boaz. Now Ruth becomes his wife, and she too becomes one of the grand matriarchs in the line of David and the Messiah. The idea of the *go'el*, which comes from the verb “to buy back,” or “to redeem,” comes to beautiful expression in this book also. A *go'el* is one who steps in between, one who steps forward on behalf of someone, one who does what is necessary so that the other can benefit and be profited. Whether you want to speak of a substitute or even of the one who pays for the other, the atoning one, the redeemer, Boaz functions very definitely as the Mosaic legislation prescribed. He knew his function. Generously, he offers to fulfill that role. There was not an awful lot for him to gain. One might say, “Oh, but he was going to get some land,” but he and his relatives seemed to have been well-supplied. This was not an act of necessity. This was an act of service. God maintains the seed line through this providential, covenantal action. That is how the book closes, too, by giving us the genealogy from Perez, the son of Judah, right on through to David.

Now many people read the Book of Ruth and they read that last little section of genealogy and they say “Okay, that is the heart of Ruth.” It is an important part, no doubt. In a way, it is a summary, but the book does more than give us a genealogy. Ruth helps us to understand how God in His providence was working sovereignly, covenantally, how He was setting forth and maintaining the line of the mediator during those distressing, troublesome days of the judges. God was not forgetting His promise. God was not forgetting His covenant. God was not in any way surrendering His sovereign position. He stayed in control. The people were not living the way they should have been, but there was a Boaz. God remained faithful and He kept His covenant promise. In a sense, Ruth really belongs right in the middle of the Book of Judges.

I want to make one comment here. G. A. F. Knight, a New Zealand theologian, has written a book entitled *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*. He follows the line of others who have said that Ruth was really written in the days of Ezra, when Ezra was forcing the Israelites to give up their non-Israelite pagan-worshipping wives. He suggests that Ruth was written as a protest against Ezra's legislation against believers who had unbelieving wives: “Look what happened to the sons of Elimelech. They married people outside the covenant line and one of them even became a great ancestor of the house of David. Boaz had to take her.”

So, according to these scholars, the Book of Ruth is a protest against Ezra. Have you ever heard that before? You will find it in critical literature. These people think that they know better how to write the Old Testament than the Spirit of God did. It is amazing how some people try to make the biblical books fit into a type of a historical, social situation. Instead of asking, “What does the Bible itself say about this?” they ask, “When do I think would be the best setting for this book?” We had better leave the book as it is, right at the end of Judges. If we do anything with it chronologically, let's put it about in the middle of Judges, so that if you are about halfway through Judges, you read about some sad things, then read Ruth, and then go on to Jephthah and Samson. Just be reminded of how good God was in maintaining His purposes.

And now we're going on to the Book of Samuel. First of all, again, a couple of introductory comments: Samuel serves as a crucial transition point from the Mosaic to the Davidic covenant epoch. Samuel is almost like a second Moses. We will discuss Samuel's threefold role, but notice that he stands at a

crucial transition point. Under Moses, the theocracy had been formed. Under Samuel, the monarchy is established. Under Samuel, the royal office comes to the fore and becomes a dominant factor for many centuries in the history of Israel, especially as the royal Davidic house.

The second comment I want to make is in regard to the book. Just as the Book of Ruth has been attacked and taken out of its biblical canonical place, the Book of Samuel has been attacked from many, many perspectives. Unlike Ruth, the book has not been repositioned, but it has been attacked in a variety of ways in commentaries and biblical theologies written by critically inclined people. If you read the work of a capable Japanese scholar by the name of Toshida, you will become aware of how Samuel has been reinterpreted, twisted around, torn apart, edited, and re-edited. We must admit that if we do very careful exegetical work from the original text, Samuel does raise many questions and problems. In some areas, the text is not very well attested. There are a few sections that are very difficult to work with, and one wonders if the text has been tampered with in the past.

It is very interesting that the book of Deuteronomy, which plays such an important role in the entire course of divine revelation, has been attacked so much in the same way 1 Samuel has been. I repeat that Samuel is placed at a very critical place in the outworking of God's redemptive work, particularly in relation to the royal office and the prophetic office. Look at Samuel, a child who can be considered of miraculous birth. He had been prayed for and prayed for and prayed for. Hannah had not been able to conceive, while her rival wife had one son after another. Elkanah said, "Am I not dearer to you than ten sons?" While Hannah was evidently thankful to have a husband, at that time to have a son would fulfill motherhood. So she prayed. We know the story; the role of prayer is certainly brought out forcefully here. We have seen prayer by a covenant mediator such as Moses, when Moses on the mountain prayed on behalf of the people who were dancing around the golden calf. We have seen how he prayed when Joshua was leading the Israelites against the Amalekites, and Moses kept up his arms. We know of how important prayer is when Abraham interceded on behalf of the nations, but here is a very personal prayer. Here we have an account of a mother praying for a family. It ties right into the social mandate: "be fruitful and multiply." Hannah says, "Oh God, let me do my part. Let me be a mother in Israel."

In Bill Hybels' book *Too Busy Not To Pray*, he quotes that well-known little phrase that, "If you ask the wrong thing, God says 'no.' If you ask the right thing at the wrong time, God says 'go slow.'" Hannah was asking for the right thing, but she was evidently asking for it at the wrong time, because God said "go slow" for quite a while until the unique time that Eli's sons had proven to be the miscreants that they truly were. Eventually, God did answer that prayer. Hannah had a lot of tears, but God says to pray, and when people pray, God has His time of answering prayer. Prayer fits into the covenantal life and here is mother Hannah doing her covenantal duty and carrying out a covenantal privilege. "Lord, make me fruitful." And then in God's own time, He hears. The thing that I like about Hannah is that when she received, she also gave. In fact, she made a promise to give before she even received. Hannah stands tall as a covenantal mother. She prayed. She committed, and when she received, she gave. She kept her commitment, and the most beautiful thing of it all was that she could do it singing.

She gave up her boy with a song, a song that reflected the great victory that Moses and Miriam celebrated in Exodus 15: "What a God, what a holy God, what a sovereign God, my soul rejoices in Him because He thinks of us, the humble, the lowly, the individual." This song is a prophecy also. Hannah is a prophetess, in that she gives eloquent expression to what had already been revealed before. God had promised that they were going to have a king. Deuteronomy 17 had said that there would be a king, and Hannah concludes her song in 1 Samuel 2:10 with these words, "He will give strength to his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." If you were a literary historical critic, you would say Hannah couldn't sing about a king because there was no king in Israel at the time. So someone must either have appended

this or somebody put this song into Hannah's mouth. "He will give strength to his king," and then he will lift high, exalt, honor the *qeren*, "horn." The horn stands as a symbol of power. We are not thinking so much now of the *shofar*, the horn that they blew, but the horn of an animal. We have to think a little agriculturally and domestically now. It is the horn of His anointed, *meshicho*, a word that comes from the verb that means "to anoint." Hannah prophesied, thanking God that He had answered her prayer and that she had been given the opportunity to give her son into the service of the Lord. She does not say, "And now my son is going to be a king," but she does lay a definite connection between Samuel her son and the king, the anointed one, who is to come. This is a beautiful insight. Hannah lays out exactly what Samuel was going to do in his fruitful life. He was going to exalt the horn of the king. He was going to anoint the king. In a way, Samuel is the initiator and the institutor of the monarchy because he anoints Saul and then later he anoints David. She sings about the *messiach*. Remember this concept of the *messiach*, the "anointed one." This title refers to the one whom God has elected, the one whom God has designated, whom God has equipped, to whom God gives authority. The anointed one is the elected, qualified, authorized one. Samuel, in the tabernacle, is called to service. The tragedy that is described sets out the call of Samuel in a startling way. The priesthood is failing.

In 1 Samuel 2:11-35 and 4:1-22, the sins of Eli and his sons are briefly described. Eli himself is not directly accused of taking an undue portion of the sacrificial meat for himself, which was so strictly forbidden in the Mosaic legislation. But Eli does not function as a father. He does not function as a high priest. He does not function as a responsible representative to stand between God and His people. He shows that he is irresponsible by the way he is not a proper father. Eli talked to his sons—"What are you doing my sons?"—but he did not restrain them. He was fully aware of their sin.

It is not easy to be a father, especially of wayward sons. We all know that, and I think in our own lives, we can recall how there have been times when we have given our fathers heartaches, where we thought we were so wise or we wouldn't accept parental advice. I guess as I look at a few of you here, you may well be parents of teenagers already. It becomes more difficult when the men get older. I have six sons now; the oldest is 39 and the youngest is 29. I have been told a few times, "Lay off, dad. You've had your time, and now it is ours." At times I thought I was just giving some gentle paternal advice, but when it is advice that is not in keeping with what the son had planned, it isn't always well-received. I get along quite well with my sons. God has blessed us richly with good relationships, for which I am very thankful, and I can also say that I learned so much from my own father. He was a good, solid, Calvinistic covenantal father. He gave us responsibilities early on when I was young. One thing dad taught me was to trust my sons.

When I was 16 years old, my dad got his first new car, a 1937 Plymouth sedan. It was a beauty and I was a fast driver. On Wednesday night, we had Bible class, and I asked dad for his new car. Normally, I took an old Model T pickup truck. That truck had a box we put on the back to take our milk into the factory. We had to deliver about 100 gallons of milk every morning and evening, but I did not want to go to Bible class—especially if I was going to take a girl home afterwards—with 10-gallon cans rattling in the back of an old pickup. That was my excuse for borrowing dad's car, but we had already decided to have a race. My friend Adrian's father had just bought a Ford V8 pickup. People were always saying that the Plymouth Cutlass and the Ford V8 had the power, and I said "Let's see." We had the race all set up, and I asked my father for the car and he looked me in the eye and said, "George, I trust you." My knees shook. We went to Bible class away from father. The race was all set up. Would I back out of it now? No, no, not George. We had the road all laid out, two miles of country road outside of that little town. There was only one problem on that stretch of road. There was an irrigation canal that went underneath the road and there was a narrow abutment about halfway through the course. We were all ready and the entire Bible class was there watching. Everybody was evenly divided over the Plymouth

and the Ford. We drew straws; I got the left lane and he was able to stay in the right lane. That meant that if any traffic was to come, I was going to face the traffic.

I'll tell you what happened. There was a driveway that led up to a big farm on the two-mile stretch, and as we were approaching that abutment, a car turned out of that driveway coming my way. I was a little ahead of the V8, and I didn't want to give up my lead so I started squeezing over. My friend started honking the horn and when he saw that I wasn't going to give way, he hit the brakes. That big heavy Ford pickup swerved a little to the left and his left front bumper caught my rear right fender and tore that fender right out of that new car. It buckled the door post so the doors flew open and there was dad's new car, badly damaged. I didn't sleep all night. In the morning, I was going to tell him after I had the first cow milked, but I didn't get a chance to tell him until we walked home after I had milked and fed all the cows. Dad never went and looked at that car. Right after breakfast, he was very solemn and he said, "George, take the car in and get it fixed." I said, "I'll pay for it, Dad." He said nothing.

Three weeks later, when the car was all fixed up and the young people were going to have a special party and we needed cars, the leader of the young people said, "George, we would like you to take that nice new car that's so nicely fixed up." My heart sank. I said, "I can't ask for that car again." But we needed transportation because there were about 50 young men in our youth group and we had invited 50 girls to join us. We had to have transportation, so I went to my father. He said, "Son, I know you have a party coming up, and you want the car," and he looked me right in the eye and he said, "I still trust you." I have never had an accident since. Would you have trusted your son with the new car a second time? That is parental trust. I learned from that and I have good relationships with my sons. I know that sometimes they betrayed my trust, too, and when I knew it, I told them. We do not have to fear our parental duties. The Lord will give grace and strength. There is no doubt about that.

The tragedy in Eli's priesthood was that Eli would not reprimand his irresponsible sons, so a prophet came and told him that the priesthood would be torn from him. This prophet, a man of God, said that a new priest would arise, and in the days of Solomon, that happened when Zadok was appointed in place of Abiathar. The entire Ithamar line of priesthood was eliminated and Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, carried on, so the Aaronic priesthood continued. Remember that Aaron had four sons, but the two oldest ones, Nadab and Abihu died, and Ithamar and Eleazar were the surviving sons. Because of Eli's sinfulness and not dealing as a father, the entire line of Ithamar was removed from the priesthood and the line of Eleazar as represented by Zadok came in. God maintained his priesthood, but He also had to make some changes. He was faithful.

Samuel was a threefold office-bearer. If you are able, it would be good to refer to the chart in your study guide. First, Samuel was a prophet. His prophetic role was, in a way, central. He was called to be a prophet, and we all know that story. He received a message regarding the priesthood, which followed the message that came from the man of God, who had already condemned Eli and his priesthood. Samuel was confirmed as a prophet. I am reading from 1 Samuel 3:19-20. "The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD."

Samuel spoke as a prophet concerning the people's request for a king, but he also spoke as a prophet in his own way. Nathan had to be corrected in his prophetic message. Samuel did too. Samuel first said to these people, "No, you cannot have a king," but then God came to him and said, "Samuel, they're not rejecting you and your sons as judges; they are rejecting me, but give them that king." We see the human side of the prophetic office when we look at the people who are called to serve. Samuel, a great man, had his failings too, even as a prophet, but he received the word of the Lord as to whom he had to

anoint. And then when Saul is rejected, again Samuel looked at the older brothers of David and said, “These men look pretty good,” but the Lord spoke internally to him and he received the message internally and so David was anointed. Samuel uttered prophecies concerning Saul.

Finally, we must see Samuel, the prophet, as the link between Moses and the whole prophetic line. Samuel was the link between Moses and Nathan and Elijah and all the other prophets who followed him. However, because the priestly office failed so sadly, we see that Samuel also functioned as a priest. Later on, when Saul tried to function as a priest, it became a reason for his condemnation.

1 Samuel 2:12-36 sets the stage for Samuel’s role as a priest, because Eli fails and Eli is rejected, and the message of doom concerning the priesthood shows how Samuel is involved already as a prophet, but he is also involved there in the priesthood. Samuel functions as a priest himself at Mizpah when people had rejected Samuel’s sons initially, he called the people together. It was a real covenant renewal at that time. But Saul also set up an altar at Bethel after he made his rounds as a judge. He had an altar at Bethel where he led the people in worship. So we see Samuel not trying to be a priest, but serving as a faithful servant of God so that the prophetic work could be done properly. He showed the proper relationship of the prophetic office to the priestly office; the prophetic office is to guide and instruct and help the priestly office. It is particularly in the royal dimension that we see Samuel functioning. He served as a judge, as we read in 1 Samuel 7:13-17. Samuel is the last of the judges, but then we also see the way he is involved with the kingship. We know of his reaction to the request, and how he grieves. He knows that the people are asking for a king in the wrong way. They are asking for the wrong person in the wrong way for the wrong reason, but he’s involved in it by anointing Saul and anointing David. He is active in the renewing of the kingship. We have already referred to that which he did also when he set up the altar and sacrificed at Mizpah and at Gilgal. He is very active in renewing the covenant, concentrating on the royal office. As I said in the introduction, Samuel stands at a very crucial stage. He fills a crucial role in the transition from Moses to David.

The role of the prophetic office is discussed by Dumbrell and Vos and here I feel constrained to make a critical comment concerning Dumbrell. Some of you may have noticed it before, but I get the feeling that at times Dumbrell, as much good as he has in his book, bends over a little too far at times to keep peace with the historical critics. For example, he presents the rise of the monarchy as if it were essentially due to the historical situation. He presents it as if it is simply part of the ongoing evolution of the Israelite community. In a way, this is true, but the way he presents it does not pay enough attention to God’s intention as it was expressed in Deuteronomy 17 and the role of the royal office and the function of the monarchy as God intended it and as God carried it out later. Dumbrell looks at the prophetic office as too much of a political entity. The prophetic office is a political entity that comes up at a situation and functions on behalf of the royal office.

I like Vos’ discussion much better. He says that what we find is rather an aversion to all political entanglements and alliances. This is not based on superior political insight on the part of the prophets. It is not that the prophets had such superior political insight. Dumbrell seems to say this, possibly because so many of the critical scholars say that the prophetic office wanted to be a royal office. According to these scholars, the prophets were often antagonistic to the king because they wanted to rule. They wanted to reign.

Vos, by contrast, talks about the prophets’ staunch maintenance of the theocratic principle that Jehovah is king and Israel is bound to rely exclusively on him. The prophets knew they were called to set forth the king. And whatever they did, they did serving the king—the King of heaven and earth. Young, in his book, *My Servants, the Prophets*, uses the phrase “the prophets were the guardians of the theocracy.” He

emphasizes much more their role within the theocracy and how they in a way defended the role of God the King, and how the kings had to represent God the King. The role of the prophetic office definitely must be seen in relation to God the King and the royal office. It is very interesting indeed that as a monarchy is established and unfolded that the prophetic office comes strongly to the fore. The prophetic office is not the dominant one at the pinnacle of the triangle. This position belongs rather to the royal office with the priest and the prophet supporting it. The kingship of God and the royalty of His people is a dominant theme in Scripture. The covenant is a way of administering it and the priesthood and the prophetic office are supporting agencies, offices that God instituted so that the royal office could truly function on behalf of the covenant suzerain.

We have to keep in mind that Samuel provides a setting for the Davidic kingship, and David's kingship must also be seen as a transition from a non-covenantal type of monarchy, which Saul represented. Saul was truly a non-covenantal type, the type that the people would have chosen. After Saul, the covenantal monarchy is established, not as an absolute monarchy, because God remains the king. This is a theocratic monarchy. Its nature is that of a theocracy and its royalty is meant essentially to symbolize and to typify the kingdom of God, to maintain the creation which had been established, but also to give a proper setting for the royal Messiah who was to come in time.

In the next lecture we will deal with that monarchy.