

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Life in a marginal zone can be unsettling. Patterns of rainfall, disease, and political power veer to the right and to the left. Winds that carry feasting for a season can bring famine in the next. Successful herders and farmers of the biblical *Heartland* lived life close to the earth and were keenly aware of these dynamics. Their survival hinged upon the ability to communicate, flex, and move as a group.

Even so, mounting challenges have a way of reaching a tipping point; they can overwhelm the human ability to respond, individually as well as collectively. In such extreme circumstances, not only does the intellect and emotion grow numb, in an act of mutilation we gnaw off that which is most precious and necessary for our recovery: personal relationships. It is a bitter act of self-destruction indeed, for what else is left when power, pretensions, and possessions are stripped away? In this state, how does one carry on? And with whom? And for whom? Such questions are hardly unique to the windswept highlands of Moab. For all who ponder such questions, the book of Ruth provides some answers.

For me, the opportunity to spend a season of study with the text of Ruth is the result of the kindness of many people. The administration of the Cincinnati Christian University offered the time needed to initiate this work with a semester sabbatical away from my teaching duties. In addition to this one-time kindness, they have, so far, supported six seasons of archaeological investment at the site of Tell Jalul in the country of Jordan. That commitment has given me – and a host of students – the chance to regularly walk the paths of Ruth’s homeland.

Within the CCU family, thanks also goes out to my colleagues, Sara Fudge and Jody Otte. Both read this manuscript and offered improvements. David Toundas, my graduate assistant, helped with many details. Rob Fleenor has been an enormous help to me as a

student, librarian, and friend. He knows that our work is bound together in ways beyond the cover to this book.

Finally, given the subject matter of this commentary, it is appropriate to honor the contribution of resourceful women who understand the need for cooperation, flexibility, and mobility while living life in a marginal zone. I consider myself blessed to have such a grandmother, a mother, a wife, and a daughter. To Doris Spencer, Karen Ziese, Vicki Ziese, and Moriah Ziese, I dedicate this work.

“Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Mark Ziese

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