



# Ruth

*A COMMENTARY OUTLINE*

REDEMPTION ILLUSTRATED

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# Outline

or “A Bird’s Eye View of Ruth”

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# Setting for Ruth

or *“The Days When the Judges Governed”*

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## THE HISTORY

From the death of Joshua to Samuel, there was a period of about four-hundred years. The history of this period is narrated by the book of Judges. It was a low point in the history of the nation of Israel. The period exhibits a monotonous and repetitious pattern. Israel sins and God responds with discipline; then, after a period of time, Israel cries out for delivery. To complete the cycle, God sends a deliverer or judge. The cycle is sometimes presented in an alliterative form: sin, servitude, supplication, and salvation.

When in this period did Ruth and Boaz live? The opening verses give us several clues. First, Ruth 1:1 tells us the events took place when there was a famine in the land, which evidently lasted about ten years (Ruth 1:4). Famines were either weather related or, many times, were the result of war or military oppression. Second, it was severe enough that Naomi and Elimelech left the land of Canaan to find food. This would fit very well into the time of Gideon (Judges 6:17).

The whole period of the judges was a time of great spiritual decline and degeneration. The story of Ruth and Boaz takes place in the Judean town of Bethlehem, surrounded by grain fields from which Bethlehem takes its name, “House of Bread.” Here is where David grew up watching the flocks of his father, Jesse. Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, will become the grandfather of King David.

The presence of the book of Ruth in this period of time in the Old Testament carries two major lessons. First, God is always faithful to those who walk with Him regardless of the degeneracy of the age in which they live. Second, God is always bringing about His sovereign purpose irrespective of appearances.

Ruth was one of the group of five books called the Megilloth that was read at Israel’s national feasts. Ruth was read at the feast of Pentecost, Esther at Purim, Ecclesiastes at the feast of Tabernacles, Lamentations at the anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem, and Song of Solomon at Passover.

## THE PURPOSE

### **Ruth Is the Classic Illustration of Redemption**

What the New Testament teaches doctrinally concerning redemption, Ruth illustrates. It also shows the practical out-working of the Old Testament concept of the kinsman-redeemer.

### **Ruth Gives Us the Genealogy of Christ to David**

Ruth shows the historical roots of Jesus Christ. He can be traced to the chosen seed of the Old Testament. This validates Jesus our Lord as truly God incarnate. The humanity of Jesus was real, not imagined.

The genealogy starts with Genesis 38 and traces the line to Obed, the child born to Ruth and Boaz. From there the line moves on to King David. The New Testament calls Jesus the “Son of David.” Ruth has the rare distinction of being one of only three women included in the genealogy of Matthew 1.

### **Ruth Contains Important Lessons Concerning Courtship and Marriage**

The attitude of an ideal husband is revealed by the words and actions of Boaz. The place of the word of God in the lives of Ruth and Boaz is significant and instructive.

# **T**he Tragedies of Moab

or “*The Hand of the Lord Has Gone Forth Against Me*”

Ruth 1:1-18

## THE JOURNEY OUT 1:1-5

### THE DEPARTURE 1:1-2

“Now it come about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup>And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.”

### Elimelech’s Intent 1:1

The days when the judges ruled take us back to about 1100 B.C. The land of Moab would refer to the high plateau south of the Arnon River, which enjoyed the rain that came from clouds that formed over the Judean desert.

God’s place for His chosen people was always the promised land. This was the case even when times were difficult, as in this instance. It was when Abram left the land that he met Hagar in Egypt, which led to disobedience (Genesis 12:10). While in Egypt Abram received no revelations from God. Under similar circumstances of famine, Isaac was tempted to leave the land but was told by God not to do so (Genesis 26:1-2).

Elimelech intended the journey to Moab to be relatively brief. The word *sojourn* in Hebrew indicates a temporary visit and is used to designate migrants in a foreign land. The life of the sojourner was often difficult since they could not hold their own land. This would attest to the severity of the famine in the promised land. They would hardly leave bad conditions for worse ones. The famine had extended to the most fertile parts of the land, even to the “House of Bread.” However, even a temporary journey from the place of God’s choosing is tragic for we read he *remained there* (1:2) and finally *died there* (1:3).

The Moabites were among the fiercest enemies of Israel, and a brief summary of the history of this hostility may be surveyed by reading Genesis 19:37, Exodus 15:15, Numbers 24:17, Deuteronomy 23:3-6, Judges 3:12-14, and 11:17. It is very clear that Moab was in direct opposition to Israel and, as such, was under God's curse. They were strong and powerful from the human standpoint, but Israel was forbidden to associate with them. Elimelech went there in disobedience.

### Elimelech's Family 1:2

Elimelech led his wife and two sons to Moab. Biblical names often carry meaning that is prophetic, and these are no exception. Naomi means *gracious* or *pleasant*, Mahlon means *weakly* or *sick*, and Chilion means *pinning*.

### THE DISASTER 1:3-5

*"Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup>Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband."*

The first tragedy is the death of Elimelech (1:3). He stepped out of pressure in the land of Canaan and into a grave in the land of Moab. The second tragedy is the marriage of his sons to Moabite girls (1:4). Deuteronomy 23:3 directly forbids this kind of marriage. Elimelech's sons would have been deprived of food in Canaan, but in Moab they were deprived of God's blessing.

Finally, as recorded in verse 5, both of his son's die. A pathetic picture—three widows and three graves. In marrying Elimelech, Naomi put herself under his headship; and he exercised it poorly. An unmarried girl who is a believer is always foolish to marry a man for whom the will of God is not his priority. It inevitably brings heartbreak, if not tragedy, into her life.

## THE JOURNEY BACK 1:6-18

### THE JOURNEY BEGINS 1:6-7

*"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. <sup>7</sup>So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah."*

The following verses show Ruth and Orpah, the two widows of Elimelech's sons, making some very crucial decisions. These decisions made by each put them on different courses in life and head-

ed them toward totally different destinies. For Orpah, a return to Moab and its pagan religion; for Ruth, on to a life of blessing bestowed by the one true God and an ultimate place in the lineage of Christ!

The verb translated *visited* is used repeatedly in the Old Testament for the activity of God in observing the suffering and need of His people and responding with blessing. In Genesis 21:1 the same word is used saying, “Then the LORD took note of Sarah...” It is translated *remembered* in Exodus 2:24 as God sees the suffering of His people in Egypt and remembers His covenant with them.

## DIALOGUE ENSUES 1:8-14

### Their Future in Moab 1:8-10

*“And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup>May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>10</sup>And they said to her, ‘No, but we will surely return with you to your people.’ ”*

It is difficult to understand how an Israelite who knew the true God would want to send her daughters-in-law back to Moab with its paganism, but somewhere on the journey Naomi strongly encourages them to abandon the journey to Canaan and return to Moab. Most of Naomi’s advice rests on the assumption that the girls will have little prospect for finding a husband and therefore lack security in life. This, of course, fails to consider the sufficiency of God that was promised to believers. It also reveals how badly human viewpoint had affected Naomi.

Both Ruth and Orpah made the same decision under the same set of circumstances. But it is not enough to make a decision; if the decision is right, one must have the tenacity to stick with it—Ruth did; Orpah did not. Decisions to opt for the will of God must be sufficiently rooted to withstand pressures. Orpah went the safe way; Ruth went the right way. As the narrative progresses, we will see that real spiritual issues were involved.

### Their Future with Naomi 1:11-14

*“But Naomi said, ‘Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? <sup>12</sup>Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, <sup>13</sup>would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me.’ <sup>14</sup>And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.”*

The two girls now go their separate ways. This is expressed by saying that Orpah *kissed* (goodby)) her mother-in-law, but Ruth *clung* (stayed with) to her. Notice what Ruth's decision involved: forsaking her family (1:8), abandoning the prospect of marriage (1:11-13), leaving her religion (1:15), and placing her trust in Yahweh (2:12). In making this decision, Ruth becomes part of the greatest plan of the ages. She will become a distant grandmother of Jesus Christ.

### THE DECISION OF RUTH 1:15-18

“Then she said, ‘Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ <sup>16</sup>But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.’ <sup>18</sup>When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.”

#### Her Decision Was Made in the Face of Opposition

Naomi had strongly encouraged her to return with Orpah, but Ruth resisted. All decisions made by the believer in this world relative to the will of God will inevitably be met with the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

#### Her Decision Involved No Limitations

This is expressed by the words *where you go, I will go*. The decision involved a committal with no strings attached.

#### Her Decision Meant Worldly Poverty

Naomi, being a widow, could not provide physical comforts for Ruth. The widow and the orphan were the two classes worst off in the Old Testament. Provision was made for them by the Law, but its effectiveness depended upon the generosity of those who left part of their fields unharvested.

#### Her Decision Involved a Break with Her Closest Associations

| Ruth turns from the people of Moab to the people of Israel.

#### Her Decision Meant Attached to Yahweh Forever

| Paganism held a morbid fascination in the ancient world. The Moabite god was called Chemosh, and worship involved wild celebrations and even human sacrifice.

#### Her Decision Was for Life

| This is expressed by the words *where you die, I will die*.

**Her Decision Was for All Earthly Existence**

Even in death she will remain with Naomi, for wherever she is buried, Ruth will be buried also. We often take a body back to its original home for burial, but not so for Ruth.

**NOTES**

NOTES

# **T**he Welcome to Bethlehem

or “Is This Naomi?”

Ruth 1:19-22

## THE WELCOME 1:19

*“So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came about when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ ”*

The prodigal daughter returning to Bethlehem is a pitiful sight. This is reflected in the words *Is this Naomi?* She had left Bethlehem ten years earlier with a husband and two sons—and now she returns with no husband, no sons, and a gentile girl; she had lost three loved ones and gained a stranger. The Hebrew word translated *stirred* denotes a noisy commotion—a buzzing like the sound of bees.

By the time we arrive at the final chapter of this short book, Naomi will once again be richly blessed. In the meantime, Naomi has many lessons to learn and much of the grace of God to experience before the time of blessing.

## THE CONFESSION 1:20-21

*“And she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup>I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?’ ”*

The first revelation of Naomi’s spiritual condition is found in verse 20. The name Naomi means *pleasant one*, and the name Mara means *the bitter or troubled one*. The word *bitterly* has the literal meaning of *a bitter taste in one’s mouth*. Figuratively it refers to sadness and grief, even a bitter spirit. This is evidence that names were observed with conscious reference to their meaning in Old Testament times. Naomi is registering a negative attitude toward God dealings. The New Testament warns believers of this possibili-

ty in Hebrews 12:15. God intends all things to be for our benefit. This must be understood and believed if we are to avoid bitterness. It is interesting to note that Naomi laid the blame for her troubles on the *Almighty*, a characteristic of human viewpoint since Adam.

Next, Naomi uses a very pregnant expression for the cost of living in disobedience to the Lord. She went out *full* and came home *empty*. Naomi went out of the land by her own choice, but it is instructive to note that it was the Lord who brought her home again. Her statement about leaving the land full is interesting in the light of the reason for their departure. Ruth 1:1 tells us they left because there was a famine in the land. In retrospect, the famine was fullness compared to her present state. Living through the famine would not have been nearly so bad as what happened in Moab.

Naomi accepts full responsibility for the time spent in Moab. In Ruth 1:1 we are told that it was her husband that made the decision to go to Moab, taking his wife and children with him. From that perspective it appears she had little choice but to go with her husband. That she uses the first person personal pronoun in the singular number shows that she alone was responsible for her actions. Though Elimelech led her out, she assumed responsibility for choosing to follow; but it was God alone who is said to have brought her back.

Certain aspects of discipline are permanent. Naomi would never regain her husband, her children, or ten years of wasted time.

## THE SEASON 1:22

*“So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”*

The time of grain harvest would have been late April and early May. Barley was one of the first grains ready to be harvested. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were probably still in progress when they arrived. Under Old Testament law, the corners of the fields were not to be harvested, but instead left for the poor to reap for their personal needs. Doubtless, many paid no attention to such a stipulation and reaped the harvest purely for their own profit with no thought for the poor. Boaz will not be among these, and the unharvested part of his field will play a significant role for Naomi and Ruth.

# **T**he Fields of Boaz

or “Whose Young Woman Is This?”

Ruth 2:1-23

## **BOAZ: HIS FIELDS 2:1-3**

“Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup>And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, ‘Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.’ And she said to her, ‘Go my daughter.’ <sup>3</sup>So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.”

The second chapter begins with the announcement that Naomi had a kinsman. These words introduce us to Boaz, the most important character in the story. The translation *kinsman* is unfortunate. The narrative revolves about the activity of Boaz as “kinsman-redeemer” (2:20), which translates the Hebrew word *goel* and carries great significance in the Old Testament. The word *kinsman* in Ruth 2:1 simply means *acquaintance or friend*, as the NASB margin shows.

Boaz’s status in the community is stated in terms of his wealth, meaning he was a landowner and, as such, a member of the respected upper class. Gideon is another example of one who enjoyed this same status (Judges 6:12).

Boaz will prove to be the salvation of both Ruth and Naomi from the physical standpoint. He will also set the standard of obedience to God under all circumstances, making an ideal husband for Ruth. Ruth had taken a step of faith; and after she did this, God provided the right someone of the right character at the right time. This principle is stated in Psalm 37:25, which says, “I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread.”

Ruth requests permission to glean in the field of Boaz so that she and Naomi will have food on which to live. Leviticus 19:9, 23:22,

and Deuteronomy 24:19 explain this custom. A farmer was to leave some grain in the field or grapes on the vine for the poor of the land, as well as the widow and the orphan. It was part of the Old Testament system that stated how the destitute were to be supplied with food.

We are told that Ruth happened to come upon the field of Boaz. Literally, the words *she happened* are *her chance chanced upon*. This is what occurred as viewed from the human standpoint, for Ruth had apparently never heard of Boaz until this “chance” meeting. Viewed from the divine standpoint, this is the sovereignty of God in operation. Ruth had come to rest under the wings of the God of Israel; and from this point on, God will bring all the circumstances of life together in order to bring her into the place of maximum blessing. The truth of Romans 8:28 is applicable to God’s people of all time, whether it be with Joseph in the latter part of Genesis, or with Ruth, or with the apostle Paul, or with any of His children anytime, anywhere.

## BOAZ: HIS APPEARANCE 2:4-7

### HIS CHARACTER REVEALED 2:4

*“Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, ‘May the LORD be with you.’ And they said to him, ‘May the LORD bless you.’ ”*

These are the first recorded words spoken by Boaz to his workers and they to him. The Lord was honored by Boaz, and his workers knew and responded in kind. This is especially striking when we recall that most of Israel had forgotten the Lord in this period of her national history. A man whose thinking process unashamedly acknowledges the Lord will obviously make a good husband for Ruth. This verse shows capital and labor on good terms.

### HIS QUESTION ASKED 2:5-7

*“Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, ‘Whose young woman is this?’<sup>6</sup> And the servant in charge of the reapers answered and said, ‘She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab.’<sup>7</sup> And she said, “Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.” Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while.’ ”*

Boaz sees Ruth gleaning and asks, “Whose young woman is this?” It is clear that Boaz is immediately attracted to Ruth. First, he requests that she stay in his field (2:8-9). Second, she is given the privilege of drinking with his workers (2:9). Third, Boaz extends an invitation to eat with him at lunch time on the first morning he meets her. Fourth, Boaz instructs his workers to leave some extra grain in the field for Ruth (2:15-16).

It is important to note that the meeting and love of Ruth and Boaz was part of a prearranged plan. God leads his children sovereignly in every area of life; and marriage is no exception.

## BOAZ: HIS REQUEST 2:8-9

*“Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. <sup>9</sup>Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.’ ”*

Boaz addresses Ruth as *my daughter*, indicating a significant difference in their ages. Immediately behind the reapers were the maidens who bound the grain. The gleaner just behind the binders had the best opportunity for gathering the best grain. Boaz bids Ruth to come near the binders and stay there.

In many ways Boaz illustrates our relationship to Jesus Christ. Here he promises to supply her with food and water as long as she occupies herself only with his field, just as Christ supplies our needs as long as we look to Him alone.

## BOAZ: HIS OBSERVATION 2:10-11

### RUTH’S QUESTION 2:10

*“Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, ‘Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?’ ”*

There is a play on words in the Hebrew that is not evident in the English translation. The words *take notice* and the noun *foreigner* sound almost the same in Hebrew. It would be like saying, “Why have you noticed the unnoticed?”

### BOAZ’S ANALYSIS 2:11-12

*“And Boaz answered and said to her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD reward your work and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.’ ”*

### He Observes Her Fruit 2:11

The response of Boaz is not that of a landed proprietor but of an Israelite who knows the Lord. At no place does Ruth call attention

to the sacrifice she made for the sake of Naomi. If that information did not come from lips other than hers, we would never know about it.

### He Observes Her Faith 2:12

The fruit of Ruth's kindness came from her faith in the God of Israel. Boaz's words indicate that he was acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. The reference to a full reward from the Lord is an allusion to Genesis 15:1, and the mention of finding refuge under the wings of the Lord alludes to Deuteronomy 32:11. Chapter 4 of Ruth will show that he was even acquainted with some of the fine points of the Mosaic Law.

The word translated *wings* here is translated *covering* in 3:9 where Ruth makes the request, "So spread your covering over your maid...", signifying his place as her husband-to-be. The believer's relationship to the Lord, then, is expressed in the same way as the union of husband and wife. The place of Ruth under the Lord's wings is not a mother bird image but a devoted husband image.

### RUTH'S RESPONSE 2:13

*"Then she said, 'I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.'"*

The words and kindness of Boaz must have overwhelmed Ruth, especially when one recalls that her recent past had been filled with nothing but sorrowful departures. She had parted with her husband, with her parents, and with her homeland. Ruth is saying, "I have long been sad, but now you comfort me." The words of Boaz were like morning dew on the fields of grain.

Favor bestowed on Ruth, though she was not like one of Boaz's maidservants, is a powerful illustration of grace—the bestowal of the richest of God's blessings upon the most undeserving sinner. Ruth is no longer a common gleaner in the fields. With verse 14 she is elevated to a new status, enjoying the common meal and a portion of everything on hand.

## BOAZ: HIS GENEROSITY 2:14-16

### RUTH'S NEW STATUS 2:14

*"And at mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.' So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left."*

It is interesting to note that Ruth is blessed in proportion to the time spent with Boaz. In Ruth 2:14 she spends time with Boaz, and

in verse 15 she receives food from Boaz. The next big armload of grain she has to take home is found in Ruth 3:15 and, once again, it is immediately after time spent with Boaz.

### RUTH'S NEW PRIVILEGE 2:15-16

*“When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, ‘Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. <sup>16</sup>And also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.’ ”*

There is constant progression in the way Boaz provides for Ruth. In Ruth 2:9 the servants are not to *touch* her; in Ruth 2:15 the servants are warned not to *insult* her; and finally in Ruth 2:16 they are to leave bundles of grain and are not to *rebuke* her. Regardless of circumstances, Ruth never complains—she is satisfied in both want and abundance.

## BOAZ: HIS RELATIONSHIP 2:17-23

### “HIS NAME IS BOAZ” 2:17-19

*“So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup>And she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. <sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law then said to her, ‘Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’ ”*

Gleaning refers to the gathering of the stalks that were left by the reapers. Gleaning was always followed by threshing. Though Boaz had no obligation to do so, Ruth was nonetheless allowed to use the threshing area to beat out the grain she had gleaned. A rod, hinged in the middle, allowed a thresher to beat the grain to loosen it from the stalks. A fork-like shovel heaved the grain into the air so that the wind could blow the chaff away while the heavier grain fell to the ground.

An *ephah* of barley is about three-fourths of a bushel, an amount that amazed Naomi. The poor rarely gleaned this much in one day. When Naomi finds out whose field it was, she breaks out in praise to the Lord. The kindness of Boaz is understood as coming from the Lord, and it is He who is praised.

### “HE IS OUR RELATIVE” 2:20-23

*“And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.’ Again*

Naomi said to her, 'The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.' <sup>21</sup>Then Ruth the Moabitess said, 'Furthermore, he said to me, "You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest." ' <sup>22</sup>And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, lest others fall upon you in another field.' <sup>23</sup>So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law."

The exact expression of praise uttered here by Naomi is also found in Genesis 24 in a very similar instance. Abraham had dispatched his oldest and most trusted servant to find a wife for Isaac. As the servant arrived at Nahor, his intended destination, he prayed asking the Lord to *grant success* in the selection of a wife for Isaac. The verb means *to order* something. He was asking the Lord to exercise sovereign direction of the selection of the right girl. As he waited at the well, Rebekah arrived to draw water. We are told she "was very beautiful, a virgin...and she went down to the spring and filled her jar, and came up." The servant recognized her as the girl for Isaac and exclaimed, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth.... (Genesis 24:27)'

It could well be that Naomi had this incident in mind. At any rate, she uses the same words of praise upon the discovery of Boaz that Abraham's servant used upon the discovery of Rebekah.

The term *closest relative* is extremely significant for understanding the relationship of Ruth and Boaz. It involves the Old Testament concept of the kinsman-redeemer. The Hebrew word is *goel* and describes the position held by Boaz in relationship to Ruth. An outline of the kinsman-redeemer concept in the Old Testament is found at the end of these notes.

# **T**he Marriage Proposal

or “*Spread Your Covering Over Your Maid, for You Are a Goel*”

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Ruth 3:1-18

## THE SUGGESTION OF NAOMI 3:1-5

### THE SETTING 3:1-2

“Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? <sup>2</sup>And now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.’ ”

Naomi desires to *seek security* for Ruth. The place of security refers to marriage. It is Naomi’s way of saying, “It is my responsibility to find you a husband.” The Hebrew word translated *security* means *a home, a place of rest and safety*. In their culture a woman’s security lay in the protective care of her husband. In the Old Testament, marriage was considered the fulfillment of a woman’s calling, without which she was helpless and defenseless.

The reminder that Boaz is *our kinsman* is justification for the course of action Naomi is about to recommend. Her relationship to him gives her the right to ask him to perform his duty with regard to her. It was the kinsman’s duty to marry the girl, and it was the girl’s duty to claim this provision.

If Boaz had been the brother of Elimelech, the law of levirate marriage would have obligated him to marry Naomi. But since he was not Elimelech’s brother, he was not under this obligation to Naomi. The term levirate means the law of brothers. If one’s brother died, there was an obligation to marry his wife to assure that the line would carry on. This is part of the Mosaic legislation and is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. In Matthew 22:23-27 the Sadducees reveal their knowledge of this law as they pose a trick question to Jesus.

### THE INSTRUCTIONS 3:3-5

“ Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself

*known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup>And it shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.’ <sup>5</sup>And she said to her, ‘All that you say I will do.’ ”*

The suggestion to put on her *best clothes* implies that she had been dressed in widows clothing, showing that she was in mourning over the death of her husband. The action taken here shows Ruth severing her ties with her past.

The time of the year was harvest season. The grain was in and ready to be threshed. The process of threshing was accomplished in the following way. A level piece of ground was selected in an exposed place, rocks were picked up, and the ground was packed hard for an area thirty to forty feet in diameter. This was called the threshing floor. The sheaves were piled on the floor, and the oxen trampled them until the stalks were separated. The grain was then tossed into the air, and the wind blew away the chaff, leaving only the barley or wheat. This process was usually carried on in the evening until midnight since the wind was better at that time. Finally, about midnight the workers and their families ate supper; and all laid down around the threshing floor to sleep.

This particular night, Boaz would be helping his men in the field, and at midnight Ruth was to “propose” to him. After this, Naomi tells Ruth to follow Boaz’s instructions. Ruth’s way of proposing is unconventional and strange to our way of doing things.

## THE ACTION OF RUTH 3:6-9

### IN LYING BESIDE BOAZ 3:6-7

*“So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup>When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.”*

Boaz follows the habit of landowners in sleeping outdoors with his workers in order to help protect the harvest from theft. The Hebrew word translated *feet* may also refer to one’s limbs.

### IN MAKING HER REQUEST 3:8-9

*“And it happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. <sup>9</sup>And he said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.’ ”*

Sometime in the night Boaz is startled to find a woman by his side and exclaims, “Who are you?” To this Ruth replies by saying in effect, “I am Ruth your servant girl; I ask you to marry me, and I wish to remind you that you are my *goel*—my redeemer.”

Previously, Ruth had been designated as *the Moabitess*, but here she refers to herself as Boaz's *maid*. Ruth has severed ties with Moab and approaches Boaz as an Israelite.

## THE REPLY OF BOAZ 3:10-13

### IN PRAISE OF RUTH 3:10-11

*“Then he said, ‘May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. <sup>11</sup>And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence.’ ”*

The *last kindness* probably refers to Ruth's treatment of Boaz, whereas the *first* refers to her treatment of Mahlon, her deceased husband. Ruth is a Moabitess, but she has no Moab morals; she has fully espoused the Lord and His word.

### IN PRESENTING A PROBLEM 3:12-13

*“ ‘And now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. <sup>13</sup>Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning.’ ”*

Boaz calls to Ruth's attention that there is a relative closer than he is. By the Mosaic Law, the closer relative had precedence in marrying Ruth. The principle exhibited here is very important. Ruth and Boaz want to marry, but that desire is subordinate to the word of God. Nothing is good that is gained by disobedience.

## THE GIFT OF BOAZ 3:14-18

*“So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, ‘Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.’ <sup>15</sup>Again he said, ‘Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.’ So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. <sup>16</sup>And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, ‘How did it go, my daughter?’ And she told her all that the man had done for her. <sup>17</sup>And she said, ‘These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, “Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”’ ”*  
<sup>18</sup>*Then she said, ‘Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.’ ”*

Sending Ruth to Naomi with an abundant supply of grain was indication of Boaz's favorable response to Ruth's proposal. It would be symbolic of his promise to act on Ruth's behalf. Naomi's advice to Ruth to leave matters in the hands of Boaz shows her confidence in his character.

NOTES

# **T**he Reward of Obedience

or “*So Boaz Took Ruth, and She Became His Wife*”

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Ruth 4:1-22

There is a definite spiritual progression in the book of Ruth. In chapter 1 we meet Ruth apart from the Lord and the truth of His word in the land of Moab. In chapter 2 she arrives in the field of Boaz, and we are told she has come to trust under the wings of the Lord. In chapter 3 she is at the threshing floor of Boaz, appropriating the blessings that the Mosaic Law made possible for the people of God. And now, in the final chapter she becomes the bride of Boaz and is integrated into the line of Christ.

## **BOAZ PRESENTS HIS CASE 4:1-12**

### **THE COURT CONVENES 4:1-2**

*“Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, ‘Turn aside, friend, sit down here.’ And he turned aside and sat down.<sup>2</sup> And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down.”*

We are told that Boaz went *up to the gate*. This was the place where business was transacted—a kind of ancient “city hall.” It was the meeting place for the marketing and business of the day. It was also the high court of the elders in Israel where disputes between citizens could be heard and adjudicated. In addition, it served as a public forum where legal transactions could take place in the presence of witnesses.

Ruth 4 begins with Boaz, the nearer redeemer, and ten of the elders of the city gathered at the gate to settle the matter of Ruth’s redemption. The author of the book of Ruth conceals the name of the *close relative*. It is possible that the name is concealed because the author wants us to remember that he was powerless to redeem. The issue is not the person of the potential redeemer but the powerlessness of the potential redeemer. This is one reason why Ruth is such a good illustration of the doctrine of redemption—only Jesus

Christ had the will, the ability, and the price to redeem man from his sin.

## THE COURT CONSIDERS 4:3-6

### The Issue of the Land Involved 4:3-4

*“Then he said to the closest relative, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.’ ’ And he said, ‘I will redeem it.’ ”*

The first question to be asked is, Who has the right to redeem? Only a blood relative could do so, beginning with the closest relative first. Both Boaz and the other potential redeemer speak of Elimelech as *our brother*, showing that they both have the right to redeem; but the redeemer other than Boaz has priority because he is a closer relative.

The Hebrew word for *redeemer* is *goel* and contains two ideas. First, one must be a kinsman, or blood relative. Second, one must be willing and able to buy back the person or property requiring redemption. Both property (Leviticus 25:25) and people (Leviticus 25:47-49) could be redeemed.

### The Issue of the Person Involved 4:5-6

*“Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.’ <sup>6</sup>And the closest relative said, ‘I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right redemption, for I cannot redeem it.’ ”*

#### *The Requirement of the Redeemer 4:5*

Naomi evidently had to sell her property because of poverty. The closest relative is willing to redeem this property. However, another issue rises: He must also redeem Ruth.

When a woman’s husband died, she held title to the land to give to her male children who were the rightful owners. Elimelech, the owner of the land, died. Naomi, his wife, was to pass it to Elimelech’s sons, but both of them died also. Therefore, the land was in the hands of their wives, one of which was Ruth. This meant the land was just as much Ruth’s as it was Naomi’s. The potential redeemer quickly figures out what is involved in this particular act of redemption. First, he would need to pay for the price of the land. Second, the land would go to Ruth’s sons; and finally he would have to marry a gentile bride who was a Moabite.

***The Inability of the Redeemer 4:6***

It becomes obvious to the potential redeemer that this would be a very costly redemption, endangering his own inheritance. He therefore concludes that he cannot redeem. This now opens the way for the next nearest kin to step in and do the redeeming. That one is Boaz!

**THE COURT WITNESSES 4:7-12****The Sandal 4:7-8**

*“Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. <sup>8</sup>So the closest relative said to Boaz, ‘Buy it for yourself.’ And he removed his sandal.”*

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 contains the “law of the sandal.” This was an ancient custom connected with the right of a widow to be redeemed by one of the brothers-in-law. If the brother-in-law refused to redeem, she was allowed to shame him in a public manner by removing his sandal and spitting in his face. In Ruth, the transfer of a sandal from one man to another symbolized the agreement they had reached. The closest relative redeemer takes off his sandal and gives it to Boaz. At last we have a name for him—he is the “barefoot redeemer”! This forcefully illustrates all attempts at a standing with God apart from the redemptive work of one man, Jesus Christ.

**The Announcement 4:9-10**

*“Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup>Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.’ ”*

The completeness of the redemption is brought out by the words “*all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover....*” Ruth is exalted because of a successful and complete redemption wrought for her by Boaz. The richest man in Bethlehem can say, “I have paid the price, she is mine!”

An additional benefit of this redemptive act is that the name of Naomi’s son will not be *cut off from his brothers*. The restoration of name and reputation is a beautiful aspect of this redemption.

The act of redemption carried great doctrinal significance in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 43:1 the Lord says, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine.” The

word *redemption* expresses better than any other the significance of the death of Christ. I Peter 1:18-19 states, "...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but with precious blood,...the blood of Christ."

### The Prayer 4:11-12

*"And all the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.*

*<sup>12</sup>Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD shall give you by this young woman.' "*

Marriage is not a secular matter. This marriage was ordained by God; and it was a joy and blessing in all ways, extending not only to Ruth but to Naomi as well. Naomi lost two sons and a husband by disobedience, but God is gracious— she is soon to be blessed with a grandson who is to become the grandfather of King David. No higher honor could be paid to Ruth than to compare her to Rachel and Leah. Perez is a direct ancestor of Boaz, being the favored twin born to Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38:29-30).

## BOAZ MARRIES RUTH 4:13-17

*"So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>14</sup>Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. <sup>15</sup>May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.' <sup>16</sup>Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup>And the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!' So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David."*

While weddings were occasions for great celebration, often lasting for several days, the text does not dwell on this or even mention it. It moves instead to the significant event—the birth of a son to Ruth and Boaz. Nothing was more indicative of God's blessing and approval than the birth of a male child. Obed will become the father of Jesse, the father of David, from whose line comes Jesus the Savior and King.

## THE GENAEOLOGY OF DAVID 4:18-22

*“Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron,<sup>19</sup> and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab,<sup>20</sup> and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon,<sup>21</sup> and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed,<sup>22</sup> and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.”*

The word translated *generations* is *toledoth* and means *a history or an account* rather than a list of names. Perez was born to Judah and Tamar and founded the main lineage of Judah. Hezron was among those who entered Egypt at the beginning of their sojourn there (Genesis 46:12). Ram is the Aram of Matthew 1:3; his son Amminadab became the father-in-law of Aaron the high priest (Exodus 6:23). Nahshon was the head of Judah during the early part of the wilderness wanderings (Numbers 2:3). Salmon became the husband to Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Obed was David’s grandfather.

Matthew follows the genealogy of Ruth exactly with the exception of the addition of the names of three women. The mother of Perez is listed as Tamar. A reading of Genesis 38 shows that she got into the line of Christ because of sin. God never approves or condones sin—it violates everything His holy and righteous character is; but, nonetheless, if Tamar had not sinned, she would not have been in the line of Christ. By way of application, we should be reminded that until we recognize our position as helpless sinners, we have no place in Christ at all.

The second exception to Ruth’s genealogy is the listing of Boaz’s mother as Rahab. Joshua 2:9-20 serves as background here when it is coupled with Hebrews 11:31. This demonstrates that Rahab got into the line of Christ by faith. No man has a position in Christ except by faith.

The third exception is the listing of the mother of Obed as Ruth, who entered the line of Christ through redemption. In the New Testament those who are exhorted to conduct becoming Christians are reminded that we should be motivated by the truth of redemption. I Corinthians 6:19-20 says, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought (redeemed) with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

NOTES

# The Kinsman Redeemer

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## THE WORD USED TO DESIGNATE THE KINSMAN REDEEMER IS *GOEL*

This word is the participial form of a verb meaning *to redeem*. It is so frequently used to designate a person that the participle is for all practical purposes treated as a noun. It is distinct from the verb *padah*, which means *to redeem*. The verb *padah* emphasizes the simple fact of redemption. The word *goel* stresses that the redeeming is done by a relative. This has led to the use of two words in English to translate the single Hebrew word. To treat the Hebrew word adequately, one must find an English counterpart that embodies both the idea of kinship and the idea of redemption.

## THE DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES OF THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

### The Kinsman Redeemer Could Repurchase Property that Had Been Sold in Time of Need

Leviticus 25:25 says, “If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.”

### The Kinsman Redeemer Could Repurchase a Person that Had Been Sold into Slavery

Leviticus 25:47-48 states, “Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger’s family, then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him.”

There are some other implications of redemption in the Old Testament, but these two are germane to the book of Ruth since both property and persons were involved with Ruth and Naomi.

## THE REQUIREMENTS OF A KINSMAN REDEEMER

### He Must Have the Right to Redeem

He must be a blood relative of the person needing to be redeemed. The nearest relative had the first responsibility. Boaz was not the nearest relative upon whom the duty to redeem fell. However, because of other considerations, the privilege became his.

### He Must Have the Will to Redeem

This is why Boaz approaches the nearest relative of Ruth. One could not be forced to redeem against one's will.

### He Must Have the Ability to Redeem

In the case of Ruth, the nearest relative could not redeem without endangering his own holdings. One obviously could not pay a redemption price if he did not have the financial wherewithal to do so.

## JESUS CHRIST THE PERFECT REDEEMER

### He Had the Right to Redeem

His right to redeem was established by the incarnation. We are told "...the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14) One should note the same truth in Galatians 4:4-5, Luke 3:23-38, and Hebrews 2:14-16.

### He Had the Will to Redeem

The voluntary nature of the death of Jesus is stated in His own words in John 10:18 saying, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again."

### He Had the Ability to Redeem

I Peter 1:18-19 reminds us, "...you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold...but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."