



RUTH

An Old Testament Exegetical Commentary



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Introduction to Ruth

1 Historical Background

The Book of Ruth is set in the “in the days when the judges ruled.” (Ruth 1:1) It was a consecrated time when there was no king but God ruling over Israel. Ruth was originally written in the Hebrew tongue. Its authorship is unknown, as is the date of its writing. Some scholars believe that it was written around the period of the sixth chapter of Judges when the Midianites destroyed the land.

2 Prevailing Conditions

The “famine” mentioned in Ruth 1:1 was serious enough to cause Elimelech to come up with a carnal plan to go to Moab for survival, and Judges chapter six seems to be the famine that best fits.²

3 Main Characters

The main characters of the book are Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Of the three, the character that stands out the most is Boaz. The reason it is Boaz is multifold. The first chapter of the book begins with a tragic series of events in the family of Elimelech and Naomi: from the famine at home in Ruth 1:1, to the death of Elimelech in v. 1:3, to the death of their two sons in v. 1:5. Naomi and her daughter-in-law return to Israel in a destitute situation. This sets the stage for the main character to enter. When chapter two opens, we are introduced to Boaz, the wealthy family member of the late Elimelech, who through a process of Hebrew custom becomes the one who redeems Elimelech’s family, and becomes the great-grandfather of King David, and ultimately the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

4 Major Themes

There are several themes throughout the book of Ruth, The overall theme is Redemption, it is what the entire book is about. The main sub-theme is “the theme of offspring”³ This theme is based upon a literal historical account of the kinsman redeemer process. Boaz met the familial requirements, as well as the financial ability, to redeem Elimelech’s family name and property, and he willingly did so, “raising up the name of the dead upon his inheritance” (Ruth 4:9-10) The offspring is the grandfather of King David. Another theme is faithfulness. Naomi remained faithful to God, her faithfulness impressed Ruth, and Ruth became faithful to Naomi and her God. (1:16) Boaz was a faithful man who recognized the faithfulness of Ruth. (2:11-12) Boaz was a faithful kinsman who made provisions for Naomi and Ruth. (1:16-17) Naomi praised God’s faithfulness (2:20). Boaz praises Ruth’s faithfulness (3:10). Boaz remained faithful to his word to redeem them and marry Ruth. (4:9-12)

Exegetical Outline **The four main divisions of the book of Ruth**

² Nicoll, William Robert. Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ruth. 1887-1896.
<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/teb/ruth-1.html> (accessed November 20, 2017), No page numbers.

³ McKeown, Ruth 1:1.

1. Death and Separation make up the first division in Ruth 1:1–18: v.1 Begins with the death of livelihood in Bethlehemjudah, and Naomi’s family’s separation from their kinfolks to Moab; v.3 sees the consequential death of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband; v.5 sees the resulting deaths of Mahlon and Chilion, Naomi’s sons; v.14 sees the separation of Orpha from Naomi and Ruth; v.18 ends with Naomi and Ruth’s separation from Moab.
 - 1.1.Naomi’s family migrated to Moab during a great famine, and while there her husband died and then her sons both died. (1:1-5)
 - 1.2.After the passing of her sons, Naomi releases her two daughter-in-laws to return to their people, but Ruth sticks with Naomi. (1:6-14)
 - 1.3.Naomi gives Ruth another chance to return to her people, but she desires to be one of Naomi’s people and worship Naomi’s God. (1:15-18)
2. Life and Provision make up the second division in Ruth 1:19–2:23: in v.1:22 They returned to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest; in v.2:1 they meet the wealthy family member; in v.2:2 Ruth goes out looking for grace for provisions and finds it in Boaz’s field through v.17; in v.18-20 Ruth brings provisions for Naomi. Chapter two ends at the end of the harvest.
 - 2.1.Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem, and everyone remembered Naomi, but Naomi was humbled. (1:19-21)
 - 2.2.When they arrived in Bethlehem it was the beginning of barley season. (1:22)
 - 2.3.Boaz, a wealthy kinsman of Elimelech had a cornfield in Bethlehem, and Ruth happened upon it to glean for her and Naomi, and Boaz inquired about her. (2:1-7)
 - 2.4.Boaz granted Ruth permission to continually glean his field and gave the young men orders not to touch her. (2:8-13)
 - 2.5.Boaz called Ruth to eat with him and his reapers, and instructed them to allow her to reap the good stuff, and leave some “handfuls of purpose” for her. (2:14-16)
 - 2.6.Ruth returned back to Naomi with her barley gathering and told her all that Boaz said, exciting Naomi because he was a near kinsman. (2:17-23)
3. The quest for Redemption takes place in Ruth 3:1–18: In v.1-5 the plan is prescribed; in v.6-7 it is implemented; in v.9-13 the plan unfolds with Boaz, and in v.14-18 the plan is confirmed.
 - 3.1.Naomi instructed Ruth to lie at Boaz’s feet, while he was sleeping, and she agreed to do so. (3:1-5)
 - 3.2.Ruth laid at Boaz’s feet and he discovered her there that night and asked her who she was, when she told him as Naomi instructed, he agreed, but there was a kinsman nearer than him that had the first choice. (3:6-13)
 - 3.3.When the morning came, Boaz sent Ruth home with six measures of barley for Naomi. (3:14-18)
4. The redemption takes place in v.4:1–22: The legal proceedings are followed correctly in v.1-5; the one who had the first option is given his opportunity to redeem Naomi and Ruth; in v.6-8 he legally declines; in v.9-12 Boaz seals the deal; finally in v.13-17, Boaz and Ruth consummate the deal, and are blessed with a child from whose lineage would spring forth King David, and ultimately, Jesus Christ.
 - 4.1.Boaz went to the gate of the city, where judicial decisions were determined, and presented Naomi and Ruth’s cause before the nearer kinsman who declined to redeem them. (4:1-6)

- 4.2. The nearer kinsman confirmed his decision with a public sign before the elders, and Boaz pledged to redeem them. (4:7-12)
- 4.3. Boaz and Ruth married and brought forth the grandfather of King David. (4:13-17)
- 4.4. The book closes with a short lineage of the children of Pharez. (4:18-22)

Interpretation and Exposition

1. Division One - Death and Separation - Ruth 1:1-18

1.1 Naomi's family migrated to Moab during a great famine, and while there her husband died and then her sons both died.- Ruth 1:1-5

As the book of Ruth opens with a very condensed family history of a family from "Bethlehemjudah." (Ruth 1:1-5) It takes place during "the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1), There is a serious issue: the land which once was "described to Moses as 'a land flowing with milk and honey,'"⁴ is now overcome by a famine that was serious enough that a man would relocate his family from their homeland of Bethlehem, which means "house of bread"⁵ to the land of Moab, to a people who were not permitted to "enter into the congregation of the LORD," because they would not give the children of Israel bread and water when they were in their exodus journey through the wilderness. (Deut. 23:3-4) The book of Ruth never attempts to explain the reason for the famine, just the condition of it, which implies that the reasons are not relevant to this account.

In the second verse, we learn the name of this migrating man, Elimelech, whose name means "my God is king."⁶ Elimelech decided, in what I ascribe, as does *The Targum*,⁷ to be a sin in a moment of weakness and lack of faith in his God, after seeing the results and soreness of the famine, to leave his home for a little while, in an attempt to preserve what he has left to his name and for his family's survival, thus, he decides to go to the closest prosperous place, "the watered field of Moab beyond the Salt Sea."⁸ However, his problem was that he "continued there" (Ruth 1:2), which will prove to be devastating to his family. In the same verse we are also introduced to "his wife Naomi (meaning "beautiful; agreeable"⁹), and ... his two sons Mahlon and Chilion," (Ruth 1:2) The first passage follows a brief series of events in their family through the next few verses.

In the third verse (Ruth 1:3) Naomi faces the death of her husband and now must depend on her two sons to provide for her. Was it judgment? Was it just his time? Elimelech's death came and went without comment on its cause, indicating that it was also not important how or why he died, but that he died. However, from a legal stand, Feivel Meltzer argued that "it was the act of remaining out of the land of Israel that warranted Elimelech's death"¹⁰

⁴ McKeown, Ruth 1:1.

⁵ Roswell Hitchcock, Calvin College: Christian Classics Ethereal Library: Bethlehem. November 12, 2005. https://www.ccel.org/ccel/hitchcock/bible_names.html?term=Beth-lehem.

⁶ Hitchcock, Elimelech.

⁷ McKeown, Ruth 1:3.

⁸ Nicoll, Ruth 1:2.

⁹ Hitchcock, Naomi.

¹⁰ Berman, Joshua. "Ancient Hermeneutics and the Legal Structure of the Book of Ruth." *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*; Berlin Vol. 119, Iss. 1, 2008, 28.

Immediately after Elimelech's death comes the next family event, his sons marry (Ruth 1:4), and their wives are introduced into the text, Orpah, and Ruth, Moabite women, which was an evidence that they "were somewhat indifferent to the religion their mother [Naomi] cherished."¹¹ It doesn't clearly state who was married to who at this point, but that is cleared up later in the book: "Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon." (Ruth 4:10).

From the wedding we skip ahead ten years and go directly to the death of Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:5), leaving Naomi widowed and bereaved of her children, with no means of financial support in a foreign land with her son's widows. Meltzer also said of them that "They died because they had remained in Moab and because they had married Moabite women."¹² Further probable evidence of God's judgment upon them was the lack of children being born to either of them.¹³ Children were symbolic of God's blessing on their union, the lack of children is symbolic of God reproaching their union. (Gen. 30:22-23 – Rachel's womb was closed up in reproach because Jacob married her after he married her sister, while he was outside of the will of God).

1.2. After the passing of her sons, Naomi releases her two daughter-in-laws to return to their people, but Ruth sticks with Naomi. – Ruth 1:6-14

Naomi received good news from back home as we enter into Ruth 1:6, causing her, with nothing requiring her to remain in Moab,¹⁴ to prepare to head back home both widowed and bereaved. Where she had heard the news of home from is not given, again rendering it not as important as the news itself. What was important was that in spite of her late husband's concerns and actions, God had blessed the "house of bread" by "giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6) like He gave His people manna when the children of Israel were in the wilderness in Exodus 16. God provides for His people!

Verses 7-9 show that Naomi had intended to head back to her homeland at first with her two daughters-in-law (Ruth 1:7). However, she stopped somewhere along the way and told her daughters-in-law that they should not continue with her any further. (Ruth 1:8) This was a very difficult thing, surely for over ten years they dwelt together as a family, and now Naomi is sending them away from her. She was not sending them away empty, but rather her desire was to send them away with the blessings of God upon them. (Ruth 1:8-9) Her daughters-in-law must have been wondering what Naomi was thinking? However, as the text unfolds, Naomi gives some sound reasoning why they should go back. At first Orpah and Ruth both resolutely expressed the desire to go with Naomi¹⁵ when they said: "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." (Ruth 1:10) Naomi begins to reason with them in verse 11-13, as to why they should go back to their homeland. She is unable to have any more children for them to marry in accordance to their law (Gen 38:8-10), and even if she could, she asks, "Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands?" (Ruth 1:13) Naomi wasn't trying to be mean, she felt bad for her daughters-in-law, as she felt personally responsible for their plight. With all the loss, Naomi believed that God was judging her, saying: "the hand of the LORD is gone out against me." (1:13) Orpah, after considering the great sacrifice it would be to

¹¹ Nicoll, Ruth 1:4.

¹² Berman, 28.

¹³ McKeown, Ruth 1:5

¹⁴ Nicoll, Ruth 1:6.

¹⁵ McKeown, Ruth 1:9.

continue on with Naomi, turned back and returned to her people, and back to her gods (Ruth 1:15) that she served. But Ruth stayed with Naomi. (Ruth 1:14)

1.3 Naomi gives Ruth another chance to return to her people, but she desires to be one of Naomi's people and worship Naomi's God. (Ruth 1:15-18)

After one more attempt to get Ruth to go back, Naomi finds a faithful daughter. Ruth makes a profound request, not only to stay with Naomi but to be part of her family for good. Ruth had seen something in Naomi that she just could not walk away from, prompting her to say “for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:16-17) Naomi's testimony had won her daughter-in-law to her God. Naomi would not be alone after all; her faith had won her a faithful daughter-in-law, “Ruth will be content to stay with Naomi for the rest of her life, whether in palace or hovel [or shack].”¹⁶ The conversation was over in verse 18, the two were headed home!

2. Division Two - Life and Provision - Ruth 1:19-2:23

2.1. Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem, and everyone remembered Naomi, but Naomi was humbled. (1:19-21)

As we enter into this section of the book we find things begin to look up for Naomi and Ruth. Though their journey is not detailed, their arrival into Bethlehem is. Regardless of the years that she had been gone, and to the toll they had taken in her life, she was remembered. Of them, it was said, “that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?” (Ruth 1:19) They had everyone's attention, and “the reaction is certainly one of ‘delighted excitement.’”¹⁷ They had not seen Naomi in well above ten years.

Naomi, on the other hand, was not so delighted, she had been humbled by the Lord. “Call me not Naomi.” She wasn't feeling very “beautiful; agreeable,”¹⁸ But she said, “call me Mara” (Ruth 1:20) which means “bitterness”¹⁹ after the bitter waters of Exodus 15:23. The God-fearing woman was none the less bitter over all the events that had taken place in Moab. She even blamed God for her plight. She was upset that she was returning home empty (Ruth 1:21). What was the cause of such bitterness? Was it just that her husband and children were gone, or does it go deeper than that? Naomi seemed to have a “me” attitude: “I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty... the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” Perhaps she was bitter as McKeown notes, because “God may have visited his people but he had not visited her.”²⁰ Sometimes we can get so bitter that we lose sight of everything but our bitterness.

2.2. When they arrived in Bethlehem it was the beginning of barley season. (1:22)

Naomi and Ruth's timely return to Bethlehem was met by the providential hand of her God that she was bitter against. God, on the other hand, did not cast her off for her bitterness, as

¹⁶ Ibid., Ruth 1:17.

¹⁷ Ibid., Ruth 1:19.

¹⁸ Hitchcock, Naomi.

¹⁹ Hitchcock, Mara.

²⁰ McKeown, Ruth 1:20.

a man would, but rather, he began a process that would ultimately result in her restoration. In verse 22, the setting in Jerusalem was the “beginning of the barley harvest.” It was a time of plenteousness, instead of famine. It was the exact opposite of the conditions when they left.

2.3. Boaz, a wealthy kinsman of Elimelech had a cornfield in Bethlehem, and Ruth happened upon it to glean for her and Naomi, and Boaz inquired about her. (2:1-7)

As we enter into Chapter two we meet the character who stands out the most in the book, “Boaz”, whose name means “in strength”²¹, or “a man, mighty of strength”²² he was the wealthy kinsman of Elimelech. We also find that Naomi and Ruth have settled in somewhere, Nicoll likely adlibs a little when he wrote in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “Naomi found the half-ruined cottage still belonging to her, and there she and Ruth took up their abode.”²³ Nonetheless, they have a place to call home, and Ruth is eager to “go to the field, and glean ears of corn” where she will be permitted to do so. The Hebrew Law made provisions for the poor and needy in Leviticus 19:9-10. Ruth, who likely did not know enough about the law, hoped to find grace in the sight of a man who would allow her to glean his field. She found that grace in the sight of Boaz. (Ruth 2:3-10) In verse 3, we find that she did not plan for it to be his field, in fact, the Scripture says, “her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz.” The word “hap” is defined as “That which comes suddenly or unexpectedly.”²⁴ God guided her to the right place for the right purpose, but she had no idea where she was going.

In verse 4, when Boaz returned home, he noticed Ruth, and enquired about her in verse 5, through his reapers. When the servant who was set over the reapers told him that it was Ruth, he had heard of her and was impressed by her loyalty and service to Naomi. (Ruth 2:11) Ruth was a worker, she was there gleaning from the morning to the latter part of the day. (Ruth 2:7)

2.4. Boaz granted Ruth permission to continually glean his field and gave the young men orders not to touch her. (2:8-13)

Boaz not only allowed her to glean there but as she asked for grace in verse two, so it was given her. He asked her to glean there in his field, and not go to another man’s field. In fact, he wanted her to stay with his maidens. (Ruth 2:8) in that verse, he also called her by a term of endearment, “daughter,” which McKeown calls a “strong affirmation that she was welcome in his field”²⁵ and would be taken care of. He not only gave her the grace to glean his field, but he gave her protection from unwanted advances of the men who worked the field and granted her favor to drink from his vessels. (Ruth 2:9) This was far beyond what the law provided for her, it had to be grace, and she knew it (Ruth 2:10). She knew that she was not worthy of his grace, as she was a stranger, she was not of the children of Israel. However, Boaz knew a little more about Ruth than she had realized. “The truth was that she had met with a man of character who valued character, and her faithfulness commended her.”²⁶ We see that evidenced in his response “It hath been fully shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.” Ruth 2:11 He not only recognized

²¹ Hitchcock, Boaz.

²² McKeown, Ruth 2:1.

²³ Nicoll, Ruth 2:1.

²⁴ Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (1828).

²⁵ McKeown, Ruth 2:8.

²⁶ Nicoll, Ruth 2:10.

her character in the earthly realm, but he noticed something deeper, he knew that her trust was in “the LORD God of Israel.” (Ruth 2:12) A true application of the Proverb: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Pro. 3:5-6) A verse that would one day be penned by her great-great-grandson Solomon.

As Ruth continues to dialect with Boaz, in her gratitude for his looking beyond her alien status and his speaking friendly to her. (Ruth 2:13) A Moabite woman would likely have been shunned by many in Israel, thus, she knows that she now has met a man who accepts her because of grace, not Law.

2.5. Boaz called Ruth to eat with him and his reapers, and instructed them to allow her to reap the good stuff, and leave some “handfuls of purpose” for her. (2:14-16)

Boaz stepped up the provisions another notch for Ruth in (v.14) she would now be eating at his table. No doubt, there were feelings beginning to stir in Boaz toward this fine woman of character. Boaz told his young men “Let her glean among the sheaves.” The significance here is that this was no longer the portion of the poor and needy, but now, Ruth has been blessed with the portion of a “daughter”! Furthermore, he told his men to leave a some “handfuls of purpose” for her to glean, easing her workload. (Ruth 2:15-16)

2.6. Ruth returned back to Naomi with her barley gathering and told her all that Boaz said, exciting Naomi because he was a near kinsman. (2:17-23)

Boaz wanted to be sure that Ruth had enough to provide for her and her mother-in-law long after the harvest is past. Ruth gathered an ephah (Ruth 2:18), which has been estimated as weighing about twenty-eight pounds.²⁷ That’s a lot of grain for one day’s labor.

Ruth was excited about bringing her gleanings for the day back to the house for Naomi to have. (Ruth 2:18) Naomi was taken back by the gleanings and knew that what she had was much more than daily gleanings, when she said, “blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee.” (Ruth 2:19) When Naomi heard that it was Boaz’s fields, she was ecstatic. The daughter-in-law she had tried three times to send away, has now brought a glimmer of hope back into the bitter heart of Naomi! What if Ruth, like Orpah had listened to her and gone back, who would have met up with Boaz? In Ruth 2:20, once bitter Naomi, who railed accusations at God, declares “Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.” (Ruth 2:20) She is now blessing the LORD as she begins to see His handiwork in the connection of Ruth and Boaz. She realizes that God “hath not left off his kindness” to her family. “This may be understood as a turning point in the book,”²⁸ Naomi explains that Boaz is a near kinsman, and in her heart, she begins to perceive her redemption!

In Ruth 2:21, there is a discrepancy in what Boaz said to Ruth, and what Ruth said he said. She said that he said, “Thou shalt keep fast by my young men until they have ended all my harvest. However, what he said was, “but abide here fast by my maidens.” “LaCocque suggested, in *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* by McKeon, that this was a mistake on Ruth’s part brought about by her different cultural background.”²⁹ Which, because of her impeccable reputation, I am inclined to believe as a plausible scenario. Naomi seems to have corrected her

²⁷ McKeown, Ruth 2:18.

²⁸ Ibid., Ruth 2:20.

²⁹ Ibid., Ruth 2:21.

speech in Ruth 2:22, and Ruth did as her mother-in-law guided her in Ruth 2:23, as would be expected from her impeccable character.

3. Division 3 - The quest for Redemption

3.1. Naomi instructed Ruth to lie at Boaz's feet, while he was sleeping, and she agreed to do so. (3:1-5)

Naomi, now encouraged by the provisions and friendship of Boaz, that her God has not forgotten about her or her late husband's household³⁰, quickly begins to instruct Ruth, explaining the impact of Boaz being their near kinsman. She made a profound statement: "shall I not seek rest for thee...?" (Ruth 3:1) This word "rest" comes from the Hebrew word "mânôach" which literally means "a settled spot, or (figuratively) a home: - (place of) rest."³¹ Could this be the fulfilling of her prayer in Ruth 1:9? Was this the means by which the LORD would grant Ruth rest in the home of her husband?

Naomi quickly came up with a plan for Ruth to position herself to become Boaz's wife. It was a risky plan, Boaz had never made his intentions known to Ruth as anything but a kind provider. Would he feel that he had done his duty during the barley season, and now Naomi and Ruth would be on their own again? Naomi knew that after gathering the barley from his field this season, he would be at his threshing floor this night, overseeing the threshing of the barley (Ruth 3:2). Naomi quickly puts her plan into motion. Ruth will have to follow each detail if they are to be successful. First, she needed to make herself desirable. Get a bath, put on some perfume, dress yourself up and get on down to the threshing floor! (Ruth 3:3) However, she was not to reveal her identity until he was done eating and drinking. Naomi knew their customs, and therefore she could predict Boaz's moves. Then came the risky part, after he was to lie down, she was to go and uncover his feet and lay down there. (Ruth 3:4) What would be the significance of such a peculiar action? Some modern theologians speculate that these were the actions of a prostitute,³² or a sexual advance from Ruth to Boaz.³³ If in fact it were an advance, Boaz demonstrated great restraint.

However, another more practical angle to look at, which is the one that I ascribe to, is that by her uncovering his feet, and laying at them, was symbolically placing herself or requesting herself to be placed under his authority as more than just a daughter. She was letting him know that she desired more from him. As the story unfolds, this understanding becomes more evident. Presenting herself as a prostitute would have been out of character for Ruth recalling her reputation in Ruth 2:11. As was her character to do, she yielded to everything her mother-in-law told her to do. That took a lot of trust.

3.2. Ruth laid at Boaz's feet and he discovered her there that night and asked her who she was, when she told him as Naomi instructed, he agreed, but there was a kinsman nearer than him that had the first choice. (3:6-13)

As was typical of Ruth, she obeyed her mother-in-law in every detail and got down to Boaz's threshing-floor. (Ruth 3:6) Just as Naomi had predicted, he ate and drank and laid "down

³⁰ Ibid., Ruth 3:1.

³¹ Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (New York, NY: Hunt and Eaton, 1890), Digital source, no page numbers, definition H4494.

³² McKeown, Ruth 3:4.

³³ Berman, 33.

at the end of a heap of corn.” (Ruth 3:7) Ruth came and gently pulled back the cover from his feet and laid there. No doubt she was nervous. What if Boaz mistook her intention to be as some today speculate them to be? Would he label her a harlot? Would he destroy her reputation? The things that must have been going through her mind.

Startled, Boaz looked down to find a woman at his feet. (Ruth 3:8) Who is this damsel? What is she doing here? So, he asks. (Ruth 3:9) and Ruth responds with three points: She is Ruth his handmaid; she wanted him to “spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid”; and she informed him that he was a relative who could redeem her and Naomi.

In the only reference to the laws concerning the levirate marriage in the Torah, (Deut. 25:5-10) only the younger brother of the deceased was obligated to redeem their late brother’s inheritance.³⁴ Thus, Boaz was quite possibly the younger brother of Elimelech.

Why such a request to spread his skirt over her? What is the symbolic meaning of it? In Ezekiel 16:8 spreading His skirt over Israel was God’s symbol of entering into a covenant with them. Ruth was asking Boaz to covenant with her in marriage (which is certainly not the desire of a prostitute). Thus, Boaz responds with blessing, again commenting on her reputation, she was not one who chased after younger men. (Ruth 3:10) Boaz understood Ruth’s intention and agreed to all that she desired, again commenting on her virtuous character. (Ruth 3:11)

However, it was going to take some craftiness to accomplish it, because there was a relative who was closer to Elimelech, possibly Boaz’s older brother, which entitled him to have the first option to redeem his inheritance. (Ruth 3:12) He will give the other relative the option in the morning, and if he refuses to redeem them than he will. (Ruth 3:13) Thus Boaz did not cover her with his skirt, as he was not in the position to covenant with her at that time.

3.3. When the morning came, Boaz sent Ruth home with six measures of barley for Naomi. (3:14-18)

After an unusual night of secured rest, Ruth awakens, and Boaz requests that she would keep the fact that she was there a secret. It was not customary for a woman to be there (Ruth 3:14) and it would tarnish her good reputation if word got out. However, he sends her home with a blessing, six measures of barley. (Ruth 3:15) Some speculate that six measures of barley were enough for one day, implying that come tomorrow she would no longer need provisions as she would be taken care of for the rest of her life.³⁵ This is a merited speculation as we find throughout the Scripture, whether the manna in the wilderness (Ex. 16), Jesus instruction to “take no thought for the morrow” (Matt. 6:34), there is a precedence that when you trust the one who provides for you, he meets your daily need.

When Ruth arrived back home, Naomi asked a curious question: “Who art thou, my daughter?” (Ruth 3:16) She asked in such a way as to say, “Are you Mrs. Boaz yet?” Ruth told Naomi how Boaz responded to her, and that he sent her home with six measures of Barley. (Ruth 3:17) Naomi understood that his actions indicated that something was about to happen. She counseled Ruth to wait for the next move to be made, knowing that Boaz was prepared to bring them a resolution to all of their problems. (Ruth 3:18)

4. Division Four - The redemption takes place. (Ruth 4:1-22)

³⁴ Cohen, Abraham D. "The eschatological meaning of the book of Ruth: "Blessed be God: Asher lo hishit lakh go'el"." Jewish Bible Quarterly. 40.3, (July-September 2012): 164.

³⁵ Standaert, Benoît. "The Book of Ruth." Notre Dame de Sion: SIDIC Periodical XXIII,1990/92:02-11., V.

4.1. Boaz went to the gate of the city, where judicial decisions were determined, and presented Naomi and Ruth's cause before the nearer kinsman who declined to redeem them. (4:1-6)

That morning, Boaz went up to the gate of the city, where the elders (judges) would hear the people's cases and rule on them. (Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7-9) He was there to confront the nearer kinsman before the elders, to see if he would redeem his brother's inheritance. When he saw this nearer kinsman approaching he called him into the judgment place. (Ruth 4:1) He arranged a jury of ten elders and had them sit in. (Ruth 4:2) He presents the nearer kinsman with Naomi's dilemma. As he presents the case, he refers to Elimelech as their "brother", lending credence to the idea that they were actually his brothers. (Ruth 4:3) He explains almost every detail of the situation and the man's ability to redeem Elimelech's wife, Naomi, leaving out the very significant detail, Ruth. To which the man quickly agrees "I will redeem it." (Ruth 4:4) However, when Boaz tells him that Ruth is part of the package, and that he will have to "raise up the name of the dead" through her, since Naomi was well past child-bearing (Ruth 1:11), and since Ruth was Naomi's eldest son's widow, she would be the surrogate who he would have to raise up seed through. (Ruth 4:5) The kinsman declined to redeem his brother's inheritance, with a snide remark, "lest I mar mine own inheritance." (Ruth 4:6) He apparently was "motivated by self-interest"³⁶ He presumed that there would be no seed raising since Naomi is aged and that once she died, all of his brother Elimelech's land would be his! However, this Moabite woman brought another dynamic into the deal. Her seed would possess the land, and he would not have the rights to what he had redeemed. The Levirate law was not there to benefit the one doing the redeeming, but rather the lineage of the one being redeemed. Boaz knew this self-centered characteristic of his brother and exposed it before the elders of the city.

4.2. The nearer kinsman confirmed his decision with a public sign before the elders, and Boaz pledged to redeem them. (4:7-12)

As a custom of their time, a man would take off his shoe and give it to the person that he was to make a deal with, in this case, he was relinquishing the right to the inheritance of his brother Elimelech to his younger brother. (Ruth 4:7) His self-centeredness would be witnessed by all as he proceeded to walk through town with only one shoe. (Ruth 4:8) Boaz then called on the elders who were seated there to witness his right to and officiating, the purchase of all that was Elimelech's and his sons from the hand of Naomi. (Ruth 4:9) Furthermore, in his declaration, he gladly took Ruth to be his wife as part of the package deal. (Ruth 4:10) He, unlike his brother, was truly an honorable kinsman, upholding his word to Ruth, (Ruth 3:13) and his Levirate duty before all. (Deut. 25:7-9) This is likely because he knew about the plight of a woman who was a stranger; after-all, his mother was none other than Rahab the harlot! (Mat. 1:5)

Not only did the elders that were assembled (Ruth 4:2) respond to Boaz as witnesses, but "all the people" present at the gate that morning declared themselves to be witnesses and prayed a blessing over the union of Boaz and Ruth, (Ruth 4:11) a prayer that would most assuredly come to pass (Mic. 5:2; Mat. 1:5, 2:1). Their marriage was compared to the marriage of Judah to Tamar, and the lineage that came through that union, would be upon theirs, (Ruth 4:12) and indeed was. Both the unions of Boaz and Ruth, and of Judah and Tamar, are included in the lineage of Jesus Christ. (Mat. 1:3 & 5, Ruth 4:18-22)

³⁶ Berman, 37.

4.3. Boaz and Ruth were married and brought forth the grandfather of King David. (4:13-17)

Boaz consummated his marriage to Ruth, and God blessed them with the conception of a child, restoring the lineage of Elimelech. (Ruth 4:13) From the mouths of the women who Naomi had previously told to call her Mara rather than Naomi, comes rejoicing for her new-found blessings! (Ruth 4:14) Ruth has proven better to Naomi than seven sons. (Ruth 4:15) God used the faithful Moabite daughter-in-law, who Naomi tried to send away, to bring her restoration of her land and her family's reputation. God blesses faithfulness, and he did so with a faithful stranger to the covenant of Israel.

Ruth gave birth, and Naomi assumed the position of the nurse to the baby. (Ruth 4:16) His name would be Obed ("a servant, a workman"³⁷), They had no idea that just two generations later, their grandson David would be anointed the king of Judah! (2 Sam. 2:4) (Ruth 4:17) This is the last we hear about Ruth, she drops off the scene, yet her name is recorded in the two lineages, the one below, and the one in Matthew's first chapter.

4.4. The book closes with a short lineage of the children of Pharez. (4:18-22)

After such a climactic series of events, the unknown author of Ruth felt it important to close the book with a brief family lineage of Pharez. This was likely included because the blessing that was prayed over Boaz in the city gate (Ruth 4:12) was that his lineage would be like that of Pharez. Pharez was the son of Judah through Tamar. His lineage was blessed, and as we see further in the Scripture, it went beyond just being the grandfather of David. The blessing continued all the way to the birth of Jesus Christ. (Mat. 1) The irony, that the one family that had such a mixed-up lineage would be the tribe that God would choose to bring the redeemer of mankind through. However, if you look at it another way, that family, above all others, truly understood the subject of redemption.

Application Statements

Application 1

Elimelech, in a time of hardship, left his homeland to go to Moab, where he thought he and his family could ride out the famine without loss. Elimelech failed to trust the Lord in the time of hardship, and it cost him and his family dearly. God had evidently met the need back home, as the people remembered Naomi and she remembered them (they did not die). When we fail to trust the Lord in the hard times, not only will we ultimately suffer loss and miss the blessings of His provisions like Elimelech, "O ye of little faith" (Matt. 6:30), but those around us will suffer as well like Mahlon, Chilion, and Naomi, and that, often gravely.

Application 2

Naomi was bitter against God for the outcome of her husband's decision. It cost his life, their children's lives, and their family's livelihood, leaving her without anyone to provide for her in a foreign land. She returned home to Bethlehem-Judah with her Moabite daughter in law, and her pride deeply wounded. All she could see was the hopelessness of her present situation, while the Lord was working in the background for her good. Sometimes we can be so blinded by our

³⁷ Hitchcock, Obed.

circumstances that we cannot see God working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28), but we need to trust that He is.

Application 3

Ruth fulfilled the role of a faithful daughter to Naomi and to her God. Her faithfulness was widely known by the people of the city, including Boaz. God brought her into favor with Boaz causing him to recognize and reward her faithfulness. God gives favor to those who are faithful. When we are faithful to what God has set before us, we too will find favor with the Lord, and with those around us.

Application 4

The blessings of Boaz upon Ruth and Naomi helped Naomi begin to see that God was in control of the situation. She began to realize that the petition that she made for her daughters in law to find rest in the house of their husbands was being fulfilled by God in a way she never expected in the life of Ruth. We must remember that God's ways are not our ways, and His timing is not our timing. When we lay our petitions before Him, we must believe that He hears us and will answer us according to His will and way.

Application 5

Ruth requested that Boaz spread his skirt over her in the light of her revelation that he was a near kinsman who could provide redemption. It took faith to approach him like she did and ask him to redeem her. Covering her with his skirt would be symbolic of him responsively entering into a covenant with her. When one seeks redemption, they must do so with faith that the one that they are approaching is able willing to redeem them. When we come to the Lord for redemption, we must come by faith.

Application 6

The nearer kinsman was self-centered. He expected to take over Elimelech's land by redeeming Naomi, who could no longer bear children, defaulting all that she had over to him. However, when he learned of the Ruth factor he rejected the opportunity to redeem Naomi because he would not be the one to ultimately possess the land, but the child born to Ruth would possess it in Elimelech's name. He ended up missing out on the blessing of becoming part of the lineage of King David and especially the greatest redeemer of all time, Jesus Christ, who Boaz became a type of. When we are consumed with self-interest, we will miss out on the bigger blessings in life. If we esteem the needs of others to be more important than our own self-interests, then we will not only be blessed but will also typify Jesus Christ.

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