

The Book of Ruth

Background And Introduction

The authorship of this book is not stated; however, the time of writing can safely be assumed to be after the ascension of King David, as his genealogy is mentioned in the book's final act. The book is named for the Moabitess Ruth and is set during the period of the judges. The book follows Naomi's family and her Judahite husband, who left the Promised Land during a famine and sojourn in the land of Moab.

Furthermore, this book builds on the anticipation of the coming King of Israel that was introduced in the dark book of the judges where, Judges 17,

Judges 17:6: "6 In those days there was **no king in Israel**; every man **did what was right in his own eyes.**"

Remember that in Genesis 49, Jacob prophesied that Royalty would come from the line of his son Judah,

Genesis 49:10: "10 **The scepter shall not depart from Judah**, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, **Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.**"

The structure of the book is as follows:

- I. Prologue: Curse (Ruth 1:1-5)
- II. Act 1: Return (Ruth 1:6-22)
- III. Act 2: Lovingkindness (Ruth 2:1-23)
- IV. Act 3: Proposal (Ruth 3:1-18)
- V. Act 4: Redemption (Ruth 4:1-17)
- VI. Epilogue: King (Ruth 4:18-22)

Theological Theme

At the center of this narrative is the drama of a love story that highlights God's redeeming love and sovereign authority to turn curse into blessing.

I. Prologue: Curse (Ruth 1:1-5)

The book begins with an introductory scene that establishes the background of the story, verse 1,

Ruth 1:1–2: "1 Now it happened **in the days when the judges judged**, that there was a **famine in the land**. And a certain man of **Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the fields of Moab with his wife and his two sons.** 2 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 came to the fields of Moab and remained there."

Here, a Judahite man leaves his hometown of Bethlehem, which means house of bread, because of a famine. This story is set amid a period of Deuteronomic cursing for Israel's

wickedness during the time of the judges. When Israel turned from true worship of God to worshiping idols, God would turn the prosperity of the Promised Land into a desolate desert, Deuteronomy 11:16–17: "16 "Beware lest your hearts be deceived, and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them, 17 and the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you, and **He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit;** and you will perish quickly from the good land which Yahweh is giving you."

Furthermore, he leaves the Promised Land for the land of Moab. Remember that Moab originated from the incestuous offspring of Lot (Genesis 19). Then, when traveling to the Promised Land, in Numbers 22-25, as they come to Moab, the Moabite king Balak hires a prophet, Balaam, to force God to curse Israel. When his plan fails, they develop a backup plan to cause Israel to bring God's curse on their head. Moabite women were sent into the camp of Israel to seduce them into fornication and lead them into idolatry. As a result, God brought judgment down on Israel, killing 24,000 rebellious Israelites. Bottom line: this Judahite is fleeing the Promised Land that is cursed for Israel's disobedience to sojourn in Moab, the place with disgusting origins, a place known for idolatry, child sacrifice, and sexual immorality.

II. Act 1: Pain (Ruth 1:6-22)

1. Return to Bethlehem (1:6-18)

As we glance at verse 6, the first ray of sunlight in this otherwise bleak scene,

Ruth 1:6: "6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law and returned from the fields of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that **Yahweh had visited His people to give them food.**"

In this verse, God's divine grace marks the end of Naomi's storm of suffering. Someone came from Israel and relayed the message that rain again had fallen, and somehow Naomi was within earshot to hear that message. Notice how the Author says that God had visited His people. God had intervened on their behalf and had come to their aid to turn their curse into blessing. Why? They were His people. He was their covenant God, and He had not forgotten them. Lastly, see that YHWH gave them bread. He restocked the House of Bread.

Naomi hears the news, and she and her two widowed daughters-in-law follow her. In verse 8, Naomi gives her first effort to compel them to stay in Moab,

Ruth 1:8–9: "8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, **return each of you to her mother's house. May Yahweh show lovingkindness with you as you have shown with the dead and with me. 9 "May Yahweh 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."

She tells them to return to their mother's house, which is a euphemism to find new husbands. To become betrothed again. She follows this command with a prayer. She requests that YHWH, the covenant God of Israel, demonstrate His lovingkindness - His faithful covenant love - to these two Moabite women. They had been loyal to their husbands and Naomi. They had been loving, they had been faithful, they had been good, they had been kind. In short, they demonstrated godly lovingkindness to their husbands and their Mother-in-law. In return,

Naomi prays that God would demonstrate His lovingkindness to them and give them rest, satisfaction, and peace in the house of new husbands.

When Orpah and Ruth do not listen, Naomi reiterates that she has nothing to offer them if they stay with her, verse 11,

Ruth 1:11: "11 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?"**"

Naomi is referencing the practice of Levirate marriage prescribed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, where a diseased man's brother would marry his widow and continue the family name. Naomi has no one left. Even if she could find a husband, marry, and conceive two sons, these widows would have to wait over a decade for a husband.

Orpah gets the message. She sees her future if she stays with Naomi and decides that life will be better in Moab. But Ruth remains. Naomi attempts to convince Ruth to stay one last time, but she refuses. Verse 16,

Ruth 1:16–17: "16 But Ruth said, "Do not press me to forsake you in turning 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. 17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.** Thus may Yahweh do to me, and more, if anything but death separates you and me."

Here, in this monumental statement, we have a chiasm. Notice the parallelism of the first and fourth oaths: Where you go, I will go — Where you die, I will die. These mirrored oaths surround an inner set of parallel statements: Your people, my people — your God, my God. Geographically, her oath covered all locations. Chronologically, her oath extended from the present into eternity. And now, in the exact center of this beautiful oath that theologically, Ruth has turned from her people and her idols to worship YHWH and join His covenant people.

If you have the NASB and LSB, you will notice that the verb "shall be" is italicized, meaning that the verb isn't in the original text. There are future tense verbs in all the surrounding sentences, "**I will go, I will lodge, I will die, I will be buried.**" Still, in the middle, it reads like this: "**Your people, my people - your God, my God.**" This lack of a future verb means that this middle statement is something other than what Ruth is pledging to do. It is a declaration of what *she has already done*.

This declaration is not primarily a statement of Ruth's commitment to Naomi. At its root is a confession of her commitment to YHWH. Here is one of the clearest and strongest pictures of conversion in the Old Testament. She counted the cost. She left her family, familiar surroundings, traditions, and idols to take on the uncertain future of a bitter widow in a land where she knew no one. Why? Because she knew that a relationship with YHWH was worth giving up everything she had.

2. Arrival in Bethlehem (1:19-22)

So then, Naomi returns home to Bethlehem with Ruth, and when they arrive, people begin to recognize their old friend, and Naomi replies to the townspeople, verse 20,

Ruth 1:20–21: "20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for **the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.** 21 I went out full, but Yahweh has caused me to return empty. **Why do you call me Naomi? Yahweh has answered against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity against me.**"

Naomi's name meant lovely and pleasant, but nothing could be further from the truth! In Naomi's mind, there was nothing lovely about her life - nothing pleasant about her predicament. Instead, Naomi scornfully asked to be called a more appropriate name - call me Mara, which means bitter. Here, in this final dialogue, the Author brings the fullness of Naomi's heart to light.

Notice the parallel here. Bitter is as far from Pleasant as empty is from full. She left Bethlehem full. She had a husband. She had her two boys. Yes, life was tough. Yes, they were leaving their homeland. Yes, they were starving. But she had everything that she held dear. Her life lacked nothing. Her life was pleasant. But now, she is empty, and the name Bitter better suits her condition.

And Naomi lays the blame for her predicament not at the feet of chance or bad luck but at the feet of YHWH, the Almighty One. In her mind, no other force in the universe could have caused her condition. She traced her bitter situation to a single, divine source, the Almighty God.

There is a key lesson here. Naomi's bitterness is wrong. Bitterness is sinful, and it is crippling. Naomi's complaint reflects her worldview, which takes God's godhood seriously. She knows that her Creator God controls the universe He created. She knows that it was YHWH who sovereignly ordained her emptiness. Notice that she does not attribute evil to Him nor condemn Him.

She calls Him **the Almighty** - Shaddai. This title for God emphasizes His omnipotence and supreme sovereignty over His creation. And that is what Naomi confesses. She says in the depths of her bitterness, "*The Almighty has made my life very bitter,*" and she is right. There is not one detail in the book of Ruth, nor one in your life that is not ultimately under the sovereign control of a great God. From this, we can glean that the sovereignty of the Almighty God is a rock to stand on in your suffering.

Not only is God the Almighty sovereign of the universe, but He is also the covenant God. Naomi calls Him YHWH. This name is His revealed name to His people. His defining characteristics as the covenant God of His people, according to His mouth, are compassion, grace, patience, lovingkindness, and truth.

Exodus 34:6–7: "6 Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, "**Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands,** who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

He is perfect in power *and goodness*. Naomi knows this to be true and knows God as her covenant God. Even amid the dark time of the Judges, even amid famine, even amid death, even amid despair, even amid loneliness, even amid bareness, even amid grief, God is there working tragedy into triumph for His covenant people whom He loves with His steadfast love.

Naomi feels empty and bitter; standing right next to her is the agent through whom God will make her full again. At that moment, when she feels that God's hand is hard-pressed against her, He lays the foundation for the most excellent demonstration of His covenant love for her.

Appropriately, the chapter ends with a note of hope, verse 22,

Ruth 1:22: "22 So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the fields of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem **at the beginning of barley harvest.**"

This chapter begins with a famine in the land of Bethlehem. It ends with the scene shifting upward from Naomi and Ruth in that same city to show us a ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds and illuminating a vast field teeming with people working to harvest the barley.

III. Act 2: Providence (Ruth 2:1-23)

1. A Random Right Turn (2:1-3)

In Chapter 2, the story slows down from covering the events of several years to focusing on the events of 1 day. The Author presses pause on the narrative to introduce us to a new character, Boaz, vs 1,

Ruth 2:1: "1 Now Naomi had **a kinsman of her husband, a mighty man of excellence**, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz."

First, he is a kinsman, a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech. Not only is he a relative, he is from the same family as Elimelech. Next, he is a man of excellence. This phrase is not simply a reference to Boaz's economic stability, *though it is that*. It is not merely a reference to his social status in Bethlehem, *though it is that too*. At its heart, this is a reference to his character. He is a man of excellence—a man of virtue. But why this random interjection? The plot picks up in verse 2,

Ruth 2:2: "2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me **go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one whom I may find favor in his eyes.**" And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

In those days, male and female workers were called reapers. Typically, the male reaper would grasp stalks of grain with his left hand, cut off the grain with a sickle in his right, and then throw the heads of grain into piles alongside the row he was harvesting. Then, the female reapers would come behind and gather up the piles of grain into bundles and tie them into what are called sheaves. At times, pieces of grain would drop to the ground from the reaper's hand or when the reapers were bundling the ears into sheaves. The Law of God, in Deuteronomy 24, stipulated that these stray pieces should be left on the ground so that the alien, the orphan, and the widow could come by and pick them up. This practice was called gleaning. And Ruth hoped to glean after one in whose sight she found favor, found grace, verse 3,

Ruth 2:3: "3 So she went. And she came and gleaned in the field after the reapers. **And it so happened that she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz**, who was of the family of Elimelech."

Ruth just happened upon Boaz's field. Translated literally, she "chanced to chance" to enter into the piece of farmland that belonged to Boaz. Why does the Author talk like this? Is this striking understatement intended to create the exact opposite impression - accident? Of course not! This chance occurrence was the providential hand of God behind this apparent human accident.

Ruth planned her way, to borrow the language of Proverbs, but the sovereign Lord directed her steps. The same hand that sent the famine and later provided bread is the hand that guided Ruth to that portion of the field belonging to Boaz.

2. The Excellent Man's Provision (2:4-17)

Boaz arrives from Bethlehem, and he just so happens to notice the new woman gleaning in his field, verse 5,

Ruth 2:5: "5 Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "**Whose young woman is this?**"

This question aims to identify both her marital status and her status within the covenant community. Boaz's servant responds, verse 6,

Ruth 2:6-7: "6 The young man in charge of the reapers replied, "**She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab.** 7 "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."

She is a Moabitess. She's not from around here. Besides her ethnic identity, Ruth is best known to the Bethlehemites by her association with Naomi and their return from Moab. She was no one's servant and no one's husband.

Moreover, the servant reveals that she is a humble and hard-working woman. Ruth asked for permission. She did not presume on her legal right to glean but instead asked, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers."

Not only did she ask for permission. But once the foreman permitted her to, she worked all morning until taking a short rest in the shade. This report prompts Boaz, the wealthy landowner, to go and speak directly to the Moabite widow, verse 8,

Ruth 2:8-9: "8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Have you not heard, **my daughter?** Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but **stay here with my young women.** 9 "Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, **I have commanded the young men not to touch you. And if you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the young men draw.**"

Note that he starts by calling her *my daughter*. Boaz attempted to break down the barriers that naturally separated her from him. After tenderly addressing her, he commands her not to glean in another field. Then he instructs her to stay with or cling to, his female workers and this command gives Ruth the ability to work a little ahead of any of the other gleaners.

After granting her request for provision and elevating her position, he offers her protection. His workers were to treat her as if she belonged in his field. They weren't to harass her. They weren't to strike her. They weren't to mistreat her. In Ruth is found extraordinary humility. In this man, Boaz is found in extraordinary kindness.

After all this, Boaz concludes by bestowing on her one sweet privilege, "**When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.**" Let's think about this in its historical context. Typically, the foreign female servants were the ones who would draw water for the Israelites. But here, Boaz tells the foreign woman to drink from the water jar his servants drew. We sit here and read this and say what an excellent man is. But dear brothers and sisters, this is the picture of the heart of God. Yes, what a great man. But also, what a great God.

Ruth responds with astonished humility to Boaz's grace, verse 10,

Ruth 2:10: "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**, though I am a foreigner?"

Ruth is so stunned by such unexpected kindness that she falls to the ground in gratitude. This outward action was a revelation of the humility of her heart. She had no right. She is the unnoticeable Moabite. This privilege was not something owed to her or earned by her. This was grace.

Why such grace, Boaz? He tells us in verse 11,

Ruth 2:11: "11 Boaz replied to her, "**All that you have done for your mother-in-law** after the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how **you forsook your father and your mother and the land of your birth**, and came to a people that you did not previously know."

He has heard her testimony. Her declaration had already become noteworthy. He had heard of the sacrificial love she had bestowed upon Naomi. He had heard how she left everything and everyone behind to serve YHWH and devote herself to her mother-in-law.

But in verse 12, Boaz reveals that it is God who is the one which is rewarding Ruth for her kindness to Naomi,

Ruth 2:12: "12 "May Yahweh fully repay your work, and may your wages be full from **Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.**"

Boaz is God's instrument of lovingkindness. This verse does not encourage us to picture Ruth as an employee of God, earning her due, but instead, as a little eaglet coming under the safety of an Eagle's wings.

Boaz tells Ruth that God is showering her with grace because she has sought refuge under his wings. She has turned in faith from her idols to YHWH, which has granted her provision. YHWH has elevated her position. YHWH has protected her under His wings and used His faithful servant Boaz to this.

After all this, Boaz invites her to come and eat with him. Not only does he promise future protection and provision, but he meets her present needs as well, verse 14,

Ruth 2:14: "14 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."

Notice that she doesn't just receive the privilege of eating with Boaz's servants, but he serves her. His grace doesn't stop there, verse 15,

Ruth 2:15–16: "15 Then she rose to glean, and Boaz commanded his young men, saying, **"Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not dishonor her. 16 "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."

Boaz goes above and beyond his original provision. Now, she doesn't have to follow after the women. She can glean between the sheaves. Access to the area would considerably increase Ruth's daily harvest since more dropped grain lay there than behind the reapers; on top of that, the servants were to be deliberately careless in their harvesting. With Ruth on their mind, they were to pull grain from the bundles and set it aside for her.

After working a full day in his field, Ruth returned home with, the text tells us, an ephah of barley, which is about 40 lbs. One commentator wrote that the usual ration of a male servant was just over 1 pound a day, which means that Ruth collected the equivalent of a month's wages in one day. What a fantastic way to end this scene. With a visual picture of Boaz's favor - Ruth left his field with over a month's worth of barley and leftovers from lunch.

Christ Connection

In this scene, we vividly see the type and shadow of Christ in his ancestor Boaz.

Just as Boaz offered Ruth water from the jar in his field. Christ offers us His cup, saying,

John 4:14: "14 but **whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst—** ever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a **well of water springing up to eternal life.**"

Just as Boaz gave Ruth bread and roasted grain, Christ tells us,

John 6:35: **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst."**

Boaz could only satisfy Ruth's physical hunger and thirst. Christ is the one who can quench the deepest thirst and satisfy the greatest hunger of your soul. Just as Boaz called Ruth to come and eat His bread, Christ calls on us to come to Him and find ultimate satisfaction and joy. He summons us to come to Him, and He will meet our deepest present and future needs. Come to Him, and we will never hunger nor thirst.

3. The Redeemer Revealed (2:18-23)

Naomi responds with appropriate shock and excitement, verse 19,

Ruth 2:19: "19 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."

Naomi immediately recognized that such a heap of grain came from the favor of some gracious landowner. Although she has no idea who this man is, she calls on God to bless him. And when Ruth reveals the name of her benefactor, Naomi's soul springs to life. She spontaneously erupts into a second blessing for Boaz, verse 20,

Ruth 2:20: "20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of **Yahweh who has not forsaken his lovingkindness to the living and the dead.**" Then Naomi told her, "The man is our relative; **he is one of our kinsman redeemers.**"

Just like she placed the blame for her pain and tragedy at the feet of YHWH, she here places the blame for their blessing at the feet of her covenant God. She knows He has not forsaken her. He has not forsaken Ruth. He is a God abounding in lovingkindness, maintaining lovingkindness to a thousand generations. He is unrelentingly loyal and committed to bringing all the blessings to His people - to Naomi and Ruth. His love for them reaches to the heavens!

But what does she mean that God has not stopped showing lovingkindness to the dead? Boaz is a kinsman redeemer. A kinsman redeemer was a legal term for an Israelite family law where a close relative was obligated by the law to come to the aid of a family member who had become poverty-stricken and destitute due to economic hardship or the tragic loss of husbands and sons. Frequently, a Redeemer had to pay a significant cost to become a Redeemer, for he had to buy back a family member from slavery or family land. Boaz is such a man. He is a near relative who can come to Ruth and Naomi's aid. No longer was he just a prominent, excellent, godly man. He was one of their near relatives, a kinsman redeemer.

Could it be that Boaz is the answer to her prayer from chapter 1, that the Lord would grant Ruth rest in the house of a new husband? In Naomi's mind, this was God's kindness to the dead. An offspring who can carry on their family name may be born through a marriage to Boaz. God had shown Himself faithful to meet their need for food. Could it be that God is also working to meet their need for a family? The time of some seven weeks will tell.

IV. Act 3: Rest (Ruth 3:1-18)

1. Naomi's Kind Plan (3:1-5)

In this chapter, Naomi is not the bitter woman she once was. God's lovingkindness has revived her. And when we read the opening verse of chapter 3, we will see that it is not her situation that consumes her. Her emptiness no longer cripples her. Instead, she is filled with a desire to provide for Ruth,

Ruth 3:1: "1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, **shall I not seek a state of rest for you,** that it may be well with you?"

No longer is the lovingkindness one-sided! Ruth's security is now her most significant burden. In chapter 1:9, Naomi prayed that the Lord would grant Ruth and Orpah *rest* in the house of a new husband. Naomi testified to God's enduring lovingkindness in chapter 2, and here in chapter 3, she is filled with a desire to imitate God's kindness and secure a future for her daughter-in-law. She is concerned exclusively for Ruth's well-being. Hers was a love that did not seek its own but instead worked for the interest of another.

Motivated by her desire to meet Ruth's needs, Naomi presents a bold and risky plan starting in verse 2,

Ruth 3:2–3: "2 "And now, is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose young women you were? Behold, he is winnowing barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 "So you shall **wash yourself and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and you shall go down to the threshing floor**; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking."

Despite his immense kindness to them and his unique relationship with them as kinsmen, he has not been compelled to pursue Ruth further. We may wonder why Boaz has not approached Ruth to marry her over the past seven weeks of her working in his field. One reason could be the likely age difference that was between them. Boaz is probably of Naomi's generation and so has little reason to expect a marriage to a woman young enough for him to call her daughter.

Another reason could be that Boaz was not technically legally obligated to redeem these women. Israelite family law provides four distinct situations in which a kinsman-redeemer is responsible for redeeming a family member. First, the kinsman redeemer had the duty to bring the **murderer** of a relative to justice by tracking him and carrying out his execution - Numbers 35. Secondly, the kinsman redeemer was to receive **restitution payments** owed to a deceased family member - Numbers 5. Third, the Redeemer was to **purchase back relatives** whose poverty had forced them into slavery - Leviticus 25. Lastly, the Redeemer was responsible for **re-purchasing property** once owned by a family member but sold out of economic necessity - Leviticus 25. Ruth and Naomi's situation does not precisely fit these 4 cases. **Boaz was not obligated by the letter of the law to redeem them.** Along those lines, Boaz was a close relative, but nowhere does the text call him Elimelech's brother, meaning he had no requirement to fulfill the law of levirate marriage.

The bottom line is that he did not seize the opportunity to take Ruth to be his wife. But if his earlier kindness to her indicated affection in his heart, Naomi intended to help Boaz spring into action with her brilliant plan.

Step 1: bathe, anoint yourself with oil, and wear your best clothes.

If you follow this language throughout the Old Testament: wash, anoint yourself, put on your best clothes, you quickly discover that this procedure was associated with two significant events. First, it was the means of declaring **the end of the mourning period**. David does this very sequence of things in 2 Samuel 12 after mourning the death of his child by Bathsheba. Secondly, this was also the procedure by which a bride would prepare herself for her wedding.

Step 2: Go down to the threshing floor to meet Boaz. Boaz was going down there to complete the harvest by winnowing his grain. It was at the threshing floor where the grain kernels were separated from the husks and chaff. This time was a festive, joyous end to the harvest process, and Naomi knew that that was where Boaz would be that night.

She was to watch him from the shadows, waiting for him to finish his work, eat his dinner, and then lie down. Naomi knew that after Boaz finished his meal, he would not return to Bethlehem but instead guard the fruits of his hard labor against animals and thieves. He would be sleeping under the stars that night, and it is then, when Boaz falls asleep, that Ruth was to act -verse 4, Ruth 3:4: "4 "Let it be that when he lies down, you shall know 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.**"

There is no mention of this strange custom anywhere else in the Bible. One thing that is clear to us and would have been clear to the original audience is that this verse's language is suggestive. Some of these words in Hebrew carry meanings that could imply intimate actions - uncover, lie down. That's not something you do with someone regularly. The Author wants us to feel uncomfortable.

There was the potential for great danger and great embarrassment here. What would Boaz think of a Moabite woman at that, coming to him at the threshing floor in this way? He could drive her away from moral indignation or give into the moment's temptation, read the situation wrong, and enter into sin. But despite these dangers, Naomi was confident in Boaz. She was sure he would treat her with perfect purity and be moved by her actions.

2. Ruth's Kind Proposal (3:6-15)

Ruth, true to character, did precisely what Naomi instructed. She was firmly loyal and unquestioningly obedient. With Ruth hidden off to the side of the scene, our attention is on Boaz in verse 7,

Ruth 3:7: "7 And Boaz ate and drank and his heart was merry, and he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and **she came secretly and uncovered his feet and lay down.**"

For Boaz, it has been a good day. It's been a good harvest. Boaz finished his excellent harvest and good day with a good meal. He labored and enjoyed the fruits of his labor, and now it is time to rest. And once the signs of sleep were clear, Ruth emerged from the shadows, verse 8,

Ruth 3:8: "8 Then 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."

The Author shrouds this story in the darkness of midnight to highlight this scene's mystery and intrigue. In these verses, all that is described are a man and a woman whispering under the secrecy of the stars. The Author tells us that the man was startled, presumably because of his cold feet, and when he bent forward, a surprising discovery quickly cleared away his drowsiness. There was a woman at these feet.

For Ruth, this moment is filled with tension. She wonders how Boaz will react. Will he be angry? Will he be embarrassed? Or will he be moved with love? Look at verse 9,

Ruth 3:9: "9 And he said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maidservant. **So spread your wing over your maidservant, for you are a kinsman redeemer.**"

This request was a marriage proposal. Ruth's words here are so intentional. Remember what Boaz said to her back in chapter 2:12,

Ruth 2:12: "12 "May Yahweh fully repay your work, and may your wages be full from Yahweh, the God of Israel, **under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.**"

She triggers Boaz's thinking here. "**Spread your wings over your servant.**" Ruth is not there to invite Boaz into an illicit relationship under the cover of the night. She desires something more permanent and pure. Ruth wants something more lasting and covenantal from him - she wants him to cover her with the protection and love of a husband, of a kinsman redeemer. She calls on Boaz to fulfill the spirit of God's law here. She appealed to him to be the Redeemer, who, at his own significant cost, would act to rescue his family members, Naomi and Ruth, from their downtrodden estate.

In the first scene, Naomi puts Ruth's interest above her own, and here, Ruth acts out of kindness in return by seeking to meet Naomi's needs by securing her redemption from Boaz. See again how God is here working for His people, through His people. His kindness is on display in Ruth's kindness to her mother-in-law.

3. Boaz's Kind Pledge (3:10-18)

Boaz responds, Verse 10,

Ruth 3:10–13: "10 Then he said, "May you be blessed of Yahweh, my daughter. **You have shown your last lovingkindness to be better than the first** by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 "So now, my daughter, **do not fear. All that you say, I will do for you; for all my people within the gates of the city know that you are a woman of excellence.**"

There is no hint of indecency. **There is** no trace of indignation. Far from being offended by Ruth's forwardness, he is flattered and pleased by it. He proclaims that her kind proposal is praiseworthy and pronounces a blessing from YHWH on her. Although entirely offstage, God was working through His people, here working through the heart of Boaz, to shower them with His love and carry out His plan.

He commends her for her lovingkindness. Instead of choosing to marry a young man, she chooses him, and she does so for kinsman redemption. In her proposal, she indicated to Boaz that marriage to her comes with the cost of redeeming Naomi. He is filled with admiration at this. Her lovingkindness, love, and care for Naomi struck his heart. She was indeed a godly woman, for she embodied the lovingkindness of God.

After praising her for her kindness in choosing him, he pledges to do as she asks. He will redeem her, for she is an excellent woman not just in his eyes but in the eyes of the entire town of Bethlehem.

A few weeks ago, she arrived in Bethlehem, a Moabite widow. She was the lowest of the low, with no option but to glean in the fields behind the servants of the landowners. But now, he is making the point that she has not only won his heart, she has won over the entire town of Bethlehem.

But there is also poetic symmetry here. Boaz was referred to with this exact language back in chapter 2. He was a mighty man of excellence, and she is a woman of excellence, too. She was a woman suitable to him. Yes, he is old, and she is young. Yes, he is a Hebrew, and she is a Moabite. Yes, he is rich, and she is destitute. But they are two excellent parts of one whole.

However, there is an obstacle that they both face before they arrive at a fairy tale ending, verse 12,

Ruth 3:12–13: "12 "But now it is true I am a kinsman redeemer; **however, there is a kinsman redeemer closer than I.** 13 "Stay this night, and it will be in the morning that, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not desire to redeem you, then **I will redeem you, as Yahweh lives.** Lie down until morning."

Boaz is a man of excellence, a man of integrity. There was a custom where the closest relative prioritized becoming a kinsman redeemer. He would not violate his conscience or the customs of that day to satisfy the desires of his heart. It has yet to be made clear who this other guy is. But what is clear is that Boaz will not stop until he secures redemption for Ruth and Naomi. One way or another, Ruth will be married, and they will be redeemed.

Notice that he promises her this and then links his promise to the most solemn oath possible for an Israelite. By swearing it, Boaz willingly subjected himself to divine punishment if he failed to keep his word. But we can have confidence that Boaz will not fail.

V. Act 4: Redemption (Ruth 4:1-17)

1. The Morning Meeting (4:1-12)

Chapter 4 opens with Boaz sitting at the crack of dawn in the place of official town business. Verse 1

Ruth 4:1: "1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and **behold, the kinsman redeemer of whom Boaz spoke was passing by,** so he said, "Turn aside, **my fellow,** sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down.

Once again, notice the providential timing of this moment. The man Boaz needs to speak to happens to walk by as Boaz sets himself up at the gate.

Secondly notice that the Author records that Boaz doesn't use this man's name, he calls him fellow, literally: Mr. So-and-so. This phrase, Mr. So-and-So was substituted by the Author to

give us a negative impression of this man. He is not worth remembering. This name intentionally contrasts Mr. So-and-So and Boaz, the man of stature, the worthy man.

After the fellow sits, Boaz gathers ten elders and holds an official public meeting, verse 3, Ruth 4:3–4: "3 Then he said to the kinsman redeemer, **"Naomi, who has come back from the fields of Moab, has to sell the portion of the field which belonged to our brother Elimelech.**" 4 "So I thought to uncover this matter in your hearing, saying, 'Acquire it before those who are sitting here and before the elders of my people. **If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if no one redeems it, 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."

Naomi's husband, Elimelech, did not sell the land before leaving Bethlehem, assuming it would be a quick sojourn in the land of Moab. They would return a couple of seasons later when the famine relents. But as we know, the famine did not relent for ten years, during which time Elimelech and his sons died. With no living heirs, the rights to the land were passed to Naomi. And so Naomi returns to Bethlehem poverty-stricken, and the land that had previously gone unworked for more than ten years now has some value. As stipulated in the Torah, tribal land must remain within the family. Even if it was sold amongst families within the tribe, in the year of Jubilee, it was to be returned to the original family (Leviticus 25:10).

And this is a no-brainer for Mr. So-and-So. He gets this great piece of land to add to his portfolio, which he can pass on to his children once Naomi dies. All he has to do in return is buy the land from Naomi and bring this elderly widow into his life. This transaction had a cost, but this was a fantastic investment in the long run.

But just as Mr. So-and-So gets up out of his seat to make his legal proclamation of redemption before the elders, Boaz springs his surprise, verse 5,

Ruth 4:5–6: "5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, **you must also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the one who had died, in order to raise up the name of the one who had died, on behalf of his inheritance.**" 6 So the kinsman redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, **lest I ruin my own inheritance.** You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

The law of levirate marriage, where a brother was to marry his deceased brother's widow and carry on his brother's family line, did not specifically apply here. Boaz and Mr. So-and-So were not Elimelech's or Mahlon and Chilion's biological brothers. However, even though there was no legal obligation to marry Ruth, Boaz implied that there was a moral obligation to marry her. Strictly speaking, this would have been a levirate-type responsibility. Boaz was operating according to the spirit of God's law here so that if Ruth gave birth to a child, that child would inherit Elimelech's property and carry on Elimelech's name.

With this new revelation, the costs of redemption now significantly outweigh the benefits. Boaz has cleverly created a situation that went from win-win to lose-lose for Mr. So-and-So. He would take a significant economic hit if he purchased the property and married Ruth. On the other hand, if he purchased the land but neglected his obligation to marry Ruth, he would incur

shame in the town of Bethlehem. For this reason, Boaz conducted this meeting in front of the whole town. Mr. So-and-So was on the spot and unwilling to pay the price of being their Redeemer.

With this rejection, Boaz, the worthy man, steps to the plate, verse 9,

Ruth 4:9–10: "9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, **"You are witnesses today that I have acquired all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon from the hand of Naomi. 10 "And also, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon,** to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the one who had died, on behalf of his inheritance, **so that the name of the one who had died will not be cut off from his brothers or from the gate of his birth place;** you are witnesses today."

Based on the economics of man, Mr. So-and-So could not afford to become a Redeemer. Such love for Ruth and Naomi required too much sacrifice. Like Orpah in Chapter 1, he counted the cost and walked away. But Boaz didn't operate based on man's economics but on the economics of God. He was bound by love for Ruth and his oath to her and Naomi to Redeem them. He was a godly man who, like his God, loved the foreigner and executed justice and righteousness toward the widow. This redeeming love came at a significant cost to him. He lived under the same circumstances as Mr. So-and-So. But unlike the other man, Boaz joyfully paid the price and took up his duty as Redeemer.

The people of Bethlehem recognize this extraordinary act of love and sacrifice, verse 11,

Ruth 4:11–12: "11 And all the people who were in the gate, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. **May Yahweh grant the woman who is coming into your home to be like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel, and so you shall achieve excellence in Ephrathah and shall proclaim your name in Bethlehem.**

The townspeople pray that the Lord would cause Ruth to be as prosperous and foundational as Rachel and Leah - the very mothers of the nation of Israel. They hope that, through a large family, Boaz would experience great prosperity. In the agricultural society of Bethlehem, a more prominent family meant free labor to work his field better. They also prayed that his name would become famous in Bethlehem and that he would be the founder of a family destined for great things.

From praying for blessing upon Ruth and Boaz, the people pray for the blessing of their offspring, verse 12,

Ruth 4:12: "12 "Moreover, **may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah,** through **the seed which Yahweh will grant you** by this young woman."

Judah was one of the 12 sons of Jacob and the founder of the Israelite tribe that bears his name. In Genesis 49, it was prophesied that his line would be one of Royalty. But who is this Tamar? Like Ruth, she was a foreign woman - a Canaanite, an outsider, and a widow. Like Ruth, she perpetuated the family line through highly unusual means - you can read that story in Genesis 38. In that story, Tamar bears twins to Judah. The stronger of her two sons was Perez, who just so happened to be the ancestor of these people in Bethlehem. The people

wished that Boaz's family, like that of Perez, would become the preeminent family of the royal tribe of Judah.

2. The Happy Birthday (4:13-17a)

After accomplishing redemption, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife, and YHWH answers the prayers of Bethlehem, verse 13,

Ruth 4:13: "13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. **And Yahweh granted her conception, and she gave birth to a son.**"

Ruth was a barren woman in her previous marriage. But now, God gives her conception. For almost this story, we've seen God operate in the background. However, for only the second time in this book, the Author brings the Lord to the foreground. The only other time the Author attributes an action to God is found in the very first chapter, in the opening scene, chapter 1:6; it is there that Naomi hears the news that "**Yahweh had visited His people to give them food.**"

Ruth and Naomi had two needs at the beginning of this book: food and family. God Himself began to meet their need for food by ending the famine in Israel and then blessing them through the kindness of Boaz. And here, in the concluding scene of the story, God enters the stage once more and meets their second need, a need for family and offspring, by opening Ruth's womb.

In the following verses, the Author fast forwards nine months, and the women of Bethlehem enter the scene. In Chapter 1, these were the women who, upon seeing Naomi return, marvel, "**Is this Naomi?**" To which Naomi responds, "**Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara,**"

But listen to their words now, verse 14,

Ruth 4:14–15: "14 Then the women said to Naomi, "**Blessed is Yahweh who has not left you without a kinsman redeemer today,** and may his name be proclaimed in Israel. 15 "**May he also be to you a restorer of your soul 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.**"

They praise YHWH for providing another kinsman redeemer, the baby boy. They prayed that he would restore her soul by ensuring her family line and provide for her needs for the rest of her life. Naomi's two needs at the beginning of the book? Family and Food. The Seed of Ruth and Boaz will be the answer to these needs. But on what grounds do these women feel confident in guaranteeing this baby's future care of Naomi? Their confidence is in the baby's mother. It is in Ruth who loves you. She is better than seven sons. Seven was the number of perfection, and in that ancient agrarian society, seven sons would have been the ultimate blessing of family. Possessing Ruth as her daughter was far better than having seven sons. She was the one who loved Naomi. So, there is no doubt in the minds of these women that the child of Ruth would live up to such an example of love for her. He would carry on the mantle and responsibilities of her Redeemer. His life will be bound to hers. His priority will be Naomi's well-being. Although he was born to Ruth and Boaz, he was to carry on her husband's name, inherit her husband's

land, and care for her as if she were his mother. As the woman declares to Naomi when she holds the babe for the first time, verse 17a

Ruth 4:17a: "17 The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "**A son has been born to Naomi!**"

The reversal is now complete. As the women had said to Naomi, Praise be to the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer. Stated positively, Praise the Lord who has provided you with a Redeemer.

VI. Epilogue: King (Ruth 4:17b-22)

At the very end of verse 17, the Author concludes this story with his greatest surprise,

Ruth 4:17b-22: "...**So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.** 18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, 19 and Hezron became the father of Ram, and Ram became the father of Amminadab, 20 and Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon became the father of Salmah, 21 and Salmon became the father of Boaz, and Boaz became the father of Obed, 22 and **Obed became the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David.**"

God didn't just provide Naomi with a Redeemer. He provided Israel with a king. This book was not merely a story about two desperate widows. It was about a desperate nation on the brink of utter collapse. It happened during the dark days of the judges. There was no king in the land, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. It is why the baby born to Ruth and Boaz would become famous in all of Israel. He would become the grandfather of the man who met Israel's greatest need - a king after God's heart.

All that occurred in the lives of Ruth and Naomi, the famine, the sojourn, the death, the devotion of Ruth, the grace of Boaz, the daring proposal at midnight, and Boaz's clever negotiation in the city gate were all part of the divinely designed master plan to provide Israel with her king.

Notice that the Author of Ruth ends this book with a genealogy to tie back to the book of genealogies - Genesis. Remember that at the beginning of Genesis, in Genesis 3:15, we have the very first promise of salvation from God,

Genesis 3:15: "15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; **He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.**"

It is in that verse that God promises the ultimate destruction of Satan, the serpent who deceived Eve and tempted mankind into sin. God promises that the one who will defeat Satan will be the Seed of the woman, the offspring of Eve. From this 3rd chapter on into the remainder of the book, we have genealogies tracking the chosen line of this Seed who will crush Satan's head. And as you move through Genesis, you move from genealogy to genealogy, from Adam to Noah, to Abraham, to Isaac to Jacob, and then to his twelve sons. At the end of the book, a prophecy is given about one of Jacob's twelve sons, Judah. He will become the ruling

tribe, the tribe of Royalty. And that's how the book of genealogies, the book of Genesis, wraps up, with hope, with the chosen line of Judah.

And this is where this genealogy of Ruth picks up with Judah's son, Perez. The point in placing this genealogy at the end of the book is to show that not only did Ruth and Boaz bear a son who would be Naomi's Redeemer.

This story began with ten years of death and tragedy and no sons. This story ends with a genealogy of ten sons - of ten generations of life and hope.

Christ Connection

Now, this genealogy continues after David. In the very first verses of the very first chapter of the gospel of Matthew, we find Ruth and these ten sons listed once more in the genealogy of Christ, the Redeemer of the World. Not only did Ruth and Boaz bear a son who became the Grandfather of Israel's greatest king. They bore a son who would join the genealogy of the Redeemer of the world.

Like Boaz before Him, Christ had the **right** to redeem mankind. He was born to a woman, fully God but also fully human. He was our kinsman. Like Boaz, He had the **resources** to redeem. We were not redeemed with gold or silver but with the precious blood of Christ, the blood of the Son of God. And lastly, Like Boaz, He had the loving **resolve** to redeem us. Because of His immense love for you and me, He endured the cross, He gave Himself up for us, and He laid down His life to pay the price of our redemption. He took our place, bore our sin and shame, and died so that we might be redeemed from the domain of darkness into His Kingdom.