

A Study Of The Book Of Ruth

Introduction:

Upon the first read of this short book you get to the end and walk away thinking, "That was a sweet story." And it is! But it is a sweet story filled and overflowing with meaning and a deep sense of how God works in the lives of his people.

As opposed to the other historical stories you have read in the bible up to this point, the book of Ruth is without visions, miracles, or even the direct audible voice of God. Some commentators have called this book profoundly human, noting that it displays the hiddenness of God, the God that we experience in our everyday lives. As you read this book you see a family just living, dying, struggling, rejoicing, much like you and me. But if you look closer you see an all Sovereign God lovingly guiding this family to bring about his ultimate purpose: to usher his Son into the world to bring salvation to humanity and Glory to himself.

Key Themes:

There are a few key themes that run through this book that we need to be familiar with in order to gain a right understanding of this piece of literature.

- **God's sovereign guidance in human affairs.** It is very important for us to make sure that before we even get into the first verse that we understand that God is in control. Nothing happens by chance or luck. While you may not see it directly, God is working in every circumstance throughout this story. If we approach the book this way it will be easy for us, as the readers, to see the hand of God work in calamity.
- **God graciously rescues Elimelech's family line.** If it had not been for the redemption of Ruth, Elimelech's

family line would have died with Naomi. The tragedy of Elimelech's family gave Israel King David...and eventually King Jesus!

- **Hesed.** *Hesed* is an important theme to understand. It means "Loyal devotion, Kindness". We see this theme all over the book. Naomi wishing the girls to go home, Ruth giving herself to Naomi, Boaz redeeming Ruth and therefore the line of Elimelech. And most importantly God practices *Hesed* towards his people. It is to be noted that *Hesed* is rewarded by God. God rewarded Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz when they were loyal, kind, and unselfish. It serves as a great example for us to be practicing *Hesed*.
- **The coming of King David.** At the end of the book we are given a short genealogy. It almost seems out of place but it is actually the most important aspect of the book. We see how the ordinary human struggles and joys bring about God's awesome plan. Through the life of this group of people came King David, and while David is an important figure in biblical history that is not what is most significant. We know that through the line of David came Christ! In this book we are given a beautiful glimpse into the history of our Savior!

Notes:

Ruth Chapter 1:

“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.”

In the first verse, we are given a lot of information in just a couple of sentences. First, in this verse we learn the setting was sometime during the Judges, before the first king of Israel was instituted. This is significant because not only does it give a timeframe in which the book was written but it also plays into one of the biggest and most important themes of the book which is the birth of David (the second king of Israel) through the line of Ruth.

We also learn that there is a famine in Bethlehem, which ironically means the House of Bread. The famine is so bad that this man has to take his family a long way away to Moab. As you can see on the map, Moab is a pretty long distance from home for them.

Moab:

The Moabites themselves come from the descendants of Lot. We recall the story about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

and the details of the children produced from Lot and his daughters. One of the sons was named Moab and the other Ammon (Genesis 19: 36-38). Since then the history between Moab and Israel has bounced back and forth between peace and war. Numbers 22:1- 25:9, give account to the almost war between Israel and Moab. Later we see that David



seeks refuge for his parents while he has conflict with King Saul (1 Samuel 22:3-4). While under different circumstances, David wages war on Moab during his reign (2 Samuel 8:2). The fact that this man takes his family to Moab proves that this was a time of peace between the nations.

As we continue, we learn about the family themselves. They were a family of four: Elimelech, Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion. Very quickly three of the four characters die, revealing one of the two main characters. Elimelech dies for some unknown reason. According to Rabbinic tradition, Elimelech died because he forsook his homeland to pursue greed, but we are not given any explanation in scripture. The two sons marry Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth. Scripture says they lived there together for ten years until tragedy struck again and both Mahlon and Chilion died. Again we are not given any details about their deaths.

What's in a name?

As you study the Old Testament you will see the importance of names. The people in those times were intentional when it came to naming their children. That fact is no less evident then here in the book of Ruth. As you look at the names given here you cannot only see the relevance it gives to the story but you can see the sovereignty of God.

Elimelech: “God is King”. Interesting, considering the fact that at the time this book was written God had given judges to rule the people as opposed to a king like the other nations had. By establishing a system of judges, God wanted his people to know that he was king and to show that they were different from the others nations. Also interesting is the fact that God does grant the people of Israel a monarchy instead of a theocracy at their unfaithful request. And the Second king of Israel is King David, who is brought about through the line of Ruth and Boaz. This name also displays the providence of God throughout this story.

Naomi/Mara: “Pleasant, Lovely one” / “Bitter”. Naomi’s name reflects the different emotions here in the story. In the beginning her family is a whole and well. Tragedy strikes the family repeatedly and when she

arrives in Bethlehem she requests that the people call her “Mara” meaning bitter since God has seen fit to bring bitterness in her life. Then she returns to Naomi/Pleasant at the end of the story when sweet Obed is placed in her arms and the women bless her.

Mahlon and Chilion: “Sickness” and “Death/Annihilation”. It has been suggested by different bible scholars that both of these boys were named after they had passed the danger of dying as an infant. In Old Testament times the infant mortality rate was high and many children did not live very long. The meanings of their names could reflect that fact that they were sickly children. Not to speculate too much but maybe this fact can shed a bit of light on why that died young.

Orpah: “Back of the neck/to turn back”. At first, to learn that her name means “back of the neck” seems odd. Why would her parents name her that? We do not know. But when it comes to the story of Ruth, it is full of meaning. In the desert scene, when Naomi pleads with her girls to return what does Orpah do? She reluctantly “turns her back” on her beloved mother-in-law.

Ruth: “Friend/companion”. It is not difficult to understand the reason behind Ruth’s name. It almost becomes a characteristic of her life. She makes herself a faithful companion to Naomi in her time of need. She stands as an example all throughout this book of how we should love and care for others.

Boaz: “Strong Spirit”/ “in the strength of Yahweh I rejoice”. Throughout the story we see the strength of Boaz’s character and integrity. As we read his words, we see the reverence of his relationship with Yahweh. Interestingly, King Solomon named one of the pillars in the temple Boaz (1 Kings 7:21). While scholars cannot agree for certain it is possible that Solomon named that pillar after his ancestor Boaz (noting the strength).

Obed: “to Worship”/ “one who serves Yahweh”. The beauty of this name speaks for itself. The story closes with the birth of Obed almost as a call to worship God for his sovereign guidance over the whole story. It also displays the hope for Obed’s future, that he will be “one who serves Yahweh”.

Three Names of God are used in the Book:

Yahweh: “LORD”. This is the Proper name of God. The name represents the immediacy and presence of God.

Elohim: “Creator, Mighty, Strong”.

Shaddai: “Almighty One”. This name speaks to God’s ultimate power over all. God is sovereignly leading every aspect of this story.

Now we are left with three women in a serious situation. They have all been widowed. In Biblical times, the security of a husband and father was very important. Not only did it offer protection but men at this time were depended upon to lead the family and interact in the community. We see another character leave the scene as Naomi plans to return home upon hearing that God has taken the famine from Bethlehem. Hearing that the famine had ended must have been such sweet news to Naomi, after such tragedy she could at least return home to the land of her people, to her God.

The Return:

“Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread: Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.”

It is interesting to note that both Ruth and Orpah initially packed up and headed out with Naomi. Both women were native to Moab and now that there were no legal ties to Naomi they had the right to stay home. It seems that they must have loved her enough to stay so close to aid her. We do not know how far out of town they were when Naomi stopped and pleaded with the girls to go back.

“And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.” The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.”

Here Naomi tries to reason with them. She tells them to go home, find a new husband, and start a family. As we read further she tells them I will not be having any more sons for you to marry, you are free to leave and start over. It is to be noted that Naomi bids them to go to their Mother’s house. Usually in cases like this, they would be bid to their father’s house, but here Naomi is directing them to were the preparations for marriage and household affairs take place, often referred to as the mother’s house or Chamber.

Naomi continues her plea and after a time Orpah reluctantly obeys and departs from her beloved mother-in-law. As Orpah Leaves we see in contrast that Ruth “clings” to Naomi. Here the word cling is more significant than it looks. In Old Testament times, this action showed a great commitment to leave one group to join another (Genesis 2:24, Josh. 23:12). By clinging to Naomi she was forsaking her home and joining another. This is confirmed in the next few verses when she gives a compelling speech to reassure Naomi of her commitment.

Was Orpah wrong to leave Naomi?

Oftentimes, Orpah is accused of doing wrong when she leaves Naomi there in the desert, especially in contrast to Ruth’s huge display of love and commitment. But in reality, Orpah simply obeyed Naomi’s wishes. It would be a big commitment to leave everything you know and possibly forsake having a family of you own in a land where you are a stranger. It was not sin for Orpah to leave Naomi, Naomi wanted her to go and start over. Orpah was doing the sensible thing. Orpah’s leaving only highlighted Ruth’s courageous actions. One commentator notes: One may understand Orpah; one may emulate Ruth.

“And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.” And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: 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.” When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.”

Here we read the beautiful commitment Ruth is making to Naomi. Her words are pregnant with meaning. She is not only saying that she is going to go with Naomi but that she is going to immerse herself in Naomi life. She will live where she lives, Naomi’s God is going to be her God, and even where she dies... that is going to be where she is going to be buried. It’s not just that Ruth is going hang around until Naomi dies then return home. Israel is going to be her home; Yahweh is going to be her God. She even seals it with an oath to mark the seriousness of her commitment, “...the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” Many commentators have said that it can be assumed that Ruth has at some future point already been converted to Judaism, most likely through the testimony of Naomi and her sons. Ruth gets the final word in this conversation and Naomi accepts the terms and they continue on the Bethlehem.

Sources say it would have been a 6 or 7 day walk back to Bethlehem. The author does not give us any details about their trip, but we do know about their arrival. The people of the city rejoiced to see Naomi return. When the people greet her, we hear the first expression of the depth of her sorrow:

“And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.” I went out full and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me

Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Naomi requests that she be called Mara, meaning bitter, because *"the Lord had dealt very bitterly with her."* She says she went out full, meaning: she left with a family, hope, happiness and she has come back empty. She has indeed returned empty, her husband and children are gone, and she has no money, food, or security. One has to wonder why she neglected to think of the fact that Ruth had just committed her own life to her. Perhaps in the depth of her sorrow she failed to see anything positive. I believe we often fall into this trap as well. It is true that difficult things do come into our lives but it is extremely important to realize that we are never truly forsaken.

Was Naomi wrong to make such a request? It is important to look at the name she uses for God in her statement: Shaddai. As we read earlier, Shaddai is the Almighty one. This name speaks to his sovereign control. She is correct to recognize that the tragic events have come from God himself. She is recognizing that Shaddai is King and what comes from his hand is not for us to question. We are reminded of Job's interaction with Shaddai here (Job 38-41). What we need to understand is that God is good, and his definition of good is different from ours. He may choose to use sin, death, joy, love, or whatever he wishes to bring about his perfect plan. In his commentary on Ruth, Robert Hubbard has this to say about Naomi's request:

"In conclusion, one applauds the display of Naomi's humanity by the narrator. Like Jeremiah, Job and the psalmists, she stood open and honest before God in her suffering. If Ruth modeled devotion, Naomi modeled honesty... Naomi's words point to the mysterious and often (from a human perspective) unjust workings of God. Finally, one must realize that her outburst in fact assumes a positive view of God, namely, that he controls the universe, normally with justice. Her case is an

exception—though not a rare one—but such is the mystery of God."

From our human perspective, we are often not able to see the plan of God. Therefore we must rely on the fact that he is good and he never makes a mistake. Along with Job and Naomi stand a host of other biblical characters and Christians in history who were given a grave circumstance but we saw that God had a bigger plan.

We close this chapter rather abruptly with the author telling us the two women traveled to Bethlehem and settled in right around the time of the barley harvest. While this seems somewhat insignificant, it provides a setting for the next chapter.

Notes:

Ruth Chapter 2:

“And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.² And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.³ And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.”

The first verse of this chapter seems just a little out of place. The author introduces the last of the three main characters: Boaz. We learn that Boaz is a relative of Elimelech. We are introduced to this character before we even officially meet him in the text. We are told that Boaz is a “mighty man of wealth”. That gives us even more context into who this man is. Boaz is wealthy and in high social standing in Bethlehem.

All of the sudden, the text changes pace and we are back to Ruth and Naomi. The last verse of Chapter one ends by informing us that it was the time of the barley harvest. This is significant because as these women, who are now widows, have no one to provide for them and they must work to provide food for themselves. The second verse picks up with Ruth telling her mother-in-law that she is going to go to the fields and glean to gather food for them. Naomi agrees with this plan. There are several things that must be noted here.

First we must understand God’s law concerning the widow. In Deuteronomy 24:19-22, The Lord makes specific provisions for the widow and the orphan. He commands his people that while they are harvesting their fields they are to intentionally leave some behind for the widow and orphans to come and collect. We also see this principle in Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, the people are told to leave some behind for the poor and strangers. What we see here is God creating a working system for his people. The

poor, widowed, and fatherless are provided for, but they are not given hands outs. They are still required to work to take care of their needs. There is an important principle here. While God provides for us we still need to work and put labor in, not just expect to be given handouts.

Ruth fits into both of these categories: stranger and widow! What is encouraging here is that Ruth takes the initiative to go out and work and provide for Naomi and herself. It must have been intimidating for Ruth to come to a foreign land as a single woman. As we will see in the next few verses it was often not safe for women to work in the fields by themselves, they could be hurt and even taken advantage of by the men in the fields. Also, her being a stranger brought another levels of uneasiness to the situation. But she went out anyway and was intent of taking care of her mother-in-law.

The first and only field Ruth came to was that of Boaz’s. Again we see the providence of God working here. Out of all the fields in Bethlehem she got Boaz’s field. The KJV here uses the word “hap” other versions such as the ESV uses the term “she happened”, showing that it was not intentional. It is exciting as the reader to see the hand of God move like this, neither Ruth nor Boaz know what is to come, but the author artfully gives us some leading information.

“4 And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.⁵ Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?⁶ And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:⁷ And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.”

All of the sudden, Boaz appears on the scene, the man whom we have already been introduced to finally arrives. Again, we see the hand of God. His first words in this book reveal a lot about his character. He takes the time to greet his employees, he says “Yahweh be with you” (we know it is Yahweh because the text gives God’s name to us in all capital letters). In response the reapers greet him saying “the Lord bless you”. This exchange gives us our first chance to see that Boaz is a religious man.

Boaz’s attention is drawn to Ruth. He asks his superintendent who this girl is and we find out more about Ruth. Although the law provided widows the freedom to glean, Ruth still sought permission to glean in the fields. Commentators disagree about whether or not Ruth was given permission to glean from the overseer and thus worked all day, or if he was not allowed to give such permission and she stood and waited all day for the owner to arrive, either way we learn about Ruth’s work ethic. She was not afraid to work hard.

Here in verse 8, Ruth and Boaz have their first interaction. He calls her over and gives her full permission to work and even goes above and beyond his responsibility and makes sure she is protected from being harmed by the men in the field; he also gives her permission to stay till the end of harvest and drink from the well. He basically gives Ruth all the rights of one of his employees without hiring her. Humbled, she falls on her face and asks why he would be so kind to her. Boaz must have heard about what Ruth had done from others in the community because here he tells her that he has heard all about her commitment to Naomi. Ruth’s character preceded her. This is an important point! Ruth had done what was right, she had practiced *Hesed* toward Naomi and now she was reaping the rewards. In turn, Boaz practices *Hesed* toward Ruth and Naomi and as we will see he will receive a reward later.

“¹²The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.”

Boaz offers a blessing over Ruth in verse 12. It is beautiful. He basically says “May the God under who protection you have come under reward your work”. We will see this type of protective covering again later in the book.

Love at first sight?

Why did Boaz take such an intense interest in the welfare of Ruth? Scripture does not give us any indication of romance here. So while it is not unlikely, we do not know if Boaz was attracted to her in that way. It is a reflection of Boaz’s character that he would seek to help Ruth. Boaz probably realized his family relationship here and out of duty and love sought to take care of his relatives.

Not only does Boaz allow Ruth to work the fields but he also allows her to have a meal with them and he serves her himself offering much respect to her. She goes home after a full day of work with an ephah of grain. Now this is a huge amount of grain, an ephah calculated to about 29 pounds of grain! The average gleaner in her position would bring home maybe 1-2 pounds at the end of the day. On the first day, Ruth brought home a half a month’s wages! What a testimony to Ruth’s work ethic and Boaz’s generosity! Bringing this much food home would explain the barrage of questions Naomi met Ruth with.

19 And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.21 And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.22 And Naomi said unto Ruth

Ruth Chapter 3:

“Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?”

Family structure was very important in Old Testament Israel. The family was responsible to ensure the health and security of its members. We see over and over again fathers and mothers arranging marriages and instructing their children on what they need to do. In Ruth, we see Naomi doing just that for Ruth. Naomi has assumed the role of mother over Ruth. If we look back at the first chapter we can recall Naomi’s plea to the girls for them to go home to their families and marry again. Naomi bid Ruth to go and find “rest” in her husband’s home. When Ruth refused to leave, Naomi became her family. The responsibility for Ruth’s future welfare fell on Naomi. We see Naomi living up to that responsibility here in the beginning of this chapter. Naomi says to Ruth, “Should I not seek rest for you?” Rest here refers to the security of marriage that Ruth may rest in her husband’s home.

“2 And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor. 3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. 4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. 5 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.”

In the time between the events of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, Naomi has devised a plan to bring security to both Ruth and herself. She brings up the fact that Boaz is their kinsman redeemer. In order to understand the importance of the kinsman redeemer we need to look at God’s law and what He has said to Israel about the care of the family. In the book of Ruth there are two different matters of redemption to be addressed:

redemption of Elimelech’s land and with that the furtherance of his name in Israel and the redemption of widowed Ruth and with that the furtherance of Mahlon’s name in Israel. Leviticus 25: 23-34, 47-55, give us God’s law concerning the redemption of the land. God says that if a brother becomes poor and is forced to sell his land that a relative (Kinsmen redeemer) may come and buy the land back. This act keeps the land in the family thus preserving the families name in Israel. Now we look to Deuteronomy 25: 5-10. In this passage we are given the law on levirate marriage. The term comes from *Levir* meaning “husband’s brother” or “brother in law”. In Levirate marriage if a brother is married and he dies it becomes the responsibility of the man’s brother (kinsman) to take the widow as his wife. The firstborn of their union is to belong to the dead husband to continue his name in Israel. Now, it is interesting to note that if the brother refuses to take this responsibility the widow is to go to the leaders and make a complaint, if the man still refuses shame is brought on him when the woman takes off his shoe and spits in his face. In shame, this man is to be known as the “house of him that hath his shoe loosed.”

Naomi gives Ruth a plan to go and propose to Boaz and ask him to perform his duty as their kinsman redeemer. Naomi gives Ruth clear instructions as to how she is to go about this task. She essentially tells her to take bath, put on some perfume, get dressed and head down to the threshing floor. Naomi wanted her to be at her best when she proposes to Boaz. This could also be a sign that Ruth was to come out of mourning her husband, and prepare herself for betrothal (2 Samuel 12:20, Ezekiel 16:9-12).

These verses let us know that the harvest was over and it was time for the men to thresh the grain. Threshing the grain involved separating the grain from the chaff. This was a lot of work. Boaz was going to thresh his grain and stay the night to ensure no one came to steal it. The time of threshing the grain

was often a joyful festive time for the men, harvest was over and their hard work was coming to an end. In light of the upcoming events of this chapter, it is important to note that in this culture, night at the threshing floor often gave way to sexual immorality. Many women would take advantage of the fact that they could exchange sexual favors for grain. One might wonder what Naomi had in mind when she sent Ruth in this way. Naomi finishes her instructions and Ruth agrees to follow them asking no questions. Ruth must have trusted her mother-in-law. This act is risky. Ruth could face a lot of shame if Boaz were to respond negatively and ascribe immoral intentions to her. Or it was possible for Boaz to take advantage of her sexually while she was there at night.

What was Naomi thinking?

There are several ways Naomi could have resolved this issue of redemption. She could have had Ruth approach Boaz in the daylight, before the leaders at the gate or even in private and request redemption. Naomi herself could have gone to Boaz and brought the matter to light. But Naomi chose to send Ruth under the cover of darkness, to a place known for immorality, with Boaz contented with food and drink. Why? Many scholars have asked the same question and many have come to one unfortunate conclusion. This piece of literature is overflowing with people of character, so it is difficult to bend and admit that maybe one of these characters was not acting with such righteousness. Let's take a closer look into Naomi's life choices for a minute. During a famine her and her family head to Moab to find food. Her family dies, mostly likely as judgment for disregarding God's law, and upon hearing that food has returned to Israel she heads back. Now she finds an opportunity to bring security to Ruth and herself and she employs some risky tactics to ensure that security happens. It appears Naomi was trying to take advantage of the situation. While I am not trying to demonize Naomi, it must be suggested that she was not operating from a position of faith in Yahweh as much as she was seeking pragmatic ways to meet her earthly needs. We see a

pattern of this thinking in her life. Sweet Naomi fears for the future and that fear drives her to pragmatism instead of faith. We must not rush to fault Naomi before we peer into our own lives and see this same reasoning making appearances in our everyday decisions. The ends do not justify the means. Luckily for Naomi, Boaz and Ruth chose to act righteously in the face of temptation and God was glorified. Also to be noted is the fact that like Orpah leaving Naomi elevated Ruth's action in staying, here Naomi's pragmatic actions elevate Ruth's in resisting a tempting situation and acting in faith. Like many other biblical stories we read, God used human folly to bring his glory to light.

"6 And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down."

So here she is, hiding in the dark waiting for Boaz to finish his meal and fall asleep. We are told Boaz lays down with a full stomach and in a good mood. Soon Boaz is sleeping soundly. Ruth tiptoes in, uncovers his feet, and lies down to wait for Boaz to wake up. We are not told if Ruth falls asleep or not but I would imagine it was a restless night for her as she laid there having no idea what would happen next.

This part of the story is immersed in controversy. Here we have our two main characters, alone in the dark, at a place that is known for sexual impropriety. Boaz and Ruth have often been accused of indulging in these immoral acts. Oftentimes in Scripture when the term "uncover his feet" is used it refers to the uncovering of sexual organs (Exodus 4:25, Judges 3: 24, Deuteronomy 28: 57.) But as we look at the Hebrew word that is used (*marglot* "place of the feet") we see that it is the word meaning the foot, therefore giving us no need to see it as a euphemism. Many commentators have suggested Naomi

instructed Ruth to lay at his feet as a sign of humility as she asked for his protection. Also, it has been suggested that uncovering his feet would expose them to the cold night air and aid in his waking up soon.

“8 And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.”

Around midnight Boaz wakes up and finds a woman lying at his feet. He asks who she is and immediately Ruth makes her proposal. I could imagine after waiting there for a few hours, Ruth was nervous and ready get an answer. We must not miss the fact that she calls herself his handmaid, or servant. Again we see her offering herself in humility. We are able to make the connection here with the first conversation between our characters. Ruth requests Boaz to spread his skirt over her. The expression used here also carries connotations of marriage as seen in Ezekiel 16:8-9. Other versions such as the ESV translates it as, “spread your wings over your servant”. Where have we heard this sentiment before? Ruth 2:12! Boaz uses this expression in a blessing on Ruth, signifying her protection and security under the care of Yahweh. Now Ruth is intentionally using this phrase to seek protection and security from Boaz. At the end of her request she says, “...for thou art a near kinsman”. She basically asks for him to perform Levirate marriage and fulfill his duty as a kinsman redeemer.

“10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.”

Boaz’s answer puts Ruth’s fears at rest. He comments on how this current kindness (*Hesed*) is even greater than the first. The first kindness shown by Ruth was the act a devotion to Naomi displayed in the first scene, the second kindness is her seeking to marry him as a redeemer. He commends her for seeking a kinsman redeemer instead of pursuing a younger man, she chose family loyalty. It should be noted that we have not been given any information on Boaz’s physical features or even his age, but here we are given a clue as to his age in relation to Ruth’s. Twice in this interaction, he refers to her as his daughter. This term is often used by older people in speaking to younger people. We can recall Naomi used this earlier when addressing Ruth. This shows that Naomi and Boaz are most likely close in age.

Boaz agrees to the arrangement making note that she is known as being a virtuous woman in their community. This is significant! Ruth is a foreign woman, fairly new to the community and already she has demonstrated that she is a virtuous woman. We see this term “virtuous woman” in the wisdom literature. Specifically seen in Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman is the one to seek in marriage, she takes care of her household, she is known for her integrity, and she is worth more than rubies. We have seen Ruth’s character displayed all throughout this short book, have we not? Her insistence to remain with Naomi, her willingness to work hard to provide, her obedience to her family, her respect for Yahweh and his people, and as recently noted by Boaz her loyalty to family in not seeking a young man to marry. We cannot proceed without making mention of the attitude displayed here by Boaz. He seems genuinely happy at the prospect of marrying Ruth. He does not appear irritated or frustrated by the request. One can imagine the delight at the thought of being able to marry this “Virtuous woman”.

“12 And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.13 Tarry this night, and it shall be in the

morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning.¹⁴ And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor."

That moment of rejoicing is quickly brought to a halt when Boaz makes mention of the fact that there is another redeemer that is closer than himself and he has the right to be offered the opportunity first. This answers a question that many people have while reading this book, if Boaz was such a good man and quick to take care of his relatives then why did he not seek to redeem them on his initiative. The answer is: even if he had wanted to he could not because the right was given to another. Again, we are offered a peek into the strength of this man's character. Here he is with this young woman offering herself in marriage and he has the integrity to do what is right and make sure they follow God's law. To the relief of Ruth, Boaz assures her that he will take care of everything tomorrow. He now takes the initiative to seek a redeemer and resolve the whole matter for Ruth again showing his leadership and protection over her.

The controversy arises again here in verses 13-14. He tells her to "lie down until morning." Again many people suggest that it is at this point Boaz and Ruth indulged in immorality. There are several proofs against that suggestion. First of which is the fact that she laid down at his feet again. She resumed her initial place of rest. Also, the whole story has built up their righteousness and integrity so much that to consider that at this moment they would ignore God's law and give into sin would be error. We must also consider the fact that another kinsman has just been introduced, why would Boaz defame Ruth and then offer her to another Israelite man for marriage. In a lecture on Ruth one pastor make mention of the fact that Scripture, while it is not

crude, is not shy when it addresses sexual situations. We are not given any indication of sexual acts taking place between our main characters. The author makes sure to use the verb, *lun* "to lodge", to remove all sexual connotations from the situation, Ruth was told to sleep till morning. So then the question remains why did Boaz tell her to stay and sleep until morning? Boaz tells Ruth to stay and sleep here until morning but she must leave early so that it would not be known that a woman had been there. There are a couple reasons for this request. First, it was the middle of the night and it would be dangerous for Ruth be out at that hour by herself. Secondly, it would give reason for gossip if Ruth was seen leaving the threshing floor at night knowing the cultural connotations of immorality linked with the threshing floor. This gossip might also make the next day's events, seeking a redeemer, difficult if Ruth was suspected of immorality.

"¹⁵ Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.¹⁶ And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.¹⁷ And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.¹⁸ Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

In the morning Boaz gives Ruth a large portion of grain to take home to Naomi. This was a generous gift. Ruth tells the events of the night to her mother-in-law and Naomi's answer is one of hope and confidence. Knowing the matter of man Boaz is, Naomi rested in the fact the he would take care of the situation and all they had to do was wait.

We arrive at the end of this difficult chapter full of anticipation. We leave dear Ruth at home waiting for the outcome and godly

Boaz with the task of finding the redeemer and resolving the matter.

Is Ruth a love Story?

As I approached this book I struggled with this question: is Ruth a love story? I think Ruth is a love story, just not our common distorted view of a love story today. Our culture has shaped our expectations for what a love story is. Between Disney and the variety of romantic comedies, “chick flicks”, we are doomed to be able to understand the depth of real love (without looking to God’s word). We see over and over again stories of men and women who foolishly disregard what is right to pursue their passion and desires for “the one”. The same type of distortion of love is seen in a whole host of movies, books and music that saturate our minds and hearts today, creating false expectations and unrealistic views of love. By contrast, in Ruth we are given a glimpse into what love is supposed to look like. In the blossoming relationship between Boaz and Ruth there is respect and honor, selflessness that puts God and others before their personal desires. The author does not fill the book with romantic overtones, feelings of romance are not present in their interactions, neither of them make mention of their feelings. This does not necessarily mean that those feeling were not present, but it does mean that those feelings were not what were guiding their choices. Their choices were being guided by God’s law and respect for each other and for the other people involved, namely Elimelech’s family and this unnamed redeemer.

Not only was this the love story of Ruth and Boaz but also the story of Ruth and Naomi. Ruth displayed such powerful and true love for Naomi when she left Moab to devote herself to caring for her mother-in-law. Most importantly we see a love story of God and his people! The big picture of this piece is how God works in the everyday lives of his people. Just as he is providing life and security for Ruth and Naomi through redemption; he is providing life and security to his people through the redeeming work of His

son, who is to come from the providential union of our very own Ruth and Boaz! God loves us and he has graciously given us his word that we may be able to love others with a love that is real and selfless. One of the greatest tests of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. In this chapter we are given a clear picture of what real love is. Does your love for others measure up to the standards of love found in God’s word?

Notes:

Ruth Chapter 4:

“Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.² And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.³ And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's:⁴ And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.⁵ Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.⁶ And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.”

Just as he promised, Boaz went to the city gates to settle this matter of redemption. Again we see the hand of God, the man Boaz was looking for just happened to be there. We are not given this other redeemer's name. It has been suggested that he was not given a name here in the story as judgment for not redeeming his relatives land. Boaz gathers the man and the ten elders of the city to bear witness to the transaction that is about to take place. The Mosaic Law did not specify that ten elders were required, so we may assume that it might have been a custom for that area.

After Boaz gathers this group, he offers the right of redemption to this other man. There are two different transaction taking place here in the deal: The redemption of the land (Lev. 25: 23-34, 47-55) and levirate marriage (Deut. 25: 5-10). He explains the fact that Naomi had returned from Moab and now had

needed to sell her family's land and the man has the first right to redeem the land and preserve Elimelech's family name. The kinsman initially agrees to redeem the land and thus Naomi. But Boaz now introduces the fact it would not be Naomi that he would be redeeming, but he would be taking Ruth as his wife. At hearing this additional information the man changes his mind. In his study on Ruth, Robert Hubbard explains the situation like this:

“. . . the surprise element must be something other than the obligation to marry a deceased's widow since the kinsman probably expected that. While certainty is impossible, a careful reading of 4:3-5 suggests that the new information was the sudden, unexpected substitution of Ruth for Naomi as Elimelech's widow. The progression of thought would be as follows. Cleverly, Boaz steered the conversation away from Ruth to focus on legal matters concerning Elimelech and Naomi in vv. 3-4. If the thought of a marriageable widow associated with the land crossed the kinsman's mind at all, he probably assumed her to be Naomi. Advanced in age beyond child-bearing, she posed no threat to his prospective profitable purchase. The alluring proposition offered him double returns for a small investment. He would not only increase the size of his own holdings but also enhance his civic reputation as one loyal to family. Future profits from the land would offset any expense incurred in caring for Naomi; indeed, given her awful suffering, one might not expect her to live much longer anyway. In any case, there was no risk of losing his investment to the claims of a future heir. A required marriage to Ruth (v. 5), however, was a very different matter. Much younger, she might bear several sons, the first eligible to claim Elimelech's property as his heir, others perhaps to share in the kinsman's own inheritance (v. 6). That possibility made the investment all too risky

and perhaps even flustered him . . . The profit to be turned would be his only until the child acquired Elimelech's land, probably on attaining adulthood. Further, the care of a younger, obviously robust wife (cf. 2:17-18) meant considerably more expense than anticipated. Hence, he willingly waived his redemption rights in favor of Boaz (vv. 6-8)."

Taking Naomi to wife posed no threat to this man's position and would not harm the inheritance he would pass onto his own children. Seeing the detriment it would do to his own family if he had taken Ruth, he passed his right on to Boaz.

"7 Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel.8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe."

To settle the matter the unnamed man gives Boaz his shoe. We have seen the removal of a shoe before in this discussion as it pertains to a man refusing to perform levirate marriage as given in Deuteronomy 25:9, if he refused his shoe would be removed to bring shame to him. The language used here does not communicate this custom being practiced, especially since the man removes his own shoe. Many commentators do not make this particular link, but rather they link it to another custom where you would give your shoe to signify the land you step on is now being given over (Gen. 13:17; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:3). Either way Boaz now had the rights.

"9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among

his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day."

Boaz makes the point to announce to the elders and observers that he has made the purchase and will take Ruth to be his wife, and by doing so he will continue Elimelech's family name so it will "not be cut off" from Israel.

"11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman."

The people who have witnessed this transaction now affirm that the deal is settled and turn to bless Boaz and his future marriage. In their blessing they hope that Ruth will be like Rachel and Leah, two foreign women that God used to give birth to the 12 tribes of Israel, she is also compared to Tamar who also carried on the family name through levirate marriage with her fath-in-law, Judah. In contrast, Judah and Tamar's story is marked with more sin and immorality than Ruth's and Boaz's story (Genesis 38).

"13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son."

We are not given any details of the wedding ceremony, instead the author chooses to focus on the fact that Ruth conceives and bears a son! It is interesting to note that for whatever reason in the ten years of marriage neither Ruth nor Orpah had birthed children to Elimelech's sons. But here we see God has opened her womb and given her a son. The fact that the child is a boy is significant for many reasons. We have already noted how men dominated to the culture of that day and for Obed that meant full

inheritance rights of his family name and property. Also he was able to replace the men lost in Naomi's life and care for her.

"14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed..."

After the infant is born the women of the city bring the child to Naomi and offer blessings to God for continuing the family line through this child. We see a contrast here at the end of our story, Naomi enters Bethlehem and requests the women call her Mara for she is empty and bitter now the circumstance has completely changed and Naomi is now full! They make comment on all the blessing that have come from his birth: He will be there to take care of her in her old age and he keeps the family's heritage alive! These women do not fail to mention Ruth doing this out of her love for Naomi and they even note that Ruth is better even having 7 sons! This is high praise for Ruth, if Naomi did not appreciate Ruth's *Hesed* then, she does now. Naomi takes this child and essentially becomes his guardian. Naomi is to raise this child as her own. What a huge gift from Ruth, giving her firstborn to her mother-in-law.

The child is finally given a name. The women who brought him to Naomi are the ones who choose a name. This is unusual since normally immediate family names the child. They name him Obed. One source remarks, "Obed's name perhaps added the nuance "servant of Yahweh," for in the end his service of Naomi served Yahweh's larger purpose as well."

The birth of a child is always a joyous occasion, but in light of the events of this story the birth of sweet Obed brought much to rejoice in. In Obed, God not only preserved the name of Elimelech's line but he also secured the line of Christ! Obed brought comfort and peace to Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

"...he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.18 Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron,19 And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,20 And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,21 And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed,22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David."

In the closing verses of this book we are given a short genealogy. It almost seems out of place in light of the all the joyful events of the chapter. But in fact this genealogy is one of the most significant aspects of the story. This is a linear type genealogy that was usually used to bring legitimacy to one's right to rule, thus this would provide proof of David lineage. Also, we are given the family line of King David and thus the line of Jesus Christ. God has graciously allowed Ruth the Moabitess to be in the family line of the King. As we look back through the story we see the hand of God sovereignly guiding the events of these people's lives in order to bring his Son, our Savior into the world.

As we conclude this study I want us to walk away with a few things in mind. First, we must approach not only this piece but also our lives with the knowledge that our God is Sovereign. Nothing is out of his control and he does not make mistakes. We mentioned earlier, when we live in the faith that our God is good and that he defines what is good we are able to take the suffering in our lives and rest in the knowledge that our God has a purpose for it. God does not waste pain. When you are facing difficult circumstances in your life, handle them appropriately by resting in God and using his word to guide your actions not just living by your emotions. Seek to glorify your Father in every situation. We

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