

# Under His Wings: Ruth's Walk of Faith<sup>©</sup>



*A Story of Suffering and Blessing in Ancient Israel*

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Suffering is part of life. Each of us has experienced it to some extent. But there may be times when the anguish in our life seems so intense that it overshadows the blessings. We feel like no one really understands our predicament or knows how to help in our time of sorrow. So we cry alone—like a stranger in a foreign land.

This was Naomi. She suffered greatly. Her family was dead. For years she had mourned. She cried out to the Lord. But He didn't seem to hear her. So she became bitter. She needed to experience the blessings of God once more. She needed to learn to trust Him again—to feel His love and be aware of His presence.

The book of Ruth is a story of suffering. But it is also a chronicle of blessing. It answers the question: What should I do when I face suffering? The book takes us to a fork in the road and asks us to make a choice. Are we going to walk down the road of bitterness or the road of faith? We must decide.

Although walking together along a dusty road on their way to Bethlehem, Naomi has chosen the path of bitterness, while Ruth is seeking refuge in the Lord. Fortunately, Naomi's bitterness is eventually abandoned and her trust in God is rekindled. The book of Ruth relates the story of how this transformation takes place. It also reveals the richness of God's blessing to both Naomi and Ruth through Boaz, their kinsman-redeemer.

The book of Ruth is considered by many to be one of the greatest love stories in the Bible. It not only portrays the love of a man for a woman, but it reveals the love of God for His people. The events in the book take place during the time of Judges, when Israel was characterized by rebellion and apostasy. In a time of despair, the book of Ruth provides a glimmer of hope. It is a brushstroke of brilliant light painted on a black canvas. Juxtaposed against the darkness of sin, it shines even more brilliantly, like the first star on a dark night.

The book begins with hopelessness and ends with anticipation. It starts with misery and concludes with joy. This transition is the work of God, whose providence is evident throughout the book.

1. *Read the entire book, writing down any comments or questions you think of as you read.*

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2. *Retell the story in your own words in one paragraph.* \_\_\_\_\_

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3. *List several themes (subjects) that are found in the book. Which ones best describe the book?*

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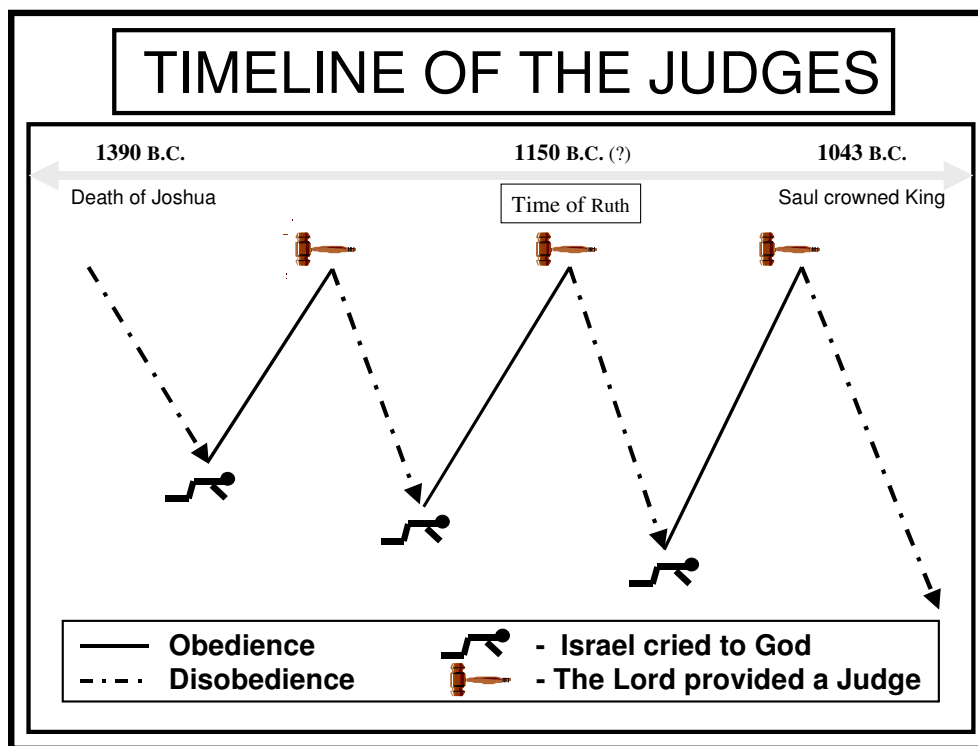
## Historical Background

After Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their forty-year trek in the wilderness, Joshua is commissioned as successor to Moses as the leader of the nation Israel. Joshua led the people in its conquest of Canaan. The people of Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua's life, even until the death of his elders (Jud. 2:7). But the next generation forsook the Lord and worshipped the gods of the pagans who lived among them (Jud. 2:10-12). The time of the Book of Judges (1380-1050 BC) began with the death of Joshua and ended with the crowning of Saul as the first King of Israel. It was a time of moral and social anarchy, as well as spiritual degeneration. Israel was beset with war as a test from the Lord in its incomplete occupation of Canaan.

The evil of the Israelites provoked the Lord to anger and He delivered them into the hands of their oppressors (Jud. 2:14). Time and time again, when Israel was at war, the people cried out to the Lord, who raised up judges because He was moved to pity by their groaning. The judges were chosen by God to declare God's wrath, because of the nation's apostasy, and to deliver Israel from their enemies, who ruled over them as a punishment for their sins.

*Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do as their fathers (Jud. 2:16-17).*

God repeatedly delivered His people, yet when the judge died, they quickly returned to their evil ways. Each generation became more corrupt than the last (Jud. 2:19). Israel's disobedience, linked with her worship of pagan gods resulted in her failure to experience God's blessing and the full conquest of Canaan (Jud. 3:1-8).



These cycles of obedience and disobedience, resulting in blessing or cursing, are a fulfillment of the promise of Deuteronomy 28 that the Lord would bless His people when they obeyed Him (Deut. 28:1-2), but would allow curses to overtake them if they did not obey Him (Deut. 28:15).

1. Read Judges 17:1-6. What did Micah and his mother do that was dishonoring to the Lord?

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It is likely that the events in the book of Ruth took place in the last half of the 12th century, toward the end of the time of the Judges. The story of Ruth is even more exceptional since the period of the Judges was a time when "there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Although there were periods of revival under each judge, the apostasy intensified and the time of the Judges ended in corruption and dissension.

In the midst of this time of decadence and rebellion, the story of Ruth and Boaz reveals the sovereign work of a faithful God to the believing remnant in Israel. The Lord God of Israel uses a gentile maiden from an idolatrous, pagan nation to be in the line of King David. The blessing of the Lord on this faithful line of Israel, through whom the Messiah would come, provides further condemnation on His rebellious people. God will always work through those who are faithful to Him. This serves as a source of encouragement to the faithful, but is a rebuke of the disobedient.

2. How would you liken the walk of a faithful believer today to Ruth's life in the time of Judges?

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3. How could you be a testimony to those who do what is right in their own eyes. \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Introduction to Ruth*

The story of Ruth, the Moabitess, is not an isolated narrative, but it completes the canon of Scripture as a vital link in the revelation of God to man. A descendant of Lot, Abraham's nephew, Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David. Along with Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, she is one of four gentile women in the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:3, 5, 6).

Ruth and Esther are the only two books in the Bible named for women. Ruth, a maiden from a pagan country married a Hebrew and was used of God to perpetuate the line of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Esther was a young Jewish orphan who married a pagan Gentile king. She was used of God to intercede for her people, saving the nation from a destruction that could have prevented the birth of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

Against a background of national irresponsibility and weak character, Ruth the Moabitess and a Hebrew landowner named Boaz shine as bright examples of purity, faith, and responsible living. The Ruth narrative provides a gratifying reminder that even in the darkest times God is always at work in the hearts of those who are faithful to Him.<sup>2</sup>

The book of Ruth is documented as an historical narrative by the indication of a specific time, place and persons.

1. *Why do you think the Holy Spirit inspired the author to record particular events and people?*

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The faith of Ruth the Moabitess is contrasted to the rebellion of Israel during the time of the Judges. The genealogy at the end of the book links the narrative of Ruth and Boaz to King David. It thus provides the connecting link with the history of David, making the accounts from Joshua to Samuel one continuous narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Ruth is part of the Old Testament section of the Canon of Scripture known as the Writings. The book was once considered to be a portion of the book of Judges in the Hebrew record. The book of Ruth, along with the Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, are the Hebrew scrolls that comprise the Megillot, five scrolls that are read on Jewish religious festivals.

The three most important feasts of the Jewish religious calendar were associated with three harvest seasons (Ex 23:16; 34:21-22). The Feast of Passover was celebrated at the barley harvest, the feast of Pentecost coincided with the wheat harvest (Ex 34:22), and the Feast of Tabernacles occurred during fruit harvest.<sup>4</sup>

Even today the Book of Ruth is read annually by orthodox Jews on the Feast of Pentecost, which commemorates the giving of the Mosaic Law. In Old Testament times, it was known as *Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks, and was celebrated at the beginning of the offering of the first fruits of the harvest (Ex. 23:16). The Feast of Weeks was a one-day festival celebrating the completion of the barley harvest that was observed fifty days (hence Pentecost in the New Testament) after the remembrance of Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread). It is also referred to as the Feast of the Harvest or Day of the First Fruits. On this day, Israelites brought gifts to the Lord as an expression of their gratitude for the harvest (Lev. 23:15-21). Ruth first arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22). Her betrothal occurred during this festive harvest season when the barley was being winnowed (Ruth 3:2).

2. Write a brief summary of the Feast of Weeks. \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Authorship.** The author is unknown, but Jewish tradition has attributed the book to Samuel.<sup>5</sup> Samuel may have written the book at the time David was anointed king of Israel in order to justify David's claim to the throne through the ancestry of Ruth and Boaz.

**Date of Writing.** Since Solomon is not mentioned in the genealogy at the end of the book (4:18-21), it is likely that it was written during the reign of King David. The author's explanation of the custom of removing a sandal reveals that the book was written some time after the occurrence of the events that are contained in it (4:6-8). Because Ruth's great-grandson David began his reign in Hebron in 1010 B.C., the events in the book of Ruth, who may have been a contemporary of Gideon, must have taken place in the last half of the 12th century.<sup>6</sup>

**Themes.** Redemption is an important theme in the book of Ruth (3:13; 4:4, 6, 14). The book provides the only historical example in Scripture of the kinsman-redeemer.<sup>7</sup> Boaz, as the kinsman-redeemer, is a type of Christ who secured redemption for all people. Various Hebrew words for redemption are used twenty times in the book. The providence of God is also evident as He intervenes in the life of the ancestors of King David. The levirate marriage, including the redemption of property, and court customs are uniquely interwoven in the book of Ruth.<sup>8</sup> Kindness is a reoccurring theme (1:8; 2:20; 3:10), as is love, although the word only occurs once in the book, where it refers to Ruth's love for Naomi (4:15). Other themes include famine, death, harvest, Gentiles, obedience, faith, and blessing. The book begins with famine and death and ends with birth and provision. Questions in the book arise with the possible chastening by God in the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion, Naomi's suggestion that Orpah return to her gods, and the marriage of a Jew to a Moabitess.<sup>9</sup>

4. What is the significance of these themes? How are they important to the book's message?

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**Key Verses.** There are three important verses on the theme of redemption:

*The man is near to us, one of our redeemers (2:20b).*

*". . . if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. . . ." (3:13)*

*Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel (4:14).*

The most popular verse in the book is:

*But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God (1:16).*

4. Memorize Ruth 1:16. Write it here from memory. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Purpose of the Book.** The purposes of this book are varied, the most important being the presentation of the doctrine of the kinsman-redeemer as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ as redeemer. The book is a witness of God's sovereignty and providence, which are coupled with His lovingkindness as He brings both famine and food, as well as rest and blessing. Ruth's devotion to Naomi is an example of submission. Her faith is rewarded by an impartial God. The book reveals that the kingship of David is a fulfillment of the promise given to Judah.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the narrative gives witness to the ongoing narrative of the nation Israel, from the times of Judges to the life of the prophet Samuel and the anointing of David as King.

5. As we begin a chapter-by-chapter study of the book, reread the first chapter of Ruth. What are some of the key words in this chapter? What are some of the themes?

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *Preparation for Redemption*

*The Providence of God is evident in this chapter as He first brings famine and then food to Israel. Naomi left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons, moving to the land of Moab where they died, leaving her alone. She returns to Bethlehem a bitter woman who is blessed by the faith and loyalty of her daughter-in-law, Ruth.*

The narrative documents the time, place and persons of this book to verify its historical accuracy (v. 1). The book of Ruth is a love story, but it is not a fairy tale. The events in the book actually take place in Israel during the period of the book of Judges in a time of ever-increasing spiritual decadence and disobedience.

*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Jud. 21:25).*

During the period of the Judges, many Israelites worshipped the Canaanite god Baal, who was believed to own the land and control its fertility (Jud. 2:11; 3:7; 8:33; 10:6, 10).<sup>11</sup> As the book opens, there was a famine in the land of Israel. Many years later in Elijah's day God sent another famine as judgment on Israel for worshiping Baal (1 Kings 16:30-17:1; 18:21, 37; 19:10).

Famines were common in Old Testament times.<sup>12</sup> Most notable were those in the time of Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Isaac (Gen. 26:1), Joseph (Gen. 41:27) and Elisha (2 Kin. 8:1). Famines were often the result of a lack of rain (Deut. 11:17), blight and mildew (Amos 4:9), or locusts (Joel 1:4-20; Amos 4:9) due to God's judgment for the disobedience of His people. His purpose was always to cause Israel to return to him.

*And He called for a famine upon the land;  
He broke the whole staff of bread (Psa. 105:16)*

*'I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew, and hail; yet you did not come back to Me,' declares the LORD (Hag. 2:17).*

Yet there were promises in Scripture for those who would trust the Lord in times of famine.

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness, To deliver their soul from death, And to keep them alive in famine (Psa. 33:18-19).*

*In famine He will redeem you from death,  
And in war from the power of the sword" (Job 5:20).*

The story begins with Elimelech, whose name means, "my God is King."<sup>13</sup> It is an interesting definition in light of his apparent failure to trust the Lord in a time of famine. His wife's name was Naomi, meaning "pleasant or lovely," a term which becomes apparent only in the later chapters of the book. His two sons were Mahlon (puny) and Chilion (pining), names that may have been descriptive of their condition because of the famine.

Elimelech was of the tribe of Judah, an Ephrathite. Ephrathah, referred to Ephrath in Genesis 35:16-19 and 48:7, was an ancient name for the town of Bethlehem or the surrounding area.<sup>14</sup> Micah 5:2 prophesies the birth of the Messiah in this town, which is about five miles south of Jerusalem.

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
Too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.  
His goings forth are from long ago,  
From the days of eternity.”

Elimelech left the Promised Land and took his family to Moab to save them from starvation during a time of famine (cf. Gen. 12:10). But the irony was that all of them died with the exception of his wife, Naomi. This was the opposite of his intent.

1. *In view of the consequences of taking his family to Moab, do you think Elimelech was right or wrong to do this?* \_\_\_\_\_

a. *What are the possible reasons he might have been right?* \_\_\_\_\_

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b. *What are some reasons he could have been wrong?* \_\_\_\_\_

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2. *Give an example of a time when you failed to trust the Lord, resulting in difficult or tragic circumstances. What did you learn from this experience?* \_\_\_\_\_

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It is likely that the deaths of Elimelech and his sons were a judgment of God resulting from their lack of faith in the Lord. The departure of Elimelech from Bethlehem would have held great significance to the Jews of that city in light of the tragic incidences recorded in Judges 17 and 18.<sup>15</sup> Elimelech was not merely making a trip to the local bakery to buy bread for his family. He took them to live in a pagan country, forsaking the Promised Land, the place of God’s blessing.

Elimelech was a native of Bethlehem, meaning “house of bread.” But there was no bread in the house of bread. This famine prompted him to take his family and immigrate to the land of Moab, rather than believe in God’s provision (Job 5:20). Moab, the son of Abraham’s nephew Lot, was born from an incestuous relationship with his elder daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). Moab was also the territorial name for the land east of the Jordan.<sup>16</sup>

Following Elimelech’s death, his two sons married Moabite women. The name Orpah (v. 4), means “gazelle,” but it comes from an unused word meaning “back of the neck,” meaning “obstinate” or “stubborn.”<sup>17</sup> Ruth, from the Hebrew word for friendship,<sup>18</sup> can mean “companion, friend,” or “satisfied.” Elimelech’s decision to leave the Promised Land had dire consequences. Within ten years after their marriage to Moabite women, both of Elimelech’s sons died.<sup>19</sup> Barrenness is an

important theme in this chapter. The land is barren, as are Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth. There is a lack of food; lives are lost; the widows are childless.

News of God's blessing in Israel traveled to Moab. It is interesting that the place of God's blessing was Israel—not Moab. The source of blessing was the Lord, not Baal. Naomi learned that the Lord God of Israel had provided food for His people (v. 6), a blessing that would have resulted from the nation's obedience to the Lord.

*The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us.  
God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him (Psa. 67:6-7).*

The first mention of the Lord appears in verse six. There is no indication that it was the Lord who led Elimelech to take his family to Moab. It seems that Naomi is only willing to return to Bethlehem after the famine is over. Perhaps she agreed with her husband's decision to leave the Promised Land. There is no hint of any attempt by Naomi to return to Bethlehem following Elimelech's death. Perhaps those living in the pagan land of Moab had influenced her.

3. Give an example of a time when an unbeliever influenced you to make a decision that was not God's will. What was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

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As Naomi was returning to the land of Israel with her two daughters-in-law, she apparently changes her mind and encourages them to return to their families so that the Lord could provide husbands for these young widows (vv. 8-9). The kindness of these young women is evident as Naomi prays that the Lord will deal kindly with them in the same way that they had shown kindness her as well as to her husband and sons (v. 8).

*Kindly* is a translation of Hebrew word, *hesed*, depicting the steadfast love or lovingkindness of the Lord. It is one of the most important theological terms in the Old Testament, occurring over two hundred times.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting that, in light of her circumstances, Naomi refers to the lovingkindness of Jehovah, which is an indication of His faithfulness. Exodus 20:6 refers to the Lord God of Israel showing lovingkindness to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

*O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption (Psa. 130:7).*

4. What are some ways you have experienced the lovingkindness of the Lord? In other words, how has He blessed you? \_\_\_\_\_

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Naomi wishes for her daughters-in-law the kindness that she feels is lacking in her own life. She also wants security for the two widows, which in their culture was based on the marriage

relationship. Naomi's only concern seems to be for the economic welfare of her daughters-in-law. Is her faith so small and her bitterness so great that she wanted them to marry and live in a pagan land rather than trust God for their future in the land that the Lord God had provided for Israel? We must be certain that our decisions are based on trust in the Lord rather than the expediency of the moment.

Orpah and Ruth's weeping and refusal to return home reveals the love they had for their mother-in-law (vv. 9-10). Their response was loud weeping, which was characteristic of those in mourning (Jud 21:2; 2 Sam 13:36). They wanted to return with Naomi to Bethlehem.

Naomi's comment that she was too old to marry again and bear sons (vv. 11-13) is probably a reference to the Israelite law of Levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10). This law required that if a married man died childless, his brother should take his wife as his own. Their firstborn would then take the name of the dead brother so that his name would not be blotted out in Israel. The introduction of the theme of Levirate marriage in these verses provides the background for the presentation of the kinsman-redeemer later in the book.

Naomi declares that it is harder (literally, *more bitter*) (v. 13) for her than for her daughters-in-law. At least they are young enough to remarry and have children. Naomi appears to be overcome with hopelessness. There is a sense that Naomi may be blaming God for her suffering, thinking He has been unfair to her. It is a temptation for us today to blame God or other people for suffering which the Lord has allowed in our life as a result of disobedience or a lack of faith. It is important to remember the purpose of suffering and discipline in our lives is to draw us closer to the Lord (Heb. 12:11). If we become bitter or blame others, we fail to learn the lesson of that suffering. We must confess any sin to the Lord and allow Him to cause our faith to grow during times of testing.

*For [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:10, 11).*

Perhaps in response to Naomi's claim that the hand of the Lord is against her (cf. Jud. 20:15; Job 19:21; Psa. 32:4), Orpah decides to return to her people and her gods<sup>21</sup> and continue to live in a land of idolatry (v. 15). Orpah may have been influenced by Naomi's lack of faith in the Lord God of Israel. So great is Naomi's despair that she also encourages Ruth to return to the land and the gods of Moab. This is one of the great troublesome sections in the book of Ruth. We wonder how a true believer in the Lord God of Israel could encourage these women to return to a land of paganism. Yet bitterness and sin can distort our thinking. There is no indication here that Naomi is trusting in the Lord. Perhaps she wonders if Jewish men would be willing to marry her foreign daughters-in-law. Or, maybe she doesn't want the burden of caring for them.

In contrast to Orpah, Ruth clings to Naomi, unwilling to return to her people (v. 14). Clinging is an indication of both affection and loyalty (Gen. 2:24).<sup>22</sup> Orpah disappears from the pages of Scripture as she chooses to return to her people and her gods.

5. *What might have been some of the reasons Ruth would choose to go with Naomi?* \_\_\_\_\_

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In verse 16, the conjunction *but* emphasizes the contrast between these two young widows. As Orpah turns back, Ruth looks ahead, willing to trust God for her future. Naomi's plea falls on deaf ears. Ruth is determined to follow Naomi and take her God, her people, and her land as her own. Ruth begs Naomi not to make her leave and abandon her. In her depression, Naomi did not want any help. Aren't we like that at times? But Ruth would be faithful to provide it anyway. Naomi is bitter. She is focusing on her problems rather than on the Lord God of Israel and His provision for her in the person of Ruth. Ruth did not choose the easy solution. She is willing to risk divine punishment and death in order to follow Naomi. Faith must be willing to take risks!

Ruth's pledge of devotion (v. 16-17) stands in sharp contrast to Orpah's departure, Naomi's despair, and the rebelliousness of Israel in the time of Judges. Ruth's commitment to the Lord God of Israel is absolute and unreserved. It is one of the greatest personal declarations of faith written in the Scriptures. Like the Thessalonians, Ruth turns from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Thes. 1:9). Gage summarizes, "Ruth the Moabitess is thus grafted into the Abrahamic root of promise."<sup>23</sup>

Ruth's barrenness and the loss of her husband have not damaged her faith. She is willing to entrust her future to the God of Israel. She is prepared to give up any hope of security, which would come from her returning to Moab to remarry, in order to care for Naomi and live among foreigners. Ruth's faith is a condemnation to the rebellious Israelites in the time of Judges. Perhaps it is even a rebuke to Naomi. Those who are willing to trust the Lord are a testimony and an example to others.

6. *What lessons can we learn from Orpah and Ruth about making decisions?* \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth makes a vow of death to prove that her commitment was certain and unwavering (cf. 2 Sam. 3:9; 1 Kings 2:23; 19:2). The keeping of her promise is verified throughout the pages of the book. In Old Testament, in voluntary oaths the usual form was, "The LORD do so to me, and more also."<sup>24</sup> A translator's note in the NET Bible summarizes:

Ruth here pronounces a curse upon herself, elevating the preceding promise to a formal, unconditional level. If she is not faithful to her promise, she agrees to become an object of divine judgment.<sup>25</sup>

Naomi's lack of faith stands in stark contrast to Ruth's commitment—one of the greatest examples of faith in the Bible. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Ruth knew when to speak; Naomi knew when to be silent. Ruth's declaration of faith should challenge us to be bold in sharing our faith with others.

As Naomi returns to Bethlehem with Ruth, the women scarcely recognize their old friend (v. 19). But Naomi's attitude no longer represents her name, "pleasant." She told her friends to call her *Mara*, meaning "bitter." She has changed her name to reflect her plight, failing to believe that God can once again make her life pleasant. She fails to acknowledge or appreciate Ruth, who was at her side, as a blessing from the Lord. The fact that Ruth was childless and a widow could have

caused her to become bitter. But she chose to trust the Lord for the future rather than dwell on the past. She is an outstanding example of how we as believers should respond to suffering.

Naomi feels empty-handed because she is obsessed with her loss and fails to see what God has provided. She has become bitter, believing that *El Shaddai*, the Almighty, has dealt harshly with her (cf. Gen. 17:1). This name for God is often used in connection with the discipline of His people.<sup>26</sup> It is used thirty-one times in the book of Job. Yet the Almighty is also the One who blesses (Gen. 28:3; 49:25).

As Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, it is interesting that the women of Bethlehem hardly recognize Naomi. This implies that she has probably not seen them since she left for Moab. These women probably had remained in Bethlehem during the famine. Naomi is older—perhaps with a few wrinkles and flecks of gray in her hair. Her face probably reflected the suffering that she had endured. It does not seem that they attempt to minister to her. But maybe they assumed that in her bitterness, she was unwilling to accept any consoling. Throughout the book, it is Ruth that comforts and provides for Naomi.

7. *How could the women of Bethlehem have ministered to Naomi?* \_\_\_\_\_

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Naomi's emptiness and bitterness (vv. 20-21) symbolize the spiritual famine in Israel during the time of Judges.<sup>27</sup> The famine was over but the hunger was now in Naomi's soul. There was no spirit of thankfulness. She believed that God had dealt with her harshly. Naomi's view of God is an indication of her attitude toward suffering. Her bitterness may be contrasted to Job's willingness to accept both good and adversity from the Lord (Job 2:10). She failed to see that what would become the greatest blessing of her life—a young Moabitess, a woman of faith—had been found in the land of her exile

The word *Moabite(s)* occurs seven times in the book, emphasizing that gentile converts to Judaism who believed in the Lord God of Israel were equal heirs of the blessings and promises of Israel. It also foreshadows the fact that through the Messiah, who would be born in the line of Ruth, all nations would be blessed.

Verse 22 emphasizes the word *return*, which occurs eight times in this chapter. There is an emphasis in this verse on the fact that Ruth was a gentile coming from the land of Moab. They arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. The chapter begins with a famine and ends with a harvest. The events in the rest of the book cover about three months (from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the barley and wheat harvest (1:22; 2:23).

This is a chapter of contrasts: famine and harvest; leaving and returning; Jews and gentiles; marriage and widowhood; the pagan gods of Moab and the Lord God of Israel; kindness and bitterness.

8. *What can we learn about the providence of God in this chapter?* \_\_\_\_\_

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9. *What are some ways you can apply the teachings of this chapter to your life today?*

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10. *As you prepare to study Chapter Two, read the chapter and write down the key words. What are some of the themes?*

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11. *How do these themes compare to those in Chapter One?* \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER TWO

### *Providence of Redemption*

*The Lord directs Ruth to glean in the field of Boaz, a godly man who is a kinsman of Elimelech. Boaz praises Ruth for her care of Naomi. His interest in Ruth is apparent as he favors this Moabitess who has placed her faith in the Lord God of Israel.*

The author immediately introduces us to the man who will become the hero of the book. Boaz is a resident of Bethlehem and a kinsman of Elimelech, Naomi's husband. In Ruth 2:1, he is described as a mighty man of valor. The Hebrew word *hayil* is defined as "power or strength"<sup>28</sup> as well as "valor, worth or ability."<sup>29</sup> *Hayil* also characterizes David's mighty men, warriors of Israel. The same word portrays Ruth as a woman of excellence in Ruth 3:11 and describes the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31. It is also used by the people of the court and the elders to pronounce a blessing on Boaz when, as kinsman-redeemer, he buys Naomi's property and promises to marry Ruth in fulfillment of the Levirate law (4:11).

In verse 2, Ruth takes responsibility for providing for herself and Naomi. She asks her mother-in-law for permission to glean in the field of one with whom she finds favor. Ruth's apparent knowledge of God's provision for the poor resulted in her requesting permission to glean in a field. The word *glean* appears twelve times in the book, all in this chapter.

When they harvested the land, the Israelites were commanded to neither glean nor reap the corners of the fields, but leave them for the needy and the alien (Lev. 23:22). The aliens were foreigners, those who spoke another language and came from a far country.<sup>30</sup> The author mentions once again in this verse that Ruth is a Moabitess. She is not an Israelite. But she is a proselyte—a convert to Judaism. She is also a foreigner.

*Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Thy people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Thy name's sake (for they will hear of Thy great name and Thy mighty hand, and of Thine outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to Thee, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as do Thy people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Thy name (1 Kin. 8:41-43).*

It is in the context of the regulation for the Feast of Weeks or Day of the First Fruits that the Israelites were commanded to neither glean nor reap the corners of the fields, leaving them for the needy and the alien (Lev. 19:9; 23:22).<sup>31</sup>

Hebrew law required that the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the stranger be allowed to glean the grain, grapes, and olives left behind during the harvest. The owner was prohibited from harvesting the corners of his field and from stripping bare his fields, vineyards, and orchards (Lev. 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24:19–21). In this way provision was made for those who had no property of their own.<sup>32</sup>

The poor were also allowed to walk behind the reapers to pick up or "glean" anything the reapers had missed (Deut. 24:19–22). The story of Ruth is set against such a background. She was able to fill the large skirt of her robe with what she had collected.<sup>33</sup>



An Israelite widow was particularly vulnerable and dependent because of her inability to provide for herself. In agrarian Israel it was necessary to own and work the land for one's sustenance. A woman without a husband or sons (particularly if she were advanced in age) would be unable to support herself (e.g. Naomi in the book of Ruth). To remedy this, the Law of Moses included all sorts of safeguards—social nets—designed to ensure that a widow would not become destitute and starve. For example, there was the provision of the triennial tithe. Instead of the tithe being brought to the sanctuary, in the third year it was brought to and deposited in the local town so that the widows who lived there might 'come and eat and be satisfied' (Deut 14:29).<sup>34</sup>

As Naomi gives Ruth permission to glean, we see the providence of God as Ruth *happened* to come to a field that was owned by Boaz (v. 3). God often leads us through the circumstances in our lives, if they are in accordance with the Word of God. By law Ruth was allowed to glean. She was both needy and alien. Matt 15:21-28 also speaks of a Gentile of great faith. Acknowledging Jesus as Messiah of Israel, a Canaanite woman is content to merely glean the crumbs of the bread that the Master gives to Israel.

In verse 3, the author repeats the fact that Boaz was of the "family of Elimelech." This relationship is emphasized because of its importance later in the book.

1. *How can you know when circumstances are leading you to know God's will and when they are keeping you from His will?* \_\_\_\_\_

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In verse 4, we get a glimpse of the godliness of Boaz. As he comes from Bethlehem, Boaz greets his workers with a prayer that the Lord will be with them. They respond with a prayer that the Lord will bless the man for whom they work. Boaz is a remarkable example of a faithful Israelite in an era of rebellion. The Lord is clearly a part of every aspect of this man's life.

2. *How can you be a testimony for the Lord in your work, your neighborhood and your family when those around you don't seem interested in the Lord?*

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Boaz then notices Ruth and asks his servants who she is, more accurately, to whom she belongs. The servant in charge answers that she had returned with Naomi and he emphasized the fact that she was a foreigner. He says that she had asked permission to glean. She had politely requested authorization for that which the law stated she had a right to do. Perhaps not all Israelites were willing to obey the law that permitted gleaning on their land. Having received the servant's consent, Ruth had worked hard, and is now taking a break in the house (v. 7).

Boaz then personally speaks with Ruth, addressing her as a daughter, which probably was indicative of their age difference (v. 8). Boaz's care of Ruth is evident as he tells her to remain in

his field with his servant girls. He was probably referring to the time it would take for the barley to be harvested. In obedience to the Lord and His Word, Boaz permitted Ruth to glean in his field. Boaz's protection is obvious, as he has commands his servants not to touch her, meaning there was to be no sexual contact (v. 9).<sup>35</sup> He provides for her food and also gives her permission to drink from the water that the servants draw.

In humility, Ruth falls on her face, bowing to the ground. This was a gesture of respect or submission, which involved kneeling and touching her nose and forehead to the ground. This was common in Old Testament times (Gen. 42:6; 43,26). Frequently it represented showing respect to a king or ruler, especially when making a request.<sup>36</sup> Ruth is overcome by the kindness and favor that is shown to her by Boaz. She asks him what the reason is for being noticed and receiving favor since she is a foreigner. However, Boaz's treatment of Ruth is in obedience to the command given by the Lord in Leviticus 19:34:

*'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.'*

Boaz's responded that Ruth has done a great deal for her mother-in-law and that she left her father and mother and the land of her birth to come to a people she did not know (2:11). This latter phrase may parallel the Lord's command to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 to leave his country and his relatives to go to another land.<sup>37</sup> Although the betrothal of Isaac and Jacob focuses on the genealogies of their future mates, Boaz emphasizes Ruth's spiritual link rather than her ancestral link with Abraham. Boaz then pronounces a blessing on Ruth, praising her for seeking a place of safety or rest in the Lord God of Israel (2:11).

*Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me, For my soul takes refuge in Thee; And in the shadow of Thy wings I will take refuge (Psa. 57:1).*

*O taste and see that the LORD is good;  
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! (Psa. 34:8).*

Ruth humbly replies that she has indeed found favor with Boaz (2:12). Verses 11 and 12 show that Ruth was faithful to fulfill her vow to Naomi. Boaz then comforts Ruth by speaking *kindly* (literally, *to her heart*) (2:13), which means to speak in a friendly manner (2 Sam. 19:7; 2 Chr. 30:22; Isa. 40:2).<sup>38</sup> Boaz then invites her for lunch,<sup>39</sup> after which he commands his servants to allow her to glean without rebuking her. Boaz's kindness extends beyond the law of Israel when he tells them to intentionally drop some grain for Ruth to pick up. This is a picture of grace.

*He who is generous will be blessed, For he gives some of his food to the poor (Pro. 22:9).*

3. List some of the characteristics of Boaz that are evident in this passage. \_\_\_\_\_

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At the end of the day, Ruth beat out the grain (Ruth 2:17). If only a small amount of barley was needed, it was threshed by beating the grain with a long flexible stick.<sup>40</sup> After working hard all day, Ruth returned home to Naomi with enough food to last several days. Upon learning that Ruth had gleaned in the field of Boaz, Naomi pronounces a blessing for him.

Just as Naomi recognized that her emptiness was caused by the Lord (1:20-21), she now attributes to Him kindness toward both the living and the dead (2:20). In both cases, it is Boaz that the Lord has used in order to show kindness to Naomi. God often uses others as a means of

blessing us. The Lord's kindness to the living is evidenced by the food that Ruth has brought home. His kindness to the dead is seen in Naomi's hope for a close relative to redeem the land. She then reveals to Ruth that Boaz is not only a relative, but a kinsman-redeemer. Naomi's hopeless condition is coming to an end. She senses the possibility that her kinsman, Boaz, might be willing to redeem the land of Elimelech. He had evidently either sold the land or borrowed money on the land before taking his family to Moab.

Naomi recognizes Boaz's care to protect Ruth and encourages her to glean with his maidens until the end of the harvest (2:22). Supported by Naomi and in obedience to Boaz, Ruth stayed close to Boaz's maidens as she gleaned during the barley and wheat harvest. And she lived with Naomi.

In Chapter One, Naomi attests to the harsh suffering that the Almighty, El Shaddai, has brought into her life. In Chapter Two, she begins to once again experience personal blessing as the Lord God blessed Israel with food and blesses her with a faithful, obedient daughter-in-law. God provided for Israel; Boaz provided for Ruth; Ruth provided for Naomi. Blessings are to be shared.

4. *What qualities in the life of Ruth are revealed in this chapter?* \_\_\_\_\_

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5. *How has Naomi's attitude changed in this chapter? What can we learn from her?* \_\_\_\_\_

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6. *What are the signs of God's providence in this chapter?* \_\_\_\_\_

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7. *What are evidences of God's blessing in this chapter?* \_\_\_\_\_

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8. *Reread Chapter Three. What are the themes of this chapter? Which one is most important?*

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9. *What do you think are the significance of Naomi's instructions in verses 1-4? (See 1:9)*

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# CHAPTER THREE

## *Request for Redemption*

*In obedience to Naomi, Ruth appears to Boaz at the threshing floor. Boaz then praises the Moabitess for her discernment and virtue. Ruth responds to Boaz's favor by requesting that he act as her redeemer. But Boaz must first present her request to an even closer relative who has the first option of redemption.*

At the end of the barley and wheat harvests, Naomi again expresses her concern for Ruth's security; literally *rest* (cf. 1:9). As a young widow in the Jewish society, Ruth could find security through remarriage. It was customary in the Old Testament for marriages to be arranged by the parents or with their consent (Gen. 24:7). Although Ruth was willing to remain unmarried, Naomi devises a discreet plan to acquire not only a godly husband for Ruth, but also a kinsman to redeem Elimelech's land.

1. *How would you describe Naomi's behavior up to this point in the story (3:4)? What do you think her thoughts and emotions were?* \_\_\_\_\_

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Naomi's suggestion for Ruth to put on her best clothes may be interpreted as either the end of her mourning period or the need for concealment with an outer garment.<sup>41</sup> Naomi is very specific in her instructions regarding the timing and the procedure for what Ruth is to do.

It is apparent that Naomi seeks to have a kinsman of Elimelech fulfill the law of levirate marriage. Naomi was familiar with this Old Testament law, but she also was acquainted with the custom of celebration at the end of the barley harvest.<sup>42</sup> When the threshing of the barley was completed, the owner usually stayed with the grain all night to keep it from being stolen.<sup>43</sup> The carrying out of Naomi's plan to have Ruth visit the threshing floor will require secrecy. Under the cover of darkness, Ruth will meet Boaz and reveal her plan.

2. *Although Ruth is obedient to Naomi's instructions, what do you think her thoughts might have been as she walked toward the threshing floor?* \_\_\_\_\_

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Naomi's suggestion for Ruth to put on her best clothes may be interpreted as either the end of her mourning period<sup>44</sup> or the need for concealment with an outer garment.<sup>45</sup> Naomi is specific in her instructions regarding the timing and the procedure for what Ruth is to do. Ruth willingly obeys Naomi in every detail (3:6). Ruth's modesty and submissiveness are evident as she quietly uncovers Boaz's feet and lies down.

But in the middle of the night Boaz awakens and is surprised to find a woman at his feet. He requests her identity and Ruth responds, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative" (v. 9). Just as Ruth has sought refuge under the wings of the Lord (2:12), and now she seeks the protection of Boaz. The word *corner* is translated "wing" in 2:12.<sup>46</sup>

The Hebrew phrase *spread your wing* is a symbol of protection, a metaphor referring to young fowls who run under the wings of their mother to hide from birds of prey.<sup>47</sup> It was a custom in Old Testament times to throw one's garment over a woman to claim her as a wife (Deut. 22:30).<sup>48</sup>

*'Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,' declares the Lord GOD (Eze. 16:8).*

The custom of a Jew throwing the skirts of his garment over a woman continues to be a symbol of his protection even today.<sup>49</sup>

The phrase *close relative* in verse 9 is the Hebrew word *go'el*, meaning redeemer. Ruth had made known her desire for Boaz to act as her redeemer according to the law of Levirate marriage.

In verse 10, Boaz pronounces a blessing on Ruth. He praises her for her wise decision to request him to be her redeemer rather than desire to marry a younger man. Ruth was free to marry anyone, yet she sought a kinsman-redeemer in order to perpetuate Mahlon's line and provide for Naomi. Boaz then agrees to her request, noting that she is a woman of excellence (v. 11), emphasizing her hard work and devotion to Naomi. The word for excellence is the Hebrew word *hayil*, meaning valor or worth. It is the same word that is used to describe Boaz in Ruth 2:1 and the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31.

Ruth and Boaz are well matched! The godliness in each of them has attracted them to one another. A godly character is the most important quality to look for in a future mate and is an evidence of the leading of the Lord.

*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband (Pro. 12:4).*

3. *What qualities in Boaz and Ruth are important in the selection of a mate? Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

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But the answer is not what Ruth expected. Boaz reveals that there is an even closer relative than he. This man, who may have been Elimelech's brother, must be given the first option of

redemption. If he refuses, Boaz will then become her redeemer. Ruth is engaged—but she doesn't know which man she will marry! The theme of redemption is emphasized in verse 13, where the word *redeem* occurs four times. The word is used ten times in the next chapter.

Although some impropriety on the part of Ruth and Boaz has been suggested, the passage clearly shows that his request for her to remain at his feet and then leave at first light is for her protection (vv. 13-14). Perhaps she must depart secretly in case she becomes someone else's wife. Before Ruth leaves, Boaz asks her to remove her cloak and fills it with barley for Naomi. Boaz's protective care as a guardian of the family is evident. He is already acting in the role of a kinsman-redeemer. The time of Naomi's emptiness is ending (3:17; 1:21) and Ruth's role in initiating the Levirate law is completed. She must now wait for Boaz to act.

4. *What is the significance of Naomi telling Ruth to wait (v. 18)?* \_\_\_\_\_

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5. *Reread Chapter Four. What are the key words and main themes of this chapter?* \_\_\_\_\_

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## *Fulfillment of Redemption*

*As he promised, Boaz intercedes for Naomi and Ruth at the city gate. He presents his case before the elders of the city as he challenges the near relative to redeem Elimelech's land and marry the widow of his son. But Boaz is the one to redeem the land and marry Ruth. God blesses Naomi with an heir.*

Boaz wastes no time in going to the city gate to conduct the necessary business in preparation for the fulfillment of the levirate law (v. 1). Perhaps he is anxiously hoping for the nearer relative's refusal so he can take the young Moabitess as his bride.

Boaz represents Ruth before the elders of the city in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 25:7 regarding Levirate marriage.

*But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him.*

The providence of God is again evident in the opening verse of this chapter. As Boaz is sitting at the city gate, the closer relative Elimelech passes by. Boaz acts quickly as he asks the man to sit with him and then gathers ten elders as legal witnesses of the conversation (v. 2). Boaz has an obligation to inform the closer relative of the option of redemption and he wants the man's response to be witnessed by the leaders of the city. His reply would be the equivalent of a legal document.

Boaz relates the return of Naomi from Moab (v. 3), stating that it is financially necessary for her to sell her husband's land. Boaz then explains that the closer relative has the first right of redemption of the property in order to keep it in the family line (v. 4).

The land of Israel belonged to God and was given to the tribes as their inheritance. The laws of Israel gave the landowner the right to redeem property that had been sold.

*'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me. 'Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land. 'If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold (Lev. 25:23-24).*

This law protected the inheritance of the poor.<sup>50</sup> The redemption of the land through the son of a widow is grounded in the law of levirate marriage and is important in understanding the practice of marriage in the Old Testament.<sup>51</sup> This type of marriage kept the property of the dead brother in the family and continued the family line through the son of the widow.

*When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel (Deut. 25:5-6).*

The Hebrew word *redeem* occurs four times in verse four (as in 3:13), but this time the redemption is concerning the land rather than the Moabitess. But when the closer relative agrees to redeem the land, Boaz adds a condition to the redemption (v. 5). The closer relative learns that he must marry the widow of Mahlon, the son of Elimelech.

1. *List the requirements of the kinsman-redeemer. Write the verse references.*

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Having agreed to redeem the land, the closer relative now refuses to act as redeemer of the land and to marry Ruth.

2. *What might be some possible reasons why Naomi's closest relative refused to marry Ruth?*

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Perhaps the best view is that when he learned from Boaz that Ruth owned the property along with Naomi (v. 5), he realized that if Ruth bore him a son, that son would eventually inherit not only the redeemed property but probably part of his own estate too. In that sense the nearer redeemer would "endanger" his estate. However, if only Naomi were the widow (not Naomi *and* Ruth), then no son from the levirate marriage would inherit part of the redeemer's estate because Naomi was past childbearing.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting that the name of the closer relative is never mentioned. His unwillingness to act as kinsman-redeemer makes his identity irrelevant to the narrative. It also emphasizes Boaz as Ruth's redeemer.

Boaz, who some suggest may have been Elimelech's nephew,<sup>53</sup> is now eligible to fulfill both aspects of the Levirate law. It appears that the dual reason for the institution of the levirate marriage was the preservation of the name of the deceased through the raising up of a son and the perpetuation of the property within the family. The Levirate marriage permitted the property of the deceased brother to remain in the family. If the deceased brother had no male heirs, then the surviving brother was to marry the widow. The first son of the levirate marriage was regarded as the son of the deceased and he would then be expected to continue the family line (Dt. 25:5-10).<sup>54</sup>

Yet the interests of the widow of a Hebrew are also considered. Ruth, although a foreigner, had the right to receive full support from the nearest kinsman of her late husband.<sup>55</sup>

3. *What are some evidences of God's care of and provision for Ruth in this book?* \_\_\_\_\_

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In verse seven, the author of the book explains the custom in Israel of the removing of one's sandal as verification of his refusal to redeem the land.

*Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, 'I do not desire to take her,' then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, 'Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' In Israel his name shall be called, 'The house of him whose sandal is removed.'* (Deut 25:8-10).

So the near relative removes his sandal and tells Boaz to buy the land for himself (v. 8).

A legal transaction was finalized not by signing a paper but by a dramatic symbolic act that others would witness and remember. The passing of the **sandal** symbolized Boaz's right to walk on the land as his **property** (cf. Deut. 1:36; 11:24; Josh. 1:3; 14:9). After giving his **sandal** to **Boaz**, the unknown **kinsman** moved from the scene and into anonymity. But the name of Boaz has been remembered in all succeeding generations (cf. Ruth 4:14).<sup>56</sup>

Then Boaz declares before the witnesses that he has bought from Naomi the land that belonged to Elimelech and his sons (v. 9). Boaz also states that he will marry Ruth the Moabitess. The redemption of Ruth by Boaz is a picture of the God's redemption of believers through the Lord Jesus Christ.

*But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Gal. 4:4-5).

In declaring that he will raise of "the name of the deceased on his inheritance (v. 10), Boaz assures that the family name of Elimelech and Mahlon will not be cut off. Apparently the assuming of the name of the deceased by the child of a levirate marriage refers only to the inheritance of the property. This is evidence of the grace of God to a young Moabitess, a Gentile.

The elders and other witnesses of the legal transaction then pronounce a blessing upon Boaz, desiring that God would bless his young and previously barren wife with many children (v. 11). The people also pray that Boaz's house would be famous in Bethlehem (v. 12). It is evident that God answered both of these prayers. The blessing upon this couple is evident with the birth of Obed, who became the grandfather of King David. The ultimate dual fulfillment of this blessing was realized when, through their line, the Savior was born in the city of Bethlehem. Truly Boaz's house became famous in Bethlehem.

Verse 13 reveals the fact that it is the Lord who enables women to conceive. Children are a gift from the Lord.

4. *Why do you think God allowed the death of Naomi's husband and sons, which left her in such a condition of despair, before blessing her with another heir?* \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How do you think Naomi should have responded to the tragedy in her life? \_\_\_\_\_

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Following the birth of Ruth and Boaz's child, the women of Bethlehem acknowledge that the Lord has provided a close relative for Naomi. The women's use of the word *go'el*, meaning *close relative* or *redeemer*, is evidence of the child's legal right as heir of Elimelech. It also leaves the readers with hope of future redemption. Whom will Obed redeem? They pray that his name would become famous in Israel—an influence greater than that of his father (v. 14).

These were probably the same women Naomi spoke to in chapter 2, saying her name was now "bitter." Naomi has once again become "pleasant" as the Lord has blessed her with the birth of a grandson. Naomi, who returned to Bethlehem empty (1:21), has been blessed by the Lord. The cry of her grandson has replaced the cry of suffering in her heart. Her bitterness kept her from experiencing the blessings of the Lord. But her faith in the Lord has now been restored. She is no longer bitter. She recognizes the kindness of the Lord. God has provided a redeemer for her in order to remind her that He is her Redeemer.

The women then pray that Obed would restore Naomi's life and sustain her in her old age (v. 15). The women remind Naomi that her loving daughter-in-law, Ruth, is better than seven sons.

6. How does verse 15 contrast with Ruth 1:13, 21-21? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What is the significance of the women saying that the son was born to Naomi? \_\_\_\_\_

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Naomi takes her heir and holds him, perhaps as a formal act of adoption under the levirate law.<sup>57</sup> The women named the child *Obed*, meaning "servant" or "worshipper." Perhaps this is a rebuke to Naomi who, in her depression, failed to worship the Lord God of Israel with a thankful heart. But it may also be a prediction of the life of her grandson. Naomi, Boaz and Ruth would teach Obed to love and worship the Lord. Obed became the father of Jesse, who would be the father of David, King of Israel.

The author then links Obed, Jesse, and David with the tribe of Judah through his son, Perez. This is the last genealogical record in the Old Testament. The lineage of Ruth 4:18-22 is repeated in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:3-6, where it is the most vital link in the chain from Abraham to Christ. Naomi's kinsman-redeemer, Obed, became the ancestor of the Redeemer of our sins.

A young Moabites, who chose to abandon the land of Moab and its pagan gods and cling to her mother-in-law and Lord God of Israel, is written forever in the pages of Scripture. Her faith is an example to all. God uses those who place their trust in Him.

God can use human tragedy, even in the lives of those who fail to trust Him, to bring glory to Himself and display his providence and love. May we as believers today be challenged to continually trust in the One under whose wings Ruth sought refuge.

8. *How has God used the book of Ruth in your life during this study? What are some things He has taught you? What are some ways that you can apply what you have learned personally?*

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***How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings (Psa. 36:7).***

# APPENDIX A

## *Kinsman-Redeemer*

The Hebrew word, *ga'al* (גאל), meaning redemption (Ruth 3:13), is most commonly known in its form *go'el*, *redeemer* (Ruth 2:20; 3:9, 12; 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14).<sup>58</sup> The word, *go'el*, which originally meant to "demand back," first appears in Genesis 48:16, when the aged Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Joseph, "The angel who redeemed me from all evil."<sup>59</sup> *Go'el* is used in Exodus 6 and 15:13 in reference to God's redeeming Israel out of Egypt.

The *go'el*, usually translated "redeemer" or "next of kin," is one legally responsible for protecting the interests of the family. His main obligation is to buy land that must be sold or buy back land that has already been sold, so as not to let property be alienated from its original line of ownership (cf. Lev. 25:25; Jer. 32:7-10).

There are five requirements in the Scriptures for the kinsman-redeemer, of whom Boaz is a type and Christ is the ultimate fulfillment:

1. He must be a kinsman (Ruth 2:1; Gal. 4:4-5)
2. He must be able to redeem (Ruth 2:1; Heb. 4:15).
3. He must be free to redeem (Ruth 4:6; 2 Cor. 5:21)
4. He must be able to pay the price of redemption (Ruth 4:9-10; Eph. 1:7)
5. He must be willing to redeem (Ruth 4:13; Heb. 12:2)

For both Boaz and Christ the motivation for redemption was love (Ruth 2:12-13; 3:10 and Gal. 2:20). In the book of Ruth, the land of Elimelech needed to be redeemed. In the New Testament, it becomes evident that sinners need redemption.

In the event of an untimely death of a husband without a son, the levirate law required that the next of kin marry the widow and raise up progeny in the name of the dead brother (*Deut. 25:5-6*).

The obligations of the "kinsman-redeemer" (*go'el*), depicted in Lev 25:24-28, 47-54; Num 35:12, 19; and Ruth 2-4, included the payment of all debts and absolving of all legal claims regarding the property or person to be redeemed, as well as the avenging of any wrongs suffered. Marriage was one of the means of redemption. The redeemer must be the next of kin to be qualified.<sup>60</sup>

The obligation of the kinsman-redeemer was 1) to purchase back the land sold by a poor Israelite (Ruth 4:3-5) or to hold a poor relative's land until the year of jubilee (Lev. 25:10-28); 2) to ransom his kinsman from a foreigner's bondage (Lev. 25:47-49); or 3) to avenge the death of his slain relative, as a matter of honor.<sup>61</sup>

## *APPENDIX B*

### *A Comparison of the Books of Ruth and Esther*

Ruth and Esther are the only two books in the Bible named for women.

The providence of God is an important theme in both books  
Both are historical narratives vital to the history of the nation Israel.

Ruth is read by Jews at the Feast of Pentecost; Esther is read at the Feast of Purim

Feasts are important in both books.

Relatives play important roles in each book.

Death is essential to the plot of both stories.

Each story has someone who stood in the way of God's plan

There are many contrasts between the two women:

Ruth was a Gentile woman from a pagan country who married a Hebrew.

Esther was a young Jewish girl who married a pagan Gentile king.

Ruth was a widow; Esther an orphan

Ruth came to Israel; Esther was an exile

Ruth was a Gentile living among Jews; Esther a Jew living among Gentiles

Ruth was a proselyte; Esther influenced many proselytes

Ruth gleaned in a field; Esther ruled in a palace

Ruth was a poor; Esther was rich

Ruth was the grandmother of a king; Esther was related to King Saul

Ruth gave life, Esther ordered death

Both were foreigners living in a land other than their own.

Both found favor in the eyes of those who saw them.

Both were taken into the homes of relatives

Both of their relatives were a blessing to others.

Both were women of integrity

Both were submissive—willing to die in order to do God's will

Both were dressed in special garments in order to make their request

Both brought joy to the Jews

God redeemed Ruth to perpetuate the line of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

God saved Esther to protect the nation through whom the Redeemer would be born.

## *APPENDIX C*

### *Suggestions for This Study*

**May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge (Ruth 2:12)**

What a wonderful blessing Boaz pronounced upon Ruth! May each of you who take part in this study also be blessed of the Lord! The Book of Ruth guides us from a place of suffering to a place of blessing. It teaches us how to depend upon the Lord instead of focusing on our problems.

It is always a blessing for women to be able to study the Word of God together. As they grow together in the Lord, they will also be encouraged to pray for one another. You may have friends, neighbors, or co-workers who would like to take part in a weekly Bible Study, perhaps meeting in your home.

The study is designed to be completed either personally or as a group. Some may wish to use this study for a Sunday school class. It has also been taught as a seminar and as a Bible college course for women. It is helpful to have someone guide the study and discussion each week. If the guide is also the hostess of the group, it is nice to have at least one woman arrive early to help with the preparations for the study. This guide can be the same person each week or women in the group may wish to take turns to give every one an opportunity to guide the study.

If it is not possible for each woman to have a copy of the study, a portion of the study could be read to the class each week, taking time to answer questions either orally as a group or personally writing the answers. It is important to answer each question in order to achieve the maximum benefit from the study. Each question could then be discussed, giving a least one woman (other than the guide) a chance to comment each time. This is the part of the lesson where the women will come to understand how the Word of God can be used to change their lives.

Another important person in the group is the one who will assume the responsibility of calling each woman in the group every week. This could be the guide, but does not have to be. A phone call will encourage each woman to complete her study questions for the week. It is also a time for the women to get to know each other better and ask how they can pray for one another.

How wonderful it would be if every woman who completed this study would then invite others to join her in a study of Ruth together. Ask the Lord if He would like you to lead a study group. May you be richly blessed as you study the Word of God!

#### **Other Ideas for a Group Study:**

1. Consult a Bible dictionary or commentary, if possible, for further definitions and explanations. However, it is best to complete the study personally first.
2. Select a favorite verse for each chapter. Memorize each of these verses and seek to apply them to your life.
3. Draw a picture of the portion of the story that you are studying.
4. Summarize what you have learned about the Lord Jesus Christ from your study of Ruth?
5. On the last day of the study, ask the women to put on a drama of the Book of Ruth. Select a portion of the book that will be dramatized. This can be a modern day version of the story or a depiction of the original narrative.

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## NOTES

1. See Appendix B for a Comparison of the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther
2. John W. Reed, "Ruth" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Walvoord, J. F. ed. (1983-c1985) (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books).
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6. Reed, "Ruth."
7. See Appendix A: Kinsman-Redeemer.
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11. Reed, "Ruth."
12. There are 99 occurrences of the word *famine* in the Old Testament.
13. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Elimelech" by J. J. Reeve.
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18. Ibid.
19. NetBible (2006) Biblical Studies Press (Electronic edition) (Ruth 1:5) notes that the word *children* in verse 5 is not the usual word for married men, therefore emphasizing Naomi's loss and linking to the provision of a child as an heir in 4:16.
20. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Steadfast Love."



21. The translator of Net Bible comments, "Or 'gods,' if the plural form is taken as a numerical plural. However, it is likely that Naomi, speaking from Orpah's Moabite perspective, uses the plural of majesty of the Moabite god Chemosh."
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39. In a simple home there was a common food pot, placed on a rug, and the family sat cross-legged around the pot. A piece of thin bread was used to scoop out the contents. When Ruth ate with the reapers, she was invited to eat in this way (Ruth 2:14). The "table" mentioned in the Old Testament is therefore nothing but a rug spread on the ground (Psalm 23:5).<sup>1</sup>
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