



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



RUTH 1 - 4

## Ruth 1

***1:1-6 - "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food."***

The events of the book of Ruth take place at the same time of history as the events of the book of Judges. We saw in Judges that Israel was characterized by everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. This book opens on a similar note, but the message of the book is distinct from Judges. While Judges was a series of object lessons on how the people of God cause trouble for themselves by disregarding the Lord and His ways, the book of Ruth is an encouraging story of the Lord at work in hidden ways even in the troubles of life to bring about the fulfillment of His greater purpose.

The book opens with a famine in the land. This was a serious food shortage in the land of Israel. In the Bible, we should not overlook details like this by seeing them as just the dramatic backdrop of an interesting story. The famine should be understood as spiritual in its origin. It is not a random circumstance of difficulty, but a caused event. Biblically, famines don't just happen, but the Lord causes them. He causes famines, and other events we would identify as disasters for a spiritual purpose. This passage from Leviticus is a declaration from the Lord of how He causes famine as a disciplinary measure toward Israel because of their sins. "And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit." (Leviticus 26:18-20). Considered as a discipline, famine is a strong message to Israel in their daily life circumstances designed to get their attention and turn their hearts back to Him. The Lord used such a severe circumstance to reach Israel's hardened hearts when they were no longer listening to Him through the Law or the prophets.

The story is focused not on the entire nation, but on a single family. This family is critical because the Lord had planned not only to incorporate its story into the

Scripture, but they will have a key role to play in the family ancestry of the Messiah who will one day come to Israel. The purpose of the famine was to stir the sleeping hearts of Israel to return to the Lord in repentance for their sins. Elimelech, the leader of the family is introduced by his response to the circumstances of the famine. He lived in Bethlehem, which means "House of bread." The irony is that the house of bread is starving. The people of Bethlehem should have recognized that the Lord was involved in their lack of bread. But, we do not see Elimelech leading his family in a repentant seeking of the Lord for relief from the famine as we might hope. Instead, not unlike many of the leaders in the book of Judges, we see Elimelech doing what is right in his own eyes. He decides to move his family from where the famine has made food scarce to the land of Moab where apparently there was no famine. This decision is problematic for a couple of reasons. Elimelech was leaving the Promised Land without any sense of the Lord's leading to do so. He chooses to settle his family in Moab, which has a long history of opposition to Israel. The Moabites refused to help Israel when they first entered the Promised Land, and even worked to corrupt Israel's covenant standing with the Lord by following the advice of Balaam.

Without any direction from the Lord to leave Judah and settle in Moab, Elimelech was acting on natural wisdom rather than spiritual discernment. Nevertheless, we will discover that, while the Lord did not direct Elimelech to Moab, the Lord will work through this decision for a redeeming purpose in Ruth's life. Ruth marries one of the sons of Elimelech and Naomi. Again, like the Elimelech's decision to move to Moab, the decision for his sons to marry women of Moab is not reflective of God's perfect will for His people. The people of Moab were not worshippers of the Lord. They worshipped the false god Chemosh. Any marriage between an Israelite and a Moabite would be a spiritually mixed marriage. However, in what we might call a sovereign exception to the rule, the Lord would work through the circumstances of this mixed marriage and redeem Ruth and bring her into covenant relationship. This exception is not intended to teach us that it's not a problem to bend God's rules, but that even if we do, God is not constrained by our foolishness to work in those circumstances to accomplish His plan. The men who made those bad decisions; Elimelech and the sons who chose to marry the Moabite women all died in Moab. The lack of any other descriptions of their lives is itself a comment on their spiritual condition.

***1:8-13 - "But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."***

When Naomi, Elimelech's widow hears word that the Lord had ended the famine and once again blessed Israel with food, she makes the decision to return to Israel. Her two widowed daughters-in-law decide to follow her. They were family by marriage and had shared the same circumstance of all losing their husbands in death. They had formed a close relational bond with each other. Both Moabite women had treated Naomi with respect and kindness, and even though her sons were no longer alive to connect her to them, Naomi identified both women as "my daughters." Naomi appeals to both women to leave her and return to their own mother. She asks the Lord to bless them for having been good wives to her sons and kind to her as well. She releases them to return to their own family to find new husbands to begin new lives in Moab. When the women insist on remaining with Naomi and returning with her to Israel, Naomi exhorts them to turn back with an argument that if they remain with her they will lose any hope of remarrying.

Then Naomi gives them a second greater reason to not stay by her side. She describes her life as exceedingly bitter and that the bitter circumstances of her life are because the hand of the Lord is against her. Naomi interprets the circumstances of the famine that originally led them to Moab, and the deaths of Elimelech and her two sons as the judgment of the Lord upon her life. She sees herself as the target of the Lord's discipline. The implication of her warning to the women is that if they stay with her, that they will have to suffer with her because the Lord has determined that her life will be bitter. She is essentially telling them to get as far away from her as possible in hope that her bitter life will not rub off on them. We will see in verses 19-22 below, that Naomi correctly identifies what has happened to her, but misses the deeper purpose of why it has happened. It is in misinterpreting why it has happened that her heart is tempted to become bitter toward the Lord.

***1:14-18 - "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more."***

The two daughters of Naomi respond differently to Naomi's exhortation and warning. Orpah is deeply moved, but decides to follow Naomi's advice. She parts from Naomi, and returns to her family, and her pagan heritage. Once she leaves, Naomi directs Ruth a third time to follow Orpah's example and return to Moab. All the factors at work seem to indicate that Orpah has made the right decision, but Ruth makes a different choice. There is no logical reason for Ruth to remain with Naomi and risk a move as a widow to a new and unknown land and people. However, as the story develops we can discern that the Lord was at work in Ruth's heart to make the decision to follow Naomi. The grace of God at work in her heart is the only explanation for declaration which she now makes to Naomi. Her statement of commitment to Naomi is one of the great expressions of covenant commitment in the Bible.

In it, Ruth reveals that her own heart has come to see the Lord as the Lord over her life. This is more than a commitment to enduring friendship with Naomi, it is a personal declaration of saving faith in the Lord. Ruth identified with Naomi, with Israel as her new people, with the Promised Land as her new home, and most importantly with the Lord as her God. Her words take on the weight of a vow. When she says, "May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you", she is making an oath which calls down judgment from the Lord on her own life if she ever breaks that commitment. Ruth already rightly understands the nature of a covenant relationship with the Lord and another person in a way that most of Israel has forgotten. It is like the Lord to work so deeply in the redemption of a Gentile and then make that Gentile a corrective example to Israel.

***1:19-22 - "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."***

Naomi and Ruth return to Naomi's original home town of Bethlehem. The women of the town recognize Naomi in spite of the years that have passed and ask if it is her. Naomi's response to their innocent question reveals the depth of her spiritual struggle in her life circumstances. Naomi knows the Lord and has a relationship with Him, but she is in great pain because of how she interprets the Lord's role in her troubles. She acknowledges to the women of Bethlehem that it is her, but she insists that they no longer call her Naomi, but Mara. She is using this name change with full emphasis on the meaning of those names as was common among the Hebrews. Names were given among the Hebrews not as we do for how a particular name sounds to the ear, but because of the meaning of the name. Names were chosen as spiritual labels for the meaning of that person's life. The name Naomi means pleasant. The name Mara means bitter. Naomi insists that they not refer to her as pleasant any longer, because when she left her life was pleasant, but as she returns her life is bitter. Her life was full when she left because she had a husband and two sons. She sees her life now as empty and bitter because the Lord had taken all three of them away from her.

Naomi is correct in one part of her evaluation The Lord had taken her husband and two sons in their deaths. The Bible clearly teaches that He is sovereign over life and death. No one lives without the Lord's grace and no one dies apart from His decision. Naomi's problem was not in identifying the Lord's hand in her life circumstances, but in her conclusion of what it meant. Her conclusion was that the Lord had decided to punish her exceedingly. She believed herself to be a helpless victim of the Lord's mysterious decision to ruin her life. In this, Naomi was greatly mistaken. It's true that the death of her husband and sons was a great difficulty for her life and a bitter pill for her to swallow, but it was not a message from the Lord that He intended to permanently ruin her life. There is no indication in the book that Naomi was under the judgment of God or that He was "out to get her."

She could not see this from her vantage point, but the Lord was at work in the bitter circumstances of the deaths of her husband and sons to accomplish a wonderful purpose beyond her wildest imagination. Had her husband and sons not died, she would likely have lived out her days in Moab with them, and had no part in the story that was about to unfold. Naomi was about to be given the great privilege of setting up a relationship between Ruth and Boaz which would



eventually produce one of the greatest men in history and the single greatest man to ever live. Ruth and Boaz would become the great grandparents of David the King of Israel and writer of much of the book of Psalms. Even greater than that, they would become the ancestors of the Messiah of Israel, Jesus. This is a deep lesson in trusting God's sovereign purpose in our lives even in the unexpected and bitter circumstances He may call us to endure. Would Naomi have seen her life in a different light if she understood that these developments were necessary to put her in a position to influence the birth of Israel's first great King, and Israel's Messiah?

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## Ruth 2

***2:1-7 - "Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest."***

Having returned to Israel and settled in Bethlehem, the practical circumstance for both Naomi and Ruth remains challenging even though they are now among Naomi's people. The real prospects for widows in the ancient world were meager unless the widow had family to support her. It was not a world or culture in which a widow could simply go out and get a job like in today's world. There were no government welfare or social security programs. Widows who were without family had to face the issue of where their next meal would be found. While it was a challenging life for all widows without family, the Lord had shown His concern for them and made special provision for them in the Law of Moses. It is true that in Israel there was no welfare system for the poor and needy. Instead, the Lord had instituted the practice of gleaning. These passages from the Law describe the gleaning system commanded by the Lord for Israel to practice.

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."  
(Leviticus 23:22)



"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this." (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)

The gleaning system required those who owned fields to harvest their fields with consideration for the poor and needy in their midst. Consideration for widows such as Naomi and Ruth was one of the focal points of the gleaning law. The field owner was to harvest his field for himself, but to leave the edges of the field unharvested. They were also to not gather the gleanings once the harvesters had gone through the field. These two requirements provided not a handout in the sense of welfare to the poor, but an opportunity for them to work and find food for themselves. By leaving the edges of the field for the poor, they could come to the outer boundaries of the field and harvest a small portion for their own needs. The gleanings left on the ground were all the harvest that had fallen to the ground as the harvesters were gathering the main part of the produce of the field. This allowed the needy person to come and pick up the scraps of the field after the harvesters had finished.

This law did require a sacrifice of the field owner since they otherwise had the right to gather every single grain that grew in their own field. However, the amount lost was an extremely small percentage of the total harvest, and it served four purposes of the Lord for His holy nation. 1) It made provision for the needy. 2) It required the needy to actually work for their own food which trained them in the kind of diligence needed to eventually work their way out of poverty. 3) It trained the field owners in the principles of kindness and generosity, and put them in the position to receive the blessing of the Lord for their obedience to the Law. 4) It represented the Lord's kindness and faithfulness to meet the needs of the truly poor and needy in Israel.

There is an important detail in the description of how Ruth came to glean in the field of Boaz. The writer mentions for our perspective that Naomi had a relative in this area named Boaz, but at this point in the story Naomi had not gone to visit Boaz since her return to Bethlehem. Boaz was related to her through marriage. We do not know the exact relationship, but Boaz was connected by family to Naomi's dead husband. However, when Ruth asked Naomi to let her go work for them both by gleaning in the field, neither she nor Naomi chose for her to go to the field of Boaz. The sense of the description is that they did not even know where the field of Boaz was. Naomi sent Ruth to glean, but she went simply with the hope that some field owner would treat her favorably and allow her to glean in their field. It was the law of the land, but not all land owners were obedient and showed kindness to the needy. The description as Ruth went out to glean is that

she "happened to come" to the field belonging to Boaz. We are meant to recognize the unseen hand of the Lord guiding Ruth's steps. This is the sovereignty of God at work. Out of all the fields in Bethlehem she could have gleaned Ruth just happened to come to the field of the man she was destined to marry to fulfill the great purpose of the Lord.

***2:8-12 - "Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"***

The sovereignty of God is in evidence, not just in directing the steps of Ruth to the field of Boaz that day, but also in both directing the steps of Boaz and in preparing his heart to be gracious, kind and generous toward her. Ruth is a Moabite woman, and though she was married to an Israelite man, she had no reason to expect the people of Israel to show her kindness. After inquiring about her, Boaz immediately takes responsibility for her and treats her as someone under his care. Boaz was not legally obligated to make this provision for her which went beyond the law of gleaning. He urged Ruth to stay in his field rather than wander from farm to farm. He also instructed her to stay close to the young women who served Boaz in the harvest for her own security and comfort. He also warned the young men working for him to not bother or harass her in any way. He also provided water for her to drink while working. The character of Boaz is displayed in these extra measures he made to provide for this young widow and Naomi through her.

Ruth's response to the kindness of Boaz demonstrates that she fully understood that he did all this for her, not from obligation, but from kindness and generosity. Her heartfelt response reveals a healthy humility in that she had no attitude of entitlement. His great kindness stirred her humble appreciation to the extent that she was compelled to show her gratitude by an excessive display of thankfulness. She fell to her knees before Boaz and bowed to the ground as a lowly servant might do to a king. Boaz answers her question of why he would show such great kindness to her with an explanation that he had already heard of her story. He was impressed by Ruth's character and the way she had shown such great loyalty to Naomi in her affliction. Boaz then pronounces a blessing from the Lord upon Ruth's life as a reward for her kindness to Naomi. Boaz gives

her a beautiful description of the deeper spiritual meaning of her recent life events. Ruth's joining Naomi in her return to Israel was really a deeper story of her finding refuge under the sheltering wings of the Lord. He identifies the most significant development in all the events of her life that have led her to this point is that she has come into a saving relationship with the Lord.

***2:15-20 - "When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her." So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers."***

Boaz followed through on his initial acts of kindness toward Ruth by making additional and extra generous provisions for her. He instructed all the men working for him in the harvest to allow her to glean among the bundled sheaves of barley. They were also to take some stalks of the grain from the already harvested bundles and drop them on the ground for her to gather. We see in this a perfect balance between a high level of generosity by Boaz, but without giving her free handouts. Ruth still had to work for the food she would take home for both herself and Naomi. Boaz could have simply given her a sack of grain to take as a gift, but he did not. Ruth worked the entire day tirelessly until the evening. When she finished, she had gathered an ephah of Barley. This amount is uncertain, but was a sack of grain between 30-50 pounds. Even at the lower estimate, the amount she gleaned in one day due to the combination of the generosity of Boaz and the hard work of Ruth was enough to feed both widows for weeks.

When Ruth returned to Naomi at night with her harvest of barley, Naomi was so amazed by the amount of her gleanings that she pronounced a blessing upon the owner of the field without even knowing his identity. When she heard that the field belonged to Boaz, Naomi asked the Lord for a second blessing upon his life. This development also marked a critical turn in Naomi's spiritual attitude. As we saw at the end of chapter one, Naomi had become embittered by the tragic events of her life. She had come to hold the Lord responsible for her hard life, and she saw no good reason why these things had happened to her. This surprising blessing began to soften her heart toward the Lord, and I think we can conclude that she began to catch just a glimpse of the hidden purpose of God

when she learned that The Lord had led Ruth to the field of her relative Boaz. We can draw that conclusion and see that Naomi begins to look ahead with hope as she identifies Boaz as a redeemer to them.

The reference to Boaz as one of their redeemers is in relationship to the law in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This law required the near male relatives of husbands who died leaving widows of child bearing age to marry the widow for the purpose of providing a continuing family for the man who had died. The responsibility toward the widow fell first to the closest male relative to the husband. If he chose to not take on this responsibility, the next nearest male relative was to take on that role. Naomi identifies Boaz as one of the near male relatives to her dead husband and son, but not the closest. She perceives that the Lord may have planned this "chance" meeting between Boaz and Ruth.

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### Ruth 3

***3:1-6 - "Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." And she replied, "All that you say I will do." So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her."***

Following the day in which Ruth gleaned the field of Boaz, Naomi recognizes from the gracious treatment Ruth received from Boaz that he would make an excellent husband for her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth. Naomi decides to do some matchmaking for them. Her motive is deeper than a desire to stir up a romance between them however. Naomi is concerned for the welfare of Ruth. Her desire is to see Ruth established in a relationship of security and blessing. She sees a purpose in the family connection with Boaz and his strength of character. She discerns that he would be the perfect one to fill Ruth's life with joy and peace.

Naomi boldly offers Ruth counsel on how to approach Boaz for the purpose of marriage. Naomi's boldness is matched by Ruth as she accepts Naomi's counsel and acts on it without hesitation or discussion. The degree of their boldness is seen in remembering the cultural context of their lives. In the society of their day, it was accepted and expected for the man to be the initiator in marriage. Women were usually passive and patient to wait for a man to seek them out for a relationship. Keep in mind that none of the methods for seeking relationships of

our modern world were available. There were no computer dating services to join, and no singles nights at the local community center. It was not uncommon for the father of a young woman to arrange a relationship for his daughter, but for a widow there was not even that opportunity. However Ruth had two factors in her circumstance that were better than even the best dating service. She had a godly older woman in Naomi watching out for her, and she had the Lord Who had planned her future. There is no indication that Ruth ever sought out any other relationship, and certainly never "dated" any other men. She waited for the Lord's provision for her. How many single believers would avoid much heartache if they followed her example.

Perhaps Naomi saw that Boaz would not likely approach Ruth, or perhaps she was stirred by the Lord to take the risk of advising Ruth to cross this cultural boundary. Naomi gave Ruth more than a general suggestion for approaching Boaz. She provided her with a specific plan that would put her in position to be able to make her interest known to Boaz without either offending him or damaging their reputations in the community. Naomi instructed Ruth to go to the threshing floor that night as Boaz winnowed his harvest of barley. The threshing floor was an open flat area outside with a breeze blowing through. All the bundles of barley stalks from the harvest would be unbundled there and beaten with rods to separate the stalks from the grain. Then the winnowers would use large forks to throw the stalks into the air. The wind would carry away the stalks and the heavier grain would fall to the ground to be gathered in sacks.

Ruth was to wash herself, anoint herself with aromatic oil, and put on her cloak. The cloak for poor people and travelers was an outer garment which doubled as a blanket at night. Naomi was preparing Ruth to be most presentable and attractive for Boaz, while also equipping her to be able to spend the night outside at the threshing floor. Ruth was to discreetly find Boaz at the threshing floor, but not make herself known to him right away. She was to wait until he finished his day's work, had refreshed himself with the evening meal, and then laid down to sleep. Once everyone was settled for the night Ruth was to approach Boaz, remove the bottom portion of his own cloak uncovering his feet in the process, and quietly without any introduction to lay down at his feet. Beyond that she was to do nothing else, but to wait for Boaz to respond to her actions. So, even though Ruth took bold and courageous initiative in placing herself in this position, she remained dependent upon Boaz to act. He would be in charge of what direction the night would go.

***3:7-11 - "And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." And he said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman."***

Boaz laid down and was soon asleep. Ruth then quietly followed all of Naomi's directions. At first Boaz was not aware that Ruth was laying at his feet. He woke up at midnight and realized an unknown woman was at his feet. It was not unheard of for prostitutes to seek out men during the harvest. The question Boaz asked was not "What are you doing there?", but "Who are you?" Discovering the woman's identity was likely to tell him the nature of her intentions. As a godly man, Boaz was understandably on guard in the circumstance. Ruth identified herself in a straightforward manner, but also called herself the servant of Boaz. This was a wise answer, because her bold approach could lead Boaz to wrongly conclude that she was being inappropriately forward with him.

By naming herself his servant she was making sure Boaz understood that she there to submit to his leadership. Ruth's second statement to Boaz is in the form of a bold request. She asked Boaz to spread his wings over her and added the information that he was a redeemer for her. Spreading the wings was a common word picture to describe a man taking a woman as his wife. In essence she proposed marriage to Boaz, but did so as a bold request, not a demand. It was the equivalent of her saying, "I would like you to take me as your wife since you are in the position to redeem me as a widow." There was no small talk here, or any romantic build up. She was clear, direct, and while very bold, she remained within the boundaries of what was appropriate.

Boaz was not offended by her approach. He was deeply impressed by it. His heart was spiritually stirred by her request and he proclaimed a blessing of the Lord upon her. In an interesting insight into Boaz's heart, he identified her request as a great kindness toward him. Ruth was a younger woman and he was an older man. We are not told his age, but he was still capable of working the harvest. Boaz compliments her for not seeking out a younger man for her husband when she apparently could have attracted a young man's interest. He saw her decision to approach him rather than a young man an indication of her character and mature values.

Boaz then responded favorably and committed himself to her with an additional

compliment regarding her reputation in the town. For Ruth to have formed such a favorable impression in the eyes of the town as a Moabite woman was a testimony to her exemplary character. Boaz shows his own boldness in his response to her. In only their second conversation he in essence commits to marry her. Was Boaz hasty and unwise in this quick commitment? No, the Lord was in this relationship. All he needed to know about her he had already learned. She was a godly woman of tremendous character and he valued those qualities in her.

***3:12-14 - "And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning." So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."***

Having committed himself to her, Boaz identified that there was one factor that might affect their relationship and change it completely. Boaz was in a legal position to redeem her as a widow, but he was not first in line to do so because he was not the closest male relative to her dead husband. One other man in the family had the first right of redemption. In the morning Boaz would approach him and see if the other man intended to exercise his redemption rights toward Ruth. What this meant is that they would both have to trust the Lord that if they were to be married that the Lord would influence the other man to decline the opportunity to redeem her and take her as his own wife. This might be difficult to understand from the perspective of our culture when romance and attraction are usually the only concerns in forming a marriage relationship. However, in Biblical culture, another priority took precedence over romance. What was right in the eyes of the Lord and honored His Law and ways mattered to godly people even more than their own feelings and desires. Even though Boaz now wanted to marry Ruth, he would willingly step aside and allow another man to marry her for the sake of righteousness.

Boaz also had Ruth remain at his feet for the rest of the night and he instructed her to leave early when it was still dark so that no one would recognize her. He did this, not because they were hiding anything, or had done anything of which they should be ashamed, but in order to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding of why she had laid near him all night. In this, Boaz displays wisdom and discretion. Rather than have to explain to curious observers that nothing inappropriate had happened between them, his advice would navigate around a socially awkward situation.



## Ruth 4

***4:1-6 - "Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."***

The next day after Ruth approached Boaz at the threshing floor, Boaz followed through on the commitment he had made to her. His intention was to marry Ruth, but because of the Biblical guidelines in such circumstances, Boaz was prohibited from marrying Ruth until her nearest kinsman redeemer was given the opportunity to redeem her. Boaz went to the gate of the city where legal issues were resolved. The city gates were the gathering place for the elders of the city and functioned as an equivalent to our courthouse. By sitting down at the city gate Boaz signaled to the community his intention to initiate a legal proceeding. As soon as he sat down, the one man who was a nearer kinsman to Naomi was walking by the gate. We should recognize the sovereign hand of the Lord in this "coincidence." The timing of the near kinsman walking by the gate at that moment indicates that when we are engaged in doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord as Boaz was that we can expect to see the Lord at work in circumstances that are outside our control to aid us in our pursuit of His will and purpose.

Boaz asks the man to sit with him as an indication of his involvement in the legal issue. When Boaz called to him he refers to him as "friend" in our translation. In the Hebrew text the word actually means something more along the lines of our saying "such and such a person", or "so and so" when we are referring to a person when we do not remember their name. It is possible that Boaz did not remember the man's name, but since they belonged to the same extended family and were relatives, it is doubtful that Boaz forgot his name here. The designation by the writer can be understood as a subtle comment on the character of the man. By not naming him, the man does not receive any fame from the telling of the story, nor and condemnation. He becomes simply a background character that serves a purpose in the story. What is revealed about his character in the exchange with Boaz that follows is that he ultimately is more concerned about his

own welfare than he is about the ways of the Lord. He does legally have the option of turning down the role of kinsman redeemer for Ruth and Naomi, but he should not have avoided this opportunity to honor God's Law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). By refusing his right of redemption, the man will also make himself virtually insignificant in the plans of God. His choice will gain a short term financial advantage for himself, but at the cost of the lasting significance of being the one to fulfill the plan of God.

Boaz also asked for ten of the city elders to join them. The number ten here is not a meaningless detail. In Israelite society a minimum of ten adult males in the covenant community were recognized as a sufficient representation of the interests of the entire community. Boaz then offered the right to redeem the field of Elimelech. In such cases the transfer of the field was not a purchase leading to full ownership but becoming the legal caretaker of the land for the sake of the man who had died. The Law required that the land apportioned in the original distribution back at the conquest of the Promised Land must remain the legal possession of the family to whom it was originally given. The redeemer in such cases was allowed to use the land and profit from its harvest, but the land was only kept for the heir of the original family. However, if there were no heir, the land redeemed would in effect become a permanent possession of the redeemer. When Boaz made the offer of the field, the redeemer immediately accepted the offer. There was no heir to that land currently, and the no clear prospects for an heir in the future.

Boaz then informed him of the second element in this redemption. The man who redeemed the land would also have to redeem the owner's widow and marry her and raise up an heir for the land through her. Boaz was shrewd in the way he described Ruth. He called her Ruth the Moabite which called attention to her status as a foreigner. This was not an issue for Boaz because he had learned of Ruth's character and faith in the Lord. For the man who did not know here, however, this could be a factor he would weigh in his decision to redeem her. As soon as the redeemer learned of this unexpected development he backed off of his interest in redeeming the field of Elimelech. If he married Ruth and produced an heir through her, he would eventually be required by the Law to give the redeemed field to the heir as well as a portion of his own wealth to the heir as his own son. Considering this from a purely financial perspective, the one who chose to redeem the field and Ruth would eventually lose the price paid for the field, the field itself, and the cost of providing for a new wife and son. To this man, he would rather sacrifice his redemption rights and keep more of his money for himself, rather than sacrifice some of his own money to fulfill his role as redeemer and honor the ways of the Lord.

***4:10-13 - "Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman." So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son."***

Boaz did not hesitate once the man declined his right of redemption. Boaz had wisely anticipated this outcome and immediately announced his intention to accept the full responsibility of the kinsman redeemer by providing the price of the field and taking Ruth as his wife. There was no need to speak with Ruth again before this announcement. Their exchange from the night before had made clear that they both wanted this relationship. The elders at the gate and the people who had gathered to observe the case all responded with a unified approval.

The community proclaimed a blessing from the Lord upon Ruth, Boaz and their future offspring. There is a prophetic element here to the blessing proclaimed on their lives. It extends well beyond the typical wish for a happy life together. The community was expecting the Lord to so bless their lives that they would be compared to Rachel and Leah in Ruth's case, Judah in Boaz' case and Perez in the case of the son of Boaz. Rachel and Leah were the wives of Jacob who gave birth to the sons who became the tribes of Israel. The comparison of Boaz to Judah involved the incident with Tamar in which the Lord caused Judah to fulfill the role of redeemer for the widow Tamar. Perez was the child born to Judah and Tamar. The sense of these comparisons is that the community anticipated something significant from this redemption marriage. The Lord was also at work to confirm His blessing in their union. Ruth had been married to her first husband for ten years without ever giving birth to an heir. Now, in the first time that Boaz and Ruth came together the Lord blessed them with a child.

***4:14-17 - "Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."***

At the end of the story of the book of Ruth Naomi comes into focus again as she was in the beginning of the book. Remember Naomi's perspective when she lost her husband and two sons in death while they lived in Moab? She was engulfed with bitter anguish and she blamed the Lord for her apparently hopeless circumstances. Since that time, the Lord was at work behind the scenes to cement a deep and loyal relationship between her and Ruth, to lead them back to Israel from Moab, to cause their paths to cross with the godly and gracious man Boaz, to give to Naomi the wisdom to direct Ruth's steps toward Boaz, and now in the fullness of the Lord's accomplished purpose to make Naomi the nurse of the blessing of their son. All of this indicates how the Lord had blessed her life and given her joy and fulfillment. Her heart was no longer bitter as the wisdom and goodness of the Lord's plan was now clear. In addition to all this, there was another deeper level of the Lord's blessing for her that she could not even perceive. The child she nursed would grow up to become the grandfather of David, the king of Israel, and the ancestor of the Messiah of Israel, Jesus who would one day be born in this family line. None of this diminishes the pain of the circumstances through which Naomi had to pass in order to arrive in this place, but in the end the greater blessing was worth the pain of the trial.