

Ruth

God in the Lives of Ordinary People

By Brett W. Avants

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Ruth teaching outline.....	6
Chapter 1: The Fall, or How Naomi Lost Everything	8
Chapter 2: Depravity, or The Contrast Between Hopelessness and Faith	15
Chapter 3: Faith, or Sometimes You Just Have to Do Something.....	22
Chapter 5: Expectation, or Midnight Rendezvous, but it's not what you think!	37
Chapter 6: Redemption, or God Helps Those Who Can't Help Themselves.....	48
Chapter 7: Consummation.....	56

Introduction

The book of Ruth is one of the most beautiful love stories in the Bible. As such, it was never one of my favorites, mainly because I am a “manly man” that loved to read Paul or the gospels, or even the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. Ruth? As one of two books of the Bible named after women, and the only book of the Old Testament named after someone that wasn’t racially Jewish, I just knew it couldn’t be that exciting. I am sure it was way too mushy for me. Sure, God had put the book in the Bible for a reason, but it was not high on my priority reading list. Not, at least, until I read it and the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to the richness and expectation that the book seemed to illustrate.

It wasn’t until I began to dig into it and see the big picture that I began to understand and really appreciate Ruth as not only a beautiful love story centered around several of the main characters, but also as a story of love and redemption with God as the main character. There are many other themes that run throughout the book of Ruth that can be taught as well, such as the faith of Ruth, the contrasting attitudes throughout the book between Ruth and Naomi, and the purity and chastity of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz. Ultimately, however, Ruth is an enduring love story of how God takes care of his people through his grace and providence. Despite the bad decisions made by Naomi’s husband and their sons, and to some extent by Naomi herself, God weaves all of these into his sovereign plan for their lives and for the lives of humanity.

We can all relate to the story of Ruth, because Ruth is the story of everyday people coping with life in various ways. We see Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, cope with the famine in Israel by moving his family to Moab, a neighboring country that is unfriendly to Israel, in the hope of providing for family needs. Yet even though he had the best intentions, he dies. His sons, Mahlon and Chilon, decide to stay a while longer, and wind up marrying Moabite women. However, due to unforeseen reasons, both of the two sons die, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law with no children and no hope.

They all cope with life differently. Naomi blames God, yet is still faithful to God, even though she is bitter and depressed. Then again, if you lost your sons and husband, wouldn’t you be a little bitter, too? Orpah, one daughter-in-law, takes a pragmatic

approach to life and decides to return to her Moabite family after the death of her husband. And who can blame her? Life in Moab was well-known to her, comfortable, and certain. She could return to her own family and be taken care of, and probably even find another husband, so she takes the practical and expected approach. On the other hand, Ruth, a believer in God for probably a short time, has faith that God will provide and makes a covenant with her mother-in-law Naomi that she will never leave her. She reacts with faith, and continues to make decisions based on faith. She takes the extraordinary approach. However, God is at work behind the scenes, and uses all of their actions and reactions to His divine glory and according to His divine plans. By the end of the book, God has blessed the main characters in ways that they can never imagine. At the same time, God has also blessed the world.

Another theme throughout Ruth is the contrast between the lives and attitudes of Ruth and Naomi. This is the contrast between a God-centered life and a self-centered life. Ruth constantly lives the God-centered life. Ruth trusts God, and lives the journey of life. Her desire is centered on God and not on her circumstances or on others (even her dead husband or mother-in-law). Ruth keeps her focus on God, who is her ultimate provider and comforter and security. She does not think of herself or her needs as the ultimate things, but keeps them in perspective as she continues to live and work and love.

Naomi, on the other hand, lives the self-centered life. Naomi is very pious and speaks of God, believes in God, and honors God, yet trusts herself or others to provide her lasting satisfaction and joy. She puts her faith and trust in her husband, her sons, herself (to give more children), the kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, and even her grandchild at the end of the story. Naomi is like many of us. We profess Christ, and maybe even believe it. But when it comes right down to it, many times we trust in ourselves rather than God. Many times we focus on these desires themselves instead of God. We have functional saviors that meet (or we think they meet) our desires and longings, when all along God is the one who ultimately will meet these desires.

And this is the way we live our lives, as Naomi does. We profess that the Bible is the Word of God, yet live and preach as if the Bible is man-centered, when in fact it is God-Centered. We tend to take the perspective that the Bible is all about our needs, our

wants, and our desires. Our perspective is that God created us and is ultimately concerned with our well-being. This is Naomi's view. However, Everything God does is for His glory, yet at the same time he also desires our joy and well-being. These are not mutually exclusive. At the end of the book, we see a family redeemed, Ruth enjoying the goodness of God (as she has always done), and God glorifying himself and delighting in His people.

However, there is an even bigger theme that runs throughout Ruth, and that is the story of redemption. The entire story of Ruth reflects the story of Christ. Ruth and Naomi are helpless – they cannot help themselves; they must have help from outside themselves to survive. Boaz is the kinsman-redeemer who rescues the two women from their certain fate. He provides grace and mercy – he loves Ruth despite herself; she is an outsider, is poor, is helpless, yet puts her faith in God. Ruth is redeemed yet Naomi and many others received the benefits and blessings of that redemption. This is a picture of what Jesus Christ does for us.

Note: All scripture verses in this study will use the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Ruth teaching outline

Chapter 1: Ruth 1:1-5

Fall. In these verses we have the fall. Naomi and her daughters-in-law fall from grace to become needy, helpless, and destitute. However, we still see God working in the lives of people for his glory and their joy.

Chapter 2: Ruth 1:6-22

Depravity. Desolation. The situation looks grim. We see the contrast between the two worldviews: God-centered and self-centered, and each of their views on God and salvation. Who saves whom in each of the worldviews is reflected in the way that Ruth and Naomi cope with their depravity.

Chapter 3: Ruth 2:1-4

Faith. Ruth puts her faith in God by actually going and doing something. She decides to trust God and go for it. Faith in God means freedom to act. God moves in our situations. God in a divine mystery integrates our moral choices with his sovereign and divine plan. Naomi, on the other hand, cannot muster the energy to do anything. She knows her helplessness, but her faith in God has been overpowered by her belief that no one can help her.

Chapter 4: Ruth 2:5-23

Blessing. God sustains his people, but the outcome is still unknown. Faith continues to drive action in the life of Ruth. While Ruth sees the blessing from God, Naomi begins to rejoice at the change of circumstances. For Naomi, the focus is on Boaz. For Ruth, the focus is on God.

Chapter 5: Ruth 3:1-18

Expectation. Ruth and Naomi devise a plan to determine if Boaz will redeem their family. Despite her helplessness, Ruth acts with honor and integrity. Ruth and Boaz both act with honor and grace, while Naomi is interested in herself. However, God is working in ways that no one realizes, and hope begins to emerge as Boaz takes the initiative to redeem the family.

Chapter 6: Ruth 4:1-12

Redemption. Boaz redeems Ruth and her family. However it is not as straightforward as perhaps they would like. Additionally, as Boaz redeems Ruth, she plays NO PART whatsoever. She and Naomi are not even in this chapter of the book. Boaz is at center stage. Note the fact that Naomi is Jewish and Ruth is a Gentile.

Chapter 7: Ruth 4:13-22

Consummation. Ruth and Boaz consummate their marriage, and God consummates his plan for their family. We see the outcome of all of the suffering and faith in the lineage of Boaz and Ruth.

Chapter 1: The Fall, or How Naomi Lost Everything

Ruth 1:1-5

¹ *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.* ² *The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.* ³ *But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.* ⁴ *These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,* ⁵ *and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.*

The book of Ruth begins with a prepositional phrase that describes rather simply the setting of Ruth; it takes place “in the days when the judges ruled...” While many people will read this and move right along, this is an important piece of information that describes what the times were like. The time of the Judges takes place between 1200 – 1020 B.C., from the time of the death of Joshua in Judges 1:1 to the coronation of King Saul in 1 Samuel 10. The days of the judges were very dark spiritually, filled with many types of horrible sin and corruption. The book of Judges, which immediately precedes Ruth, ends with an apt description of those times, and perhaps our time as well: ^{21:25} *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* While there were exceptions such as Gideon and Samson, the people of Israel were consumed with sin, worldliness, greed, sexual immorality, drunkenness, and idolatry. It was a dangerous time as well because of lawlessness and perversion, and single women, including widows, were potential targets for exploitation.

There was a famine in the land of Bethlehem of Judah. Famine in the Old Testament is usually a sign of God withholding His blessing on the people of Israel as punishment and judgment for their sins. For example, 2 Kings 8:1 states, *Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, “Arise, and depart with your household, and sojourn wherever you can, for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will come upon the land for seven years.”* Again, in Isaiah 3:1, *For behold, the Lord*

GOD of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water;... There are other instances such as Amos 4:6 and Jeremiah 13:14-18 where the Lord uses famine to judge Israel for their sins, and to bring them back to repentance and worship to God. This scenario becomes more likely as an explanation for the famine at the beginning of Ruth as there was apparently food in the neighboring land of Moab, only about 50 miles away. What is ironic is that the famine also included Bethlehem, which interestingly in the Hebrew language means “house of bread.” So there was no food in the house of bread!

Because of the famine, a man named Elimelech took his family to sojourn in Moab. The term “sojourn” implies a temporary state of living. Elimelech apparently decided to go to Moab for a while until the famine ran its course. While the famine was probably God’s judgment on Israel, we can’t blame Elimelech for trying to run from God’s judgment and find a better place for him and his family. After all, that is what men do. We have the burden of support for our families, and we make practical, pragmatic decisions that sometimes seem to be the right thing to do at the time, but turn out just the opposite in the long run. Rather than dealing with the underlying spiritual causes that impact our life, we try to run from them. The book of Ruth is filled with irony, and again, ironically, Elimelech means in Hebrew, “God is my king.” Unfortunately, Elimelech trusts himself to take care of his family, rather than live as his name suggests, and trust in God as his provider. Nonetheless, as we will see later, God uses our poor judgments to work His divine plan, and ultimately, God uses this sojourn in Moab to further His plans for the salvation of His people, and to bring about a family line whose descendent would literally be the person that would reconcile us back to God.

Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, and Chilion all went to Moab to stay for a while. To understand the ramifications of this move, we need to understand a little about the country of Moab. The Moab nation descended from the sinful actions of Lot and his daughters, as described in Genesis 19:30 – 38. Lot’s two daughters both got him drunk on two separate nights, and they both slept with him, their reasoning being to further their family line because they could not find suitable men for husbands. Both became pregnant, and the older daughter had a son whom she named Moab, from whom the Moabite nation grew. Moab was considered an evil and wicked place because of this

incestuous beginning, and the Hebrews and Moabites experienced constant hostility between themselves. Additionally, the Moabites did not worship the one true God, Yahweh, but instead worshipped an idol named Chemosh. So Elimelech took his family away from God, away from familiar surroundings, to a place that was considered hostile and evil, because of the need to trust in someone other than God to provide for them.

Elimelech moves his family to Moab to improve their chances of survival; yet in another example of bitter irony, Elimelech dies. Despite all he tries to do to help himself and his family, he cannot guarantee his own survival. What was initially intended to be a temporary living arrangement turned into a more permanent move. Without a husband, the responsibility of Naomi's care and well-being now falls to her sons. Her sons decide that they like Moab, or perhaps the famine is lasting longer than they anticipated, and they decide to marry Moabite women. They settle down in Moab and hope to start a family.

The Lord in Deuteronomy 7:1 – 6 specifically calls Israel out to be a chosen people, not to intermarry with the surrounding peoples that they will encounter because those people will be polluted with the idols and gods other than the Lord. Deuteronomy 23:3 specifically states that no Moabite may enter into the assembly of the Lord, because they were followers of the idol and abomination of Chemosh. Nonetheless, in Moab there were probably not very many followers of God, so the prospects were slim in finding good Jewish wives for the two boys. Worldliness and Moabite traditions had probably infiltrated their home, and bringing up boys in a godless country as a single mom was hard enough.

However, tragedy strikes again in multiple ways. First of all, Naomi's family lived in Moab about ten years, and yet the boys had no sons. No children at all. We are not told why, but we do understand that in that time period, sons were critical in carrying on the family name, land, and property, and they were critical in caring for the women. What's worse, both sons die, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law without any prospects of family, care, or means of living. Naomi and her family came to Moab for a better chance at survival, a better life than in Bethlehem. But circumstances proved that

Moab was more hostile, more deadly, than Israel. With Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, all dead, Naomi and her daughters-in-law are left with a bleak future and little hope.

For us in modern 21st century America to fully grasp the situation in which Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah found themselves, we must understand a little bit of the culture of that time period, and the role and opportunities for women in that part of the world. Men worked and earned the living for the family, and women took care of the household chores, kids, and other tasks that revolved around the home. Women in many countries were considered second-class citizens, or worse, and were subject to abuse, exploitation, and degradation. Jewish law prevented much of that, but at this time, in the days when the judges ruled, there was more lawlessness and sin than obedience and love. There was no social security system, no equal opportunity education or employment, and rarely outside of Israel, and even in Israel during this time, there was no equality under the law. So women depended on their husbands, sons, or other male family members to provide for them and support them, especially in times of crisis.

So Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah found themselves in dire straits. No male support, no male children, and living in a hostile land quite different than Judah. They could not take care of themselves. They had no opportunities for employment, and no skills to offer a rare potential employer. Tragedy struck, and they were helpless.

On October 3, 1997, I received a call at work from my wife telling me that she was taking my only child (at the time) to the hospital. She had taken her to the doctor's office earlier that day because my daughter was having some weird symptoms, such as getting up constantly throughout the night to go to the bathroom, or feeling really down and not energetic as she usually did. Karen thought something was up. I thought it was nothing.

Karen called me and told me to get to the hospital as soon as I could. Our daughter Renee had juvenile diabetes. She was 3 years old.

I knew nothing about this disease, but learned quickly that it had no known cause, had no known cure, and would be with her for the rest of her life. But it did have some serious side effects, some of which could kill her if not taken care of properly. I was devastated. I was angry with God, and I was angry with myself. Why had God done

this? What had I done to make God do this? Why did I deserve this? My daughter...she was only 3 years old.

Where was God in all of this? Was he a sadistic God that wanted to see me suffer? Was he not powerful enough to prevent this from happening? I mean if he was all-powerful, then my question was...God, what are you doing with all of that power?

We can all relate to this scenario, can't we? We have all experienced the pain of loved ones dying prematurely...or our children getting sick with some incurable disease...or the sudden loss of a job, our livelihood gone...the pain of a nasty divorce or a relationship gone very bad...a catastrophic car accident that leaves a loved one maimed for the rest of their life....

In May 2003, Fortune magazine ran an article about Ted Turner. It was interesting because it provided some good insights into his life and specifically his spiritual life. Ted Turner is a billionaire agnostic. That means that he believes that there is not enough information to believe in God. In other words, that is just a fancy name for an atheist. In this article it talked about his early life, and how Ted Turner was raised in a good Episcopal home. He led bible studies in his high school, and was planning to become a missionary. However, like in Naomi's family, tragedy struck the Turner family.

When Ted Turner was 20, his sister contracted a rare form of Lupus, and suffered badly. He said he prayed for an hour each day asking God to heal his sister. God didn't and his sister died. "She used to run around in pain, begging God to let her die," he recalled. "My family broke apart. I thought, 'How could God let my sister suffer so much?'" This devastated Turner and his belief in God, and he turned away from God. He says in the article, "If there is a god, he is not doing a very good job, and it seems he has kind of checked out."

We have some things in common with Ted Turner, don't we. I often wonder why God did not save his sister. It was not selfish. Lord, save my sister. And he prays about it and prays about it. And just think if God had saved his sister Ted Turner would have possibly used all of his energy and creativity and drive for the kingdom of God. And yet God doesn't do anything. He lets Ted Turner's sister die. And when my dreams shatter

and God doesn't answer my prayers, quite frankly I have the same reaction as Ted Turner. I get angry and shake my fist in the air and question why, God? I think we all have the same or at least a similar reaction, don't we? God, why don't you heal my daughter? We all ask God, why don't you....?

We are not alone. Believe it or not, people throughout history have had these same feelings and thoughts and reactions, and you don't have to look any farther than the book of Ruth and its central character Naomi. The problem is that we live in a fallen world, marred by sin, corruption, and death. We ourselves are fallen creatures, separated from God because of our sin and rebellion, basically our inability to love God before everything else. We strive to create a world where we are in control, where we call the shots, and where there are really no surprises. We all, like Elimelech, make our plans and dream our dreams thinking we can plan our futures and control our destinies, when, in fact, we can plan and dream but there is no guarantee that anything will happen as we plan or dream.

This is the Fall. When Adam and Eve used their God-given privilege of moral choice to disobey God, thereby sinning, it created adverse consequences for the human race as well as for creation. Naomi and her girls bear witness to those adverse consequences by undergoing a type of the fall in the first five verses of Ruth. Elimelech flees God's judgment for a better life, at least a better life in his mind and according to his plans, but this decision has consequences beyond his reach. Naomi is left in Moab with no husband, no sons, and two widowed daughters-in-law. Death is a punishment for sin, as indicated in Genesis and in Romans. While I am not saying that Elimelech and his sons die because of their sin in moving to Moab and marrying Moabite women, I do believe that these events represent a type of the fall of mankind.

What is a type in the theological sense? A type is a representation by one thing of another. Adam was a type of Christ (Romans 5:14) and so was Isaac (Hebrews 11:19). The Passover was a type of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). There are many types in the Bible and most of them are too extensive and deep to be listed. However, I can see the book of Ruth as a type for the plan of salvation. The first five verses are a type of the Fall, where sins cause the family of Naomi to experience death and be left helpless and in need of

redemption. As we progress through the book of Ruth, we will see types of depravity, faith, blessing, redemption, and consummation. The pain of death is experienced by both Jews (Naomi) and Gentiles (Ruth). Sin and death create a situation where Naomi and Ruth cannot help themselves, and are completely dependent on another to act on their behalf. Boaz, as we will see later, secures their future through his own work. And we see God providentially moving through their situation in a caring and loving way, blessing them through Boaz, and finally securing a lineage that will bless mankind.

Throughout all of this we must remember that God's dreams are bigger than our dreams, and God's plans are bigger and better than our plans. While that statement may seem trite in the middle of tragedy, it is nonetheless true, and can serve as a great encouragement. This is an encouragement because God is not only sovereign over all things and events, but he is also a good, loving God. So while we assume the deaths of Naomi's family were not directly caused by God, He certainly allowed them to occur. However, He did not allow them to occur in a vacuum. He loves His people and as we will see later, He has a plan for them that is beyond what they can dream or imagine. While Elimelech moved his family to Moab for a better life, God had plans for an even better life, with eternal ramifications, that no one could dream of or imagine.

Chapter 2: Depravity, or The Contrast Between Hopelessness and Faith

Ruth 1:6 – 22

⁶ 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. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” ¹¹ 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? ¹² 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, ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.” ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

¹⁹ 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?” ²⁰ She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went 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?"

²² 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.

After the tragedy in verses 1 – 5, Naomi hears that God has blessed His people back in Judah with food, and decides to return back to her homeland. Naomi is heading back to her hometown. What she cannot know and does not know is that she is on an unlikely journey to joy. Sometimes God uses the pain of our shattered dreams in our lives to awaken within us the longings deep within ourselves for God. In many of our cases, I believe that it takes an experience like what Naomi and Ruth experienced to provide the ground for the Holy Spirit to plough and work, which ultimately brings forth those longings for God. And when we realize these longings, then we are on our way to a kind of joy that we could not experience otherwise.

There are several important things to note just in this particular verse, verse 6. First, note that God is the one that provides food for His people, just as in the first section God was the one that took away the provision from His people. Through His abundant grace, God is the one who provides for us. We may work and strive and plan, but it is ultimately God who provides. David Atkinson, in his commentary, *The Message of Ruth*, states, “Here is a central theme in the Bible: all of life is traced directly to the hand of God. To concentrate primarily on second causes may encourage us to seek to be manipulators of the system. It is concentration on the Great Cause what teaches us to live by faith.”¹ And just as God provides food for his people in Judah, God allows Naomi to hear about His goodness and provision in Moab. Provision may constitute a knowledge of blessing, as well as the blessing itself. Also note that this is only one of two times in the entire book of Ruth that God is referenced outside of dialogue between characters. The other instance is Ruth 4:13, where the narrator states that God gave Ruth and Boaz a son. These two verses act as bookends to the whole story of Ruth. The first bookend is the provision of food for the people in Judah, for their immediate blessing. The second is

¹ Atkinson, David. *The Message of Ruth*. pp 40-41.

a blessing of provision, a son, not only for Ruth and Boaz, but for God's people throughout history. This is an eternal blessing.

Verses 8 and 9 are one of many prayers that are prayed for others in the book of Ruth, and they also introduce a key word that summarizes a theme that runs through the entire book. Naomi prays for her daughters-in-law that the Lord deal *kindly* with them, as they have done to her and their dead husbands. The Hebrew word underlying this word *kindly* is *hesed*. *Hesed* sums up all of God's positive attributes, such as goodness, grace, love, kindness, mercy, and faithfulness, among others. In the book of Ruth, it is used of both God and Ruth, showing a great and merciful God and a godly woman that imitates Him.

Naomi prayed that the Lord would bless her two daughters-in-law, and urged them to leave. When they would not go, Naomi revealed the bedrock of her inner trust and faith – herself. In verses 11 – 13, Naomi tries to convince Orpah and Ruth that there is no way possible, in her mind and according to her imagination, that they can ever be blessed and find rest and satisfaction if they continue on with her. Naomi analyzes the situation and, looking at the natural world and all of the possibilities within that world, surmises that it would be best for them to stay in Moab. She can't imagine how or even if God could ever bless them or her ever again unless they remained in Moab. Naomi focuses on trying to remedy the situation herself. Instead of putting her faith in God, she puts her faith in herself and then becomes depressed because she cannot fathom how the situation can get any better.

Naomi, in verse 13, expresses through dialogue that the hand of the Lord has gone out against her. Naomi believes she is the object of God's wrath, God's judgment, and she is tormented because she believes she is the cause of her daughters-in-law's situation. Most commentators believe that the cause of her circumstances is based on her and Elimelech's decision to move from Judah to Moab, and the decisions of her sons to marry Moabite women. She does not realize, and because she places most of her faith in herself, cannot imagine, that God will provide for her later in life. There is still a glimmer of faith, however, because even as Naomi blames God for her predicament, she acknowledges that God is sovereign, and while God does not cause everything in the

world to happen, He does allow it. Nothing can happen unless it first passes through the filter of God's sovereignty. Naomi still realizes this even in her depression.

In verse 14, we see the contrast between Ruth and Orpah. J. Vernon McGee describes the contrast this way, "Ruth and Orpah demonstrate the two kinds of members in the church—the professors and the possessors. Orpah made only a profession of faith and failed at the climactic moment; Ruth possessed genuine faith, which produced fruit and works."² Perhaps McGee is correct, or maybe Orpah is just being pragmatic. From her point of view, it does appear that Naomi is cursed, and that her future will be full of hardship and depravity. If she went to Judah with Naomi, Orpah would be an outcast in a foreign land, with little to no prospects of finding a good husband there. Realistically speaking, it would be much more reasonable to stay in Moab, where her family lived, where she felt comfortable, and where the prospects of a brighter future looked more likely.

However, Ruth "clung" to Naomi. This Hebrew word, *dabaq*, illustrates the closeness that a husband and wife experience when they are joined in marriage. Essentially, Ruth promised to stick with her mother-in-law no matter what happened to them. Despite Ruth's actions, Naomi was still trying to dissuade her from coming. In fact, she was almost an "unevangelist" when speaking to Ruth. Naomi pleaded with Ruth to go back to Moab and to her own gods. She is not trying to convince these girls to come with her to worship the God of Israel, the one true God. It's almost as if Naomi is saying, "Don't come with me. Go back to your own gods. Because my god will ruin your life!" False gods are more comfortable than a real live God.

Ruth, however, makes a strong confession of faith in verses 16 – 19. Whereas Orpah chooses the pragmatic and reasonable path to go back to Moab, Ruth chooses the extraordinary path of faith and dedicates her allegiance not only to Naomi but to the Lord God, Yahweh. Robert Hubbard notes,

Significantly, though the oath formula normally has Elohim, Ruth invoked the personal, covenantal name Yahweh—the only time in the book in which she does so. Since one appeals to one's own

² McGee, J. Vernon. *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption*. 1943. Reprint ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981. p.61.

deity to enforce an oath, she clearly implies that Yahweh, not Chemosh, is now her God, the guardian of her future. Hence, while the OT has no fully developed idea of conversion, vv. 16-17 suggest a commitment tantamount to such a change. As a result, one expects the story subsequently to reveal some reward from Yahweh for this remarkable devotion. . . .³

Ruth becomes a follower of Yahweh, the one true God, and commits herself to Naomi as part of that conversion.

Ruth's conversion and commitment are exceptionally strong when considered in the context of the day. Ruth chose to leave her people and to make her home with the Israelites. Remember, Ruth, as a Moabitess, was a descendant of Lot and his incestuous relationships with his daughters. Lot left the Promised Land because he thought he could make life better for himself elsewhere. However, Ruth is now reversing Lot's decision and returning to Judah with Naomi where she has faith that God will bless her and care for both her and Naomi. Even more significant was the commitment by Ruth to die and be buried with Naomi and the Israelites. The place where one was buried signified home in the ancient near eastern culture. Ruth was breaking with her current home of Moab and, without looking back, was putting her life, faith, and future in the hands of God and Naomi.

Hubbard sums it up best:

. . . Ruth's leap of faith even outdid Abraham's. She acted with no promise in hand, with no divine blessing pronounced, without spouse, possessions, or supporting retinue. She gave up marriage to a man to devote herself to an old woman—and in a world dominated by men at that! Thematically, this allusion to Abraham sets this story in continuity with that one. Thus, a sense of similar destiny hangs over Ruth's story. The audience wonders, May some larger plan emerge from it, too?⁴

Once Ruth made her commitment, Naomi didn't even thank her, hug her, or show any type of affection towards her. She merely stopped urging her to go. Naomi apparently couldn't grasp the extraordinary faith that Ruth was exhibiting, finally acquiesced, and

³ Hubbard, Robert L., Jr. *The Book of Ruth*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament series. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988. p.120.

⁴ Hubbard, p.121.

continued on towards her home of Bethlehem not knowing what she and Ruth might find there.

After making the fifty-something mile journey from Moab to Bethlehem, the whole town is stirred and curious that Naomi is back. They want to know how she has been. Names in the Old Testament are usually pregnant with meaning. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” Elimelech means “God is my king.” Naomi means “pleasant one,” or “sweetheart.” When Naomi and Ruth arrive, and the townspeople inquire how they have been, Naomi retorts with a snappy and irritated demand that they call her Mara, which means “bitter.” Naomi has gone from a pleasant personality, a sweetheart, to a bitter old woman. She still recognizes the sovereign hand of God that she says has gone out against her, and so still ascribes faith and worship to the sovereign and almighty God. But her anger and depression have made her become bitter.

Naomi even neglects to acknowledge that Ruth is with her. Naomi responds that she went away full, but the Lord brought her back empty. How do you think Ruth felt as Naomi was saying that? Ruth, standing beside her, must be thinking, “What do you mean, empty? I am here with you! I made a commitment to you. I stuck with you. What do you mean empty?” While Naomi acknowledges that God is working negatively in her life (she states that the Lord has testified against her and brought calamity against her), she refuses to recognize that God might also be working in her life toward her greater good. After all, she is not completely empty! She still recognizes that God might be working for the good in the lives of others, but can’t get past the fact of her own circumstances.

Then again, who can blame her? The Bible never admonishes Naomi or criticizes her for her attitude. Sure it’s bad, and sure she blames God for all of her trouble. But she is brutally honest with God. Haven’t we all been there? We are devastated, in total depravity, and we cry out to God with anger and bitterness. Perhaps Naomi had a strong enough faith to be open and honest with God. She opens her feelings and lets them spill out, in all of their bitterness, devastation, and emptiness. Perhaps she knows God so well that she is able to voice her complaint to Him while understanding His sovereignty in our life and the lives of others.

Naomi perhaps has a mixed view of God's sovereignty coupled with her inability to see past what she can imagine God can do. She has the faith to voice her complaint to God, yet does not have the faith to trust God to act in a way that is outside her boundaries of understanding. Thus she is in despair. Naomi and Ruth's situation is a type (representation) of the biblical doctrine of total depravity. They can do nothing to help themselves. Ruth and Naomi have no means to help make their life better. They have no husbands or sons in a time that was ruled and run by men. They have no skills with which to make a living, even if they could find work. As we will see later, they have no land, as they probably sold it to another family member before they moved to Moab. It was also a terrible and dark time in the history of Israel, especially for two widows, when people did not generally obey the law and did all kinds of wicked and sinful things.

However, God does not let us wallow in our depravity. He gives us faith to believe, and works all things for the good for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). He providentially works in the lives and actions of His people, and ultimately knows and does what is good for Himself and consequently for us as well. While we cannot help ourselves, God out of his infinite grace and mercy, helps us. The old adage that God helps those who help themselves is completely unbiblical as far as salvation goes. Ultimately, God's love and grace is demonstrated through the fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us and reconciled us back to Himself (Romans 5:8).

However, in verse 22 there is a glimmer of hope. The two women return just as the barley harvest is beginning. They arrive in a season of joy, bounty, and provision, when the *hesed* of God has come and blessed His people.

Chapter 3: Faith, or Sometimes You Just Have to Do Something

Ruth 2:1 – 4

2 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² 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." ³ 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. ⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you."

Just when the reader thinks that there is no hope for Ruth and Naomi, the author hints that there may be a ray of hope. In the last lesson, in the last verse of chapter 1, Ruth and Naomi arrived just as the barley harvest was beginning. There was food at last in the "house of bread" as God was blessing and providing for His people. In chapter 2, verse 1, the author is hinting that now there may be a person, a relative on Naomi's husband's side, who may play a part in her ordeal. He is mentioned at the beginning of chapter two as the author sets us up for what is coming. So now there is not only food and provision back at home, but there is also someone who may be able to help the family in their depravity.

Boaz is described as a worthy man. This word has a lot of meaning, such as mighty man of valor or wealth. Boaz could have been a war hero, something like a knight. Honorable. Noble. Full of integrity. He was also wealthy, as we will see later on in the story. He was a man of influence and social standing in the community. Note in verse 4, how he greets his workers and how they respond to him. He is obviously respected by his laborers, and he obviously cares for them and is gracious to them. Boaz is a real leader, a man of integrity, who stands out in this time of the judges when much evil and sin abounded. He greeted his workers with a blessing from God, which seems to indicate that his spiritual life permeated his entire life, including his business life. Boaz is an example of a true man of integrity that thrives under the gracious leadership and fellowship of the Lord. His attitude towards others, towards his laborers and workers,

and his care for Naomi and Ruth demonstrate his loving, gracious, yet strong and noble character.

He was from the clan of Naomi's husband, Elimelech. To understand the strong ray of hope that is shining through this passage, we need to understand that God in the law, the first five books of the Old Testament, had made a provision called the kinsman-redeemer. This concept essentially stated that if one family member was in trouble, in need, or otherwise vulnerable, another family member could serve as an advocate for that family member. Two aspects of this concept should be reviewed since they greatly impact our understanding of this verse and of the rest of the book of Ruth.

The first aspect concerning what is called Levirate Marriage is found in Deuteronomy 25: 5 – 6. *⁵If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. ⁶And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.* This allowed the family line to carry on. It was a kinsman who redeemed the family name.

The second concept was that if a relative was forced to sell some of their land out of economic necessity, economic hardship, then another family member would come along and buy that land back. He would redeem the land. Leviticus 25:23 – 25 states, *²³The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. ²⁴And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land. ²⁵If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold.* Owning land in Israel was representative of the relationship with God. God gave this land to the Israelites, and He didn't want it outside the families to which he had apportioned it. So he made a way in the law for the land to remain in the family.

Now the spirit of these texts is that this act of kinsman-redemption is a voluntary act. The nearest relative was not to be forced into making this redemption. It was a volitional act. But if the nearest relative did not come and redeem the land or redeem the widow, there was shame involved. If the nearest relative did not come and marry the

widow, she was supposed to call the elders of the town together and literally take off her sandal, spit in his face, and hit him upside the head with the sandal. Deuteronomy 25: 7 – 9 explains, ⁷*And if the man does not wish 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 perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me."* ⁸*Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, "I do not wish to take her,"* ⁹*then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, "So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother's house."*

Now this is to what Naomi was referring back in chapter 1. Naomi was trying to convince her daughters-in-law to return home, because she would not have any more sons who could marry them and act as their kinsman-redeemer. She was saying that there is no hope, because the daughters-in-law have no brothers-in-law that could come along and marry them and redeem their family name. However, she was relying on herself, putting faith in herself and putting God in a box. But the author hints that maybe there is a close relative on her husband's side that could provide a glimmer of hope. His name is Boaz.

Ruth asks her mother-in-law if she can go out and glean in the fields and try and find some food for the family. Notice how the author refers to Ruth as "Ruth the Moabite," as if reminding us constantly that Ruth is an outsider, a Gentile. Ruth is showing initiative and courage by announcing to Naomi that she is going out to the fields to see if she can work and provide for the family. Ruth again sets the example. Naomi, on the other hand, can't even muster enough strength to get out of bed. She seems to be still in this state of despair. She only says two words – two words in Hebrew – go ahead, my daughter. But Ruth is humble enough to go out in the fields and pick up the leftovers behind the harvesters. She is industrious enough to get up and go to work. She is courageous enough to do this even though it may be dangerous. She does something.

God had provided in the law a means to support the poor and the widows. He provided a means to be generous to those who had nothing. Deuteronomy 24:19 – 22 explains, ¹⁹*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. ²⁰*When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.* ²¹*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.* ²²*You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.*

God was reminding the Israelites not to be greedy, to leave some of the harvest for the poor and for the helpless. It was a reminder to them that God had taken care of them when they were slaves in Egypt, so also they should take care of the poor and helpless as thanks to God. But the problem was, not everyone obeyed this law. Not everyone in Israel was generous, just like not every Christian is generous. In fact, it was a courageous act on Ruth's part because it was very risky. Many of the land owners were rude. They might beat their servants. They might rape the women that were gleaning behind the harvesters. The harvesters themselves would often mistreat the women. So for Ruth to go out and glean was an unbelievable risk.

Ruth went out to the fields to try and find some food, and “just happened” to glean in the fields belonging to Boaz, from the clan of Elimelech. The NIV says, *As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.* As it turned out.... The Hebrew words underlying this phrase means, “her chance chanced.”⁵ From the human viewpoint, Ruth may have happened upon the fields belonging to Boaz, but from God's viewpoint, nothing just happens. Ruth now found herself in a field that belongs to a possible kinsman-redeemer. God is working behind the scenes, hidden from the eye. He is working behind the scenes for the good of His people. Boaz and Ruth and Naomi can't see all of this, but we can. God is at work in the tapestry of your life even though the bottom has fallen out and dreams have shattered. God is involved in the day to day events in your life to accomplish His dreams for your life. When things go south, loved ones die, or when relationships end, and it seems that maybe we have been abandoned by God, rest assured that God is still working in our lives.

⁵ K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *The NIV Application Commentary, Judges/Ruth*. Zondervan, 2002, p. 441.

There is something happening here that we can't see, and it is fascinating. In the book of Genesis a promise was made by God to the descendents of Judah that one day there would come a savior from the descendants of Judah. Matthew chapter 1 tells us that Boaz was a descendent of Judah. The problem is that Boaz is single and doesn't have any kids. And if he is single and has no kids, then there is no Savior. Personally, I think it is a miracle of God, and most ladies would agree with me, that there is this single wealthy guy of great character in Bethlehem that is not already married. And he is not gay either! But there is something more. Boaz is a man of great character, but his mother was Rahab the prostitute. I think the author wants us to marvel at the fact that God is able to reach into the stench and gutter of the fallen world and take the son of a prostitute and make him a bible hero. Never think that your background dictates your future as long as God is in the equation. Regardless of your background, your dysfunctions, your past, or your family members or occupation or standing, if God is in the equation, your past will not dictate your future. Boaz is a great example of this truth.

In verse 4, the ESV states that, *Behold, Boaz arrived*. The NIV states, *Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem....* But these translations don't capture the surprise and suddenness of the moment. In fact, a better translation would be... *Wouldn't you know it, Boaz arrived*. Without violating their ability to make moral choices, God is moving Ruth and Boaz in a position where they will meet each other, and something amazing is going to happen. A.W. Tozer, in a little book called *Knowledge of the Holy*, said this:

*"To believe actively that our Heavenly Father constantly spreads around us providential circumstances that work for our present good and our everlasting well-being brings to the soul a veritable benediction. Most of us go through life praying a little, planning a little, jockeying for position, hoping but never being quite certain of anything, and always secretly afraid that we will miss the way. This is a tragic waste of truth and never gives rest to the heart. There is a better way. God has charged Himself with full responsibility for our eternal happiness and stands ready to take over the management of our lives the moment we turn in faith to Him."*⁶

⁶ A.W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, pp.

God orchestrates events and lives so that His Will will be done, and by His will being accomplished, our eternal happiness and rest is secured.

This section of the book of Ruth demonstrates that faith has an action component. Faith is not necessarily passive. Throughout this wonderful narrative, Ruth consistently puts her faith in God, yet still gets out and does something. That view of faith and belief greatly contrasts with the view held today by many evangelical Christians and, I would venture to state, many Christians in general. Faith, belief, is not merely assent to a body of facts, or simply agreeing to a few doctrinal propositions that make up our belief system. Faith has an action component. Ruth doesn't just pray and wait for God to do something; she gets up, goes out to the fields, and assumes that God will work through her decisions for her good.

There is an old proverb that says, "If you don't live it, you don't believe it." This is true. Many people nod their heads at what the Bible says, and claim to believe it. They may raise their hands for salvation, and may agree that they believe what Jesus says. Why then, does survey after survey report that the behavior of Christians is no different than nonchristians in terms of divorce rate, stealing, lying... whatever you like. In 1987 George Gallup reported, "There's little difference in ethical behavior between the churched and the unchurched. There's as much pilferage and dishonesty among the churched as the unchurched. And I'm afraid that applies pretty much across the board: religion, per se, is not really life changing."⁷ In 1991, William Hendricks writing in Christianity Today stated,

"The Princeton Religion Research Center has measured the impact of religion on day-to-day work. Comparing the 'churched' with the 'unchurched' on a wide range of behaviors like pilfering supplies (stealing), overstating qualifications on resumes (lying), calling in sick when not sick (lying and stealing), and overstating tax deductions (lying, stealing, and cheating), the center finds 'little difference in the ethical

⁷ George H. Gallup, "Vital Signs," *Leadership*, Fall 1987, p. 17

views and behavior of the church and the unchurched.’ What differences there are ‘are not significant or are of marginal significance.’”⁸

Finally, George Barna in a 2004 research report, stated that, “...people’s faith does not make as much of a difference as might be expected - especially among non-evangelical born again Christians.”⁹ This type of faith and belief that is being professed and practiced by many people who claim to be Christians is often superficial, non-impacting, and quite frankly not real. Again, the old proverb is worth repeating. “If you don’t live it, you don’t believe it.”

Ruth, on the other hand, models for us a faith that is real. She believes God, commits her life to Him and to her mother-in-law, and acts on her beliefs. James 1:22 states, *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* James also states in 2:14 – 17, ¹⁴*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* Ruth exemplifies James admonition that faith has an action component. For those of us who profess we are Christ-followers, we should look to the example of Ruth as one who not only professed God, but also acts on that profession. She commits to God. She commits to her family. She commits to work to feed her family thereby glorifying God. Through all of her circumstances, she never complains, and always puts her trust in God for her provision and for her life. C. H. Spurgeon claimed that 98 percent of the people he met—including the criminals he visited in England’s prisons—told him that they believed the Bible to be true. But the vast majority had never made a personal, life-changing commitment to Jesus Christ. For them, “believe” was not an active verb.¹⁰ For Ruth, it was an action verb.

⁸ William Hendricks, in *Christianity Today*, Nov. 25, 1991

⁹ George Barna, in “Faith Has a Limited Effect On Most People’s Behavior,” May 24, 2004, viewed at <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=164>.

¹⁰ Source unknown, from Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/illus.php?topic_id=135.

Chapter 4: Blessing, or What a Difference a Day Makes

Ruth 2:5 – 23

⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” ⁶ 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.” ⁷ 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.”

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.” ¹⁰ 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?” ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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!” ¹³ Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah⁴ of barley. ¹⁸ And she took it up and went into the city. Her

⁴ An ephah was about 3/5 bushel or 22 liters

mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. ¹⁹ *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.”* ²⁰ *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.”* ²¹ *And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’ ”* ²² *And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.”* ²³ *So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.*

The first chapter of Ruth takes place over the course of 10 years, and maybe more. However the second chapter of Ruth takes place in one day. And what a difference a day makes! God, through His providence and sovereignty, works through the lives of Ruth and Boaz so that they meet in the fields. God is seen in this section pouring out his blessing on Ruth, Naomi, as well as Boaz. Ruth’s reputation as a woman of integrity is known to Boaz, and Boaz shows his kindness and blessing to Ruth and her family. The two widows’ situation, which before seemed hopeless, now appears to have some glimmer of hope. What does God have in store for them? 2 Peter 3:8 states *that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*. In other words, God is above and beyond all time. In the space of one day, he brings together two unlikely people, who will, according to God’s plan, be part of an eternal blessing.

Boaz notices Ruth, probably because he cares for his people so much that he takes notice of all of them, and notices Ruth is new. Perhaps she is also young and attractive, and Boaz can’t help but notice this woman in his fields. Beyond these human concerns, God of course brings Ruth and Boaz together as part of his providential workings in their lives. The chief laborer tells Boaz a lot about Ruth in his short reply. She is an outsider, a Moabite. She is considerate, as she asked the foreman for permission to glean in his

fields. She is also hard-working and industrious, as she has taken very few breaks and worked hard all day. Again, Ruth models for us someone, though poor and destitute, does not expect favor from anyone. She does not feel she is entitled to blessing, but instead works hard for what she gets in order to glorify God and her family.

Boaz approaches Ruth. Can you imagine how Ruth must have felt as she watches this man, this landowner, come toward her? She has no idea what is about to happen. He could have just as well beat her and rape her. But he says to her that he will take care of her and asks her to stay. Boaz refers to her as “my daughter,” indicating that she was considerably younger than he was, and also indicating his affection for her. Boaz in effect makes her one of his maidservants, giving her a higher level status than one of the gleaners, and allowing her to stay in his field so he could provide for her more fully. Normally, the gleaners would go from field to field to obtain enough food for themselves and their families, but Boaz wanted Ruth to remain, and not be subjected to any potential harsh treatment or harassment from others. He even instructed his young male laborers to respect her and keep their hands off of her. Ruth had apparently caught the eye and the heart of Boaz.

Why? Why did Boaz show such favor for Ruth? She herself asks the same question in a very humble and reverent manner. The Israelites during the time of the judges were not typically kind to foreigners, and Ruth knows this. Boaz’s reply marks him as a man of God and integrity in a time of unrighteousness and evil. Boaz knows what is going on in his town, and he knows of the magnificent act of faith, dedication, and commitment that Ruth has shown to Naomi. What is amazing is that even in these dark days, Ruth has left what is comfortable for her, accepted the God of Israel, despite all of the tragedy in her life, and has placed her confidence in God. Boaz sees that and hears about that. I think Boaz is impressed and touched by Ruth’s act of kindness and faith.

In fact, I think that Ruth has not only found favor in Boaz’s eyes, but has also found favor in his heart as well. Boaz blesses her in verse 12, but also states that, *full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!* Ruth put her trust and faith in the Lord God, and He brought her to Boaz.

Verse 12 makes it clear that her faith and trust in the Lord has become public knowledge. Some commentators state that Boaz was simply blessing Ruth as reciprocity for committing to Naomi. Hubbard states, “. . . Boaz's kindness toward Ruth simply reciprocated hers toward Naomi. He was, indeed, a true son of Israel: he treated foreigners kindly because Israel itself knew the foreigner's life in Egypt.”¹¹ However, there is something more in Boaz’s kindness than simply reciprocation. While it may be premature, I believe that Boaz is subtly signaling to Ruth that he would like to be her kinsman-redeemer. This analogy reflects the love and protection of a mother hen and its chicks. Ruth has put her faith in the providence of God, but it is through Boaz that God works this providence.

In verses 14 – 17, the writer makes clear Boaz’s generosity. This is quite unusual behavior, especially for a wealthy landowner towards a foreign widow. The writer makes it clear that Boaz goes above and beyond the call and the spirit of the law in his treatment of Ruth. These verses provide another subtle hint that Boaz cares for Ruth as more than a poor and helpless widow. I believe that Boaz sees in her someone like himself, a person of honesty, integrity, and above all, a true follower of the one true God. This generosity is illustrated by the fact that Ruth gleaned an *ephah* of barley that one day. We do not know exactly how much an *ephah* is, but some commentators estimate that it was about 30 pounds of food. This could be made into cereal and bread which would feed two women for over a month!¹² In the cultural context of the time of Ruth, most laborers would rarely exceed 1 – 2 pounds per day, so Ruth gathered between two weeks and one month’s worth of food!¹³ This little statistic recorded by the writer of the Ruth demonstrates the extreme generosity of Boaz, which was far above the normal haul for any laborer.

Ruth packs this on her back, probably struggling to carry it all home. When she does arrive at home, Naomi was astonished, to say the least, at the amount of food that Ruth brought back. Naomi asked Ruth about where she had gleaned. Now, if Ruth had been a man, she would have just come right out and said that the guy’s name was Boaz.

¹¹ Hubbard, pp. 164 – 165.

¹² Mills, M. (1999). *Ruth : A study guide to the book of Ruth*. Dallas: 3E Ministries.

¹³ Hubbard, p. 179.

But Ruth does not do that. With my apologies to the ladies, she begins to tell her mother-in-law about with whom she had worked. She told her mother-in-law about all of the other people she had met, about the other girls there, what they were wearing, possibly some of her new friends, the great lunch she had, and all of the other details. Finally, at the end of her long description, she tells Naomi that the name of the man was Boaz. Naomi exclaims a blessing on him, and excitedly announces that he is one of their relatives, one of their kinsman-redeemers! Ruth even adds that Boaz had instructed her to remain and glean in his fields, and not to go to any other ones.

Naomi now sees her hope rising. Things are starting to come together. She has food. Ruth is obviously being blessed by Boaz. Life is starting to look better and better. While the writer of Ruth reminds us again that Ruth is a Moabitess, a foreigner, blessing is still being poured out on the family. Naomi is clearly concerned about Ruth's safety, and also advises her to remain in Boaz's fields to glean. Ruth did as both Naomi and Boaz instructed, and remained in Boaz's fields throughout the barley and wheat harvests, about a two month period. During these two months, Ruth supported her mother-in-law, and probably got to know Boaz to some extent, at least as far as possible within this cultural period.

There are three main themes that run through the book of Ruth, and are particularly vivid here in this section. The first one is the sovereignty of God; the second is the character of the participants, especially Ruth and Boaz; and the third, but certainly not the last or least, is *hesed*.

While I do not in any sense want to minimize the role of the providence of God in this book, I have already discussed how God is moving in the lives of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz without being a master puppeteer and fatally determining their lives for them. Throughout their lives, our characters make decisions, and live their lives based on their moral choices. However, God knows these choices and decisions in advance, in fact from the beginning of time, and works His will to His glory through their decisions.

The character of the participants, especially that of Ruth and Boaz in this section, is an example for us to model. Ruth determines to provide for her family, and works hard in the fields. Her hard work is noticed by the foreman, who relates his experience to

Boaz. Ruth is also very humble, and gracious in her interaction with Boaz. By asking Boaz why she has found favor in his eyes, she is also being prudent. She doesn't know Boaz, and wants to make sure why he is being so kind to her. Does he want something? Sexual favors? Or is he in fact just being kind? Ruth puts her faith in the Lord, but is also wise. Boaz, a man of integrity and chivalry, demonstrates the Lord's kindness to Ruth, not for any sexual favors or any other impure motives, but has heard about Ruth's kindness and wants to repay her, to bless her, for her actions. Boaz treats her as if she were his own daughter, asking her to work with his own girls, perhaps so she would make some friends and find comfort in those surroundings. He also prohibits his male laborers from messing with her, thereby protecting her as well. Boaz is a man of honor, integrity, and chivalry towards Ruth. Boaz and Ruth are followers of the one true God, and their life and actions demonstrate their devotion to the Lord in no uncertain terms.

Part of the grace of God is His blessing on us as we obey His commands and learn to follow Him. The concept of *hesed* is critical to the book of Ruth. Unfortunately it is a word that no English word can convey accurately. It is expressive of relationships, and includes loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, mercy, love, and compassion.¹⁴ There are a couple of aspects that must be understood about *hesed* in order to fully grasp the concept as it is used in Ruth. One is that it springs from and is based on relationships. *Hesed* is never alone. It is deeply tied to the concept of covenant, and highly emphasizes the commitment and loyalty between two parties within this concept. Another aspect is that *hesed* is fundamentally an action. It is not just something nice for someone as we might think of kindness today. It is not superficial. It refers to an act performed for a person in real and desperate need, in the context of a deep and enduring commitment between two parties.¹⁵ It is usually performed by a stronger person for a situationally much weaker person. In this context, Ruth can perform *hesed* for Naomi in chapter 2 because Ruth is in a stronger position. A final aspect is that it is voluntary, and goes beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary. *Hesed* goes the extra mile, or three. It goes from the law, which is what is required, all the way to grace, which is undeserved favor. As we will see throughout the book of Ruth, Ruth and Boaz both exhibit extraordinary

¹⁴ Younger, p.393.

¹⁵ Younger, p. 394

hesed to each other, and to others. They both go beyond the law, above and beyond the call of duty.

There are two models in which *hesed* is performed. One is on a divine level, and the other is on the human level. It is certainly a characteristic of God. While mankind may appeal to God to bless them based on merit, or what they have done, mankind may also appeal to God based not on merit but on the faithfulness of God, His *hesed*, to help the undeserving obtain forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration. We see this illustrated throughout the Bible, and specifically in the book of Ruth. God blesses his people with food, and he lets Naomi know about it. God works through Ruth's and Boaz's decisions so that Ruth shows up in Boaz's fields, just as he does, and brings them together. God blesses Ruth through Boaz, and eventually brings them together and perpetuates the line of David, eventually leading to Jesus and the salvation of God's people.

On the human level, we see a number of examples where Ruth performs *hesed* for Naomi, such as when Ruth commits herself to her until death in chapter 1, when Ruth goes out to glean in order to provide for them, when she returns with an abundance of food, and when she finally in chapter 4, blesses her with a grandson. Boaz is also the model of *hesed* in the book. He blesses Ruth in her dire need, protects her as she gleans, goes way above the law right to grace when he provides her with an enormous amount of food in chapter 2, and finally when he redeems her and the family in chapter 4.

Both Ruth and Boaz serve as models for us as we go through life and have opportunities to perform *hesed* for others. Note where Ruth and Boaz both perform *hesed* for others – it was not in church or someplace special. It was in their normal everyday course of their lives. It was on the job, in the fields, and at mealtime. Ruth does the extraordinary and takes the initiative to do *hesed*. She commits herself to Naomi, much as Abraham does to God, as she moves from her home, her people, and her gods to be with Naomi in a strange land with unfamiliar people with a new and unknown God. She takes the initiative in chapter 2 as Naomi is paralyzed with despair, to go out and take care of the family. Sometimes, it takes action. *Hesed* is an action word and derives its meaning from action and relationships.

Finally doing *hesed* for others is not always easy or safe. Ruth went to Bethlehem with Naomi, knowing that she was leaving the comfortable and traveling into the unknown. The Israelites did not treat foreigners kindly, especially Moabites. There was risk involved. When Ruth decided to go out and glean, she was putting herself tremendously at risk. She could have been assaulted, raped, or even killed. Ruth was a woman of exceptional character, and was willing to put herself in danger to do the right thing. She was selfless in her determination to take care of Naomi. Ruth models for us. While we may never be in a position where we are called to risk our life, or to be prepared to give our life, for the sake of another, we must understand that doing *hesed* for others is never easy. Yet it is the right thing to do. We as Christians are called by God to go above and beyond what is expected by the law and to fully strive to give gracefully wherever we can.

Chapter 5: Expectation, or Midnight Rendezvous, but it's not what you think!

Ruth 3: 1- 18

3 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?"² Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.³ 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.⁴ 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."⁵ And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet!⁹ He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.¹³ 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."

¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city.¹⁶ And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her,¹⁷ saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-

law.’ ” ¹⁸ She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”

Ruth has stayed with Naomi during the barley and wheat harvests, and has been gleaning from the fields of Boaz for these last two months. During this time, Naomi’s attitude has to have undergone a change from when she first arrived. When Naomi first arrived back in Bethlehem, she wanted to be called bitter. She was a bitter old woman who felt that God had cursed her and made her life miserable. Now, at the beginning of chapter 3, we start to see a change of heart and a change of attitude in Naomi. Chapter 3 is, I believe, the turning point in the whole book of Ruth. Naomi has now come out of her depression and is thinking of how she can ensure that Ruth has a good husband.

Chapter 2 radiated with a budding relationship between Ruth and Boaz. We are introduced to the warrior hero, Knight-like Boaz, who was a follower of Yahweh, a man of integrity, and a generous provider for all of his people. We were captivated at how Boaz noticed Ruth, and blessed her with an incredible *hesed* that went beyond the law and could only be defined by grace. We are led to believe that Boaz is attracted to Ruth, perhaps not in a physical nature, but perhaps by her godliness, her disposition, and her reputation. She is obviously younger than Boaz, and perhaps very attractive even in the fields since he has to warn his male laborers to keep their hands off of her. We have the making of a budding relationship that seems to be moving forward at a quick pace.

The writer of Ruth, however, does not give us much detail between chapter 2 and chapter 3. It has been about 2 months, and we have no indication that Boaz and Ruth have done much or said anything to each other of significance since their first meeting. So what happened? While many commentaries don’t say much about this time, I have to believe that Boaz continued to be generous, taking care of her at least in an indirect way, and perhaps even saying a word or two to her as she worked and as he checked on his fields. We don’t know this, and this is pure speculation on my part. However, I believe it is safe to say that God continued to work in both of their hearts, bringing them together in a divine way that only He could understand at this point in time.

Naomi is now the one who actively does *hesed* for Ruth. Naomi will continuously refer to Ruth as “my daughter.” This is only one word in Hebrew, but

signifies the strong bond and relationship that the two women have for each other, and especially the family bond that Naomi feels for Ruth, even though she is not a blood member of the family. Naomi poses a rhetorical question to Ruth, asking if she should not seek rest for her. The NIV translates this as find a home for you, and the NASB translates this question as seeking security for her. Clearly Naomi had in mind marriage for Ruth, as all of those translations describe various aspects of marriage from Naomi's point of view. Naomi's desire for Ruth was that it may be well with her. This phrase translated literally is something like, "so that you will be well situated." This is a common idiom associated with attractive benefits, such as bridal happiness, security, long life, material prosperity, and many children.¹⁶ Naomi has come to the conclusion that she must do something to bring Ruth and Boaz together in a decisive manner.

Remember in Chapter 1 that Naomi actually prayed for these things for both her daughters-in-law (1:8-9). However, now, through the providence of God and His working behind the scenes, the situation has emerged in such a way that Naomi can put together a plan that will in effect answer her own prayer. Hubbard makes a good point, which I believe is true, that God moves human history along according to His sovereign plan and desires, yet it is sometimes ourselves that actually execute God's plan in our lives. Hubbard states that Naomi "models one way in which divine and human actions work together: believers are not to wait passively for events to happen; rather, they must seize the initiative when an opportunity presents itself. They assume that God presents the opportunity."¹⁷ As we stressed earlier, faith has an action component. Theologically speaking, Naomi is God's instrument to act out His sovereign will; God acts in Naomi's acts.

Naomi indicates that Boaz will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. For many of us who are not agriculturally savvy, we need to understand the significance of his act if we are to understand how Naomi could put her plan into action. The grain was bundled together and brought in from the fields on the back of laborers or by cart. It was brought to the threshing floor, which was a hard open area. It was here that the grain was *threshed*, or beaten with a large sledge hammer or trampled under foot by animals, to

¹⁶ Hubbard, p. 198.

¹⁷ Hubbard, p. 199.

remove the husks from the kernels. Winnowing grain consisted of tossing the straw, chaff, and grain into the air with a large pitchfork. The wind would blow the chaff the farthest away; the straw would also be separated; and the heavier grain would fall back on the threshing floor.¹⁸ Boaz would be winnowing at night (tonight, as the text says, instead of in the evening). It would be dark, secluded, and Boaz would be alone.

Winnowing was a time of celebration and festivities. It marked the end of the harvest season, and was a joyous occasion, especially at this time as God had blessed his people with an abundant harvest after a time of famine. There would be winnowing, celebration feasts, and partying. Boaz would probably stay after the party and feasts to guard the grain from robbers. The time would be right for Ruth to quietly and secretly approach Boaz and move the process along.

Naomi then formulates a plan. This section of Ruth is complex, because it seems that Naomi is perhaps giving Ruth some advice that may not quite be appropriate. She tells Ruth to go and wash herself, put on some perfume, get dressed up, and go see Boaz. In other words, she was to make herself attractive for Boaz, perhaps even alluring. So what was Naomi telling Ruth to do? Get dressed up, put on some makeup, put on the most enticing perfume, and go and seduce Boaz? That seems quite out of character with all of the players in this story, although this is exactly what it sounds like. Several commentators suggest that Naomi is telling Ruth to get dressed like a bride, in order to make it clear to Boaz her intentions of marriage. However, others say that Naomi is now telling Ruth to end her period of mourning and to get on with her normal life.

There is a parallel in the life of David in 2 Samuel 12:20, where David mourns the loss of his son. When he is done mourning, he washed himself, applied perfume, put on his clothes, and went to the temple to worship. This signaled the end to David's mourning period for his son. It appears that Naomi is encouraging Ruth to do the same. This would also explain why Boaz may have been less outgoing with Ruth as she was working in his fields. She was probably still wearing her mourning clothes, and Boaz, being a man of honor and integrity, did not want to impose himself on her during this time period.

¹⁸ Hubbard, p. 200, and Younger, p. 458.

Naomi instructs Ruth to go to the threshing floor but not to make herself known to Boaz until he has finished eating and drinking. In other words, wait until after he has had dinner. Boaz is a man after all, so wait until after he has finished eating and had a few drinks, when he will be in good spirits (but not drunk) and the time will be right to approach him. Naomi understood timing, and she also understood men. Ruth was not to interrupt his meal, nor was she to embarrass him or make any scene in front of his guests. Naomi wanted to make sure nothing was left to chance, and made detailed plans and instructed Ruth to do exactly as she said in order to make the most of this important opportunity. Ruth was to take notice of the place where he lies down, and then go to where he is lying, uncover his feet and lie down at his feet. Then she was to wait for his instructions.

The wording in these verses is replete with sexual innuendo. Wait until he is alone and in the dark. Go to him, uncover his blanket, and lie down with him. Then tell him you will do whatever he asks! The verb to uncover, or make visible something hidden, occurs primarily in phrases describing illicit sexual relations.¹⁹ The writer probably used these words to add a tinge of uncertainty and perhaps tenseness to the situation. Naomi told Ruth to lie down next to Boaz, which is another sexually suggestive phrase. Things could get a little dicey here if Naomi misjudged either Ruth's character or Boaz's character, or both. "The delicacy of the scheme is obvious, and the potential for disaster is extreme. From a human perspective Naomi seems to be taking a huge gamble that Boaz may not interpret this series of nonverbal gestures in accordance with the meaning she intends."²⁰ Would they succumb to the temptation of the moment? Ruth was looking good, smelled very attractive, and Boaz had a full stomach. Was Naomi risking a disaster, or provoking one?

Naomi told Ruth to uncover his feet and lay at his feet. In the night air, his would probably awaken Boaz by making him uncomfortable, but would not startle him or rudely awaken him. Additionally, by lying at his feet, Ruth would demonstrate her humility

¹⁹ Hubbard, p. 203.

²⁰ Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). Vol. 6: *Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (687). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

towards him as his servant, and not as a loose woman looking to ensnare Boaz with illicit sexual relations.

Ruth did as her mother-in-law asked of her. Naomi's scheme is obviously a gamble. The effectiveness of her plan is measured by the extent to which Boaz's interpretation when he awakes conforms to the meaning she has intended in Ruth's actions.²¹ At midnight, Boaz was startled, and noticed a woman was lying at his feet. Surprised, he whispered, "Who are you?" Ruth's answer indicates she understood clearly what Naomi was asking of her. Her reply was "Ruth your maidservant," not "Ruth the Moabitess." She had become a woman in her own right, and her status of Boaz's servant superseded her status as a foreigner. Maidservant indicated eligibility for marriage. Giving her name meant that she trusted Boaz with her very life.

Here she departs from Naomi's script and asks Boaz to spread his wings over his maidservant, because he is a redeemer. Naomi had ended her instructions for her daughter-in-law in verses 2-4 by telling her to do whatever Boaz would say she should do. Now Ruth turns around and lectures Boaz on his obligations to her! Clearly, this was a marriage proposal. However, it reflects Boaz's prayer for Ruth in chapter 2, where in verse 12 he blesses her for taking refuge under the wings of the Lord. Just as Naomi begins to answer her own prayer through the providence of God by making plans for Ruth, Ruth is asking Boaz to answer his own prayer by taking her under his wings of protection through marriage. This association assumes a theological connection between Boaz covering Ruth with his garment which implements God's protective covering of her with His wing.²² Their marriage was the means which God protected Ruth and paid her in full for her *hesed* to Naomi (2:12). God worked his sovereign plan not by direct intervention, but through the human actions of righteous followers of the one true God.

Boaz's response indicated that he understood Ruth's proposal, and clearly she was not soliciting some illicit sexual favors. Boaz immediately blesses and prays for Ruth, which is not something one normally does when approached with an offer of illicit sex! Boaz deems that this act of *hesed* is greater than the act of kindness that she showed toward Naomi by leaving her homeland, committing herself to Ruth, and gleaning in the

²¹ Block, p. 687.

fields. She has an interest in Boaz, and not in the younger, more attractive, men. She did not want to marry for love (the poor but attractive men), or for money (the rich men), but she subordinated her own desires and interests for her mother-in-law's; namely, Ruth desired to marry Boaz because he was a kinsman-redeemer, and could provide the family with an heir. Ruth married for family loyalty, and this was more commendable to Boaz than even leaving her homeland. This action deserves greater reward from God than what he has already provided thus far, and we get a glimpse of what is to come.

Boaz tells Ruth that he will do for her all that she asks. He even relates that everyone in town knows that she is a worthy woman. This word, worthy, is literally a woman of strength, and used only in Proverbs to describe an ideal wife.²³ A similar word was used to describe Boaz in 2:1. Boaz was telling Ruth that she was no longer considered a foreigner, a woman of ill repute, but a woman that was strong, trustworthy, admirable, and generous. In effect, her character was equal to that of Boaz's. Ruth's character had become known to everyone, and she was considered fully qualified to marry him. Block states:

But because of her devotion to her mother-in-law and her willingness to abandon all for her, the townspeople knew her true character. But she did not gain this reputation by trying to be somebody, by associating with the important people. On the contrary, it was her self-effacing embodiment of Israel's lofty covenant standards, her *hesed*, her kindness and loyalty to the family of her deceased husband, especially her mother-in-law, that has won her the praise of all.²⁴

What a change of events! In chapter 1, Ruth comes to Bethlehem from Moab a poor, destitute, stranger, at the mercy of foreigners who probably don't like her. She submits herself to her crabby mother-in-law, and performs *hesed* as a true Israelite and follower of God. This exemplifies the character of Ruth, and the character of God.

Then, Boaz drops the bomb. He is a redeemer, but there is one closer than he is! There is a relative that is closer to Naomi than is Boaz. If he is willing to redeem, then let him! I can only imagine what Ruth is thinking! Wait a minute, what about us? Perhaps she is so selfless, that she is not thinking about Boaz, but is more concerned with her

²² Hubbard, p. 212.

²³ Hubbard, p. 216.

²⁴ Block, p. 694.

provision for Naomi. But who is this other guy? Is he like Boaz, a man of integrity, or is some toothless Joe that would abuse her as a possession and not love her? We now have another roadblock, and it just underscores the work of God in this whole situation. If indeed Boaz and Ruth are to be married, then it must be God that brings it all about.

This little incident also reveals again the character and integrity of Boaz. Instead of scheming how he could circumvent the law and get around this closer kinsman in order to have Ruth to himself, he was obedient to the law and respectful of the customs of Israel. Boaz respected and obeyed God. This event showed that he truly cared for Ruth, and ultimately wanted her protection, safety, and blessing above even his own desires and wants. Boaz obviously knew this relative who was closer in relation. He definitely showed integrity, but did he also have a plan? Was he intent on marrying Ruth while working within the system? I think Boaz was a man of integrity without question, but he also knew the players, the system, and the intent of God's law. Boaz was adamant about God's law, but he also loved Ruth. Boaz swore that he would marry Ruth if the other redeemer would not, and he linked his promise to the existence of God. He willingly subjected himself to divine punishment if he failed to carry out his promise.²⁵ Boaz forcefully affirmed his commitment to Ruth.

Boaz protected Ruth by allowing her to “lodge” at the threshing floor until the morning, thus keeping her safe late at night from going back through the city when it was dangerous for a lone young woman to be out. He again blessed her with more food to take back to Naomi. Notice the word “lodge” is devoid of sexual connotation, indicating again that both Ruth and Boaz understood the intention of Naomi's plan, and were both of such character as to resist the temptation to take illicit advantage of the situation.

Ruth went back to her mother-in-law and told her everything that happened. This is the post-date review. Ruth showed her the barley and told Naomi that it was for her from Boaz, so she wouldn't come back “empty-handed.” Ironically, it was Naomi in chapter 1 who complained that God had brought her back *empty-handed*. Ruth was standing right there with her, probably thinking, “What do you mean, empty handed? I am here!” So now she adds here Boaz gave me these six measures of barley, saying,

²⁵ Hubbard, p. 219.

‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law *empty-handed*.’ Same word. Seems like you are not so empty after all, doesn’t it! I think it’s a little jab. Not so empty after all! Naomi complained that she came back cursed by God with famine and childlessness. Ruth brought back grain to signify that the famine was over, and perhaps it also indicates that her childlessness might also be close to being over.

There are a number of key lessons and themes from this chapter, but one main lesson is that of hope. Christian hope is not wishful thinking. Christian hope is the confident expectation of a favorable future under God’s direction. There are four characteristics about Christian hope from this passage that we need to understand. The first one is Christian hope is based upon the character of God. Our hope is not based on people, because people are too fragile. Our hope is not based upon material things, bank accounts, jobs, cars, because those things are too fleeting. Our hope is not based upon the American Dream, but based upon the character of God under whose wings we have come to take refuge through Jesus Christ. Naomi’s hope in this passage of scripture is based upon seeing the hand of God in her life. She is full of hope. We are to be hopeful not because we have the American Dream or because we believe that God will give us the all of our desires and fulfill all of our plans. We are hopeful because we have a good God that is sovereign, providential, gracious, loving, and merciful and that He is watching out for our lives and futures and will give us the very best thing for us. That is why we are hopeful.

The second aspect is that Christian Hope manifests itself in strategic action. Hope is active. Hope moves. Hope doesn’t just stand still. Hope does something. In the first four verses of this passage of scripture Naomi is full of hope, so she comes up with a plan and implements it. She doesn’t just sit there like a bump on a log like she did at the beginning of chapter 2. She has hope and she moves out. Christians with little hope or confidence in the Lord do not engage in strategic planning and action. They keep the status quo because they are more afraid of ruffling feathers than they are of radically and dangerously pursuing the great commission. The leaders in unhopeful churches ring their hands in fear that loud and angry people are going to make their lives miserable or that givers in the church are going to leave if they radically change, if they radically go after the great commission. So they do nothing, and they die a death of despair. We can take

calculated risks because we trust in the character of God and the goodness of God. We can trust that God will honor our hope. And we push forward and pursue the great commission. We make changes and do things we feel like we have to do to go after fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Third, Christian Hope manifests itself in integrity. Hopeful people meet the challenges of life head on with integrity. It is hopelessness that causes people to feel like they have to steal, lie, and seize illicit pleasure. But it is hope that causes people to meet the challenges and temptations of life with integrity. This is what Boaz and Ruth do in this passage here. They meet this temptation with integrity. If we want to see a real man, let's look at Boaz. Boaz cares for Ruth's reputation, her safety, her provision, and is sensitive to her situation. Instead of giving into temptation he honors Ruth with his goodness and kindness and shows integrity despite his desires. That is a real man. Boaz really cares for Ruth, but he chooses to subordinate his desires and wants to God's word. He refuses to go outside the boundaries of God's word in order to get what he wants. He will hope in God's goodness. They both hope in the character and goodness of God.

Finally, Christian Hope manifests itself in gracious generosity. Ruth takes place in the day and age of the Judges, where everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Except Boaz. Boaz makes provisions in his fields for the poor and destitute to come along and glean, but then he goes beyond that and demonstrates abundant and gracious generosity to Ruth by giving her about a month's food in one day, and gives her even more in chapter 3 by filling her shawl with barley to take home. Christian hope manifests itself in gracious generosity. And in the end God honors his generosity by making him an ancestor to King David and to the King of the World Jesus Christ. Hopeful people are generous people, because hopeful people believe God will honor their generosity in this life and the next just like He did with Boaz.

Imagine if we were a person of hope. What a difference it would make in your life if you were a person of hope. The stock market falls, and you are having to talk all of your friends off the ledge, but you move forward in hope because you have confidence in a future guided by God. Pain leaves other people in despair, and you grieve, but you grieve with hope because your hope is based in the character of God. Other people are

hamstrung in fear over a decision they have to make, but you move forward because you hope in the goodness of God. You believe in a God that is sovereign and whatever happens is good, according to God. What a difference it would make in your life if you were a person of hope.

Do the people around you see you as a person of hope? Now I am not talking about optimism or wishful thinking. But a Christian hope that is born by the Spirit of God in you. Is it based upon God or what we desire? Wealth and possessions can be here today and gone tomorrow; ask millions of people. Do people see you as a person that makes plans and takes action and is willing to move out to glorify God? Or they see you as a person that is constantly indecisive because of fear. Do people see you as a person of hope?

Do they see you as a person of integrity? Do the people around you see you as a person of integrity as it relates to sexual temptation? Or they see you as a person who is in as much despair as the rest of the world? We live in a world that has given up, that has no hope. The thought today is that young people, single people, anybody, cannot be expected to refrain from sexual temptation because they are animals, so we give up and give them condoms. People who struggle with homosexuality could never hope that their life could be full of anything else other than that lifestyle, so we give up and ordain them in our churches. Hopeful people believe there is something better. Of course we don't hate people who struggle with homosexuality. We love them enough to call them to repentance and tell them that God has something better for you.

Finally, do people see you as a person of gracious generosity? Or do they see you as a miser, afraid to give anything? Do you give just a little because it's yours and you are scared of what the future holds? Do you go out to a restaurant and not tip generously because you are afraid? Do you not go to a church and really give generously because you are afraid? Or do people see you as a person of gracious generosity that hopes and believes that God honors gracious generosity in this life and the life to come? Who do people see you as? A miser, or a gracious giver.

Boaz and Ruth and Naomi all model a hope that is rooted and grounded in the goodness and sovereignty of God. They serve as our examples today.

Chapter 6: Redemption, or God Helps Those Who Can't Help Themselves

Ruth 4:1 – 12

4 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.² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.³ 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.⁴ 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 you¹ 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."⁵ Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth² the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."⁶ 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."

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel.⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal.⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon.¹⁰ 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."¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman,

¹ Hebrew *he*

² Masoretic Text *you also buy it from Ruth*

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,¹² 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.”

Ruth chapter 3 ends with Naomi exuding confidence that the plan worked, and that Boaz will take care of the situation this very day. Boaz is a man of integrity, but he is also shrewd. In this section of Ruth, we will see Boaz work within the bounds of God’s law to ensure he is the one that God will providentially use to care for Ruth and Naomi. With all of the obstacles, and especially this last one, that have come between Boaz and Ruth, only the providence of God working in the lives of people will be able to bring them together. Will Ruth and Boaz be together, or will the other unnamed redeemer be the one who wins the heart and life of Ruth and Naomi?

Boaz leaves his harvest in his barns and at the threshing floor and proceeds to the center of town, to the town gate. This is the location where much of the town’s official business was conducted. It was a public place, a well-known location, and was heavily trafficked during the working day. Ancient middle eastern cities were built with walls around them to protect the townspeople from invasion. These cities typically had several gates, but there would be one gate where at night the gate would be closed and in the morning the gate would be opened where the men would make their daily commute to their fields to work. The fields were actually outside the city walls. The men would go out in the morning and come back in at night. I guess you could say this was one of the first gated communities.

This town gate then becomes sort of the official meeting place where official business is done. The elders of the city are the officials that preside over that business. Boaz has gone to the town gate, where he knows this kinsman-redeemer is coming and has gathered 10 of the elders there. He has gone to great care and concern to make sure that this is all done properly. Now you will notice that not only are the elders there but also many of the townspeople are there also. They see the elders gathered there and Boaz and they sense something is going down. They want to know what is happening.

Verse 1 states that, “*And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by.*” Was this the hand of God, or did Boaz arrange this “chance meeting?” I believe that perhaps it was both. Since Boaz knows this unnamed redeemer, he probably knows his schedule and some of his comings and goings. After all, Boaz seems to have the pulse of the town, as indicated by the fact that in Chapter 2 he was well aware of the kindness that Ruth had shown Naomi by coming back from Moab with her and committing to her (2:11). However, the same wording is used in chapter 2 when Boaz arrives at the fields from Bethlehem (2:4), indicating the hand of God orchestrating behind the scenes the events of the day. Theologically, remember, we cannot separate the working of God from our actions. As a sovereign God, He works in and through our actions to fulfill His grand design for the world and for our lives. Boaz has probably done his homework, and knew approximately when the redeemer would be passing by. He also informed the elders of the town, the officials, because Boaz knew he would need their witness for the official transaction.

Boaz initiates the conversation by describing Naomi and a piece of real estate that she has, or is selling. Now the text is a little unclear here, but it implies that Naomi is selling a piece of land. We haven’t heard anything about this so far in the Book of Ruth, and this may be a little confusing. In Israel no one could buy and sell land permanently. God owned the land and the Israelites were stewards of the land. What is probably going on here is that before Naomi and Elimelech left to go to Moab, they sold the rights to use the land to someone while they were away. The proceeds from this sale would have provided them a nest egg to use for moving and establishing their life in Moab. Now that Naomi is back in town, she probably wants to get the land back into the family. Since she can’t afford it, a kinsman-redeemer can now buy the land back, or redeem the land, for their family.

One interesting thing about the redeemer Boaz is meeting is that he is never named. When Boaz asks him to come and sit down, he would have surely called him by name. So the fact that the redeemer does not have a name is not due to Boaz, but to the narrator. The passage in 4:1 states, *So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.”* The word translated “friend” is actually a Hebrew wordplay that loses its impact in

translation. The best translation is, “Old so-and –so.”²⁶ The narrator intentionally hides the redeemer’s name, perhaps in order to create a less than favorable impression of him to the readers. Perhaps the narrator intends to hide the man’s identity to prevent him and his family embarrassment after having rejected the deal of the land and Ruth offered by Boaz in front of the elders.²⁷ Whatever the case, he is referred to in the book of Ruth as “old so-and-so.”

Boaz begins his discussion about Naomi with something that has of yet not been brought up, the land. The redeemer agrees to redeem it. After all, it is probably a good investment. He can use the land now, and make a profit from crops he can grow on it now. It may even make a good addition to his current land. The redeemer may or may not know about Ruth, but in all probability, he does. In Ruth 1:19, the whole town stirred because of the return of Naomi and Ruth. So if the redeemer quietly ignores his voluntary family responsibility to marry Ruth and produce an heir, the line of Elimelech will die off without an heir and the land will default to the redeemer’s ownership.²⁸ The amount he would pay for the field would be more than compensated by the crop yield he would produce from it. The redeemer, therefore, quickly answers that he will redeem the land.

However, Boaz now calls the redeemer to fulfill not just the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law, by agreeing to marry Ruth as well as take the land. Notice how Boaz seems to set up the unnamed redeemer by first bringing up the land, then later mentioning Ruth. I think Boaz is exploring the motives of the unnamed redeemer as they relate to this proposal. Boaz paints a picture here that is obviously not an optimal deal, and wants to discover his true motives and the extent of his responsibility and care for Ruth and her family. Boaz reminds the man that Ruth is a Moabitess, which would normally make her a poor candidate for a wife, unless the unnamed redeemer knew of Ruth’s character. If the man already has a wife and children, the picture becomes even more complicated as this deal would generate even more expenses and complicate inheritance matters with his own family. Boaz maintains his integrity throughout the

²⁶ Younger, p. 474.

²⁷ Hubbard, p. 234-235.

²⁸ Younger, p. 476.

negotiations, and in no way lies to the man, but he actively engages the unnamed redeemer and asks for a swift decision while painting a picture of the complexity and expense that convince the redeemer of the unwanted burden of the offer.

However, the very first words of the nearer redeemer in his response reveal that he has neither the motives nor the character to rise to this occasion. One commentator sums it up best:

His words clearly express concern only for his own patrimony and interests; they show no concern for Ruth and the line of Elimelech at all. Thus, unwilling to shoulder his full responsibilities as the redeemer with the prior right, he summons Boaz to acquire his rights (v 8a) and expresses the transfer symbolically by the physical act that customarily accompanied such a transfer: he removed his sandals and gave them to Boaz (v 8b).²⁹

So the unnamed redeemer refused the offer of Boaz, and refused to redeem Ruth and the property of Naomi. As he is refusing to marry Ruth, he still refers to the arrangement, and to Ruth, as “it” instead of “her.” Notice this in verse 6 and verse 8. Whenever the kinsman-redeemer refers to this proposition he refers to it as “it.” Not her. He is not interested in Ruth or Naomi or their family. He interested in the land. And because it is going to cost him something, he turns this opportunity down. He passed the right to Boaz, and secured the transaction in front of the elders and the townspeople by taking off his sandal and giving it to Boaz.

The book of Ruth is full of contrasts, and it is important to note two of those here. Ruth took the extraordinary path with Naomi by committing to her and to the one true God, while Orpah took the practical and reasonable way back to Moab. Boaz also took the extraordinary path to redeem Ruth and Naomi, demonstrating *hesed* above and beyond the law approaching grace, while the unnamed redeemer was interested in purchasing the rights to the land out of practical economic reasons, but ultimately refused to redeem the land and Ruth based on these same practical economic reasons. Both the unnamed redeemer and Orpah are not condemned in the Bible for their actions, yet we never hear nor read of them again. We can clearly see the contrast between the selfless demonstration of courage, commitment, kindness, and faithfulness in Ruth and Boaz, and

²⁹ Bush, F. W. (2002). Vol. 9: *Word Biblical Commentary : Ruth, Esther*. Word Biblical Commentary (245). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

the selfish pragmatism of Orpah and “old so-and-so.” These contrasts serve to highlight the significant differences between just doing the everyday practical thing, and going the extra mile or so by stepping out in courage and risk to meet the needs of people through the providence of God.

As the unnamed redeemer fades from the scene, Boaz immediately makes a public declaration in front of the elders and the townspeople of his intention to redeem the land and to marry Ruth. He proclaims that he will take care of the land issue, and take Ruth to be his wife, so that the clan of Elimelech may not cease to exist. Boaz continues to show *hesed* to the family of Ruth and Naomi, even in his public announcement of his buying the rights to the land and in taking Ruth as his wife. Boaz confronts the redeemer, with a well-thought plan but with integrity nonetheless, and continues to demonstrate his integrity and character in announcing the redemption of Ruth and Naomi. Boaz is a shrewd, action-oriented, and decisive business person with a heart for God. He is strong, bold, and wise. Immediately after the unnamed redeemer turns the offer down, Boaz takes action, seals the deal with the unnamed redeemer, and then redeems Ruth and Naomi.

The townspeople respond with a two-fold response, witness and prayer. Boaz proclaims his desire to redeem, and the people act as witnesses to the transaction. They also pray for Boaz and Ruth. They first bless Ruth, the wife, in hopes that she, like Rachel and Leah, will be blessed of God and provide a son that will build up the people of God. Secondly, they bless Boaz, so that not only the name of Elimelech will be made famous, but also the name and line of Boaz. Thirdly, they bless the family, the house of Ruth and Boaz, so that their family line will be used mightily by God.

One important aspect of this section of chapter 4 is that both Ruth and Naomi are not mentioned, except Ruth in passing as part of the deal, and play no part whatsoever in the events held at the city gate with the redeemer, the elders, and the townspeople. Ruth has acted with the utmost character and has demonstrated *hesed* on a number of occasions, and has been the recipient of blessing and providence from God. Naomi, awakened from her depression and bitterness by these acts of kindness on the part of Ruth and Boaz, put together a courageous and risky plan to get Ruth in the way of Boaz

in order to grab his attention and bring the matter to a conclusion. But ultimately, there was an obstacle that could not be overcome by either Naomi or Ruth: the rights of the nearer relative, the unnamed redeemer. Ruth and Naomi were blessed, but were nonetheless still in their desperate situation. They could really do nothing to settle the matter of redemption themselves. They could get by on the blessing that Boaz provided, but at some point they would again need a redeemer to finally, once and for all, remedy their situation.

Boaz is the one in this section of chapter 4 that must act on behalf of Ruth and Naomi. The girls have done all that they could do, but it was not enough. They can't ultimately redeem themselves. It is now up to Boaz, and the two women must trust him to act courageously and righteously on their behalf. Does Boaz have the means and the guts to act within the law yet trust God to overcome this one last obstacle? What is God's plan for them, anyway? Is Boaz even still in the plan? Ruth and Naomi must now sit back and trust that God is working in their lives, and that Boaz is the means and the mechanism through which God will redeem them from their situation. Of course, God is working in the lives of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Boaz takes action, works through the system with honor and integrity, and still is able to secure the land and Ruth as his own.

Ruth and Naomi cannot ultimately help themselves. There is an old adage, commonly attributed to the Bible, but more accurately attributed to Benjamin Franklin, which says that, "God helps those who help themselves." This statement is indicative of typical American individualism, pragmatism, and self-help, but it is not Biblical. Sure, we as God's people are called to act, work, and love. Laziness, sloth, and selfishness are all condemned as sin. But in one important aspect, this statement is just not true. All human beings are in a similar situation to that of Ruth and Naomi. We may be temporarily blessed, may have food, and may have shelter, but we are still in bondage to our situation and must be redeemed in order to truly be free. We are separated from God because of our sin nature, and we are living in a spiritually depraved state. We as human beings need a Boaz to redeem us, to buy us back, out of the slavery of our sin nature. Our Boaz is Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price of redemption through his death on the cross and bought us at a high price. Like Naomi and Ruth, we cannot buy our own redemption, because the price is too high. In an act of extreme grace, God, in a similar fashion to

Boaz but on a much grander scale, helps people who cannot help themselves through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once referred to Jesus as “our glorious Boaz.” Boaz and Jesus do have some things in common. Boaz’s redemption of Ruth is often considered a type (a representation) of Christ’s redemption of His people. How are the two similar? A short comparison of Boaz and Jesus reveal some remarkable similarities.

1. Boaz was a near relative to Naomi and Ruth. Jesus is God that became human, our relative, so that He could redeem us.
2. While the law was very specific about the kinsman-redeemer and his obligations, Boaz voluntarily acted to redeem Ruth. Jesus also sacrificed himself voluntarily in order to pay for our redemption.
3. Just as Boaz loved, blessed, and cared for Ruth and Naomi, so Jesus also loves, blesses, and cares for His people, the church.
4. Just as Boaz performed grace-like *hesed* in redeeming Ruth, so Jesus redeems us through His grace and mercy and love, even though we don’t deserve it.
5. Just as Boaz was a man of wealth and was able to pay the price of redemption, so Jesus lived a sinless life and was able to pay the price for the redemption of His people through his shed blood on the cross.
6. Just as Boaz did all of the work in chapter 4 to redeem Ruth, Jesus does all of the work in our redemption. Just as the work of Boaz was final, so was the work of Jesus final in our redemption. Nothing else needs to be done. The sacrifice of Jesus was and is enough.
7. Just as Boaz redeemed the land and Ruth, Jesus will redeem His people and His creation.³⁰

Paul wrote in Romans 5: *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. He is our kinsman-redeemer.*

Chapter 7: Consummation

Ruth 4:13 – 22

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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!” ¹⁵ 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.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ 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.

The Genealogy of David

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

In the last chapter we saw Boaz deal shrewdly with the unnamed redeemer, with the ability to redeem Ruth and Naomi, legalize the contract, and make a public declaration of his intention to redeem the land and marry Ruth. In this last section we see the consummation of God’s plan working throughout the entire book of Ruth. As readers, we are able to get a bird’s eye view of what God has in store for Boaz and Ruth.

Boaz made Ruth his wife. Then he “went to her.” “Boaz went to Ruth” is a typical Biblical euphemism for sexual intercourse between Boaz and Ruth. Note the order here in these first few sentences. Boaz made Ruth his wife, then he had intimate sexual relations with her. A sexual relationship between a man and a woman has been designed by God to be exercised only within the marriage relationship. Today, we have made sex as strictly a fulfillment of stimulation and pleasure, with little to no deep commitment or relationship. It has become a superficial act of pure stimulation in which

³⁰ The idea for this list, as well as some of the content, came from Pastor Mark Driscoll’s message and message notes, “God’s Hand in our Shrewdness,” given on February 4, 2007, in his series on Ruth.

we attempt to selfishly satisfy our own desires and urges. What modern man and woman has made sex is much to the contrary of what God designed sex to be. God intended sex to be the consummation of a close and personal relationship within the marriage covenant.

The primary Biblical picture of a marriage is that of a covenant. God's covenant relations with his people are described in the language of marriage. We get our meaning and models for relationship from the covenantal relationship of God and his people. There are three main elements of the marriage covenant that we can derive from the Bible: 1) the promise of committed love between the husband and the wife; 2) the public declaration of the covenant by which a new family is created; and 3) the personal communion between a husband and a wife in the relationship.³¹ Boaz in chapter 4 demonstrates all three of these aspects: 1) he loves Ruth; 2) he publicly declares his covenant with her through the redemption of her and her family, and their marriage in verse 13; and 3) they have intimate sexual relations within the marriage covenant. God's covenant with his people is permanent, and the marriage covenant between a man and a woman is also permanent. When we think of marriage as a model of God's relationship with His people, we have a solid foundation on which to build our own marriage.

Again, as we look at sex in the modern context, its primary function seems to be purely satisfaction of our desires. However, in the Bible, sexual relations were designed not only for pleasure, but just as importantly for reproduction. Boaz and Ruth are intimate and Ruth gets pregnant with a child. God's providence is visible here in their relationship, because Ruth appeared to be married to Mahlon for 10 years yet did not conceive. Boaz and Ruth immediately conceived and had a son. God's hand was again working behind the scenes to ensure that His plan was accomplished. Moreover, verse 13 makes it clear that the Lord gave Ruth the ability to conceive and have a child. The Lord's timing is perfect, and He works His plan to the benefit and honor of His glorious name, and consequently also to the joy and delight for his people as well.

Something should be stated here about conception and birth, and the Lord's work in both of those activities. The Lord had a plan that He was working behind the scenes in

³¹ Atkinson, p. 121.

the lives of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. God weaves the decisions and everyday occurrences of our lives into His magnificent plan, and we witness Him doing the same thing in the lives of Ruth and Boaz. However, what we can see, but what Ruth and Boaz cannot see, is that they will have a son who is the grandfather of David, through whose line is born the Messiah and savior Jesus Christ. The Lord had plans for the child of Ruth and Boaz before the child was born. When the Bible states that the Lord gave Ruth conception, we also see that life begins long before the child is physically born into this world. The biblical witness leaves no doubt that life begins at conception, and that God through his overarching providence plans and conceives life.

In chapter 1, after the death of her husband and sons, Naomi could not imagine in her mind how God could provide her with a son and an heir to care for her and her family. She was bitter and cried out that the Lord had gone out against her. She went to Moab full, but came back to Bethlehem empty. However, what she didn't realize was that she was far from empty, as Ruth had stuck with her, committed herself to her, and become a follower of the one true God. Ruth was the means through which God provided Naomi with a grandson. The people of the town bless him, and pray that God will make his name great in all of Israel. He will be the one to take care of Naomi in her old age. The townspeople proclaim that this grandson is worth more than seven sons. So while Naomi in chapter 1 could not possibly imagine how she was to survive, despite the fact that Ruth was with her, in chapter 4, she has a redeemer grandson who is praised and blessed by all of the people, who will one day be in the line of the Messiah. God can achieve what the human mind cannot conceive, and He proves it to Naomi throughout the book of Ruth, culminating in the birth of her grandson and grandfather to David.

In the beginning Naomi had bitterly accused God of emptying her life by robbing her of her husband and her two sons. But now the women console her; she may have lost her sons, but she has gained a daughter-in-law. And what a daughter-in-law Ruth is! Ruth loves Naomi. In fact, in her action we observe one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the meaning of the Hebrew word for love or kindness, *hesed*. Whereas modern definitions of love tend to view the word as an emotional term, in the Old Testament love is fundamentally an expression of commitment, the kind of devotion to which Ruth had given such eloquent verbal expression in 1:16–17. But “love” is not

demonstrated primarily in words; it is expressed in acts of kindness, placing the welfare of the other ahead of oneself. In fact, more than anyone else in the history of Israel, Ruth embodies the fundamental principle of the nation's ethic: "You shall love your God with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 6:5) "and your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). In Leviticus 19:34 Moses instructs the Israelites to love the stranger as they love themselves. Ironically, it is this stranger from Moab who shows the Israelites what this means.

In the time of the judges, when Israel was under attack both from without and within, when sin and disobedience abounded, it perhaps might have seemed that Israel would disintegrate and God's covenant promises would be lost. However, in the midst of all of this turmoil and strife, God was preserving his people, and continuing to work his plan and providence in the lives of ordinary people. He continued to work his covenant of love and redemption in the lives of those who loved Him. "Surrounded by the Lord's covenant-love, they experienced His redemptive grace, not only in establishing and developing their personal relationships, but in those relationships reflecting what He was doing on the macroscale, in preparing His people for their coming king."³² In the lives of an ordinary family, in a time of great hardship and suffering, two people trusted God to provide for them and bless them. Two people decided that no matter what their circumstances, they would live and demonstrate *hesed* to others, regardless of the cost. This family, used by God working his plan in and through their lives, was blessed beyond all imagination, and was used to bless all nations and all peoples for eternity.

³² Jackman, D., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1991). Vol. 7: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 7 : *Judges, Ruth*. (352). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.