

Forbidden Love

A Commentary on
The Book of Ruth

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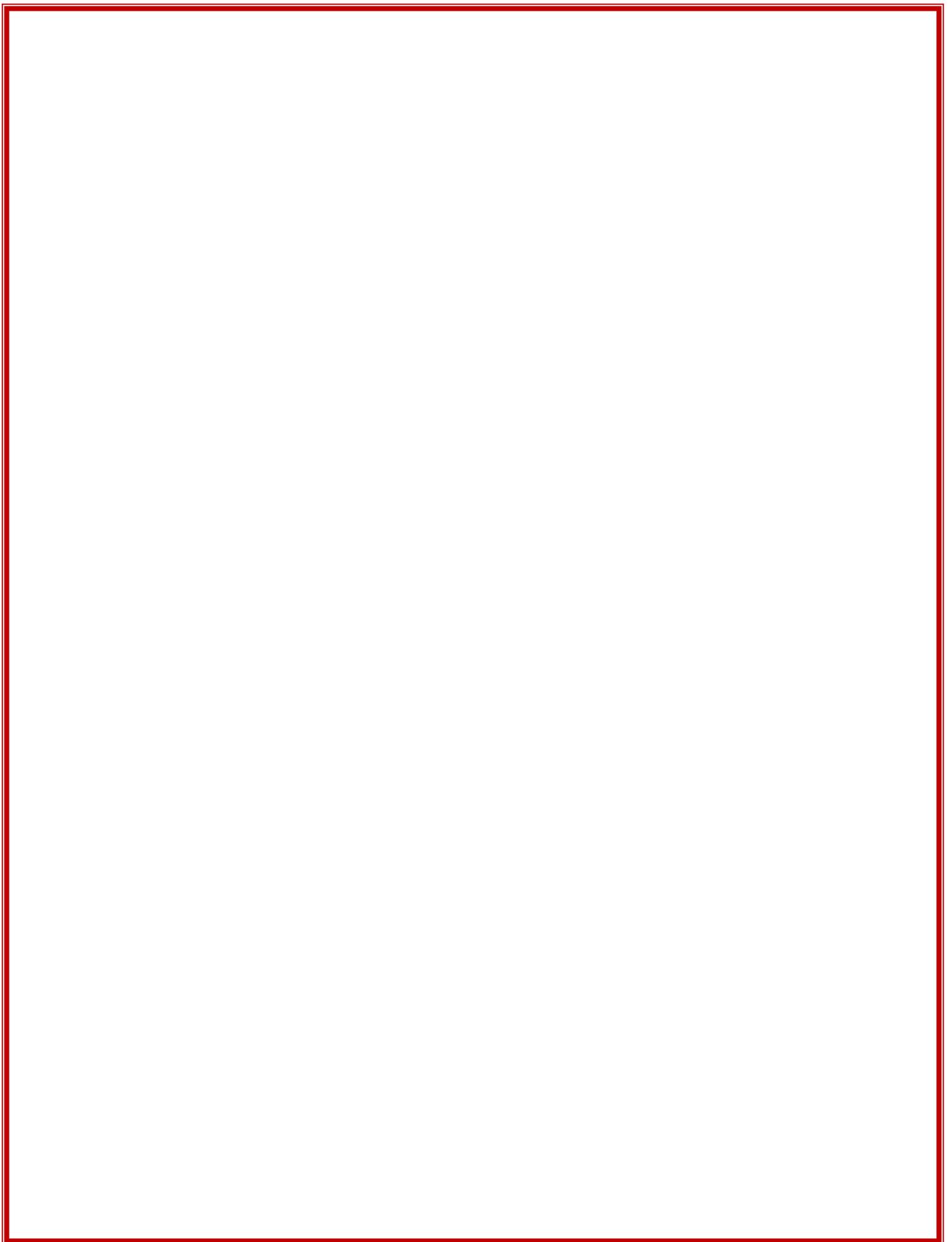


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Book Introduction

Overview

Although destruction and violence ran rampant in the streets of many of Israel's cities and towns, and no good came out of everyone choosing what seemed right to them during the times of the Judges, one story stands out in romantic and godly contrast to the norm. Within this dark and devious history a story about following God's law and His unexpected involvement in the mundane lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz produces an extraordinary account of how God changed the fortunes of everyone involved.

Each character begins the story in what they thought was a good place until unfortunate events begin to play out and they find themselves steeped in the worst situations life has to offer them in their time. With good counsel and godly character, these wonderful people begin to see God working behind the scenes to form a most perfect new beginning that brings each of them the greatest joy, and also gives us a background into two of the most important kings of all history! Do you feel like God doesn't care about your mundane life? Well, the story of Ruth will challenge that belief to its core.

Author

The author does not make an appearance or claim to the book. Tradition suggests that Samuel was the writer, having written the books of Samuel, Judges and Ruth. But because we have no information about the author, no one can claim with certainty who it may be. Sometimes those who wish to push the date of the book to a late date have a different author than Samuel and it also depends on what a person thinks is the purpose of the book as we will see below.

Date

The book begins by telling us the setting or time period of the book's happenings. It is set in the time of the judges. However, some scholars have made claims based on their understanding of the book's purpose that the date of writing, not the setting, could be far removed from the time of the judges. If this were so, it would significantly change the book's orthodox and written point of view that is written in that time of political and spiritual upheaval during the time where judges led Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. I would suggest that arguments for a later date based on a foreign purpose are superfluous to what is found within the pages of the book itself. It was written around the time of the judges.

Audience

The book of Ruth contains certain customs and characteristics that make it an excellent read for a Jewish audience. In fact, the book of Ruth is read during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks. This is a harvest festival in which the people

celebrate whatever crops have come in the storage house. Within the bounds of the book of Ruth, the main character, Ruth, is often harvesting grain so that she can take it home. The marriage proposal of the book takes place at the threshing floor. These are all the background for the book which make it perfect for a book to read aloud at a harvest celebration like the Feast of Weeks.

Often, the specific audiences that would have enjoyed the book of Ruth are tied into the purpose that a scholar picks for the book, as you will see below. Suffice it to say, because of the customs of Levirate Marriage and the Kinsman Redeemer, the book would make less sense to anyone outside the Jewish community. It also has a Jewish audience because it gives the background to King David's line. This would not be so important to most other cultures.

Purpose

Several purposes for Ruth have been put forth by scholars of all backgrounds. One unlikely suggestion from more liberal scholars that would love to date the book much later suggests that it is a post-exilic book that seeks to offer a critique or referendum, even a polemic, on Ezra's policy of not marrying foreign women upon return to the promise land. This evidence is gathered by seeing the marriage of a foreign woman before the exile as a positive custom in Israel. However, the book contains no polemical language or structure. No one in the book claims that this custom is the best thing since sliced bread, so it is most likely that the book was not written as a polemic against Ezra's administrative laws.

Other purposes have been postulated as well. Because of the genealogy at the end of the book, which most scholars suggest is added on at a later date, many have suggested that the purpose of Ruth is to explain the gentile influences on the line of King David. While it is true that the genealogy, which actually fits with the structure of the book, does provide this important data, that genealogy is only seven verses out of the whole book. It is most likely that this is not the overarching purpose for the book.

Others have suggested that the book provides a contrast and balancing effect to the time of the judges. This is more sensible because it shows us that in a time where many Israelites avoided following the Law of God to the letter, there were others who did indeed follow God's law and reap its benefits. While the cold, dark world of doing whatever seems right to a man inundates Jewish culture in the judges, the book of Ruth provides a lighter and brighter image of people following the desires of the Lord recorded in His Law.

Other possible purposes have to do with the placement of the book within different canons. The Hebrew Bible places the book after Psalms. But the Septuagint places Ruth after Proverbs. Finally, the Christian canon places Ruth after the historical context of Judges. The reason the book falls after Psalms in the Hebrew canon is that it is the first of five books that are read during the festivals held throughout the year.

The Septuagint interestingly puts Ruth after the Proverbs probably based on the "noble woman" from Proverbs 31:10-31. After providing wisdom on the noble woman worth marrying, we see an example of Ruth as the noble woman, called that by Boaz in Ruth 3:11. So we not only see the wisdom and theoretical example of such a desired noble woman, but in reading the next

book, we see a historical example of the noble woman in Ruth. The Christian canon puts the book behind Judges to show that it fits within the time period, creating a purpose of showing a much brighter side to the dark side of the judges. Each placement produces a different purpose for the book. The first, the Hebrew canon, stresses its importance in festivals. The second, the Septuagint, uses it as an example of the noble woman desired in wisdom, and the third, the Christian canon, shows that there were obedient and noble people living in the darkest time in Israelite history. All of these are possible contenders for the purpose of the book.

Most appealing is one of the suggestions that the book is written to show us that God rewards godly character and is involved even in the mundane and regular events of our lives. Throughout the book, we see people with excellent character doing what God has commanded in honorable ways with great integrity and loyalty. God rewards these attributes with a better lifestyle that is desired by the characters and also brings about a better destiny and new setting than in the beginning of the book. Such a purpose teaches us, as most Old Testament passages carry a didactic function, that the Lord is intimately knowledgeable and involved with our lives and that He seeks to bless those who willingly and sacrificially serve Him.

Genre

Ruth is a classic historical short Jewish narrative. The genre of romance could also be considered for the book because that is the driving force of the plot. In fact, it fits very nicely into a four act play. The narrative provides a background and setting, dynamic and static characters, a well developed plot, and conflicts of all kinds. It also presents a classic denouement, a new beginning that is favorable for all the characters at the end.

There is great literary skill involved in the narrative of Ruth which we will see as we focus in on the different acts and scenes of the narrative and enjoy the superb storytelling capabilities of the author. Every part of this short narrative is expertly crafted into a timeless tale of love and loyalty and heroic character.

Throughout the book the author uses literary conventions such as dialogue and intrigue, as well as other common devices. We will talk about these as we come to them. The book starts with a conflict that continues to deepen and deepen until it seems impossible to resolve. The backgrounds of the characters make the narrative more and more interesting as the climax continues to a crescendo. This timeless and classic romance will not only please aesthetically but also teach us about character and God's influence in our lives.

Theological Themes

Several themes come through the book as it is read. Some of them come right out of the Law of Moses, such as Levirate Marriage. This is one of the ways to show how much God cares for the poor and downcast in Israelite society. God's provision for the poor is also seen in the leaving of crops to be gleaned by the poor. Four groups within the Law are given special provision by the Lord: orphans, widows, foreigners and the poor. Ruth qualifies as three of these. Naomi qualifies as two of these. The Lord cares deeply about the poor and downcast. So should

we who believe in Him. When we, like Boaz, have the means to help these groups that are close to God's heart, we should not hesitate to glorify Him through action that better their life.

Not only does God care for the lowly, but He also is intricately involved in each person's life. Although it is not officially stated within the book, the Lord is working in the background, making things happen "by chance" as the book says in chapter two. The Lord is making sure that things line up even in the bad times in the beginning of the book. He gives Naomi a loyal daughter-in-law who refuses to leave her side despite the rejection she may feel in Israel. The Lord then provides Boaz, a wealthy landowner, who is interested in Ruth, a widowed foreign poor woman, to take care of their mutual issues. At every turn of the book, He is changing the fortunes and destinies of the main characters and working out even the details of their relationships so that they might be together.

Another theological theme is the godly character of the individuals that is favored and rewarded by the Lord. Boaz is a man of integrity who seeks to do what is right in every situation in the book. While he could marry Ruth before informing a closer relative, he instead deals with the relative in public first. When he sees Ruth working hard in the fields, he makes it easier for her to gather grain for her family. Ruth shows godly character in being loyal to Naomi and also in trusting in the Lord as a Moabite. Although she is a foreigner to Israel's customs and God, she still is willing to go there and live in that culture. She shows great poise and strength of character in doing so.

The book also points to the restoration of destiny for these godly individuals. In the beginning of the book, the many things that go wrong become trials and snares to the women. Naomi leaves her homeland because of a famine. She must then live in a foreign land and her sons die after marrying Moabite women. She then is left as a widow without an heir and therefore cannot own property putting her in a very vulnerable level as a pauper.

Boaz is a righteous man who restores the fortunes of these women. God uses Boaz to bring restoration to broken lives and relationships. He replaces through Levirate marriage Naomi's lost sons and also marries a poor and destitute Ruth who is a widow and incapable of owning any land. He also restores some land that Naomi owns through being the kinsman redeemer. While the book starts in the darkest of situations, the restoration that the Lord works in the background is uncanny and noticeable. Beyond this, the Lord restores the destiny of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz by putting them in the line of King David as part of the reward for their upstanding character. The fact that Ruth is barren in her first marriage and has a child with Boaz also brings out this theme of restoration.

Finally, another theological highlight to the book is the idea of the kinsman redeemer who is able to restore the land and fortunes of the destitute women. In the book, Boaz is the kinsman redeemer who is willing to put his own life on the line to redeem not just the land of Naomi but the relationship status of Ruth. He also provides an heir for Naomi to continue the family line and redeem it. The word redeem means to buy back, and he certainly does this with the land and the family line. As we look through the pages of this lovely story, we also see Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, as a type of Christ, who later sacrificially restores our relationship with

God through redemption. We are adopted into God's family because Jesus mediated between God and humanity to bring restoration as well.

Book Outline

- I. Act I: The Lord Taketh Away (Ruth 1:1-22).
 - A. Scene 1. Trouble in the land of Moab (1:1-5).
 - B. Scene 2. On the Road Again (1:6-18).
 - C. Scene 3. A Bitter Disposition (1:19-22).
- II. Act II: All in a Day's Work (Ruth 2:1-23).
 - A. Scene 1. Putting Bread on the Table (2:1-7).
 - B. Scene 2. A Special Dispensation (2:8-13).
 - C. Scene 3. The First Date (2:14-23).
- III. Act III: Engaged (3:1-18).
 - A. Scene 1: The Plan (3:1-5).
 - B. Scene 3: Midnight Rendezvous (3:6-13).
 - C. Scene 2: Love is in the Air (3:14-18).
- IV. Act IV: Hold the Line (4:1-22).
 - A. Scene 1: Legal Eagles (4:1-12).
 - B. Scene 2: It's a Boy (4:13-22)!

Ruth Chapter 1

Act 1: The Lord Taketh Away (Ruth 1:1-22)

Section 1: Trouble in the Land of Moab (Ruth 1:1-5)

Introduction

Times were hard in the period of the judges. Famines and loss of food were common, especially when the enemies around Israel occupied them and stole their crops. But we hear about a family in Bethlehem that endures a famine by leaving and going to Moab instead. They outsourced their lives so they could survive, but at every turn, the situation continues to become more dire for them. They end up coming back worse than when they left! In the worst of their situation, is the Lord still there? Does He still have followers in the midst of the worst life ever? We will find that loyalty and love for God go beyond the outer circumstances that envelop our lives.

Translation

1 Then it happened in the days when the judges judged that there was a famine in the earth. So a man from Bethlehem of Judah left to sojourn in the fields of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. **2** Now the name of the man was Elimelek, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephraimites from Bethlehem of Judah. Thus they came to the fields of Moab and they stayed there. **3** But Elimelek, the husband of Naomi, died, and she remained with her two sons. **4** And they took for themselves Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. Thus they dwelt there about ten years. **5** Then the two of them, both Mahlon and Chilion died. So the woman was left without her two sons and without a husband.

Commentary

In common story form, the most excellent use of the Hebrew language, we begin a historical story laid out for us in perfect form. Starting with the setting, we meet a family that lives in Judah, in Bethlehem. We learn that they lived in some of the darkest and hardest times of Israel, before there were kings and when people stopped listening to the guidance of the Lord. So the Lord's only recourse in this time was to raise up judges that would rule parts of Israel. They weren't like the kings, centralized with full authority. They were raised up for a certain need. The Lord takes care of Israel and each of us even in the darkest times of life! He never lets go or leaves us to our own devices. He has always had a redemptive plan for your life! That's one of the elements of the story of Ruth we learn.

This family lives in a city that means, "House of Bread." How would you feel if you worked at a place named "Waffle House" and when you came to work, the boss said, "We're all out of waffles and won't have any for the foreseeable future, so we're not going to give any to the people." But you work at a Waffle House! What will you serve to the customers if not

waffles? The same thing happened in their hometown of Bethlehem. The place that always had bread had no bread now. The famine was severe enough and unrelenting to make Elimelek, the leader of the household move the whole family to a foreign land just to survive.

The parents in the family had wonderful and special names. Elimelek means, “God is King,” a good strong Hebrew name. And his wife, Naomi, meant something like “pleasant.” Who wouldn’t want to marry a woman whose name promises a pleasant life? It also doesn’t get better to have two sons in this time as they work the fields and pass on the family name and keep the property in the family. They named their sons Mahlon and Chilion. Mahlon, we will learn toward the end of the book (4:10), is Ruth’s husband, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Each of the two sons owned land along with their father in Israel, and even though they had left to go to Moab, that land still belonged in the family.

The family living in Bethlehem were referred to as Ephraimites. This could have been a geographical or even a tribal reference. We can’t really be sure which is referred to here, but suffice it to say, this is a very solid Jewish background family. They only leave because they need to survive. So they pack up and start on a journey to Moab, a much more adequate place for farming that is less affected by famine. An astute listener would hear the number of times in these first five verses that the word for “leaving” is used. There is a lot of leaving of familiar places and people. The family leaves Bethlehem for Moab, and the wife Naomi is left by her dead husband to fend for herself. Her sons take care of her, of course, but then they both leave her and her daughters-in-law as they pass away. And then Naomi decides to leave Moab. There’s a lot of leaving throughout our story and there’s a lot of heartbreak as well.

We’re not told how long they are in the land of Moab until a tragic event occurs. It could have been years or months or days, but Elimelek, the father of the house, dies. He left behind his wife and their two sons. Naomi now is under the care of her sons by Jewish customary law. So she stays now with them but the loss of a spouse is not something one easily forgets. How much in those days did Naomi miss her husband, his fingerprints seemingly in everything that she shared with her sons. The situation continues to spiral down for this family, and strength can only last so long when it is tested with extreme pressure.

Her sons seek for themselves wives from the Moabite women. It is not extremely uncommon in the Old Testament for Israelites to take foreign wives, especially when they are living outside of Israel. So ten years of marital bliss surround the family, but all of a sudden, things get worse! If you can believe it or not, this family has quite an issue with its males staying alive, for after about ten years, both brothers die. They leave also. They leave behind their wives and their mother. In a culture where being a widow is the gateway to being poor, these women are destined to be poor and childless and widows. Can things possibly get any worse? Never ask that question.

Now these two women that the boys married seem like nice girls. But it seems that neither of them bore any children, at least not boys. There was no way for them to help carry on the family name or to have a male figure to take possession of the family property. Ruth’s name might mean something like “friendship” and we’re not sure what Orpah’s name means. Names

are very important in Scripture because they usually coincide with the character of the person who bears them. Ruth does show much friendship to her mother-in-law Naomi. And we will see how important names are in the last section of chapter one.

Nevertheless, these women are all left in Moab destitute and without any means of security or prosperity. They are left to their own devices as all of the men in their lives pass away. What would you do if you were Naomi? How would you react to so many heartbreaking situations in a row? We will find out what she and her daughters-in-law do very soon, but ponder the moment that is presented in the story here. This is just as bad as Job's situation, and as many outlined in Scripture that take us to the brink of wondering if God even exists, and if He exists, if He has some kind of vendetta against us. But how we react under the pressure of such moments is the very beginning of character formation.

Application

From the very beginning of this beautiful love story, we are introduced to characters of strong attributes and fortifications. These are people with good names and reputations. They are people who are able to endure great losses, and many of them through time. In a world where such catastrophes could have resulted in the same types of sinful indulgences we see in other parts of Israel throughout the time of the judges, we see people of high character attempting to deal with whatever life has brought before them.

Their character has not even been fully exposed to us, and yet we sense that we are about to learn about some extraordinary people. What would others say if they saw or read your life story up to this point? Would they honor you as a person of character and principle and integrity? Or would they see someone who buckles under the pressures of life? What is your reputation? What kinds of trials have you had to deal with in life? How do you cope with less than adequate circumstances? Naomi and Elimelek were willing to leave the House of Bread to find a way to make ends meet, to leave family and friends and their own country. What would you do? Would you be willing to leave your country for God's sake?

Such an opening challenges each of us as we are given a glimpse into these people's lives. What of our own character? Are we strong and noble? More so than that, can we learn how to get by when life throws us curveballs? Are we the kind of people that survive or even thrive in such situations, or do we cave under the pressure? Ask the Lord to help you become a person of noble character who lives with excellence despite the situations that surround your life.

Section 2: On the Road Again (Ruth 1:6-18)

Introduction

While many would give up, consider themselves cursed, and go hide somewhere, or simply live out a miserable existence, Naomi is a woman of extremely fortified character. When life kicks her down, she gets back up and goes for the gold. This part of the story is about the worst part in the whole narrative. Not only did Naomi share with her daughters-in-law the

anguish of saying goodbye to her husband and her sons, but now she must say goodbye to her daughters-in-law, for the road ahead is hard and life in Israel will hold nothing for foreign widows who are poor. The smartest thing to do is send the women back to their own land to search for another husband. But Naomi will discover that while both women do not wish to depart, one of them refuses against all odds to give up following her back to her people and is willing to completely assimilate into the worst of lifestyles with no promise of any comforts.

Translation

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law and returned from the fields of Moab because she heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord visited His people to give to them bread. **7** So she went out from the place where she was there, and her two daughters-in-law with her and they traveled on the road to return to the land of Judah. **8** But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go along! Return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal in lovingkindness toward you just as you have dealt with the dead and with me. **9** May the Lord give to you that you may find rest, each of you in her husband’s house!” Then she kissed them and they raised their voices and wept.

10 But they said to her, “Surely with you we will return to your people!” **11** But Naomi said, “Return my daughters! Why will you walk with me? Are there still sons in my womb that they may become for you husbands? **12** Return, my daughters! Walk, for I am too old to have a husband! If I said I have hope, even if I had a husband this night, and even bear sons, **13** would you then wait until they were grown? Would you refrain, then, to be without a husband? No, my daughters, for it is beyond bitter to me for your sakes. For the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.”

14 Then they raised their voices and wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. **15** And she said, “Look! Your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law!”

16 But Ruth said to her, “Don’t implore me to leave you, to return from following you, for wherever you walk, I will walk. And wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. **17** Wherever you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me and thus even more, for only death will separate me from you.” **18** So when she saw that she was determined to walk with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Commentary

There was nothing left in Moab for Naomi. Life was no longer pleasant for the woman named for pleasant. She had lost everything, her home in Israel, her husband, both of her boys, and there was nothing left for her to enjoy. After mourning for all of her losses, she made a decision to go back to her homeland. Some people don’t look for options in the worst of times. They give up and consider their lives over.

But not so with Naomi. She is a woman of strong character who is never completely dragged down and out. Perhaps one day in the fields of Moab, she discovered through

conversation or from overhearing a conversation that Bethlehem, the House of Bread, had bread again! She could return to the property. Sure, she didn't technically own it. It belonged to her nearest male relative. But perhaps she might find someone to redeem it. Nevermind that the possibility someone would marry her and redeem her and her land was extremely slim because of her age.

Naomi made a conscious decision to leave Moab behind instead of continue to be left behind herself. Of course, her daughters-in-law had gone through all of this with her. They had grown so close together that they went with her. They gathered up all of their things and for the first time in our story left behind something of their own. They took the 100 mile trek, the whole week's journey to return from Moab to Bethlehem, Naomi's homeland.

Throughout the Bible, the word visit is used mostly in negative terms, but sometimes it is used in positive ways. The word itself reminds us that God is not a God who stands far off and watches things happen. He gets involved. He visits! The prophets used this word mostly in a negative context, for God to visit His punishing judgment upon Israel or one of the ungodly nations around Israel. But here, the word is used in a rarely positive sense, that the Lord visited blessing and prosperity back on the land of Bethlehem. That was all the reason Naomi needed to return. Perhaps the God who had allowed all of this bitterness in her life, who seemed to be against her at every turn, would once again show her blessing if she returned to the place He was blessing.

Now Naomi was happy to have the company of these young daughters-in-law with her. They were family, despite their blood or background. But then as they were on the road, working their way back to her home, she realized that she was taking these poor women into the most dangerous and uncomfortable lifestyles that could be! Though she loved these women so much, they had indeed become daughters to her legally through marriage, but even more so through their suffering with such great losses.

She had forgotten that as they would enter the land of Israel, these women would have at least three strikes against them. They were widows. Widows had no claim to any land or property. They had no one to protect or provide for them, and were viewed with pity despite their abilities or age. On top of being widows, they were, unlike her, also foreigners to Israel. That was a second count against a good lifestyle. They would never really fit in, and the chances of finding a spouse dwindled because they weren't Israelites. Because of these first two facts, the third fact became quite clear to Naomi as she worked it out in silence on the road to Israel. These women would be poor as she was, without any option for remarriage and therefore without any inheritance or protection. This simply would not do for such wonderful women!

She must do something, and fast. They were well on their way. There was only one thing to do. They must be freed from following her and sent back to their mothers. They still had a chance to find a husband as Moabites in Moab. She must not let them continue into certain lifeless lifestyles! She must command them to go back, for they had become too close to simply suggest it. Though she didn't want to let them go, she had to make them believe she did not want them to come with her.

She turned to these poor women and commanded them to turn around and go back the way they came, to go back to their true mothers' houses. She challenged them to find a husband again and so enjoy a life of protection and provision, to leave her to her own bitter life. She wished to not be the cause of their discomfort, whether in Moab or Israel. She wanted their best because she loved them, and although it would cause her pain to miss their presence, she must do this for their benefit.

As she attempted to push them away from her accursed path, knowing that the Lord's hand was against her, she made her position clear to them. But she was not yelling at them in anger. She feared for their future if they stayed this course with her. They must find something better. She blessed them in the name of her Lord. She asked Him to deal with them in the same lovingkindness and loyal love that she had been shown by such wonderful daughters-in-law. She asked the Lord to give them rest and husbands so that they would have protection and provision.

She kissed them goodbye and pushed them on their way, but they would not budge. They would not leave her. Like puppies pulled away from their new owners, they wept and as she kissed them, they refused to leave her side. Their loyalty was touching, but they had no idea how tough it would be if they did come with her. After all, they had been wonderful and faithful wives to her dead sons, and wonderful daughters to her. She could not allow them to suffer anymore. She must walk the accursed path with the Lord's hand against her only, not against them as well by association.

When they were stubbornly refusing to go, she had to reason with them. She asked them if she could bear more sons that could give them that protection and provision. She was too old for childbearing. That wouldn't work. She could not provide this thing for them. Even if she could provide it this very night, right now, the children would have to grow. That would be years! Would these women put their lives on hold for that?

That kind of loyalty would simply make her life more bitter because she would be directly responsible for their lives being on hold. There has been enough bitterness in life. No need to add to it any more! They must go. The decision was clear. No argument about it. The women would go back. And now. They wept again and raised their voices. No one wanted this but everyone needed it. To be separated from family is the hardest decision that can be made! But they must be strong and continue their lives without the bitterness that seemed to envelop her life.

Orpah was obedient to her mother-in-law. She finally after much crying and talking gave in, kissed her on the cheek and said farewell, returning to her homeland and to her mother's house to continue on hopefully with a better life than she had or could have if she continued with Naomi. What a good daughter to be obedient even when it hurt to do so! Not everyone learns how to be obedient like that. In fact most people aren't obedient. She would be chided and picked on when this story was told because she so easily went back to a familiar lifestyle. But oh how much she fought to continue on. She was not as tough a cookie as her mother-in-law. Would that we would all learn such obedience even when it hurt to obey!

Not so with Ruth! She was so loyal! Too loyal. Was she throwing her life away just to stay by Naomi's side? Naomi would not have it. She adjured and implored Ruth to be obedient like her sister-in-law. But Ruth would have none of it! She clung to Naomi like a man is to leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. Her loyalty, although commendable, was going to cause her more bitterness and heartache in life. Naomi was to the point of prying her off and pushing her away when the most loyal and loving statement that had ever been made to her flowed like honey from Ruth's lips.

The young woman stared her mother-in-law down and pledged undying loyalty to her and didn't care what would come. Naomi thought she was bold and bullheaded, but she had met her match! Ruth proclaimed that only death would separate the two of them from one another. She said that she would follow in Naomi's footsteps no matter what may come. No outside circumstance would stop Ruth. She didn't care about bitterness! She didn't care about being poor or widowed or a stranger!

Not only that, but she committed herself without reservation to Naomi's God, to the Lord Almighty! This woman was ready to be fully integrated into Jewish society! She was willing to learn a new culture, to leave behind everything she ever knew and loved because of what she saw in Naomi. Wouldn't it be wonderful if those who don't know God would want to be with His people just because of their connection to God? What would it look like if unbelievers flocked with loyalty to God because of the reputation of believers?

Ruth would not be denied. The talking didn't work and as they continued on the road, they got closer and closer to Israel. The woman would not listen to her at all. She could see that fire of loyalty in her eyes. There was no way to dissuade her, so Naomi quit trying for the first time in her life to arrange things the way she thought best. Besides, in her heart of hearts, she was overjoyed that Ruth was so willing to endure the worst of life with her. Though she tried to push everyone she loved away, it didn't work, and she was glad.

They set themselves like flint to return to Naomi's people and homeland, in hope to change their fortunes, so that the Lord would turn His hand of bitterness away from them and that they might enjoy the blessing of the hand of the Lord that was blessing the House of Bread with bread. They returned to Bethlehem the worse for wear, but they were home!

Application

Many people attempt to push others away in the same moment that they need them the most. We need to be people who refuse to let our friends suffer like lone rangers all on their own. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation and of being a help to others. Sometimes your mere presence is all that is needed, a hand to hold through the roughest voyages of someone's life.

But being such a person of loyalty will be costly. Don't think for a second that it is a cinch. There may be personal sacrifice and pain involved in your decision to bear pain and bitterness with another. But you must be fully committed. You cannot run when the going gets

tough. You must develop the character trait of loyalty as Ruth did. Her commitment is uncanny and extremely rare in any society.

We must also remember that no matter how bad things get in our lives, though the Lord allows them, He has a greater picture in mind. This is of little comfort in the midst of the storm, but we must notice that He is there with us, holding our hand through it, crying with us and enduring having to watch but not interfere so that we can grow and be stronger. The only way to strengthen is to apply resistance.

The Lord surely does not enjoy our storms and trials. But they are absolutely necessary for us to grow in Him. He walks with us, and we all walk the path together. Don't be a gossip or a slanderer as a believer. Reach out to others in genuine love, not to get some juicy material for your "prayer meeting" for them. If you can't do that, then don't reach out to them at all. We need Ruths to help us in the church today! Let us be used by God to show His larger good plan over the small bad situation in our lives.

Section 3: A Bitter Disposition (Ruth 1:19-22)

Introduction

In the short section following Ruth's loyal choice to serve her mother-in-law until death, a commitment just as deep as marriage, we find the women arriving finally at their destination in Bethlehem. The town is small, and so everyone comes to greet them, especially the women of the town, happy to hear about Naomi's travels, but Naomi is in a bitter mood. She tells them how the Lord has been against her and her life has been bitter and miserable since the famine. In this respect, Naomi sounds much like Job and David in being upfront and honest about how they feel after going through such horrible trials. We should not sugar-coat our lives. When things are bad, admitting how bad they are only makes the story of God's restoration greater.

Translation

19 So the two of them walked on until they came to Bethlehem. Then it happened when they arrived at Bethlehem that the whole town was stirred up because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" **20** And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara because the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. **21** I was filled when I walked away, but empty the Lord has returned me. Why then would you call me Naomi when the Lord has answered against me and the Almighty *brought* calamity to me?" **22** So Naomi and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, returned with her, who returned from the fields of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Commentary

Finally the little town of Bethlehem filled the horizon as the women drew near. It was a very small town, so Naomi knew that everyone and their sister would want to know how things

went. She was not prepared to be welcomed as the pleasant woman who left when such bitterness had so reversed her fortunes in life.

As they entered the city, they became instant celebrities, the women gathering around them and wanting to know every detail. But neither of the women wanted to regurgitate the pains of yesterday nor did they want to relive the deaths of their beloved husbands, nor the separation of family by any means. Naomi instead ended up telling the women with naked honesty exactly how things went for her in these years.

Naomi's name meant pleasant, but she did not feel pleasant, nor was her life pleasant. It was a life of learning how to leave and let go of the dearest people in her life. Such scars barely covered a deep sense of bitterness for the loss and pain of so many years. And that pain erupted when she heard that name again. In biblical times, a name was everything. It was your reputation, and your life tended to line up with that name. But when it did not, you were seen as pitied.

So Naomi informs the crowd of gossiping women that her life was not at all pleasant. In fact, they should rename her Mara. Mara in Hebrew is the word for bitter, like when the waters were bitter in Moses' day before the tree made them sweet and pleasant. Even in admitting the Lord's dealing as bitter with her, Naomi does not forget to revere and honor Him, referring to Him as the Almighty. That name for God often implies His protection and provision for His people. How curious that Naomi would acknowledge God's provision for all her needs without the husband and sons to provide and protect her and her family!

She might have blamed herself, thought herself some accursed person by God. This might be the reason for trying to push others away, not wanting to endure being the one at fault for their sudden bitterness as well. But the Lord was still providing for her despite her thoughts of how He allowed bitterness, and despite not having men in their lives to provide and protect, the Lord is Almighty in His provision and protection.

Naomi could not resist but completely join in her fifteen minutes of fame. So she contrasted how she left and how she now returns. When she left, she was full, despite a famine that was the cause of leaving Bethlehem. Now she was empty, had food from the fields in Moab but without a husband and sons, with no way to carry on her family line. She even used the word "evil" when she talked about what the Lord brought to her.

Most of our English versions don't translate the word "evil" as evil when speaking of the Lord because in English, the word has a negative moral connotation. But that is not how it is seen in Hebrew. Evil can be a calamity without a moral value. It can be what we perceive as evil in our own perspective, but is not caused by moral decay. For instance, if God let us endure the consequences of horrible sins, we would not consider His judgment to allow consequences morally wrong. We would consider the consequences evils that we must endure. So Naomi sees her life in this way, calamity after calamity and death after death that are not moral problems but evil things that did not go her way.

The tension is that while Naomi sees the Lord allowing afflictions and calamities to come her way, she twice calls Him by His provisionary and protecting name Almighty. This means

“God of the mountains.” He can provide all things and He is a strong fortress to His people. Is there a way to acknowledge that He is sovereign over all things, even the calamities of our lives, and still yet provides and protects at every turn? Naomi never suffered without having her basic needs met. But she also endured terrible events in her life. If only we could learn to honor God even in the midst of the calamities and trials of our own lives!

We are given a nice finishing statement in the last verse of the chapter that tells us when Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem. This is important because it sets up the rest of the book by giving us the environment of the harvest time, where Ruth will go to the fields to harvest and everything in the book will center around harvesting surroundings. Ruth is described in so many different ways here. She is the foreign Moabite woman, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, and the person who returned with Naomi. Her descriptions show an evolution of her character so far. First she was a foreigner from a strange land. Then she became a relative of Naomi, and finally, she has become the woman of faith who stayed the course in the face of future hardships.

There is also a sense that the tides of the book are shifting, as the leaving begins to fade into the background and the blessing of the Lord is about to be poured out. The final statement tells us that they arrived at the House of Bread, at Bethlehem, at the time when the Lord was blessing it with heaps of barley. The House of Bread is full again, and it’s a good thing too, because Naomi has returned empty. There is a new beginning in the winds of change!

Application

We have much to learn from Naomi. She still honors God despite her circumstances. She is open and honest, real and genuine with God and her friends. She does not allow the bitterness to fester within her but opens up and expresses the calamities in her life. What a healthy spiritual position to take.

We must learn to trust in God no matter what we face, even if He is allowing what we perceive to be evil or calamity in our lives. We will suffer hardships and afflictions. We are in a fallen world that is corrupted and decaying because of sin. It is sin collectively, not even specific sins or moral and ethical failures. It all adds up. We must never blame God for the sins we commit or the calamities we face. Some of them are to make us stronger. Adversity produces strength.

We must not take from God His given right to be called Almighty, the provider and protector of our lives. He continues to do this even despite whatever situations or calamities we face. We must thank Him for His goodness to us, and look for what is gained as much as what is lost. Some people don’t like to admit sickness or speak of things that they are not pleased with in their lives. But if we never acknowledge the worst of times, how can we contrast them with the best of times?

Without the loss of husband and property and heirs, how could Naomi have such joy in chapter four when her grandson fulfills the levirate marriage and becomes her heir and also gives her life? The darkest night makes the brightest dawn all the more brighter. We need not glory in our shame or sin or darkness or calamity, but we should be brutally honest about how we

perceive it and feel about it. Even if our perspective is incorrect or incomplete, the Lord does not hold this against us. Instead like Job, He corrects us.

We must also never let the emotions deep inside of us remain unexpressed and bottled up. Then they will explode at the wrong time to the wrong person. We are not designed to bear the heavy burdens we place on ourselves. Naomi is open about her pains and hurts. Only when a wound is opened can it be cleaned and mended and healed.

Some people keep their wounds hidden deep inside, bleeding internally, and no one can see the hurt until it's too late, when they've already squeezed the wounds and received the volcanic eruptions of the wounded person. Let us learn to endure the lesser pain of cleaning and healing our wounds over the greater pain of wounding someone else more deeply than we have been wounded ourselves. Let us learn reconciliation before we inflict greater pains on others than we will ever know ourselves.

Ruth Chapter 2

Act II: All in a Day's Work

Section 1: Putting Bread on the Table (Ruth 2:1-7)

Introduction

When the women get back to Bethlehem and settle in, they still need to provide food for themselves. Naomi is older and probably not able to work the fields very well. Ruth takes it upon herself to do the hard labor that Naomi would have to do if she wasn't there with her. One of the themes of Ruth can be found as Ruth goes out to Boaz' field. In the mundane and ordinary chores of life, God does extraordinary things, working behind the scenes to make the impossible happen. Ruth goes to the field of a kinsman redeemer without previously knowing him, and he just happens to be a nice single guy who is more than willing to bless her for her loyalty to Naomi. The man understands loyalty and wants to bless her for it. Being a person of character means doing the hard work and putting others first, but God will bless you in ways you could never put together for yourself.

Translation

1 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a noble man from the clan of Elimelek, and his name was Boaz. **2** And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me walk to the field and glean among the ears of grain after which I may find favor in his sight." So she said to her, "You may go, my daughter." **3** So she walked by and went out and gleaned in a field after the harvesters, and she happened by fortune to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz who was from the clan of Elimelek. **4** And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" And they answered, "The Lord bless you!" **5** Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the harvesters, "Whose young woman is this?" **6** And the young man who was in charge of the harvesters answered and said, "She is the young Moabite who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab." **7** And she said, 'Please let me glean the sheaves behind the harvesters.' So she came and has continued in place from then in the morning until now, except for sitting in the house for a short rest."

Commentary

The story of how God worked all things together so that Boaz and Ruth would meet one another begins with a note from the storyteller, the narrator, to us as listeners and readers. We are privileged to be introduced to the hero of the story, Boaz, before Ruth meets him. One of the most important lessons we can learn from the historical story of Ruth and Boaz is mentioned about Boaz in our introduction. He is a great man, or a noble man. The last chapter of Proverbs talks about the "noble woman" but the same word for noble is used to describe both Boaz and Ruth.

So we're not talking about your ordinary people here. They may be in mundane and ordinary situations, but they are not ordinary people. They are special because they have noble character and they do what is righteous. They stand in stark bright contrast to the darkness all around them in the time of the judges where every man did what was right in his own sight. Instead, you have Boaz, a man who does what the Law says rather than what he feels is right.

Ruth has a plan that demonstrates her amazing character traits as well, but that is not why she devises the plan. She brings this plan to Naomi for their survival, but it puts her as the one doing most of the work. Harvesting is hard work. The women need food to live, so Ruth asks Naomi if she can go out and glean from the fields. Israel had this law that most likely was not followed very well during the period of the judges.

It comes from Deuteronomy 24:19 and Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22. The idea was that God provided for the poor and the sojourner by leaving a little bit of grain for them to work in the fields of the harvesters. This was God's form of welfare, but it was better than ours because the people still had to work the edges of the fields. Ruth will spend all day harvesting and beating out the grains. This was not easy labor by any stretch of the imagination. This way, the provision was there, but they had to work for it. It was not handed to them on a silver platter.

But Ruth is willing to do the work for Naomi and support them both. She could have said she would work for her own food. That's also a position of character because such a person is not living off of another's hard work, but Ruth goes the extra mile, sacrificing herself to the work of providing for both her and her mother-in-law. She receives Naomi's blessing to do this, and she goes out to work the fields.

When Ruth goes out, she does not know the kinsmen of the family of Elimelek. She doesn't plan to end up in Boaz' field, but the Lord plans for her to end up there. The Lord can use the slightest and most mundane things in our lives to bring favor and blessing our way. But we must be people of character to receive that blessing. Ruth is willing to work hard for herself and Naomi to eat, so the Lord will not only take care of her need for food, but also her need for a man to protect and provide for her.

The words used actually suggest that it is by happenstance, that it is almost an accident that she ends up in Boaz' field. It is by chance or by fortune but she had not planned it that way. The Lord had planned it that way. In the midst of trials, we often forget that the same God who allows trials to come our way and bitterness to be our cup also provides for blessings in our lives. We often remember the God who allows calamity but we forget the God who brings abundant blessings our way.

Just as much as Naomi can point to God as being against her in bitterness, Ruth can point to God as the one who guided her by His plan to this specific field. The reason this field is so significant is that Boaz is a kinsman to Elimelek. Ruth may have known about the law concerning the poor and the widows and the foreigners being able to glean the edges of fields, but she most likely didn't know the law about Levirate Marriage.

So she goes and works the day in this field, gleaning from what is purposely left behind by the harvesters. It was probably around noon or in the afternoon that Boaz came to visit the

fields, to check up on the progress of harvesting. Harvesting was a very important time in Israel. Much of the time in the period of the judges, the fields were given to the enemies of Israel in conquest. But as anyone who is a good steward of resources, Boaz is out checking on his fields, and making sure that the laws about gleaning at the edge are put into practice.

So Boaz goes out into the country from the town of Bethlehem and meets with his workers. He offers them a greeting of blessing probably common to that time. The harvesters are very happy to return that blessing upon him because when Boaz is blessed, so are the workers he employs. It is wise to pray for the blessing of the town in which you live and for the blessing of your employer because that will in turn flow to you in a godly system, and we know that Boaz is a godly man of integrity and character from what we have seen of him.

When God blesses us, it is important to use that blessing to bless others. We see Boaz, a man whose fields are plentiful, following the law to leave the edges for those who are in need, and so his blessing flows to them. We also see later on in this story that Ruth will share the blessing with Naomi and even from what she does not eat at Boaz' table. It is important for us to pass on the blessing of God to others. It doesn't always have to be in the same form, but we must bless others when we are blessed.

It is at this moment that Boaz was inspecting the field and making sure the poor, the widows and the foreigners were taken care of on the edge of his field that he noticed Ruth. Because Ruth was working on the edge, it narrowed down who she could be, but it did not tell him everything. She was either poor, foreign, a widow, or a combination of these. So he asked the young man that he had put in charge of all of the field who would have known who she was.

Boaz taking an interest in Ruth and her circumstances was just as much part of God's plan as her ending up in his field "by accident." Ruth even says later that Boaz showed her more favor than she could have imagined. What caught Boaz' eye with Ruth? Was it her looks? It's sad to say that in our culture this is probably the most accurate reason a guy takes notice of a woman.

But that is probably not what he noticed. He probably noticed her work ethic and her strength. He probably took notice because of the proverb that tells guys to look for a "noble woman" which is what Ruth was. So more than anything, Boaz was attracted to her character! What attracts you to someone else? Is it the fleeting looks that fade or the powerful strength of character that gives you a desire to get to know someone more?

Boaz can't stand the suspense! He must meet this hard-working woman. So he asks his foreman to tell him who she is. Then he finds out that she is both a widow and a foreigner. He also finds out that she is Naomi's daughter-in-law. It is most likely that he was familiar with Naomi, because Naomi knows about him. So all of a sudden, he knows that Ruth takes care of a kinsman, Naomi, and that she is a hard worker who puts Naomi ahead of her own needs. The young foreman also attests to Ruth's hard-working character, telling Boaz that she stopped from working the fields only a short while to rest in the house. We can't tell from the original language if she rested in a sort of shed or in the house near the field. But she took a rest at some

point. The rest of the day, she has been working hard. And that kind of character and strength is exactly what the woman of Proverbs 31 is like!

Application

The most emphasized element of this first part of the story is the character of these two extraordinary people. Boaz is a noble man and Ruth is a noble woman. They are both hard workers. Boaz is wise and checks on his fields during their growing and harvest and Ruth does not stop working until she gets what Naomi and her need to make food to survive.

Character should be one of our major attraction points rather than the fads of each year or the fashion sets. These are external things that we are flooded and surrounded with in our culture, but they don't help us live life together with someone that we are attracted to. It is much better to be attracted to foundational things like personality, character, and these types of intangibles that will still be there even when someone gets older. Character is what it's all about. Having noble character or strength of character is an asset to anyone who is truly looking for someone to be attracted to in the long haul. Don't look for people that you are outwardly attracted to, although that is not unimportant. Look first for the inward attraction of character that you can love.

The other principle to take and apply from this is that there are no accidents even in the regular parts of our lives. Everything seems to be ordained by God behind the scenes in this story. Even the fact that Boaz happened to be going to check on his field, and that Ruth happened to be there, and that Boaz was a perfect solution to her and Naomi's problem. All of this was not lined up by idols or stars but by the Lord of the Universe.

We need to trust that God is leading us daily even in the smallest of things. We need to learn to trust Him in His leading for all things. Let's not carry it too far. You can do things without asking God about every little thing. Can you imagine having to ask God if it's His will that you use the restroom? That's going too far, but God does set up divine appointments in our lives on a regular basis. It is up to us to know when they are and to use the opportunities for His kingdom. Now go and do normal things in your life, but see the opportunities that He blesses you with and milk them for all their worth!

Section 2: A Special Dispensation (Ruth 2:8-13)

Introduction

The humility and honor found in this section of our story is not only admirable, but godly. We find the intrigued Boaz granting a special favor to Ruth and Ruth wondering why he would be so kind. Boaz set up a way for Ruth to be provided for no matter what. He made her a celebrity among the gleaners. She maintains humility even after he tells her that he's thankful she has been loyal not only to Naomi, but to the God of the Israelites. She has given up everything, and he wants her to know that sacrifice and humility are indeed attractive and that God's blessing comes to those who have such a pure heart and devotion. In our struggles to become truly humble, we often hit snags in the way, but Ruth's humility is rewarded with favor from Boaz.

Her loyalty goes before her as a fine reputation. Humility brings in God's favor when we truly put others first and are loyal to God's interests.

Translation

8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter! Do not go to glean in another field nor leave this one, but instead cling here to my young women." **9** Let your eyes be on the field that they are harvesting and walk after them. Have I not commanded the young men to not touch you? When you thirst, go to the vessels and drink from whatever the young men have drawn." **10** Then she fell on her face and bowed to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you take notice of me, even me a foreigner?" **11** But Boaz answered and said to her, "It has surely been reported to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law after your husband's death and you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth and walked to a people that you never knew. **12** May the Lord repay you for your deed and may it be a full reward to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, whose wings you have come under to take refuge." **13** Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and because you have spoken from the heart to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

Commentary

Boaz heard about this lady and could not resist to bless her in a special way. He heard the report about how she was a hard worker, and knowing that she is Naomi's daughter-in-law, he sees the truth and reality of her servant's heart and her loyalty. Her hard work shows that she is putting Naomi first before herself, and that is yet a third quality that should not go without blessing. The reward of blessing does not always come in the same way that the offering or sacrifice is given.

Boaz calls Ruth, "my daughter" for possibly a number of reasons. Some would say that Boaz is much older than Ruth, but others would talk about his desire to protect and provide for her. It might also be noted that he might have been trying to make her feel welcome as a foreigner in Israel, accepting her because of her character, not her place of birth or ethnic background. He tells Ruth that she no longer has to look for favorable fields every day. She can stay in his field and he'll make sure that she gets what she needs. He doesn't make it too easy, but he does favor her. Making it too easy would be to just give her the grain, but instead, she must still work the field. But he will put more supply out there for her.

Once again the word for clinging is used here. It is usually used of marriage but here can speak to a loyal holding on to anyone who is a helper to Ruth. First she clings to Naomi and now she is to cling to the young women who are gathering with her. These young women will show her the ropes and make it easier for her, as well as present her with an opportunity to interact with others as someone who is accepted even though she is a foreigner.

Boaz also makes sure that she is not mistreated by the young men who do the work of harvesting and also are there to protect the field and keep order. They could decide if someone

was not to be in that field but Boaz makes sure that she will not be pestered by them. They could not lay a hand on her or kick her out of the field. Not only that, but Boaz then makes sure that when she needs water, they will draw the water for her. He provides protection, plenty to glean, and water for her.

Ruth can't help but react with genuine surprise and thankfulness. She reacts as someone who is humble and grateful. She bows low in thanks and is dumbfounded at her good favor. She asks Boaz why he does so much for her, going above and beyond what the law demands of him as a land owner. Ruth has not forgotten that she is an outsider, a foreigner in this land. So many of us feel like outsiders. When you're on the outside looking in, it's not hard to wish to be accepted or to see her point of view. In making a decision to stay with Naomi in Israel, she had resigned herself to the background of life, but she is being put in the forefront here. It really is true what Jesus said in Luke, that those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

Sometimes we remind others of who we are, our background. We see our origins and our struggles sometimes more readily than others see them. We beat ourselves up for not being what we think people want, and Ruth does that here. She doesn't want Boaz to forget that she doesn't fit in. But Boaz won't hear it because he has heard more about what she is made of than where she comes from. He is more interested in her loyalty and love and humility than her address.

The intensive that Boaz uses to have surely heard the report of Ruth shows just how big of a report it was. After she was willing to leave so much and struggle with such new surroundings, Boaz can't help but show her that God blesses godly character. She has been giving to others, like Naomi, and now she receives the blessing that God wants to give to all who live a godly life. There is indeed great gain in godliness, not that it is earned, but that its quality is rewarded.

She left everything she knew and came purposefully to a land where she would be an outsider. And for that, she is given an inside track to becoming an insider. Her adventurous and challenging promise to Naomi shows us of the great character she has. And all of that for in-laws nonetheless! Boaz literally says that she walked to a land and people that she didn't know yesterday or in previous days. She never knew this people until she arrived, but she was not afraid of the unknown.

The most important thing that Boaz says as he makes Ruth an insider is that she has come to shelter under the Lord's wings. She has changed from the idols of Moab to worship the God of Israel. And the Lord will bless her most for her loyalty to Him. Boaz tells Ruth that the Lord blesses the selfless deeds that we do for others.

Ruth responds with thanksgiving as she calls Boaz, "my lord." This is not the same word for God, but it is like saying "Sir." She once again is profoundly astonished that he would take any notice of her. She thinks nothing of herself or her actions. She didn't do the humble and loyal things to gain attention or fame. She did them out of who she is. We can't live godly lives because there is a reward. We live godly lives because they please God. The reward is a

byproduct. We are not on a give-to-get system with the Lord. We are on a “It pleases me to please You” system.

The favor of Boaz is poured out in the comforts of doing her job more easily, not having to search for grain and go field to field to meet what Naomi and her need. Not only this, but Boaz has also spoken from his heart to her. He has offered out of loyalty and love, not to get something from her. And in calling herself a maidservant, she shows that she is glad to be included in society even on its lowest rungs. We all seek to be wanted and loved and accepted. Boaz broke down those barriers for Ruth in his kindness. For that, she is grateful. Even though she doesn't fit in with the maidservants ethnically, she feels welcomed and comforted by Boaz.

We need to be the people who welcome others from different backgrounds into our own worlds and lives. Jesus accepts us even though we were enemies of God. We need to be the people who accept others no matter what their hang-ups or backgrounds or problems. Acceptance doesn't mean that we are cheering on the things they need to stop doing, but that we want to be around them for who they are. This is one of the hardest things for us to learn how to do.

Application

One of the greatest lessons we can learn from this part of the story is that God blesses godly character. He doesn't bless it just because it is godly. It's not some kind of formula that we can expect out of Him. He blesses it because He delights in godly character. And certainly Boaz and Ruth both demonstrate godly character. They are loyal and loving, selfless people who put others first.

God will not always bless godly character in the ways that we expect. He might find ways to surprise us. But we don't live godly lives purely for the profit of getting blessings from Him. We live them to please Him. We are loyal to God because we love Him, not because He rewards loyalty. A lot of companies do that very thing. They reward people who are loyal by giving them perks. But if the person showed even a little less loyalty, they rip the prizes and perks out of their hands. We must not be loyal and godly because it gets us stuff. It happens because that is what God is making us to be and we love to please Him.

Another lesson we can take from this passage is how to make someone who is looking in from the outside one of the insiders. It doesn't take much to extend a hand to comfort or encourage people who don't feel like they fit in. But if no one is kind and hospitable, then a person will never become part of the in group. Remember the times that you were the outsider? How did that feel? We need to make an extra effort to welcome the outsiders and the people that are shunned by everyone else in the world because Jesus did for us what Boaz does for Ruth. He made us friends while anyone else would keep us as strangers. Reach out to those around you and give them a place to call home. It doesn't have to be a literal place, but it needs to be home.

Section 3: The First Date (Ruth 2:14-23)

Introduction

In the final scene of Ruth chapter two, we find Boaz and Ruth eating with the hired hands. This is extremely unusual for one of the poor gleaners to be with the field hands and the master of the field, but this is part of the honor that Ruth is given by Boaz. We find out more about Ruth, that she is a woman of noble character and we find out also about Boaz that he is a kinsman redeemer, someone who can help Naomi and Ruth! We continue to observe the selflessness and resourcefulness of Ruth as she even saves what she isn't able to eat to give to Naomi. We also see Boaz go even farther in blessing her with easier labor. Do you think of others before you think of yourself? When you are blessed, do you save a little so you can bless others? We find that this is also part of being of noble character.

Translation

14 Then Boaz said to her at the time for eating, “Draw near and eat from the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar. So she sat down by the harvesters and he held out to her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied, and had some left over. **15** When she arose to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, “Even among the sheaves let her glean and do not let her be ashamed. **16** And also pull out for her from the bundles and leave it. When she gleans, do not rebuke her.” **17** So she gleaned in the field until the evening. Then she beat out whatever she gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley!

18 Then she arose and went to the city and her mother-in-law saw what she gleaned. Then she brought out and gave to her what she had left over after being satisfied. **19** And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean this day and where did you work? May it happen to the one who took notice that he be blessed!”

So she informed her mother-in-law with whom she worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked this day is Boaz.”

20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the Lord whose lovingkindnes has not forsaken the living or the dead.” And Naomi said to her, “The man is a close relative to us. He is our redeemer.”

21 And Ruth the Moabite said, “Also, as he said to me, ‘You will cling to my young men until they have completed all of 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 and not be assaulted in another field.” **23** So she drew near to Boaz’ young women until the end of the barley and wheat harvest and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Commentary

While the law of God demanded that a land owner would share the outer edges of his crop with the poor and the outcasts of society, it by no means demanded that the poor and

widows eat at his table. However, that is exactly where we find Ruth, at the table of Boaz, and by invitation! Boaz is really going the extra mile in showing her extreme care and blessing. She sat down with hired hands, although she was not one of them and enjoyed one of the most intimate in-group activities in Israel, that of eating together.

When a person ate a meal with you in Israel, they were declaring that you and they were family and kindred. This is why the Pharisees are so incensed with Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. To eat or share a meal was the deepest act of friendship and fellowship that you could initiate in Israel for someone else. So when Boaz invites her to the table, he is shouting from the rooftops that she is one of them. He can't get any more inclusive!

So Ruth sits down in a place you would never expect to find her and eats with Boaz and his hired hands. This was most likely the noontime meal or lunch. She has bread and some vinegar wine, a most common drink in this time. Although visions of poor people eating at a feast might be dancing in our imaginations, it is most likely that because Ruth was a hard worker, neither she nor Naomi went hungry. I can imagine that common image of someone stuffing themselves because they don't know when their next meal will come along, but this is not how Ruth would have acted. However, she is full and satisfied when she is done. He lets her eat not just breadcrumbs from his table, but she eats her fill and then some. He actually gives her more than she can eat.

That was a big deal in their culture. Today, every restaurant you go to gives you more than the common person should be able to finish, but for her to eat her fill and then have some left over tells you how well off Boaz is and also how much he favors her. It is most likely that all of the people at the table were full. But Ruth goes the extra mile as well. She actually saves up what is left as her portion and gets a to-go bag for Naomi! Even in satisfying herself with blessing, she saves up some to give to Naomi!

Boaz continues to show her favor, demanding that his men not only leave her alone when she gleans in the fields and supply her with the water that she needs, but then he tells them to give her grain out of what they are harvesting, out of the sheaves of grain. The grain that was left at the edge of the field was not as nice as the grain in the middle that was picked. It was like getting premium foods rather than the cheapest kind. He is showering her with kindness. Ruth continues to work after the meal into the afternoon and evening, showing that she will work the whole day no matter how much she already has been satisfied. She still must work to help Naomi.

She worked so hard in just a day's time that she took home about an ephah of beat grain. This would be anywhere from 30-50 pounds of beat grain! That's a massive amount for gleaning on the edges of the fields for a mere day. The harvesters listened to Boaz and obeyed him well. The stalks would be laid on a hard surface, like a threshing floor, and then they would need to be crushed or beaten with a rod or stick until the grains separated from the husks and chaff. We don't know if Boaz let her borrow his threshing floor or how she arranged this, but she was a hard worker up to the end.

Being an industrious woman was also part of how the “noble woman” of Proverbs 31 is described. Ruth certainly was industrious! After she had finished working, she returned to Naomi to show her what all had happened that day. She got up and took the grain into the city of Bethlehem and went to see her mother-in-law. Naomi probably had the biggest eyes in the world to see what this young woman did in the fields by herself. Surely she had help to bring that much in one day!

Not only this, but the young woman came up to her and handed her the leftovers from her lunch as well for Naomi to eat. As the writer of Proverbs might have said, “This girl was quite a catch!” Of course, such unusual circumstances warrant discussion. It’s like when someone brings in a big fish from their catch. Every fisherman asks where they went to fish. So also, Naomi asks Ruth whose field she was working in.

Naomi figured someone blessed Ruth as she worked and took notice of her. She was right. Ruth told all about how Boaz had favored her with such a wonderful blessing in the day. When Naomi heard the name of Boaz, she immediately knew who he was because he was one of their kinsmen from the clan or family group of Elimelek, her deceased husband. Could that be why he’s being so kind? Was it just because Naomi was family, or did he have another purpose in being so kind?

Naomi cannot repay Boaz’ kindness to her and Ruth with wealth or things, but she can bless him with words. She blesses Boaz for his kindness to Ruth and her. She uses the word that the Bible uses for loyal love, the covenantal love of God, the word *hesed*. This is a very special love that is faithful despite all circumstances. Then Naomi informs Ruth that Boaz is related to their family and is a redeemer, someone who can buy something back. Maybe even right there, Naomi’s mind begins to think on the possibilities of what this can mean, the implications for them.

Ruth also told her mother-in-law of Boaz’ suggestion to hang out at his field for the rest of the harvest, to cling to his young women and continue to receive such goodness. Naomi wouldn’t tell her it’s not a good idea. In fact, the opposite happened. Naomi was all for that. We can see that the concerns for a woman in the time of the judges was very important. She does not want Ruth to be assaulted in other fields. Ruth is single and poor.

She couldn’t have advertised any better that a man might be helpful to her life. Just by showing up in the edges of the field gave any observant man a clue. She could have even been manhandled or abused by the men, especially if they did not wish for her to glean as the Law commanded. Not everyone, maybe even barely anyone, was following the commands found in the law of Israel. So for her safety, Naomi agrees that this is the best course of action.

A new sense of life began for Ruth. She had a guaranteed place of food until the harvest ended. There were at least two types of harvest that may have happened at different times in Israel or right after one another. The first was the barley harvest, followed by the wheat harvest. Ruth would have food well enough, and if she continued to experience such production, would have plenty of food for when there was no harvest. She had it set, working with other women in safety and being blessed by Boaz. And she had a place to lay her head at night, a place to live

with a loving mother-in-law. The woman who risked everything, even her very life, to follow Naomi into a horrible life was beginning to experience life better than she could have imagined on the road to Bethlehem from Moab. She was experiencing the blessings of God!

Application

We continue to learn about the kindness of Boaz and the industry of Ruth. It seems her noble and strong character has no limit to the blessings it provides. We need to be like Boaz, transforming even the mundane things of life like eating lunch to include others completely. He uses the meal, a standard act to invite an outsider and then blesses her abundantly with plenty of food. What are some things in your life everyday that you can share with outsiders to make them welcome and help them feel the comfort and kindness of being an insider? How can you minister through the mundane of your life?

Most of us need also to work on being more selfless and industrious like Ruth. What a strong woman to be able to work so hard and even when blessed, continue to work for the sake of her mother-in-law. She doesn't quit until the job is done! And she receives such a great reward for her effort. When we work hard, we will see the blessing of God for being industrious. But when we put others first, the blessings will never end. Who knows how God will bless you for your selfless acts?

We know for Ruth that God was about to do something she didn't even know could happen. Boaz was a close relative who could redeem her situation and Naomi's, but that is for the next part of our story. Perhaps God is wanting to bless you in ways you cannot even perceive are needs that can be filled right now. Be strong and continue on in your character development, and see how God does not hesitate to open up the storehouses of His blessing in your life!

Ruth Chapter 3

Act III: Engaged

Section 1: The Plan (Ruth 3:1-5)

Introduction

At the time of the harvest, we find that there is a plan in the works by Naomi to get for her daughter-in-law the things that every woman of that era longed for, a marriage to a good man and security and provision that come with that marriage. We are almost taken the whole way back to chapter one when Naomi wished that she could give the young women two more sons for them to marry. So Naomi instead begins to look to Boaz to fulfill that role more as a kinsman than for her to have an opportunity to produce another son who could marry Ruth. She is looking for a way to show her gratitude to the young woman for being loyal. We can devise all kinds of schemes to show our gratitude. Some of them may not even work, but we try so hard. Here, the Lord will use Naomi's plan in an even greater way than she had envisioned.

Translation

1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well for you? **2** Even now, is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? Look, he is winnowing barley at the threshing floor tonight. **3** Therefore, wash and anoint yourself, and put your cloak on yourself and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has stopped eating and drinking. **4** Now when he lies down, notice the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down and he will inform you what you should do." **5** So she said to her, "All you have said I will do."

Commentary

Naomi feels it is her burden to make life more tolerable for the hard-working and never complaining Ruth. Ruth has been nothing but loyal and good to her, and she longs to bring about her rest. The word for rest talks about the idea of permanence or enjoyment, a time of relaxing and security. Naomi has longed for this since the beginning, since chapter one, for both of the daughters-in-law. But especially since they are in Israel, a foreign country for Ruth, she longs even more to return the kindness Ruth has shown.

The way that she plans on doing this is through a plan that involves Boaz, a man who at every turn has suggested his love for Ruth. Because Boaz is a close relative, a kinsman, he could very likely marry Ruth and through marrying Ruth, buy back or redeem the land and the whole situation of these two widows. But there's just one problem. Boaz has been dragging his feet. Why has he not already approached Ruth? Naomi might figure that Boaz just needs a little bit of encouragement.

So she devises a plan that Ruth agrees to be obedient to follow. Because it is the time of harvest, after the grain is plucked from the fields, it must be winnowed or separated from the

chaff and then stored. The way to do this is by a threshing floor, a hard surface upon which usually oxen tread on the harvested grains. Their treading separates out the wheat and breaks it from the stalks. Then, with a winnowing fork, the harvester takes the grains and stalks and tosses them into the air. If this is done in the evenings, there is almost a clockwork breeze that is strong enough to separate the chaff from the wheat. The chaff is lighter and is carried on the currents of the winds and the wheat falls back to the floor.

Every landowner was doing this around this time of year and so would Boaz be doing this. So Naomi devises that her daughter-in-law will go to him in the secrecy of night and basically ask him to marry her. Of course, she does not explain all of the symbolism to Ruth of going and laying at the man's feet after uncovering them. But Ruth must know what's going on considering this is Naomi's goal.

Naomi makes an important point that Ruth should dress for success. She anoints herself with sweet-smelling oils and perfumes, washes herself and dresses in her finest. She wants to make a good impression on Boaz. Another part of the plan hinges on Boaz being happy and satisfied, in the right frame of mind before this deal goes down, so she tells Ruth to wait until he has eaten and drunk his fill.

Ruth is to make note of the place where Boaz sleeps. This would be important because Boaz would be one of at least several men sleeping by their grain that evening. The men would sleep by their grain because it took at least one night to get the grain separated from the chaff, and it was too late to move the grain, so the men stayed with it to protect it from thieves. But if Ruth were to proposition for marriage the wrong harvester, that would create quite a stir. This plan is risky, but it can achieve the rest that Naomi wants for Ruth.

She then tells Ruth to uncover Boaz' feet and lay down. When he awakes, he'll tell her what to do. For a woman to uncover a man's feet was a plea for marriage. We are under the impression that Ruth would not know the details of this Jewish custom because she is not given any further instruction than, "Boaz will then tell you what to do." But she does know that it is Naomi's goal to marry her off. Uncovering feet would refer to the place of the feet, up to the legs. This makes more sense later when Boaz is cold in the middle of the night and is stirred awake. Lying down at the man's feet would have symbolized a desire to be provided for and protected by him.

Ruth then pledges to do exactly what Naomi tells her in the plan. It is very dangerous and could endanger Ruth's reputation if just a small bit of it does not go according to plan. But Ruth is obedient to Naomi and promises to do exactly as she has told her. Despite the dangers and difficulties, her loyalty and trust in Naomi never waver.

Application

One of the take-aways for this passage is that Ruth is obedient despite the dangers and difficulties of the plan. She puts her reputation and perhaps her life on the line to obey Naomi's instructions. Ruth once again is the object of extreme and fortified character. She is willing to endure the risk so that the plan can be fulfilled. She does not fight with Naomi about the dangers

in the plan, although they directly affect her more than Naomi. She continues in the path laid out with trust in her mother-in-law.

We need to be people who are willing to follow God's plans no matter how risky or dangerous they seem to us. Many of us think that we can converse with God and convince Him otherwise in His perfect plans. But we were not meant to question His every command. We were meant to learn how to be obedient like Ruth. The plan is indeed risky, but the rewards for the plan are incalculable. If only we had the perspective He has! We must learn as we walk His path how to trust Him more deeply with every turn.

We might also take away the good intentions of Naomi in wanting to bless her daughter-in-law. The plan that she devises is quite dangerous. If she weren't related and dearly loving her daughter-in-law, one might suggest that she was trying to destroy a great reputation. But Naomi knows that a good and effective plan will be risky because Boaz has not already moved to marry Ruth. She is cunning in that plan.

The Bible tells us that people devise their own plans but only the Lord's purpose remains. We think up plans and ways to do them, and sometimes the Lord is not in the planning process or its intentions or its results. But other times, He humors us by allowing things to work out His way in our plans. Sometimes, He uses our plans to accomplish His goal, because they do line up with the purposes He has for them. We must be careful to never imagine that we completely plan out with the same perfection of God's will our plans. We must ask the Lord if our plans agree with His plans. And then we will see success in them!

Section 2: Midnight Rendezvous (Ruth 3:6-13)

Introduction

In our second scene of this third act, Ruth faithfully and obediently carries out her mother-in-law's plan, for the most part. She actually steps out and adds a bit to it when she speaks with Boaz, but she does whatever Naomi had told her. The plan is played out despite its vast dangers to everyone involved. Every character acts with intelligence and foresight as the plan comes to fruition. Let us not forget that God allows the plan to succeed despite how dangerous it is. When we make plans, the Lord is the one who decides whether or not they will actually work out. When they agree with His will, He allows success in our planning.

Translation

6 Then she went down to the threshing floor and did everything just as her mother-in-law commanded her. **7** When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was pleased, then he went to lie down at the edge of the heap of grain. Then she came and in secret uncovered his feet and lay down. **8** Then it happened half way in the night that the man was startled and he turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! **9** So he said, "Who are you?"

And she said, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Spread your wing over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

10 And he said, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. This last lovingkindness you have made greater than the first, because you did not walk after the young men, whether poor or rich. **11** And now, my daughter, do not fear. All that you have said, I will do for you because all my fellow townsmen know that you are a noble woman. **12** And now, indeed it is surely true that I am a redeemer, but yet, there is a redeemer nearer than me. **13** Stay this night and in the morning if he will redeem you, good. Let him redeem. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the Lord lives. Lie down until the morning.”

Commentary

After Naomi had told Ruth exactly what to do to set herself up for a rest or happiness, Ruth did faithfully what her mother-in-law had told her to do. She went and dressed in her finest clothing and put on perfumes and sweet-smelling oils. She dressed for success and then she went down to the place where the threshing floor was located. A threshing floor was most often a communal floor shared by the farmers of a small town like Bethlehem. It would be situated on a nice flat plain perhaps in a valley.

The threshing floor was shared by all throughout the harvesting season. After the grain was gathered, it was taken to be threshed. Threshing started with treading the grain out of the stalks and chaff, usually accomplished by oxen walking and stomping on the grain to separate it out. Then it would be winnowed with a fork, thrown into the air on a breezy evening so that the wind would carry away the chaff and the heavier grain would fall back to the floor. Then it was gathered and put in a giant heap, and the owner of the grain would guard it overnight, because it was too late to haul it to storehouses in the dark.

So this is what Boaz was doing the evening that Ruth went to go seal the deal with him. He would have worked all through the breezy evening and then ate and drank his fill at the end of the evening and gone to sleep by his heap of barley until the morning when it could be hauled away to his storehouses. Thieves could come in the night and steal the grain, so it had to be protected, and it is best to protect it yourself rather than pay someone to protect it for you. Sometimes a hired hand is not as trustworthy as the farmer guarding it himself. There would have been a number of men lying by their heaps that night in this community setting, so it would have been dangerous for Ruth to go in without knowing where he lay down.

Ruth waited until after he had eaten and drank and was about to go to sleep in front of his pile of grain because she had to know which heap he would protect. It would have been awkward and destructive to her reputation to pledge marriage to any other man in the threshing area that night. She had to get the right heap and the right man! She also waited, as part of Naomi’s plan, for Boaz to be in high spirits, a man satisfied by the day’s work and a good meal. People are usually more open to life-changing decisions when they are in a pleasant mood.

There is much secrecy in this plan. It is at the setting of night time when everyone is asleep and Ruth sneaks through the threshing floor community to find Boaz who is also asleep. She stays with Boaz throughout the night in case someone would see her leaving. She is told to leave before anyone is fully awake in the morning to recognize another person and one of the

alternate reasons for giving her some grain was in case someone would see her leaving, they would think she was simply starting the gathering work early in the morning.

The secrecy is not done out of improper actions. They are not trying to cover up something they did wrong or immorally. Some will postulate that Ruth and Boaz consummated their marriage in this night, but there is very little historical, cultural or biblical evidence for such a view. In fact, the high praise of their character everywhere else in the book more than suggests that nothing immoral happened this night.

Why the secrecy then? It was indeed meant to minimize the public destruction of their character if someone were to find Ruth walking around in a field full of men at night, or laying at anyone's feet where she didn't belong. She was a widow, and therefore in need of a husband in that culture. Boaz was a man of honor, but if someone found a woman hanging around at his feet and sleeping there during the night, they would think otherwise about his character. This is not to mention that there is a closer kinsman, as Boaz will explain later. All of these factors would be very dangerous for both of these people of strong character. The danger of the plan warrants secrecy because of the way things would look to an outsider, not because they do immoral things.

The symbol of a woman uncovering a man's feet was a custom for marriage. Ruth was blatantly pledging her loyalty to Boaz if he would marry her. We see other places in Scripture where this practice or symbolism occurs, one most poignantly in Ezekiel 16 when God covers the nakedness of the young woman Israel and puts the wing or corner of His garment over her. So also, this is what Ruth will ask of Boaz, a desire for marriage with him.

When the woman uncovers the feet, we are talking about the region of the feet, from the feet to the calves of the legs, maybe even the thigh. Some have made a connection that the plural form in Hebrew of feet is sometimes the word used for the genitals, and have then postulated that she uncovered Boaz' nakedness and committed sexual acts with him that night. But this is completely unwarranted. Their character strictly prohibits such suggestive behavior. If this were so, why then would Boaz go the next day and speak to the other man who has first rights to Ruth and the field? Why would Boaz even tell Ruth about this other man? Why would they not have done this sooner if they were not people of strong and noble character?

Because this is a symbol seen elsewhere in Scripture, and feet can simply mean feet most of the time and not always the genitals, there is no reason to suggest such a thing. This is a romantic story about marriage, not a lewd story about how a woman was sexually explicit and forward with a man of noble character. Their nobility does not end with the setting of the sun.

About midnight, Boaz was chilled because his feet and legs were uncovered. The desert nights could get very chilly. So he had wrapped himself up in a cloak and was now unwrapped and awoke with a start, with a shiver. He turned over to pull the cloak back over himself when he found to his amazement and surprise a woman at his feet! Even though it was dark, he knew it was a woman, and not some animal or something. How did he know? Don't forget that Ruth had dressed her finest, as a woman does, and had also put on sweet-smelling perfumes. Men just don't do that!

Out of the shock of the event, and probably out of grogginess, Boaz asks, “Who are you?” What is interesting is that Naomi will ask that of Ruth in the next section. Although Ruth is a woman of noble and strong character, she is being asked in this chapter about her identity, because it is being changed. She starts out being called Ruth the Moabitess throughout the first two chapters and even in chapter four. She is at first the servant of Boaz, a generic term meaning that he can treat her kindly or harshly according to his desire. She is always an outsider in the text until now!

Ruth answers simply but more intimately than she has allowed herself to answer before to Boaz. She says her name and then she calls herself his maidservant. The word here is the other word for maidservant that speaks of a young woman who can be pledged to marriage. It is a more intimate term for her. She gives it to herself. She decides her own identity and decides that she would very much like it to be an identity shared with Boaz.

Then Ruth is more forward than Naomi had suggested in the plan. The uncovering of Boaz’ feet would have been particularly obvious as a marriage proposal, but now she pours it on even further with her words. She asks Boaz to spread his wing over her because he is a kinsman. Part of this whole plan was brought about because Boaz had been kind and blessed her with grain and help in the fields, but had not advanced toward her with a marriage proposal already. She wants to make sure he gets her intentions and desires.

When she asks Boaz to spread his wing over her, the word wing has been used in chapter two when Boaz blessed her and said that she had come to shelter under God’s wings of salvation. She used the same word to suggest to him that he was part of God’s salvation for her as a kinsman redeemer, that he was one of the wings of God’s salvation. The word wing refers to the edge of his cloak. She was asking that he would take her to himself to protect and provide for her, beginning with keeping her warm in the cold night.

Another danger within Naomi’s plan is that Boaz would reject her overture for marriage. After all, though he has been favoring her in the field and the harvest and been very kind in his words to her, he has not asked her to marry him. There might be a reason for that. Indeed Ruth learns that there are two reasons for him to not ask her hand in marriage. But he could have outright rejected her that night. It is yet another risk that she took in this plan!

Instead, just as at first, Boaz blesses her again. He does not reject her. All of the elements of this plan seem to be coming into place. Perhaps God might be involved in making such an insane and dangerous plan work! His blessing this time is more personal to her as well. He once again invokes the Lord’s blessing upon her and again calls her his daughter. Many suggest that Boaz is a bit older than Ruth because of this and one of his voiced concerns about her going after younger men. But the reason he calls her “my daughter” is that he wants to be her provider.

Boaz is genuinely surprised and enchanted with her overtures for marriage. One of the reasons he held back from asking her to marry him was because he believed she would want a younger man as a husband, but instead she has ignored the young men and has actively sought him out instead. He is delighted! He also knows she is not a gold digger, looking for a young and

rich man. She is no respecter of persons but seeks what she really wants. There is no pretense between these two people of noble character.

Although Ruth's actions are urgent because she wants a reversal of her situation in life as a widow without protection, provision, and a future, he tells her to not fear the situation. It will change very soon! Because Ruth is a woman of noble character, and that fact is not disputed by anyone, Boaz will do as she wants him to do. He will gladly take her as his wife. Don't let it be lost on us that Ruth's character is the reason he marries her! We should be looking for people of godly character to associate with in our lives. Make good decisions on who you hang out with!

The fellow townsmen are literally the men at the gate. The gate was a very important place in Israel's history and culture, as we will find out in the last act of our story. This was the cultural and civic square, the center of activity. It is where judgments were made in court by the wise men sitting at the gates of the city. It is one of the main places where business was transacted. The fellow gatesmen are important to Boaz because they make the decisions in legal matters.

It is next that Ruth and each of us as readers discover the second reason that Boaz has shown her so much favor and has not married her yet. First, it is because he thought she was not interested, but the second reason is also important in legal matters. There is a kinsman who is closer and has first right to the property that Naomi owns. He has been waiting on the man to make a decision on the property, but the closer kinsman has yet to deal kindly with Naomi and Ruth.

Boaz shows that he cares for Ruth and Naomi's very best possible future when he says that if the other redeemer redeems them it will be good for them. Although he will not be able to marry Ruth, he seeks her higher good. But if the man does not respond favorably, then Boaz will gladly step in as the next of kin and redeem their whole situation. Boaz gives her another level of security, knowing that one way or another, her concerns about her situation will be quickly met and dealt with, no matter which man redeems them.

Finally, he swears by the Lord that he will deal with the matter. "As the Lord lives" is a Hebrew vow that invokes upon the truth of God's existence that the man will do as he says he will do. It is a guaranteed truth to the Hebrew that God lives, so upon that truth, this truth of action is placed. He will do it with haste and speed in the morning. The sun will not go down on his decision or actions. This reinforces his godly and noble character.

He does not let a bad situation continue on. He deals with it the moment it is brought to his attention. When Ruth sought him out, she gave him the legal precedent he needed to bring the matter to the other redeemer's attention. And he will do so straightway in the morning! He then tells her to stay until the morning so that no one sees her leave the field in the middle of the night as a prostitute might. He keeps her character in tact as well as his own. And the cold dark night that Ruth and Naomi have suffered through the first three acts of our story will soon give way to the warm and bright dawn of a new life.

Application

We once again in our story see the stalwart character of two noble and godly individuals. Even as a dangerous plan is hatched out of sheer desperation, each character acts within godly bounds to keep the other's character from being exposed or trashed by people who know nothing of the inside situation. The reputations of both individuals are preserved through wisdom and quick action.

The plan that has been presented seems to defy all odds of its failure, even though it is a very frail plan that could go wrong at so many turns. Humans make plans and then they attempt to go through with them. We often attribute a plan working out the way we hope when we devise it as being lucky. But it has nothing to do with luck. It has everything to do with how much our plans line up with God's will. When they agree with His will, He allows the plans we make to prosper. When they don't, they are not so successful.

The important point, as James tells us, is to include the Lord and His will in our plans. When He wills things, they happen beyond any laws that might stop them. We need to line up with what God wants in our lives. God was always on the side of the poor and the widows and foreigners and orphans in Israel. Ruth's desire for a husband and security and provision are what God wants for her and people in her situation. When we plan things, we need to plan for God to be involved in our lives, like sending us opportunities to witness and minister to people without saying, "I don't have time for this!"

No matter what the dangers and risks, when our plans agree with God's will, the plans will be blessed by Him and we will experience the success of such plans. It is not wrong to plan. It is wrong to plan without considering God's will. It is dangerous to plan against His will. And when we experience success, it is not something we did. It is something God allows and blesses! Let us give Him the credit due His name when our plans are successful.

Section 3: Love is in the Air (Ruth 3:14-18)

Introduction

In this section, we see the filling out of the character of both of these people. We see Boaz who goes immediately to deal with the situation in chapter four, but we also see the statement about his character by Naomi. We also see the initial change in Ruth by others as her mother-in-law, hungry for information on how her dangerous plan worked out, asks her who she is now. Boaz provides even more barley for the women and Naomi's plan comes together with the very best result possible. God blesses the plans that we make when they follow after His will. And character drives everything that makes the plan work! Godly character brings success in our endeavors.

Translation

14 So she lay down at his feet until the morning, but she arose before a man could recognize his friend, because he said, "Don't let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." **15** Then he said, "Give the garment that you are wearing and hold it out. So she

held it out and he measured six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went to the city.
16 So she went to her mother-in-law and she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she informed her of all that the man did for her.

17 And she said, “These six measures *of barley* he gave to me, for he said, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’”

18 Then she said, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter falls, for the man will not be at peace but will complete the matter this day.”

Commentary

Ruth was now obedient not only to Naomi but also to Boaz, who was looking out for her reputation. The danger would have been that after getting a promise from him to deal with the matter of the women’s future the next morning, Ruth would be seen in the night leaving the threshing floor. If anyone did see her, questions would be raised as to why a single woman was anywhere near a bunch of men guarding their heaps of grain in the middle of the night. It was not a good looking situation to an outsider who would presume many things if she was seen leaving.

Instead, Boaz told her to stay and she was obedient to his suggestion. There is no evidence that they had any sexual relations because she quite possibly could end up the wife of the closer kinsman and Boaz and Ruth are both people of noble character. She stays the night so that no one sees her leaving in the middle of the night. While staying in the night is one matter, being with Boaz when the sun rises and the men around them wake up is a different matter.

Boaz apparently suggested that Ruth arise and leave the threshing floor before anyone was awake enough to recognize their friends. That’s the moment in the morning where you’re not awake yet and while you may be arising and walking around, you’re not aware completely of your surroundings. Boaz was so concerned about her reputation that he wanted no one to know what she had done in coming to the threshing floor.

But before Ruth left to return to Bethlehem, Boaz wanted to bless her yet again! This was his primary reason for giving her six measures of barley. Of course, while some consider a “measure” to be an undisclosed measurement, there was most likely a common measurement for moving the grain. A couple of scholars have said perhaps a double handful of grain would be one measure. It had to be under the amount of grain one woman could carry on her own measured up to six measures.

There was another reason for giving her grain, although by Boaz’ own words his main reason was to bless her and her mother-in-law. This should not be a surprise to us because we have seen him bless her over and over in the story. The secondary reason for this gift was also intelligent and wise. If anyone saw her leaving the field, and she had grain with her, they would think she simply got an early start. This was an added advantage to blessing her and Naomi with grain.

Ruth traveled back to the town of Bethlehem and went to Naomi’s place where she lived, returning with the heap of blessing in grain from Boaz. It is early in the morning as she arrives, and her mother-in-law literally asks her, “Who are you?” Now most translations have something

like what I put with “How did you fare?” because the very next sentence says that she answered the question by telling her everything that happened that night.

This is the second time in less than twelve hours that Ruth has been asked who she is. She answered Boaz that she wanted to be his maidservant. She told her mother-in-law everything that happened. The question must not be overlooked. There is a change occurring in Ruth’s very identity. She has always been a woman of noble character throughout the whole book, but that character is forcing the change that others will see in her life situation.

When Naomi and Ruth are unpacking all the grain they just received as a gift of blessing from Boaz, Ruth explains that as well, that the man wanted them to be blessed. This is looking like a great probable future for women who have had a horrible time of it so far! And Naomi is also aware of the man’s character, promising her daughter-in-law that he will deal with the matter immediately. He will not rest until it is done.

His character is such that leaving a matter go or unattended or festering creates in his person a war instead of peace. He doesn’t feel well until all of his matters are dealt with. He can’t sleep at night and can’t stop thinking about these things until they are dealt with. That is character, to deal with things as they rise instead of letting them go. Ruth was less than a day away from having her life situation completely changed. All of the hard work, the great character, and the plan had paid off. Now she simply had to wait to see how things played out at the gate.

Application

This last scene in the third act shows us that godly character really brings desired action into our lives. God is behind everything that is going on, making the plan that is quite feeble in its own right work, and rewarding with great blessing the godly character of everyone involved. The dilemma of life for these two women is being changed by the promises laid out for the future.

God promises us many things in His Word as well and He is bringing them to fruition. Like Ruth, we must learn how to wait after our obedience to see what He does with reality. Waiting might be the hardest discipline that we learn as believers. And trusting in the promise and character of God is also hard for us because our priceless trust has been dashed by others who were not like God. But just like Boaz giving Ruth even more grain, God gives us deposits that give much evidence to us that He will do as He promises. We must trust and wait on Him!

Also in this time our identity is being defined. We are constantly wondering who we are but God has already spoken of our identity in Him. We can be confident that when others ask, “Who are you?” we can answer with how God has done great things for us and what He has said about us. Listen to what God says about you, not to what others say about you. His opinion is all that matters. God will do the protecting of your reputation and the providing for your future!

Ruth Chapter 4

Act IV: Hold the Line

Section 1: Legal Eagles (Ruth 4:1-12)

Introduction

Ruth's rather forward moves the night before gave Boaz the legal right to pursue the other redeemer and ask him to make a decision on the matters at hand. In this scene, we get a picture of the legal and economic situation surrounding Naomi and Ruth's possibilities. This section is less about the women's agenda and more about the legal matters that men are concerned with. We focus in to find a discussion between two redeemers and an honorable man makes sure everything is done appropriately and with witnesses. No one will say that Boaz cheated the system later on. His forward thought makes each of us desire to be so pure of heart and open in our own dealings!

Translation

1 Then Boaz went up to the gate and sat there. And behold the redeemer whom Boaz had spoken about passed by, and he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit here." So he turned aside and sat down. **2** Then he took ten men from the elders of the city and said, "Sit here." And they sat down. **3** Then he said to the redeemer, "The plot of a field that belonged to our relative Elimelek Naomi is selling, who returned from the fields of Moab. **4** So I said I would reveal it to your ear saying, 'Buy it in front of those sitting and in front of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if not, inform me, so that I will know, because there is no one besides you to redeem it. Then I come after you."

Then he said, "I will redeem it."

5 Then Boaz said, "In the day that you buy the field from Naomi's hand, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.

6 Then the redeemer said, "I am not able to redeem it for myself lest I spoil my own inheritance. Redeem my right of purchase for yourself because I am not able to redeem." **7** (Now this in former times of Israel *was the custom* for redemption and exchange to come to a transaction: a man removed his sandal and gave it to his friend, and this was the confirmation in Israel). **8** So the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." Then he removed his sandal.

9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses of this day that I have bought all which belonged to Elimelek and all which belonged to Chilion and Mahlon from Naomi's hand. **10** And also Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon I have acquired to be my wife to perpetuate the name of the dead concerning his inheritance, so that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his borthers and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day.

11 Then all the people which were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord give the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah who

together built the house of Israel and may you act nobly in Ephrathah and *your* name renowned in Bethlehem. **12** And may your house be like Perez' house whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the offspring which the Lord will give to you from this young woman.”

Commentary

After Ruth left the heap of grain, Boaz would most likely have waited in the early hours of dawn for his foreman or whoever was in charge of his fields to come to the mound. He could not leave it unattended, but wanted also to get to the gate as fast as possible to catch the other redeemer before he left to go to the threshing floor or his fields. So Boaz most likely waited for someone to come and direct the moving of his grain from the threshing floor to his storehouses.

So when the opportunity first presented itself, Boaz went right to the gates of the city where the business and court of the town were carried out. The gates would have been the public square, the central location for buying and selling items, deciding court cases, and anything else that mattered in the social life of the town. So Boaz would go there to have witnesses of his transactions with the redeemer. Most gate areas had seats all along the wall or in the area as one entered the gate, so he sat there in hopes of seeing the other redeemer and the witnesses he needed to do business.

In the same chance that Ruth came to Boaz' field earlier, Boaz just happens to run into the other redeemer! There is no such thing as chance or coincidence or luck. The Lord works in the background of our lives and guides events toward His plan. This was the Lord's work again, managing to have one man in a hundred still at the gate in the midst of one of the busiest times of the year, during the harvest.

Boaz wasted no time in grabbing the man's attention and offering him a seat so that they could discuss the matter at hand. The redeemer may have known Boaz considering they were part of the same clan, so he turns aside and sits with Boaz. Now Boaz has part of his plan fulfilled. There is one more part, the witnesses. So Boaz finds ten elders of the town and has them sit as well so that they may overhear and be privy to the conversation between the two redeemers.

Now Boaz lays out the matter at hand for which everyone is gathered. Naomi is selling the fields that Elimelek owned, probably to make ends meet as a widow. Now anyone would be able to buy the property, but the key in Israel was that the land was tied to the tribes. A family could die out purely by not having any land, so it is best for Naomi to sell to a redeemer in their own clan to keep the land in the family. So the dilemma is that Boaz is willing to buy, but he doesn't have the first right to do so.

Boaz asks the other redeemer in the family if he wants to redeem the land of the dead. Boaz talks only about the land, but the idea of perpetuating the family name is obvious within the understanding of redeeming, or buying back, the land. So the redeemer is all for redeeming the land, because it will add to his children's inheritance. It was an investment in their future, although it would cost him upfront.

However, Boaz is not finished telling him all that is in the deal. He adds that Ruth, the Moabite woman, would also be married as part of the arrangement so that her first born son could perpetuate the family name and keep the family going. Otherwise, the name of Elimelek would die and the line would die out right here in the midst of the troublesome times of the Judges. But when Boaz informs that man that Ruth comes with the field or fields, he is all of a sudden reticent to buy the land.

There may be several reasons for this. He might already be married and unable to take care of Ruth and Naomi long-term. He might not want another heir so that he would have to split his lands up into smaller sections for his heirs. We don't know exactly why the man turns down the agreement, but we know it has to do with his inheritance. Instead, within the hearing of all the witnesses, the redeemer gives full permission for Boaz to buy the field and take Ruth as his wife.

It is within the hearing of the people that this transaction takes place in a legal matter. It is from the lips of the other redeemer, so that later he cannot say Boaz cheated him out of it. Boaz is very wise in his dealings with the man. Next the man takes off his sandal and gives it to Boaz. This might seem like a strange custom. It is a strange enough custom for even the narrator to explain that this was the custom in Israel in a parenthetical statement.

The custom originates in the idea that the owner of a property has the right to tread or walk through his holdings. In fact, it was often that a man would measure out his land by walking its length and breadth, so giving the sandal was like a symbolic handing over of the deed to the land. In giving the sandal, the other redeemer was giving the right to tread upon the field to its new owner.

Boaz then makes it completely official by calling the witnesses to do their legal duty in bearing witness to the transaction in public in case a later question is raised. Boaz summarized the agreement that he now owned all of Elimelek's land and the land that would belong to his sons Mahlon and Chilion, and that he would also take Ruth as his wife to perpetuate the name of the dead so that the family line would not die out and be cut off from the living forever. This was not a cheap deal that Boaz made in the presence of the people. Much money and a marriage went into all that Boaz was willing to do in redemption.

The people of the gate respond in kind and accept their duty as witnesses and bear witness to the transaction, and then they bless Boaz and Ruth's marriage and the children they will have! They put a blessing on Ruth to be like Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the twelve sons of Israel. This blessing is designed to bless them with fruitful child bearing, so that an heir may be produced. The blessings of the people at the gate demand that we know the stories behind the names they mention, as the blessings directly link a blessing of someone else upon Boaz and Ruth.

The second part of the blessing does not seem to fit as well. It is a reference to Tamar and Perez. The story of Tamar can be found in Genesis 38 where Tamar is denied the rights of levirate marriage, so she dresses up as a prostitute at the gate and is met by Judah, who has intercourse with her and impregnates her. Then she has her heir to carry on the line. Why would

they bless them in this way? Because it is a levirate marriage that Boaz and Ruth enter into now. So they are praying that the marriage bring a son to the couple that will redeem Naomi and the family line. Perez is the result of Judah and Tamar's incident, and the line was carried on through the faithfulness of Tamar to do what must be done to have an heir. Ruth had that same strength and fortification to produce an heir despite the danger of losing the family line.

So after the people bless the couple, Boaz most likely headed back and took his wife immediately, after which a festival would be observed and the redemption of the house and line of Elimelek would take place. We will find out next what happens as a result of their marriage and will see in the ending of our book some of the key themes finally come together for the characters who started out with bitterness from God. Oh the joy that will be poured out from this redeeming act by Boaz!

Application

After viewing this part about the legal ramifications of all that is happening in the story, we are left to consider the image of the kinsman redeemer and the incident at the gate. We must be people of action, like Boaz, not waiting for something to happen, but dealing with the matters of our lives upfront and immediately. Leaving things go only pushes off the issues that may get worse as time passes. It is better to deal with the matters of our lives with a ready quickness in most circumstances.

The most applicable part of this scene is that of the two kinsman redeemers and their actions. Boaz is more than willing to fulfill the redemption of both the field and the woman, but the other redeemer who has first right is only willing to take the land. One has the concerns of kinsmen while the other looks out for his own concerns. While we must not be too hard on the other redeemer, the distinction is quite clear to us.

We ourselves are in a worse situation even than Naomi and Ruth! And we need a redeemer more than anyone else! Jesus is our Redeemer. He has come and bought us back from the sin and death that we have found ourselves in. We were born into sin, but also with the image of God in us, although it was tainted and marred by sin. The Lord Jesus is like Boaz in that He came and redeemed us when he did not have to. He wants to redeem us, and went to great lengths of personal sacrifice to redeem each of us. He is not like the first redeemer in our story who did not have our best at heart. He is our true and everlasting Redeemer! And we owe Him a great deal of praise and worship for what He has done for each of us!

Section 2: It's a Boy (Ruth 4:13-22)!

Introduction

The final scene of Ruth's story has two parts to it. We have the narrative part and the genealogy that helps us understand the historical context of the whole story. We learn here that the fortunes of those who started the story with depressing means and happenings now have that depression and loss replaced by joy and gain! Because of redemption, the best possible outcome

happens to the characters in the story. Bitterness is turned to sweetness and our characters are well-cared for. We also can learn to endure the hard times of life because of the redemption of our Lord!

Translation

13 So Boaz took Ruth to be his wife, and he went in to her and the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son. **14** And 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** And he will be to you a restorer of life and a provider in your old age because your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth, she who is more to you than seven sons! **16** Then Naomi took the boy and set 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!” And they called his name Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18 Now these are the generations of Perez. Perez fathered Hezron. **19** And Hezron fathered Ram. Ram fathered Amminadab. **20** And Amminadab fathered Nashon. And Nashon fathered Salmon. **21** And Salmon fathered Boaz. And Boaz fathered Obed. **22** And Obed fathered Jesse. And Jesse fathered David.

Commentary

We don't know how much time elapses between the gate incident and the happenings of this scene. It would take at least nine months after Boaz and Ruth married for the child to be born, and it is most likely that they did not drag out their engagement very long. Most likely, Boaz took Ruth to be his wife that very afternoon or day! Boaz is a man of honor who fulfills his intended vows. When he marries Ruth, his firstborn will actually be Mahlon's firstborn and heir to all of Elimelek's belongings.

Contrary to the ten years that Ruth was married to Mahlon, she is almost immediately pregnant by Boaz, it seems. We know that she had no children with Mahlon in Moab, but when she comes to the place that is being blessed by the Lord with good harvests, Bethlehem, the House of Bread, Ruth is quickly pregnant with an heir! It seems that when the Lord is involved with the success even of pregnancy, there is an immediacy about everything. One of the greatest truths that we take for granted is that the Lord allows for any woman, whether barren or fertile, to conceive. We forget that He is the Giver of life! The language is very clear in the story that the Lord gave Ruth conception.

Although it may seem unusual to societies in which there is less of a community fabric, the women of the neighborhood play a vital role in blessing Naomi, the pleasant one. We are so used to an individualized culture that it may even strike us as odd that every woman in the neighborhood is aware of everything going on, but in Israelite culture, there was much more of a community element than an individual one.

So these women gather around Naomi, understanding of course that this was a levirate marriage and she now has an heir, and they blessed her and joined in the celebration with her.

We also don't do that extremely well in the church and in life in our American culture. The Bible talks about having an emotional intelligence and knowing when to mourn with those who mourn and laugh with those who laugh. Part of being in community is getting to personally experience the joys and sorrows of others!

The women bless the Lord for His hand in the matter, as it is obvious that Ruth is able to bring forth a son when the Lord must save the family line. They contrast the Lord with everything that had happened in Naomi's life to start the book. In the beginning, it seemed there was no favor toward her or her family. There was a lot of leaving in the first chapter, but the Lord never left. He was working things out and they did get worse before they got better, but they were getting so much better now!

This is the denouement of the story, the new setting in which Naomi is aptly named "Pleasant" and has a pleasant and blessed life. It is the new setting in which Ruth is well cared for by a man who loves her and they share their lives. It is the new setting created by redemption and we too have a new setting in our life when we are redeemed! Obed, the son, is technically Naomi's redeemer while Boaz is Ruth's redeemer. Obed will be the one to continue Naomi's family line through Ruth and Boaz with Elimelek's name.

Not only is Obed a redeemer, but he is also a help to his grandmother and one who restores her life. Her life had been hard and uneasy until this young man is born, and now it is pleasant and wonderful with him in it. Not only this, but he literally restores the life of the family line by being born. It would have been up to this young man to provide for his grandmother and mother, seeing that Boaz was most likely already an older man. Obed's name primarily means "Servant," but also carries the name "Worshipper." The one who served worshipped whoever or whatever was served. So the boy would be a worshipper of God, and so his line would show some great worshippers, like King David!

Then the women talk about Ruth, who is proclaimed better to Naomi than seven sons because of her loyalty and her love toward Naomi, and because she is able to have a son in the right time for the family. The number of seven in the Bible can be symbolic of perfection or completeness. Ruth is the complete package for a daughter-in-law, exceeding all expectations and demands upon her because of her noble character.

It is after this blessing that Naomi takes Obed and raises him as her own son. It is not clear to us exactly how the legal ramifications were worked out for a levirate marriage and the son born to a deceased father. Most suggest that because the extended family would live close together, if not in the same house, that it was more about the son blessing the widow Naomi and learning lessons from her, that she would be the caregiver.

But it is most likely that Obed knew his natural mother and father very well and lived with them. Naomi was the one to teach him everything he needed to know. It might be like Moses, who was nursed by his real mother, even though he was taken by the Pharaoh's daughter. He received an education about his people most likely from his mother during that time of nursing.

It is somewhat strange that the women in the neighborhood gave the boy his name, but that is what the text says. I don't know of too many occurrences of this happening. It was usually up to the parent to name the child. Perhaps in the excitement, because the boy was such a help to Naomi they called him "Servant" and Obed stuck and she approved it. We do not really know much about this communal naming practice, and it is most likely an unusual experience rather than the norm.

Then we catch a glimpse before the literary break in verse seventeen of the Davidic line and the implications of our story from the time of the judges. They tell us that Obed is the father of Jesse and that Jesse is the father of David. David of course is the second king of Israel. This raises some questions about whether or not this story was written in the time of the judges or if it was written later with the setting in the time of the judges. Either way, the story loses none of its charm or factual and historical importance.

The last section of the book elaborates on the line that was just mentioned with a fuller picture of the family lineage. This is extremely important not only for King David but also for Jesus! The genealogy gives us the full context of the line and how closely it came to being wiped out during the reign of the judges. Without this story ending on a glorious note, there is no King David and there is no Jesus! We start with Perez, who was interestingly enough part of the blessing upon Boaz and Ruth by the people at the gate.

The only other point that should be made about the concluding genealogy is that it may not completely have every relative within it. We have seen throughout the Biblical genealogy records that the author of the record might shorten a full genealogy to prove a point or point out certain aspects of a lineage. This is neither right or wrong, but simply the way compositions were accomplished. What is important to note is the harbinger that within King David's line, a Moabite woman became part of the salvation of Israel during his kingship, and especially as mentioned in the genealogy given in Matthew, in the line of the Savior of the whole world. Even those who are outsiders can become insiders who can bring salvation to God's people!

Application

As we apply this final installment of this wonderful story of ups and downs to our own lives, we might be amazed how many times God is working behind the scenes in our own lives to bring us blessing upon blessing, and yet we only know about the bitter times and the times where we feel He is cursing us! But God is setting us up, making things happen so that we can see His blessing and enjoy it in our lives here and now. It's one thing to marvel at what heaven's going to be like, but God places little bits and pieces that give us a foretaste of heaven here in our lives now. Can we see them when they are upon us?

The other point that we can mention is that the night must pass away and the dawn will come in our lives when we are facing hard times and depression. In the times where we wonder if God is even with us anymore, the darkest of nights, the Lord is whispering softly that He is with us every step of the way. And His dawn will come! The light will dispel the darkness and we will see His glory and a brighter day! But we have to trust in Him in those nights, or we will

never enjoy the dawn of a new and bright day. Naomi finally experienced her dawn after many years of night. And it was worth every moment, every pain, and every sorrow. We must enjoy the light of each glorious day as much, if not more, as we endured the darkest night.

Finally, we can see from this scene that we must not wait for the other shoe to drop, expecting in the midst of blessing that God is going to lead us right back into the darkest hours of our lives. We must live in the now, not back then or in the next pain. And it is not just for us to live in the moment, but for all believers to live together in the moment.

When God's doing something great in a brother or sister, we need to rejoice with them. And when troubles come, and they will, we must pray for them and walk with them. That's what a community is all about, and we need to uphold biblical community in our churches today. We're traveling the path of life together hand in hand. Let us see where God takes us. Sometimes the journey is rough and dark, but other times it is filled with dancing and joy beyond our wildest dreams. But we have to take the next step.

Ruth Conclusion

There is much to be learned and gained in the story of a woman whose loyalty and noble character won the hearts of many in Israel. Ruth was no quitter. She was a woman who was determined to see her destiny through. She goes through identity changes as she becomes an insider instead of an outsider in Israel. We learn that God can do great things with great character and that nothing happens by accident or coincidence. And we see God setting up even in a romantic love two wonderful people for success in Israel. We see Him guarding the family line of a great king and the King of the universe!

It has been a great story and as we conclude, we must ask ourselves about our own lives. Does God care about the little and seemingly mundane parts of our existence? I believe that He does. He even cared about a romance between two people who would have never met if Ruth and Naomi had not suffered hardship that brought them to Boaz. We see God drawing people to certain places to make things work out exactly, and even using feeble human plans for His purposes.

As we close the book cover on Ruth and her wild life, there's much to ponder and muse upon and meditate upon. Let us take the lessons we have learned and not only think on them. Let us put into practice what God's Word has given us to implement in our own lives. Are you in need of noble character? Ask God for that! Are you someone who needs to realize that God is working things out for your best even when you can't see it? He never leaves us! Ever! And that is the foundation of our walk with Him.

Let us now turn to our own mundane lives and perhaps we might discover how God takes the ordinary parts of our lives and makes extraordinary events and powerful character-buidling moments culminate into the person He's making you and me out to be. Let us run headlong into our destiny of success ordained by our great Father who loves us more than we can ever know!