

# **THE BOOK OF RUTH**

John D. Calvert

[NCTM study]

Rostrevor Baptist Church;

First Term 2004

## Contents

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>STUDY ONE.</b>	<b>1</b>
Reading: Ruth 1: 1–15.	1
<b>STUDY TWO</b>	<b>5</b>
Reading: Ruth 1: 14–22.	5
<b>STUDY THREE</b>	<b>12</b>
Reading: Ruth 2: 1–12.	12
<b>STUDY FOUR.</b>	<b>20</b>
Reading: Ruth 2: 13–23.	20
<b>Ruth 3:1–18; FALLING IN LOVE – RUTH AND BOAZ</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>STUDY FIVE</b>	<b>27</b>
Reading: Ruth 4: 1–22.	27

## STUDY ONE.

### Reading: Ruth 1: 1–15.

**Introduction:** The name Ruth means ‘friendship or companion’ and the book was one of the five ‘scrolls’; Ruth, Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther. It was read at the Feast of Weeks at the end of the wheat harvest (Pentecost). The main religious festivals each year were linked to the agricultural calendar with the Barley Harvest coming first and linked with the Passover and Unleavened Bread. About seven weeks later there came the Feast of Weeks. Then followed the Feast of In-gathering or Feast of Booths at the end of summer when the harvest of various fruits was complete. Each occasion was the opportunity for a party.

The historical time is the twelfth and eleventh centuries B.C. but the author is unknown. The characters in the story are Ruth, Naomi and Boaz.

The theme of the book is relationships, with the main character being the role of God. The same is true in our lives.

Some time during the period covered by the Book of Judges which traces the moral, religious and political decline of Israel, a famine in Palestine caused a Hebrew family to migrate from Bethlehem in Judah, to the land of Moab, east of the Salt (Dead) Sea. They intended only a temporary stay, but verses 3–5 reveal family tragedy.

‘Why doesn’t God ...?’ ‘Where is God when you ( I ) need Him’?

**MOAB:** East of lower Dead Sea. Genesis 19: 37, Lot’s elder daughter named her son *Moab*, ‘from my father’. To the Israelites it was maybe a derogatory pun reminding them of Moab’s incestuous origins. The country ran sheep, goats, cattle, wheat, and barley with metal and stone crafts. Aramaic was the dominant

language and the people engaged in Fertility worship with similar religious practices to its neighbours. Animals sacrificed on hilltop altars with standing stones marking holy sites. Sexuality was part of worship, with astral symbolism. Kings had priestly functions and the gods were thought to bring military victory.

Two main deities; CHEMOSH led the pantheon as god of war and judgment. ASTAR, was the female consort and goddess of fertility. The Moabite Stone was found in Transjordan by a German missionary in 1868, a stele of black basalt inscribed with some 34 lines commemorating various military and building activities of Mesha, king of Moab in 9 century BC.

The book throws light on the domestic scene and shows loyalty and integrity. It enshrines much of what is basic in human relationships and Israelite religion. It demonstrates overruling Providence and the all-embracing love of God; Acts 10: 34–36. This is the story of ordinary people into whose lives there comes the Father's word of hope to the hopeless, to the desolate and the bereaved; 4: 17. Note that the same cause that induced Orpah to leave, induced Ruth to remain; 1: 14. Orpah returned to her people and to the gods of her people in Moab. There are initiatives shown by Ruth in chapter 2, Naomi in chapter 3 and Boaz in chapter 4, but the book is about God, His purposes, love, provision, sovereignty, and He is trustworthy.

**Key verse:** 2: 12, cf. Isaiah 63: 16.

The story is written in prose but there may be poetry in the background. Conclusion of chapter 4 presents a genealogy and this shows God's preparation for the coming of His Son–Messiah through David and the tribe of Judah. Ruth is woven into the ancestry of Messiah for she is King David's great grandmother. A Moabitess, a gentile woman brought in is significant. Genesis 17: 1–8, cf. Genesis 12: 1–3, cf. Joshua 24: 2–4. There are no accidents or fate, nothing haphazard or takes God by surprise. God does not answer our questions nor ask our permission. To ask 'why' is the wrong question. There may be an answer to 'what'? We live in a fallen, sinful world and we are ourselves, sinners who are totally

reliant on God's grace in Christ. Salvation history is the true history. Nothing is wasted; Genesis 50: 20.

**Kinsman–redeemer;** *kin* means relatives or relationship and is used some eight times in Ruth for next of kin whose responsibility it is to redeem, protect and defend. Ruth 2: 20; 3: 9, 12 f; 4: 1, 3, 6, 8, 14. In NT, Mark 6: 4; Luke 21: 16 & 1: 16; Romans 9: 3.

**Redeemer;** buy back, release by payment of a price; for person, animal, land, property. Leviticus 25: 25f. In OT, redemption is salvation wrought by God for His people; Exodus 6: 6; 15: 13; Psalm 107: 2; 130: 8; Isaiah 43: 1; 44: 22; Jeremiah 31: 11.

Redemption is not just deliverance but mode of deliverance. Exodus was deliverance from foreign bondage; Exodus 15: 16; Isaiah 11: 11 & 43: 3f. The intermediary who secures the redemption is the *GOEL*. This title is given to the Lord, Isaiah 41: 14; 43: 14; 44: 6; Psalm 19: 14; Jeremiah 50: 34. A Redeemer will come to Zion, Isaiah 59: 20 cf. Romans 11: 26. Therefore the coming salvation is mentioned often in redemptive terms.

In this story, Boaz redeems Ruth: Leviticus 25: 25; Mark 10:45; Hebrews 2:14–18. God does not become something, He does not become Redeemer because an event occurs in human behaviour. He has always been Father–Redeemer; Ephesians 1: 4–8. Terms in the NT include 'price of release, set free and ransom'. Luke 14: 21; Titus 2: 14; 1 Peter 1: 18; Acts 7: 35; Romans 3: 24 & 8: 23; 1 Corinthians 1: 30; Ephesians 1: 7 & 14; 4: 30; Colossians 1: 14; Hebrews 9: 15; Galatians 3: 13f; & 4: 5.

Therefore there are three facts beyond question.

- 1] The work Christ came to accomplish was one of ransom.
- 2] The giving of His life was the ransom price.
- 3] The ransom was substitutionary in character.

1 Timothy 2: 6, giving of Himself as a ransom for all. He gave Himself in the place of all people and therefore ransomed them from death. Titus 2: 14 Christ's self-giving has the two fold design of ransom from all iniquity and sanctification of the ransomed

possession. Deliverance from the power of the archenemy of God and His people, John 12: 31–33 & Hebrews 2: 14f.

Redemption is redemption from sin and its bondage.

Ransom is a way of understanding the death of Christ. Sinners are the slaves of sin and condemned to death. Christ the Saviour paid the price of release by taking their (our) place. He suffered and they (we) go free.

## STUDY TWO

### Reading: Ruth 1: 14–22.

There are at least four purposes for the Book.

1. At exhibits faith and Godliness in times of apostasy.
2. The concept of kinsman–redeemer is illustrated.
3. The story shows that the scope of God’s grace in the Old Testament included the Gentiles who were outside the covenant of Israel.
4. The ancestry of David is traced back to Judah.

Review study one. 1: 8, 9, 13, ‘Lord’ = Yahweh, believed to be the personal name for God. Naomi regards the Lord as one who controls everything including her life, even though in verse 13, *the Lord’s hand has gone out against me!* No thought of fatalism nor trite or simplistic explanation.

For a Hebrew, *the land*, verse 1, meant the land God had given His people, ie. the land of Canaan. With uncertain rainfall, drought and famine were common, and mentioned many times in the Old Testament. The family originally planned to return as soon as produce was plentiful but they were absent a number of years.

Naomi is *left without* her husband and two sons, verse 5; ie. Completely alone for there is no requirement for Ruth and Orpah to stay with her.

In the story of verses 6–14, Naomi hears that the famine has ended and the three widows commence walking to Judah. Naomi does not pressure the younger women to stay with her but strongly suggests they return to their mother’s house, not fathers. The book is written from a woman’s aspect although Ruth’s father was still alive; 2: 11.

Naomi uses the name *Yahweh*, for ‘Chemosh’ does not figure in her thinking. The expression kindness = loving kindness or grace. To *find rest* means security and the blessing of the Lord, eg. Joshua 21: 45. Naomi saw no future for them in her country, although they wanted to go to Naomi’s people, a significant religious and cultural change.

Then the reference to levirate marriage that was widespread in the ancient Near East, Deuteronomy 25: 5ff. cf. Matthew 22: 24ff. Naomi verbalises her bitter time from the hand of the Lord. Not blaming God, or did she in verses 13, 20 & 21?, but acknowledging that nothing is outside His working. Now come tears and action.

Verse 15 shows the belief that ‘the god can be worshipped only on the soil of his own country.’ eg. Namaan two mules burden of earth, 2 Kings 5: 17. The deity and the land in those times were so tied together that it was believed the deity had no jurisdiction outside the country. In contrast, Naomi regarded *Yahweh* as active in Moab, verses 8, 9, 13. The Bible does not regard other gods as real but accepts that they are objects of worship.

Orpah and Ruth, both Moabite women; needed to decide their future. Verse 14 reveals that Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and returned to her former home. Ruth clung to her mother-in-law. The older woman sought to persuade Ruth otherwise, and stressed the belief that in leaving her homeland Ruth was also leaving her gods. Ruth’s words were a very high expression of friendship, for at the conclusion of her reply she refers to Naomi’s God as *Yahweh–Jehovah–Lord*. Ruth must have known the truth of Godly relationship from Naomi, her father-in-law, brother-in-law and her own husband. She casts herself entirely on Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God. Verse 16 & 17 shows that Ruth’s hope and shelter and security is not ultimately in Naomi but in God. Our security is not in people or circumstances, health or position, but in the Lord.

According to Mosaic Law the Ammonite and Moabite were prohibited from entering a congregation of Israel. Deut. 23:3, *No*

*Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord...* However, the Law did not prohibit marriage with a Moabite, although prohibition may have referred to marrying foreign men. If Ruth’s understanding of faith was genuine, she would not return to the gods of Moab, and that of course is her intent.

Verse 19 ... *the whole town was stirred because of them...*

The Hebrew expression means ‘a buzz of conversation.’ Perhaps rumours and gossip about Naomi forsaking the Lord and going to Moab and even following their god Chemosh was part of the market-place conversation.

The older woman was recognised by the inhabitants; *Can this be Naomi?* Her reaction was pointed. In verse 20 & 21 Naomi pours forth her bitter experiences. She went away years before from a famine situation, a happily married woman with two sons, believing it was best for the family. Now she has returned empty, leaving three graves in Moab, and except for Ruth’s support, she was alone.

There are families and single people today who can be bitter and empty. While there are people who have not experienced a close related death; or divorce, a living death; there are many who know relationship pressures which grind them into a performance role that deeply scars their identity.

There are family groups where a dominant member in subtle behaviour patterns can force their manipulating influence onto others. Paranoia and psychological control is the often unrecognised daily ritual in numerous families, including Christian homes which make faith and moralism a series of legalistic sledge-hammer blows to bring others into submission.

Dr. Eric Berne depicts the psychology of human relationships in his volume; “Games People Play.” In one chapter he writes about marital games. There is the case where children are all urged to be more helpful about the house, but when they are, parents find fault with what they do. He also tells of the little girl who asks,

“Mummy, do you love me?” The word ‘love’ frightens mum and she replies, “What is love?” The answer leaves the child with no direct recourse. She wants to talk about mother, but mother switches the subject to philosophy, which the little girl is not equipped to handle. She begins to breathe hard, mother is irritated, asthma sets in; mother apologises, and the asthma game has now run its course.

The alibi habit is learned from a young age; but is there any answer? Is there any place for honesty and integrity?

The answer is the impact of divine, holy love. This is no simplistic response for that God shaped black within us can only be filled by the One who is Himself the Holy Father. *We love because he first loved us.* [I John 4:19] The God who alone initiates love and is Himself love has come to us in the Cross of His only Son and demonstrated the truth of love.

Christ, the Son, *loved me and gave himself up for me.* This means that He took all my sin, evil and guilt into Himself on that Cross and dealt totally with every last vestige so that not even a dreg remained to haunt me.

God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ and as He is Holy Father I am reconciled to all other human beings. They may not be reconciled to me and may despise my love but from my perspective I love everyone and cannot hate my fellows. There are no options.

I cannot hold grudges or grievances or feel justified in anger against another. I have no basis for self-avenging for all such basis has been dissolved in the Cross. This liberating truth means that in the glory of forgiving for I am forgiven. The past is dealt with and gone so **I let it go.**

**There is no healing of the memories for they are already cleansed.**

Now let’s look at the story in other aspects.

We notice that Naomi was a strong, determined woman with great character and tenacity. A woman who learns through the bitterness of her situation and was a realist.

Naomi pictures many in our churches today. She is not evil, but manipulates her Christian profession to view it entirely through her own perspective. She has grabbed her hurtful situation to herself, and in a sense enjoys being hurt because it makes her the centre of attention. She then wants to pull others into that circle so they can impart sympathy and agree with her problems.

Supposed bitterness and anger can result in emotional strength. One who adopts a perfectionist attitude and radiates coldness and apparent superiority can be a walking civil war. On the one hand desiring acceptance, understanding sympathy and attention. On the other using weapons of an explosive and emotional verbiage to keep others at a distance and off balance in their relationships.

All of these aspects can illustrate the setting of a magnificent love story between Ruth and Boaz that as yet is still unknown. It’s a time of physical and spiritual darkness and suffering, of people who experienced deep emotional hurt, cultures that clashed, poverty, widowhood, diverse personalities.

Over all and in all is the Sovereignty of One whose purposes are always being worked out in the history of salvation.

In the midst of the story is the magnificence of Ruth expressed in verses 16 & 17.

Ruth was also a widow but there is no sense of bitterness or blaming God or giving in to circumstances. She had been hurt and had suffered but there is no expression of anger or attempting to rationalise her situation.

In this she is a direct contradiction to the attitude of Naomi. She is to live in a foreign land and cuts herself off from her own people of Moab.

The obvious difference between these two women is the way they relate to their Heavenly Father. Naomi kicked out against God,

whereas Ruth demonstrated a profound gratitude for being able to come to know God through her need. In growing up in Moab she had been taught to worship a demon, but now she comes to know Jehovah, the Lord.

Ruth knew what it was like to live in the darkness, as did Naomi. But Naomi prefers to remain in the darkness at this stage while Ruth reaches out for the light that has already broken within her.

Naomi would not have been an easy person to love in her bitter attitude, and yet Ruth reached out to her. A younger woman ministering to an older woman.

The second chapter of Paul's letter to Titus reveals in verses 3–5 the ministry older woman can demonstrate in training younger woman in the way they live.

No one suggests an easy method but our story pictures a woman from a non-covenant background reaching out to one who had been brought up in the faith of the Patriarchs. Ruth's service in ministering to Naomi so filled her life that she did not give in to stewing and worry about her own future.

Where did Ruth learn about the God of Covenant? In the home!

We have shown a side of Naomi's life and reaction and our desire is not to paint the older woman as cantankerous. There are contrasts and some of them approach speculation as we regard two truly great women who responded in different ways to their circumstances.

We place no halo over Ruth nor pull the carpet from under Naomi. We can learn significant lessons from this domestic scene for every one of us has or will face similar hurdles.

Jehovah God is our God and His people are our people; we are one and there is no room for excuses or claims that our scene is peculiar to ourselves. The mangle of grass roots living in hope because we trust the God of hope is the greatest and only security given to us. He understands because He tasted all the areas of life before us.

Morris, L.L. *Ruth, Introduction and Commentary*, London, The Tyndale Press, 1968, 259. Morris, 250.

## STUDY THREE

### Reading: Ruth 2: 1–12.

The story shows that Ruth was God's gift to Naomi. She naturally wanted her husband and two sons and a secure home. We don't need to understand WHY, but **WHO!** We can despise God's good gifts because we want what we want. God always gives us what we need for His glory, not what we think we need, 1 Thessalonians 5: 16–18.

**Complaints**; different wife/husband, different parents/children, different job, house, car, etc. Hebrews 12: 14 & 15. God does not bless us because we are good, but because He is good.

Widows in ancient Palestine faced great difficulty in making a living. One way provided was through gleaning. (Leviticus 19: 9 & 10; 23: 22 and Deuteronomy 24: 19–22.) The Law stated that at harvest time a farmer could not reap his land to the boundary or border of his property, nor pick up what remained after the reapers had finished. If a sheaf of wheat was forgotten and left in the paddock, he was forbidden to return for it. In this way provision was made for poor people. They could go through the paddock and glean what was left. Similar provision was made concerning the grape and olive harvests.

The previous chapter concluded with the words. *So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.*

This time of their return was no circumstance or fate for the Sovereign Lord was continuing to work out His purposes in the lives of two widowed women and make provision for them in spite of the situation.

The first verse of this second chapter reads; *Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.*

The word *relative* is 'kinsman' although the exact relationship is not defined. Boaz was not a relative of Naomi, but of her late husband Elimelech. He was a man of influence and integrity in the community.

Verses 2 & 3 describe the scene with Ruth asking Naomi's permission to go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain. By law she could glean but as a foreigner could be rebuffed. She does not know the customs, but does not use excuses, nor retreat into herself. Naomi agreed and the author states, *As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.*

Rather than several farms around the village as happens in our country there was a common field or paddock where all grew their crops and the men owned parts of the one large area of land. There were no fence divisions or hedges, but boundaries indicated by stones. Boaz had heard of Ruth's kindness to Naomi and when he realised she was gleaning in his part of the land he took steps to ensure she was not molested. He is revealed as a man who believed that faith in God and daily work are compatible; hence his greeting in verse 4, *The Lord be with you!* The harvesters replied, *The Lord bless you!*

Through the sadness of losing her husband and father-in-law there will come the even greater blessing of God to Ruth in re-marriage and being part of the line resulting in the birth of Messiah.

We notice a number of interesting aspects about Boaz. One observation is in the way he related to his subordinates, to the little people in his life. When he arrived at the place of work he did not take an inventory of the grain, or give any commands. His first act was to bless his workers, to long for their spiritual health, and in return they blessed him.

It was certainly not our understanding of, ‘Good morning, how are you’? [Which in many cases we don’t want to hear a reply.] Rather, he cared about the spiritual condition of other people. He paid enough attention to recognise a newcomer gleaner among the workers. Ruth was obviously wearing Moabite dress but he did not ignore her presence. A selfish businessman would not have noticed such people, and may have resented them, but Boaz cared for others, so he inquires about her indirectly [v5].

Verses 5–7, Ruth’s work ethic was observed. All of us know what it means to be under pressure. We not only have to deal with what is expected, but the sudden emergency situations that throw our schedule into chaos. So we need to ask in the light of this story, how we treat the little people we meet. Those who are our subordinates, or who may not fit into our social register. The people we regard as different in culture and churchmanship.

In what ways do we respond to the waitress, the garage attendant, and the bus driver; particularly if it’s late? What about those who work for us or assist us so that we can major on our priorities? The husband and wife relationship in not taking one another for granted and being aware of the other’s needs. Children can be shunted off to watch television that becomes a convenient baby sitter. When such children are older, parents can be heard to complain at the inordinate amount of time their teenagers spend in front of the box. We reap what we sow. So these verses cause us to inquire about our behaviour patterns and reactions to others.

Ruth was gleaner because she needed to provide food for her mother-in-law and herself. She had no other motive than obtaining sustenance. Because she and Boaz were not primarily interested in seeking to obtain a marriage partner, and because they exhibited a servant attitude towards others, God worked in such circumstances and allowed them to meet. The person who seeks to manipulate the opposite sex in order to ingratiate themselves, or to be accepted for a possible marriage because they imagine that will solve their problems; is likely to bite off more than they can chew. Numbers of folk have been convinced about a particular relationship and of

marriage, but once that has been initiated they may live to regret their scheming for the remainder of their days.

Some even pray for a partner or concerning a situation and then have the audacity to say; ‘if God doesn’t want me to do that, then He will stop me’! Who says? The old adage remains true; marry in haste, repent at leisure!

There are some helpful principles that issue from the account.

1. The less we are concerned about our own needs, and the more we are concerned to serve others; the more surprised we may be at the Lord’s working. While we concentrate on building our own castles, or playing politics to ride roughshod over others, or arrange situations so we come out best; the more we are asking for disaster.

Matthew 6:1 & 33 remains on target for today. Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

2. We need to realise how little we really know about what is important. The profound and significant life-changing events may come about through very ordinary conversations. Many of us can look back and see the Lord’s hand at crucial points in our lives, but at the time we had no idea that such events were significant.

With our finite minds we cannot have a clear perspective of what is vital in the mind of God. The lesson is to be sensitive to others, and open-hearted particularly to the Word of truth which the Spirit is speaking.

A number of years ago I met a married couple whom I had not seen for many years. They had no idea I had entered the ministry

and had lost track of my whereabouts. Then they informed me that they had prayed for me every day, where ever I was and whatever I was doing; that the Lord would bless and guide my life. That knowledge of prayer was great encouragement to me; and to them when they realised I was a Pastor.

3. The conversation and interaction between Boaz and Ruth, reveals they both displayed natural ability to be a man and a woman, ie. To be what God created them to be. If only we would be what we were meant to be instead of trying to make ourselves into someone else, life would be more straightforward.

When these two met each of them independently had a love relationship with Jehovah. We don't know whether Boaz had previously married, he probably had, or if he was a widower. But both of them had settled in their minds that the Lord God was King and Sovereign.

An unmarried friend of mine once stated. "I've come to terms with my singleness." But he did not come to terms with an excess weight factor and was required by medical advice to lose a significant amount. As a result of their heart relationship with Jehovah, Boaz and Ruth related to each other without any undercurrent or innuendo or psychologically sexual games.

Verses 8–10 Boaz initiates the relationship and approaches her directly and serves Ruth. In front of his workers and everyone else within earshot he honours her by stating, "I have heard that you are a Godly woman." This is the underlying thought from verse 12. *May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*

These gracious words come at the conclusion of a section describing how Boaz provides for Ruth's needs and protection. Gleaners were often beaten and attacked and could not easily protect themselves, so Boaz issues clear instructions; v6–11.

Note Ruth's genuine question in verse 10, *Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?* Boaz' reply in the following verse reveals that he is well aware of Ruth's biography.

*I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—since you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.*

Ruth is grateful to him because she did not expect such treatment. She is not trying to get in good with him, and in a very feminine and beautiful manner expresses her gratitude. Ruth's further response is contained in verse 13. *May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,* she said. *You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.*

The literal meaning is; 'You have spoken to the heart of your maid servant.' It is a powerful expression of thanks. He has spoken, not just to her outward needs, but to the needs of her heart. She is deeply moved in having met a man of such character and integrity, a man of God. Ruth did not have to contrive that response. It stemmed from her character through the new relationship she had with Jehovah, cf. Psalm 91: 4.

What have we learned from this account? We have learned that circumstances do not necessarily determine our response. We have realised that because we do not know and cannot know what events will be crucial in our lives, we are to be obedient as men and women of God in all of our everyday situations. We do not have to impress God; we cannot. We do not have to impress anyone else. We are to see ourselves as we are and live out what we are in the light of His truth. Notice the encouraging impact of I Peter 1: 13–16.

We see also that whether in a single relationship or a marriage, Ruth and Boaz bring forth the lesson of being servants towards

others. They served and responded to each other because their relationship was a serving response to Jehovah.

Being a man or woman is a priceless privilege. Certainly there are folk with deep problems who need help and some who are battling with the temptations of alternate lifestyle and their roles and identity. We neither put such people down, nor do we become so condescending that anything goes.

Advertising thrusts its wares at us with the offer that we want to be other than we are and that the answers emanate from obtaining certain commodities. We are blasted with advertising that lists the so-called answers to make us acceptable or 'real' or achievers. Sadly, a similar lie is pushed in church where we are told to 'reach our potential for God.'

Advertising has its legitimate place but let us not be conned into accepting standards of maleness and femaleness which are based on the noise of minority groups or the latest 'in thing.'

It is not difficult to be a man, nor a woman; for that is what God intended. Genesis 1: 27 & 28 & 31 state clearly *...male and female he created them... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...*

But we know it is difficult to be unselfish, and difficult to be faithful. It is never easy to stand against the forces that would turn us down convenient side paths to attractive, so called, 'new truths.' Every day it is a battle to live in God's grace, to walk in the Spirit, to obey Christ. But it's a glorious battle that we fight, not to victory, but from victory for through the Cross we can all be what He has called us to be.

The answer is not by taking some course in how to be a total person. Self-help courses whether Christian or otherwise; are external emphases, which can never affect or alter our inner relationship with Christ. Without radical change within, there is no possibility of bettering human relationships. The One who does the work within us is the Holy Spirit of God. This is not some extra but the natural on-going work of the Cross. No emphasis on outward

reform to be this type of man or woman, will produce pure, healthy people.

The Bible says that we are fellow-heirs of the grace of life. We do belong together. If there is deviation we have allowed ourselves to be sidetracked. When we recognise our newness in Christ, that He has remade us in that Cross; then we know we can support each other whether male, female, single, married, separated, divorced, widowed.

The words of Boaz to Ruth as recorded in verse 12, *...the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*

## STUDY FOUR.

### Reading: Ruth 2: 13–23.

**Verse 12** reveals the imagery of a little bird snuggled under its mother or father's wings in a picture of safety and security; Psalm 17: 8; 36: 7 & 63: 7. Boaz prays for Ruth and eventually his prayer for blessing is answered through himself. Ruth accepts his kindness, verses 13 & 14, and shares in the meal with his people. Fresh ears from the crop were roasted in a pan, and she enjoyed a good meal.

**Verses 15–17;** the Law gave gleaners the right to go over the field after the reapers had finished. Boaz gave Ruth the right to glean before the reapers had finished and even instructed them to purposefully leave some grain. An 'ephah' was about 4 gallons or 22 litres.

**Verses 18–23** show Naomi's reaction and she is revived in faith and her focus is again on the Lord. Ruth gleaned only in Boaz' field for if she worked in another area it would show she did not appreciate what Boaz had done for her. She works with his workers but lives at home with Naomi. Verse 21 again refers to her as a Moabitess.

**KINSMAN–REDEEMER;** (Study One) Reminder that Israel was not the absolute owner of the land for it belonged to the Lord and they were entrusted with it. While it was not theirs to sell, this expression was used to explain that in hard times they might part with some of it to obtain finance, 4: 3. They had the right and duty of redemption, otherwise a kinsman–redeemer bought it back for them. In 4: 3 the land is mentioned before the woman, hence its importance.

### Ruth 3:1–18; FALLING IN LOVE – RUTH AND BOAZ

God is and must be regarded as the main character in any story and He is closely involved in the human characters of this drama involving; Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Ruth and Boaz demonstrated a concern for the Lord and His people rather than focusing upon themselves and their own needs. Their maleness and femaleness is clearly demonstrated in the open relationship they had with each other and the care and consideration, which they generated.

The result of this growing involvement is revealed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ described in Matthew chapter I:5 & 6, *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.*

Rahab (Joshua 6: 25) was the harlot from Canaan who assisted Joshua and the children of Israel during the conquest of the Promised land. Again there is the lesson that people outside the Covenant were accepted when their hearts were opened to the message of God's grace.

Boaz does not come across as a dominating nor defensive man, nor is he timid or uncertain of himself. He is a man's man. Ruth has an ease and femininity with which she responds to him, respects and appreciates him.

The beginning of their love relationship was this reciprocal encouragement each to the other. The end of chapter two records that following their meeting Ruth continued to spend time harvesting in the fields of Boaz. No doubt as the days went by they began to appreciate each other more, and be attracted to one another.

Each of them loved God and trusted their Heavenly Father to provide for them. But suddenly they faced a different situation. It is possible for an individual or family to live under difficult circumstances for long periods of time, but once hope is brought into the scene so that the circumstances might change, the situation can become unbearable.

C.S. Lewis wrote of the experience he and his wife shared when she had cancer. They expected she would die and prepared themselves. Then the cancer went into remission, it seemed she had been healed, and all of a sudden their hopes of a future life together seemed possible. Suddenly the cancer returned, and it was much more difficult for them to deal with than it had been initially. What type of situation confronts Ruth and Boaz? As far as we can understand they did not expect to fall in love.

They had learned to trust God with what He had given them. She had been widowed and we don't know whether he was already married or a bachelor or a widower. Whatever their situation in life they had accepted it and not given way to bitterness or scheming.

Now their hopes had been raised, and a different perspective looms in their thinking. Also, Naomi interjects herself into the situation, and plans for Ruth's future, and encourages her to win Boaz over to her side; *v2 Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours?...*

**Verses 1–5** demonstrate Naomi's plan. We don't want to be hard on Naomi, but from our western culture viewpoint she seems to be scheming. Therefore we need to understand something of the cultural patterns and belief of the day.

Actually Naomi's idea is not that Ruth obtain a home NIL but that she have rest, which means that she becomes settled in life, cf. 1: 9. According to the scene before us, Jehovah owned the land, which He had given His people for an inheritance. The Israelites received this and they could not part with their family portion nor sell it. The land was to remain in their particular family.

If anyone was obliged to sell his inheritance on account of poverty, and disposed of it, the nearest relation had the duty to redeem it. If it could not be redeemed, it came back in the next year of Jubilee; Leviticus 25. Alongside this was the procedure that if an Israelite who had been married died without children, it was the duty of his brother-in-law to marry the widow, ie. his sister-in-law, and establish his dead brother's name in Israel by raising a son through his sister-in-law. She would continue the name of her deceased

husband, so that his name would not become extinct. The son then became the legal heir of the property. This was a Biblical and traditional custom.

If the redeemer renounced his obligation, then he would take upon himself the disgrace connected with such a refusal; Deuteronomy 25. Boaz was a relation of Elimelech, Naomi's late husband, and he became the redeemer whom Naomi hoped would fulfill the duty of redeemer; ie. he would not only ransom the purchased field, but also marry her daughter-in-law Ruth, who was the widow of the rightful heir of the land. So these factors were behind her words of encouragement for Ruth to visit Boaz who had already showed that he was a man of God, and most considerate in his character.

According to our customs the account of Naomi's influence upon Ruth seems objectionable, but when viewed by the accepted customs of the people of Israel, it is not that way.

**Verses 6–12** bring the next scene, which occurs at the threshing floor. Again this picture is strange to our understanding. The harvested grain was separated from the husks by being trodden out by animals. The mixture was thrown into the air against a stiff breeze, and the wind blew the chaff away while the heavier grain fell to the ground. Threshing floors were usually situated in exposed positions so they could catch the breeze.

The story of Gideon reveals his fear of the enemy that he beat out his wheat in a winepress, a most unsuitable location. In those days people would camp out during the harvest, and remain by their produce to protect it. When Boaz lies down to sleep, Ruth is instructed to observe and mark in her mind the place where he lies. Later she is to come and uncover his feet. This would awaken him, as his feet became cold. The position also presents Ruth as a petitioner to Boaz.

Boaz slept for sometime before discovering Ruth, and around midnight was awakened. Verse 8 suggests that he trembled or was startled, either through fear or because his feet were cold. Verses 7–9 tells that Boaz enjoyed good food and drink and lay down in good spirits at the far end of the corn pile. That position probably

made Ruth's approach in the middle of the night, much easier. She uncovered his feet and lay down. Startled, Boaz inquired who was there? Her reply is straight to the point with no hidden agenda. *I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman–redeemer.* Ruth is appealing to Boaz's responsibility before God. She is not appealing to his physical interest in her. There is no thought that the end justifies the means. They have a slowly awakening love and interest in one another, but we emphasise that it stems from their primary love and relationship with Jehovah.

In our western culture it is easy to give in to temptation because of selfishness. We want something that we feel is valuable for ourselves, and those around us may agree. In other words, we trust God on the one hand, but act for our own behalf on the other to ensure we come out on top. Boaz and Ruth did not follow that philosophy. God was faithful to them. They chose to do what was right and follow His prescription for them and allow Jehovah to take care of them.

Boaz was much older than Ruth and commends her character in not running after the young available men of the village. Verses 10 & 11 present his reply to her and his promise to her petition, *And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.* The twelfth and thirteenth verses bring out the possible complication that there is a closer kinsman–redeemer than Boaz. This unnamed relation has priority but Boaz determines that if the other man refuses his obligation, then; *...I vow that as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it. Lie here until morning.* She obeyed his instructions and rose before the dawn could disclose her presence. She returned to Naomi with her shawl bulging with produce; and he journeyed into town.

Naomi was naturally anxious and inquired to hear the news from Ruth. The older woman not only knew the accepted practices but also relied on the integrity of Boaz. Her response in verse 18 shows the high regard she had for Boaz and her confidence in the whole

situation. *Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.* It is not that there is only one wife or husband for a person in life, nor do we suggest that those who are not married or who are widowed and do not remarry are out of God's plan or are Christian 'martyrs'. We must not rationalise situations from our own misunderstandings.

If Ruth had not been widowed she probably may not have come to know Jehovah, nor come to Bethlehem, and not met Boaz. In the sovereign purposes of God who always works out His will through human lives and circumstances, the word 'if does not compute. We cannot ask 'if for there is no adequate response. If we must inquire then ask, 'what'? What is the Lord revealing to me, or teaching me? We must also underline the fact that neither Boaz nor Ruth used pressure tactics. They acted in accordance with the practices of their faith and their historic setting.

Sometimes we are so concerned to emphasise the Good News of Jesus Christ and desire to see others come to know Him that we use pressure tactics, false promises, and phoney marketing technique to make things happen. We push people to 'make decisions' as if we were red Indians on a scalp hunting expedition. We badger people with prayer as a weapon and with religious terminology like spiritual salesmen so as to fill in our 'church growth' statistics. The Gospel message is 'love and care' for people through the natural witness of the Spirit in our own overflowing lives as we reveal God's grace.

Marriage too can have this; the end justifies the means approach.

"You know my husband doesn't know what's good for him, but I do, and I'll twist his arm and nag him to attend church." Husbands do the same. "My wife doesn't understand that what I have in mind is for her best interest." Parents pressure their children to conform to expected patterns, acceptable friends, and the 'right' job in life. There is no suggestion that we back off our responsibilities to one other and there are occasions when we need to speak clearly and strongly. But the Lord is at work and knows what He is doing. Our responsibility is to be who and what He wants us to be in the given

situations of daily life; for this is our true worship wherever we are found. We can never improve on the faithfulness of God.

## STUDY FIVE

### Reading: Ruth 4: 1–22.

This fascinating account is one of the few documents from the ancient world which informs us regarding the legal processes of redeeming both the land and the relative concerned.

The first verses picture the scene of Boaz sitting at the town gate and waiting for the kinsman–redeemer to pass. As the unnamed man arrived, Boaz called him to join in conversation along with ten of the town elders.

The gate of ancient cities was the centre of city life and business, the place where legal transactions were heard, discussed and decided. The kings of Israel and Judah sat on thrones in an open area; I Kings 22: 10; Jeremiah 38:7. The place for executions, Deuteronomy 22: 23, 24. Excavations reveal that cities in Palestine were generally closely built together and there were no large open spaces like the Roman Forum or the Greek areas used for conversation.

We have earlier described Boaz as a man of integrity and Godly character, and he makes no behind the scene manipulation regarding this important matter. He sat patiently at the town gate until this closer relative comes past and requests him to stop and join him. The closer kinsman's name is not recorded for his identity is not important and he soon disappears. With the town elders as witnesses the matter unfolds. This was like a courthouse and the elders were often judicial although here they seemed to be witnesses. The number ten is not particularly significant in this account; Joshua 20: 4.

The word *I* in verse 4 is emphatic, signifying Boaz taking the initiative. He mentions that Naomi is poor, and needs to sell the family property, Jeremiah 32: 6–12. He suggests the unnamed relative buys it and received the reply, *I will redeem it*. Then Boaz reminds him that there is more to the deal than at first appears.

Along with the land there comes the dead man's widow and his responsibility is to maintain the name of the deceased with the land. He cannot add the property to his own for it belongs to the descendants of Elimelech. His task as redeemer was to look after the property, marry the widow and produce a child who will grow up bearing the name of his mother's dead husband, Mahlon.

The man may not have been wealthy and has second thoughts. He could redeem the field but knows it will not be an extension to his own property. The deal will diminish his finance for he must pay to buy back the land and it will not belong to his family. He realises that financially he cannot cope with the deal, and probably doesn't wish to be involved with two wives who may not be compatible. The land and Ruth together presents a double financial requirement, and raises the possible question of his own children and their inheritance? There must have been a law or custom for the closer kinsman does not object to the argument. He refuses the legal responsibility and the elders of the city were witnesses to what had occurred. Boaz is entitled to redeem the property and marry Ruth. There is no reference to the land before this scene and there are no clues as to when Naomi informed Boaz about her plans. It seems clear that there are conversations between Naomi and Boaz that do not appear in the story, plus Boaz' willingness to marry Ruth suggests he had more knowledge of her than is written in the account. The line of succession is sons, daughters, and then closest male relative. Women could succeed to the land in later times; 2 Kings 8: 1–6.

Dr. Leon Morris comments that 'redemption' involved the family not just the individual. If a murder occurred the whole family suffered injury and the next of kin was to take initiative and execute the murderer as *the avenger of blood*; Numbers 35: 19. Shed blood defiled the land so when the murderer was executed, the land was cleansed. The expression 'Avenger of blood' in our culture does not link closely with either 'kinsman' or 'redeemer' but they are translated from the same root. 'It denotes a man who

acted in any one of a number of ways to forward the welfare of the family'.<sup>1</sup>

Verses 5 & 6 reveal that the law of the redeemer in this instance was designed to prevent the alienation of any land or the extinction of any family. If the redeemer was already married, that would still not relieve him of obligation. But he could drastically affect his own inheritance by spending money on land that would never belong to him. It would belong to the children his 'redeemed' wife would have. Ruth, being a foreigner, could apparently not inherit her late husband's property. Ruth was being bought, the land and the wife go together and this is why the land is mentioned first. We will see that Boaz, as redeemer, paid the cost for the land and for Ruth. He married her. She was a Gentile and outside the Covenant, but through believing in Jehovah, became a member of the Covenant family.

I Peter 1: 18–21 teaches us that our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has paid the price. The transaction of bringing us by grace into His Covenant family has been totally completed in the Cross. As foreigners (heathen, Gentiles) we have been brought into relationship with the Father through the atoning death of the Son. There are no human works involved in this, it is entirely by His initiation and grace.

Hebrews 10: 11–18 throws more light on the transaction of Christ as our priest who, as described in verse 12 and 14; *...offered for all time one sacrifice for sins... because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.*

Verses 17 & 18 of the same section in Hebrews are so liberating and refreshing. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Atonement; its meaning and significance* (IVP, England, 1983) 111.

In returning to the account of Boaz and Ruth we are confronted with more unusual customs from ancient history. Verses 7 & 8 refer to taking off a shoe [sandal] which apparently means that the one who does that resigns the right of walking on the land as master, in favour of the one to whom he gives the shoe. The transaction is legalised as the closer redeemer tells Boaz that he can buy the land and then removed his footwear as a visible sign of the arrangement before the elders. This was a transfer of rights not property and confirmed the agreement before witnesses. Possibly had the idea of placing feet upon the land to possess it; Deuteronomy 1: 36; 11: 24; Joshua 1: 3 & 11.

Following the public statement of Boaz that he has bought all the property from Naomi and acquired Ruth as his wife, there is respect and honour paid to him by the elders, and also by the inhabitants of the city. There is something refreshing about being honoured and respected by people; not because we have manipulated or used seduction to obtain our goals, but because we were open before the Lord as people of integrity who had nothing to hide.

Senator Edward Kennedy might have made a great contribution as President of the United States. But he will always live with the stain of Chappaquiddick on his character. Whether the event occurred as the media described it or not, they will never free him of that dreadful night.

Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover, at the height of their careers, were among the most powerful and influential men of their day. They had tremendous opportunity to shape the course of history, but neither of them will be remembered with respect or integrity.

We wonder about manipulations in families, politics and behind the scenes manoeuvring in sport, the lack of integrity in some church situations where folk are determined to obtain their way at any cost.

A cartoon once depicted a senior demon talking to his friend. In the background is a church building from which emanate obvious

sounds of violent dispute. The senior demon comments, 'We always start our juniors on church politics, it never fails.'<sup>2</sup>

Christians are to reflect and reveal Christ in their behaviour. We know we fail but there is never the acceptable alibi, 'I'm only human.' The Holy Spirit of God indwells us; He is the Spirit of Holiness. We are not informed about the faults of Ruth and Boaz, as others like David the King. What we must realise is that the Covenant relationship into which we have come by faith is God's family, and not one in which the behaviour reflects the standards of human society nor the expectations of peer pressure.

Ruth and Boaz could have chosen to make things happen so as to accommodate their own interests. If they had chosen the path of selfishness, they may have been married as a result, but their marriage would not have had the character and beauty that resulted from knowing Jehovah as Lord in their relationship.

How many attractive marriages do you know? To follow the instincts of greed and beating the opposition may grant us a reward regarded as self-achievement. There may be short-term success in popularity. But such behaviour never produces character, respect or honour. Some people achieve the veneer of respectability and honour from their associates because of the power, money or dominance they wield. But behind the scenes, and certainly once they have left such a position, the true story soon becomes apparent.

In chapter 1 Naomi insisted, ... *the Almighty has made my life very bitter... The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.* But her voice is drowned out at the end of this book. The women surround her with the reminder that God has not abandoned her.

Chapter 4: 14 & 15, Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous

---

<sup>2</sup> See also; C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters; Letters from a senior to a junior devil* (Fontana Books and William Collins, 1942 & 1958).

throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.

This marvellous statement follows on the marriage of Boaz and Ruth and the fact that the son who was born is by God working in their marriage. Verse 13 *And the Lord enabled Ruth to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.*

The Lord did not leave this older woman alone, and any complaints and bitterness on her part are now lost in the past through the goodness of the Sovereign Lord who works all things out according to His purposes. Being in the Covenant family is not a form of escapism from the trials and difficulties of human life. There are times when any of us can feel deserted and discouraged. If we build protective walls, or condition ourselves by circumstances or feelings we are done for. Someone has said, it is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us that is significant. Naomi cares for this child and we see the working through of kinsman-redeemer for the women exclaimed in verse 17, *Naomi has a son.* [cf. 1 Chronicles 2: 4–15]

They name him Obed, and the conclusion of the story states that Obed was the father of Jesse and grandfather of David, the king. Here is the line of Messiah, 'great David's greater son,' Jesus Christ. The author presents the genealogy of the family. Ruth and Boaz had no idea that through them there would be such royalty. But they did have the opportunity to either serve themselves or trust God in a situation that could have gone the wrong way. Their individual choices throughout the story were that Jehovah is Lord and King, and they would trust Him in sorrow, displacement, turmoil, daily need and legal complications.

God's sovereignty is reassuring in the midst of life's uncertainties but that never excuses our responsibilities. We have no alibis or excuses; we are responsible under God for the path we take. None of us can ascertain the influence of our behaviour for we influence those with whom we mix day by day for good or evil. Our task is to know what our Lord is doing and saying, for only then in such

relationship can we follow Him. In practical terms this means we will not trust the Lord on the one hand and our own manipulations on the other. The person who is open is vulnerable can never lose. Ephesians 1: 3.