



FROM BITTER DREGS
TO BLESSED DAYS . . .

The Book of Ruth
And
The Storyline of the Bible

Patrick J. Griffiths

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The Book of Ruth and the Storyline of the Bible

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible tells a single *Story* of creation, rejection/rebellion, condemnation, redemption, re-creation and fulfillment. It is **the** *Story* from which, through which, and for which all stories find their reason for existence. To understand this singular idea is to understand the Bible in all of its parts. In the absence of this singular theme, the Bible is a collection of discombobulated pieces contributing to fanciful speculations and imaginary depth. But to understand the singular Personage who ties all of the pieces into a unified whole is to measure the immeasurable landscape of God and sound out the unfathomable crevices of His being and activity, both of which, in reality, are incapable of happening by finite beings.

Yet this is our quest: To know who He is, what He has done, and who His people are in Him. There is no journey that can benefit the adventurous as does this journey.

The Book of Ruth is a piece to this marvelous puzzle. The Book of Ruth enables us on our journey. It points out where we are in tracing the Seed's path to completion. We encourage you to read and re-read each part with the larger picture in mind. Thus we commend you on your journey. May you find Him at every bend in the path and at every oasis in the pursuit.



The Triumph of the Woman's Seed – The Moabites

The Bible is a well crafted literary work. In fact, it is the *Story* from which all stories find their footing. The Son and His seed is the *Story*. Before going any further, let us acknowledge that everyone has an agenda. Regardless as to how obscure or open this agenda is, there is always an underlying element that motives the *Story*. In the November issue of *WORLD* magazine, Andree Seu commented on this idea in her short editorial entitled, “Real Life: Those who try to define it for us always have an agenda (November 20, 2010, 91).” Her comments are insightful.

What is the purpose of telling stories, ever think of that? Here is a better question: What is God's purpose in telling stories? God Himself is a *Storyteller*, and we are to be ‘imitators of God’ (Ephesians 5:1). What kinds of characters does He draw? What is His agenda in telling the *Story*? Every writer of movies, plays, and musicals has an agenda. From *The Three Little Pigs* to *Brokeback Mountain*, somebody is sending you a message, spliced in with the Pepsi ads. Call it ideological product placement, or embedded marketing. What is ‘real life’? Who are you going to let define it for you?¹

God had an agenda in creating. There is an agenda behind the Trinity and incarnation, the cross and resurrection. This agenda drives the *Story*. What we always need to correct is the misconception of how sin might be perceived as a knowable but unintended consequence of free moral agents.

This removes God from being the primary writer of the *Story*. Genesis 3:15 is not a reaction by God because of an accident within humanity. Genesis 3:15 is part of the *Story* written from the beginning.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15).

When God created all things He equally created Lucifer, a significant and notable angel of light. Lucifer rebelled against God. This rebellion was directed at the second member of the God-head. Lucifer loathed the Son’s unique status and desired to replace Him by destroying Him. Prior to Adam’s sin, Lucifer was already seeking to destroy the Son and then the Son’s seed. This pursuit of destruction can be traced throughout the Word of God. Every inclusion of perceived folly in the seed’s journey is the triumph of the woman’s seed in God’s march toward fulfillment and victory. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was Lucifer’s attempt at thwarting the Son’s victory. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was there whispering doubt and denial. At the cross, he genuinely believed he had stopped the *Story*. His rage against the woman’s seed has only accelerated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Genesis 3:15 is not the beginning of the seed promise. The Son and His seed predate our introduction to the *Story* in Genesis 3. Jesus Christ is the fullest and final embodiment of the woman’s seed promised in Genesis 3:15 whereby the serpent’s head would be crushed. If we were to work back from the fulfillment to the initial promise through the various shadows, we would see how the *Story* unfolds.

The promise of Genesis 3:15 creates longing within His people for fulfillment. From the very beginning of child-bearing, each birth held hope that this child would be the one who would bring an end to the serpent and his seed.

The seed promise and the longing of God's people can be traced through five larger movements: Primeval history (Gen. 1-11), Patriarchal history (Gen. 12-50), Judicial history (Exod. - 1 Sam.), Monarchical history (1 Sam. 1-Malachi) and finally Jesus (Matt. 1-Rev. 22). The seed promise would come through Noah, his son Shem, his descendent Terah, who would be the father of Abraham (Gen. 11:10-32). Through Abraham and his wife Sarah would be the fulfillment of the seed promise in the birth of Isaac (Gen. 17:19; 21:12). Isaac would father Jacob through whom the seed promise would continue its march toward ultimate fulfillment (Rom. 9:9-13). Jacob would have two wives, Leah and Rachel. Through them twelve sons would be born. Through Leah, the seed promise would come through Judah (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17). It is of interest to note how Rachel was the one whom Jacob loved, not Leah. Leah was not his first choice, but it is through Leah the seed promise continues. Judah would function as a kinsman-redeemer for his son's wife Tamar (Gen. 38). It is worth noting how Tamar was a Canaanite and she would have to deceive her father-in-law to function as a kinsman-redeemer. She would, through her father-in-law, give birth to Perez (Gen. 38:29). The genealogy of Perez is noted in Genesis 46:12 and Numbers 26:19-22. This same genealogy resurfaces in Ruth 4:12-22.

Elimelech, the father-in-law of Ruth, was from the tribe of Judah. Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, is also from Judah. The

father of Boaz was Salmon (Ruth 4:21) and his mother's name was Rahab (Matt. 1:5). It is noteworthy to remember the land conquest, the fall of Jericho and Rahab the harlot (Josh. 2, 6; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25).

The brief genealogy given in Ruth spanned five generations in a period of 490 years—Ruth, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David—an average period of 98 years between generations. We know that David was a son of Jesse's old age, and that Boaz was Ruth's second husband. This suggests Rahab achieved great longevity and was probably well advanced in years when she gave birth to Boaz.

Boaz took Ruth as his wife and enabled the line of Elimelech to continue, through whom King David would be born. Yet the inclusion of a Moabite into the seed promise was one of great mystery. It is at this time we wish to note the Moabites and their rise to fame.

The Moabites are the descendants of Lot by Lot through his eldest daughter (Gen. 19:37). It is an incestuous union and an inglorious beginning. The Bible prohibited such action and identifies such as sin (Lev. 18:7). By the time of the Exodus, the Moabites were marked as the enemies of Israel (Exod. 15:15; Num. 21:29). This animosity would prove unrelenting. When the Israelites journeyed in the wilderness, the leadership of Moab sought to aggressively curse the people of Israel (Num. 22). The Moabites were not passive in their aggression toward the Israelites. They actively sought their demise. Although the Moabites sought their cursing, Balaam the son of Beor spoke of Israel's salvation and Moab's condemnation (Num. 24:17). The Moabites were portrayed as immoral and idolatrous and a means of attacking the seed of the woman in Numbers 25:1ff

(Judges 10:6; 1 Kings 11:7, 33). Because we know the fuller *Story*, we cannot allow this part of the narrative to be lost on us as it relates to the Book of Ruth and the seed's lineage. The quest for moral purity was violent and brutal (Num. 31:1-20).

Israel sought peace with the Moabites, but they were the aggressor in seeking Israel's destruction. God gave explicit instruction "not to harass Moab" (Deut. 2:9). Moses was buried in a valley in the land of Moab (Deut. 34:6). God used the Moabites to "discipline" His people because of their disobedience (Judges 3:12).

It is within the context of the Book of Judges we are introduced to the Moabite Ruth (Ruth 1:1, 2, 22; 2:6). Ruth would become part of David's lineage and thus included in the line of Jesus Christ (Ruth 4; Matt. 1). During the monarchy, the Moabites continued as enemies of Israel (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5). As a fugitive from King Saul, King David found refuge for his parents among the Moabites (1 Sam. 22:3, 4). King David would ultimately subjugate the Moabites (2 Sam. 8:2). The *eschatos* (i.e. "Last Days/End Times") speaks of Moab and Ammon in subjection to the nation of Israel (Isa. 11:14; Zeph. 2:9). The prophets spoke emphatically against the nation of Moab and her future destruction (Isa. 15, 16; Jer. 25:17-27; 48; Amos 2).

Why is this narrative so significant in our journey within the *Story* and toward God's fulfillment of promise? The *Story* we find ourselves in is often replete with twists and turns that make no earthly sense. It is often marked by heartache and sorrow. We are lonely and isolated with feelings of insignificance and inadequacy. Many within the line of promise failed to cling to the hope of a future seed. Many

were swallowed up in the dark recesses of forgotten times. Yet God is always working and nothing is obscure or unmarked by God. He knits sin's tragedy into His *Story*. Although it would appear safer to believe God reacts, there is so much inclusion that it would appear God is the teller of the tale and we are the subjects who support the ongoing advancement of His *Story*.

No one would read the various pieces of Moab's history and conclude that they would be part of the Messiah's lineage. Who would write such a *Story* whereby the incestuous union would produce the prophesied seed of the woman that would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15)?

How many of us are the consequence of rape or incest or were unwanted children and thus have felt like the outcast and offspring of rejection? Yet God has written into His *Story* such earthly tragedy. Why? Fundamentally it is so no one can boast, so that His people might trust Him even when the night is dark and the journey long.

God brings us into such seasons so that we might long for His coming. If we are so embedded in the things of this world that to leave them would be loss, then we are invited to consider the claim of Christ on our lives. If you find yourself swallowed up by the pain of rejection and loss and bitterness and heartache, then you are invited to remember the *Story*.

We might be the Naomi or the Ruth or the Elimelech within our own story. Friend, God has not abandoned us. We are a part of His one *Story*. May He enable us to rest in Him, knowing He is too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind.

¹ Andree Seu, "Real Life: Those who try to define it for us always have an agenda", Nov, 20, 2010, 91.

The Triumph of the Woman's Seed – A Star Shall Rise



The period in Israel's history called, "The Judges" was filled with utter chaos and anarchy. The period of the Judges was once more a direct assault by the serpent's seed to stop the promise of Genesis 3:15. During this time the people of God were rejecting promise and living for sensory stimulation. Unfortunately, such periods pock human existence. Yet woven into all of this is a constant theme of promises made and promises kept. God uses various images to speak of these promises. Consider the following passages. All of them speak to **the** promise to provide a seed from the woman who would crush the serpent's head. Let us consider a rather lengthy reading of various passages speaking to this singular idea of the promised seed.

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; **A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise** from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Num. 24:17).

¹ "For seven women will take hold of one man in that day, saying, 'We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach!' ² **In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel.** ³ It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy – everyone who is recorded for life in

Jerusalem. ⁴ When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning, ⁵ then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain" (Isa. 4:1-6).

¹ **"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. . .** ¹⁰ Then in that day the nations will resort to **the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.** ¹¹ Then it will happen on that day that the Lord will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. ¹² And **He will lift up a standard for the nations** and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. ¹³ Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, And those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim" (Isa. 11:1, 10-13).

¹ "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For **He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground;** He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isa. 53:1, 2).

“Then say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD’” (Zech. 6:12).

⁷⁸ “Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, ⁷⁹ TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78, 79).

“So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19).

“and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals’” (Rev. 5:5).

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (Rev. 22:16).

Now let us place all of this within the historical context of Judges. The Book of Judges takes great strides to show the deplorable condition to which the nation had sunk. For over 300 hundred years, they forgot the promise and lived according to the world, the flesh and the devil. It was deplorable. Yet in the midst of all this, God had a believing remnant. He would show Himself mighty in the keeping of

His promise to provide a seed from the woman who would conquer and reign over the serpent's seed. Embedded in all of the decay would be a constant stream of hope rippling forward. There is a star, a branch, a root, an insignia, a standard which the hope is focused and fixed on, whereby the hopeful are identified. In all of the twists and turns, Ruth is identified along with Boaz as those who were hope-filled.

It is impossible to know just how deeply they clung to the promise. We do not know how profound was the faith of Judah or Tamar or Perez or Salmon or Boaz. Yet we do know that **despite His people, God was working His promise.**

Within the darkness of this moment a star still shone, a root still broke forth, the morning star still rose, and hope continued to live. As such, the *Story* contained within the book of Ruth is to be contrasted with the disgraceful debacle of Micah's idolatry and Dan's anarchy (Judges 17, 18) and the gruesome travesty of the Levite priest, his concubine and the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19-21). Ruth and Boaz picture the believing remnant which clung to the seed promise.

Such as, so also; today the times in which we live are just as horrific as then. Yet God still has a believing remnant clinging to the seed promise. Just as He has come, He will come; "Even so come Lord Jesus," Amen.

The Prologue

3

Read Ruth 1:1-5

The Book of Ruth is a carefully crafted faith-filled historical novella providing significant historical bridges and incredible theological insight into the character of God as the author of the *Story*. The hope-saturated grace-infused activity of God is seen against the backdrop of immediate despair and confusion mixed with personal loss and bitterness.

The first paragraph places the reader into the immediate context. Strong, significant brush strokes containing edgy lines and dark colors are splashed on the canvas with such words as “in the days when the judges governed, there was famine in the land, a certain man of Bethlehem sojourned in the land of Moab . . . and [he] died and both [sons] also died and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.”

The Bible narrative is determined to paint as dark a picture as possible lest we think the hope and grace offered existed in an abstract reality. For the sake of encouragement, let us consider these initial brush strokes.

First, let us reflect on the historical context noted by the phrase, “In the days when the judges governed.” The Book of Ruth, as stated earlier, forms a historical bridge between the Book of Judges and that of 1 Samuel with the rise of the prophetic office and monarchy. The Book of Judges tells us, “In those days there was no king in Israel; **everyone did what was right in his own eyes**” (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

There was total anarchy. Lawlessness was the norm and injustice was prevalent. This state of existence lasted for centuries. It is comparable to the condition of many countries where there is no central or strong government and “law” is marked by regional despots and brutal victimization. In light of this, the collective nation was militarily weak and thus pillaged often by outside nations (Judges 6:1-6). This was the political condition in which we find Elimelech and Naomi.

Second, an additional dark color is supplied to our canvass with “there was a famine in the land.” Not only was their economy strained by marauding bandits, but the weather robbed them of the necessary natural means of raising produce and sustaining life. The famine was significant enough to warrant migration by those who were residents. In a desperate attempt to maintain his family, Elimelech left Bethlehem for Moab.

Third, although caution must be exercised, it cannot be mere coincidence that the name Elimelech means, “God is [my/the] King,” Bethlehem means, “House of Bread,” and Naomi means “fair or pleasant.” Each of these elements speak to the greater truths provided by the shadow. Each is an intentional part of the one *Story* written by God.

The intent of the author was to paint a very dark picture. He wanted us to taste the bitterness of failed expectations and the consequences of “poor” choices. Everything was going from bad to worse. If God was Elimelech’s king, then why did he not trust Him to provide for his family in Bethlehem? If God is king, then why did they leave the “house of bread” for the land of Moab? If God is king, then why did one who

is “pleasant and fair” return bent and bitter? I trust the author has succeeded in making us feel the despair of this situation. These are the questions confronting us at the front end of the *Story*.

Fourth, the despair of the circumstances continues to be compounded by noting the land to which they went, Moab. The Moabites were the consequence of Lot’s daughter’s deception and incest with their father (Gen. 19:30-38). There was nothing pretty about their origin. In fact, it was downright dirty. It was a “bastardly” beginning. Yet, lest we speak to this situation too harshly, let us remember that Moab was not at fault but rather the fault is found in the deviant and depraved behavior of his mother. She was to blame and is to carry that initial shame, not Moab.

In addition, they were to be excluded from the assembly (Deut. 23:3-4).

³ **“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD;** none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, ⁴ because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you” (Deut. 23:3, 4).

Thus Moab is outside the inheritance of Israel.

Fifth, all male leadership was taken through death thus leaving three widows to fend for themselves. Think of Naomi’s initial joy in the birthing of, not just one, but two sons. If not both, at least one son would be able to provide

for her as she aged. Yet in all of her hopes and in all whom she trusted, they were methodically removed from the *Story*. There was nothing left for withered Naomi. Again, remembering the historical context in which we find our *Story* unfolding, it is with significant gravity we hear of the condition of being widowed in a land fighting to produce sustenance.

Finally, “they lived there about ten years.” This was a protracted period of time. Whatever strength and confidence they might have possessed in the early part of the journey has long since ceased and evaporated. Often we are able to face the immediate when we know it is for a moment. It is, however, the chronic condition that wears and tears strength from our souls which often brings us to a place of brokenness and perhaps bitterness.

It is inside this very ominous state that we feel and taste its bitter dregs. Can you taste Naomi’s despair? She awakened each day racked with worry and filled with anxiety as she contemplated by whatever means necessary how to scratch sustenance from the formidable foe. Life was barely sustainable, and she wept often as the immediate gnawed at her soul. There was no present, thus no future. There was no hope, thus no reason for living or life itself. Naomi’s misery was increased by her failure to place herself in the one *Story* of God.

Perhaps she had forgotten the promises and pictures. Perhaps she failed to remember Genesis 3:15 where God promised the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. We do not read of Naomi’s faith. All we read of is her acidic circumstances. The Book of Ruth, like much of the Bible, will allow us to see behind the curtain of

concealment and thus enjoy Naomi's joy. But let us not run too quickly to the "rest of the *Story*." Let us wallow in the mire of Naomi's circumstances as we seek to understand the person and work of God.

4

The Return

Read Ruth 1:6-22

Our initial paragraph (1:1-5) paints a picture set in dark tones and heavy colors. Having come to the end of herself, Naomi determined to leave the country of Moab and return to the city of Bethlehem. This migration back was prompted by a report that God “had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them” (1:6). Verses 13, 20-22 reveal the harshness of life and the bitterness of heart experienced by and contained within the soul of Naomi.

“Would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; **for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me**” (Ruth 1:13).

¹⁹ “So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ ²⁰ She said to them, ‘**Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.** ²¹ **I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.** Why do you call me Naomi, since **the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?**” (Ruth 1:19-21).

Her name Naomi means “pleasant” and now she refers to herself as “bitter.” Oh the pain communicated in her self-

inflicted state. It must be remembered that a decade had passed since many had last seen Naomi. She left “full” with a husband and two promising sons and now she returns “empty” of all hope and promise . . . except for this Moabite daughter-in-law. A **MOABITE** daughter-in-law! It would appear there was a significant relationship between Naomi and Ruth (1:15-18), yet there was also pain and hurt. Ruth’s presence reminded Naomi of her loss. She once had a husband and two sons and now all were lost to her. Those who once knew her now saw a broken and bitter old woman; how sad and how tragic.

Naomi’s deep wound was also felt in her perspective of where this affliction originated. “It is the hand of the LORD that is against me.” It would appear she believed God was watching her life and He saw the wrong and rewarded her accordingly. She worked from the premise that God is unkind and thus cruel. It is of interest to note how she called Him, “LORD.” LORD is God’s covenant name. It speaks of relationship and promise. God “established an agreement (i.e. covenant/testament) between Himself and His people.” This contract is neither malicious nor mean. It is a covenant marked by mercy and grace. God does withhold from His people what they justly deserve and provides for them what they can never merit. His favor and blessing was upon them. Yet Naomi’s circumstances had robbed her of this truth. Time and trial had trampled trust into the ground.

This is how we often see God and the hardships that make up our lives. We believe God is “rewarding” us for our evil or ineptness of service. What we fail to see is how those occasions when we exist in the “backside of the desert” and

“wander in the God-forsaken wilderness” are significant parts of God’s *Story*. We (she) neither saw nor understood.

Likewise, what Naomi failed to embrace was how her life was the unfolding of God’s *Story*. Naomi’s life was not deviating from the *Story*. She was a part of the *Story*. This, however, was momentarily lost to her. In commenting on the idea of despair, 17th century pastor William Ames provides us with this insightful comment:

There are many reasons for despair. Either the grace of God is not considered sufficient to bestow good on us, or God himself is not willing to bestow it. Desperation grounded on the first is always a sin, but not so in the latter sense, if one could be certain of that will of God. But because it is seldom or never shown ordinarily to anyone before the end of this life that God will not make him a partaker of grace and glory, there is no human desperation in this life which is not sin.¹

In the midst of this bitterness, we encounter the commitment of Ruth. There is movement within the narrative away from Naomi and to Ruth. Both women will play significant roles in the unfolding narrative, but Ruth will slowly begin to take the lead.

Without blame, Naomi’s other daughter-in-law, Orpah, stayed with her people and her involvement within the *Story* ends. Let us not assume she failed in her role. She spoke to all whose lives seem insignificant and unimportant. Yet she, without fanfare, continued to fulfill her place in God’s *Story*.

It is, however, with Ruth the *Story* continues. Whatever Ruth was prior to this moment, it becomes apparent that her commitment to Naomi transcends Naomi.

¹⁵ “Then she said, ‘Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.’ ¹⁶ But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.’ ¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her” (Ruth 1:15-18).

We can only surmise and assume Ruth’s determination is from the LORD. It would appear Ruth embraced the Law of Moses and had become a follower of YHWH. What is of interest is to see how Ruth’s faith eclipsed that of Naomi. Naomi was bitter, and Ruth appears buoyant. Naomi had neither the strength nor patience to urge Ruth any further, thus she “stops urging her” and allowed Ruth to join her in her journey back to Bethlehem.

As present day readers, we have the distinct advantage of knowing the fuller *Story*. Nonetheless, as we place ourselves into the *Story* of Ruth, we feel the weight carried by these two widowed women. So far there is nothing that speaks to hope and promise. The chapter, however, ends with this promising note, “Arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning...” (1:22). Not all is lost.

¹ William Ames, *Marrow of Theology* [(Translated from the Third Latin edition, 1629) Baker Book House, 1968], 249.

The Encounter

5

*“There is scarcely any chapter in all the sacred hiStory that stoops so low as this to take cognizance of so mean a person as Ruth, a poor Moabitish widow, so mean an action as her gleaning corn in a neighbor's field, and the minute circumstances thereof. But all this was in order to her being grafted into the line of Christ and taken in among his ancestors.”
(Matthew Henry on Ruth 2:1)*

Read Ruth 2:1-16

The significance of the next verse unfolds as if incidental or without considerable implication, yet on it hinges the entire *Story*: “Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.” Verse two, like verse one, almost appears minor. It is earthy and driven by base need, “We’re hungry and I need to find work.” Almost grudgingly, Ruth received Naomi’s permission. We have already tasted Ruth’s deep commitment to Naomi and beyond her to Naomi’s professed faith. Here she willingly served Naomi by working in the fields.

Ruth left and “she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.” She just happened? Whoever crafted this narrative pushes us to our seat’s edge. Again, it must be remembered that if we were reading this *Story* for the first time, we would not know the significance of any of these initial statements.

How and why she ends up in the fields of Boaz is not answered for us. Perhaps she asks, or in the outworking of God's purpose He leads her to the exact field in which He desired her to labor. Oh how encouraged we are when we begin to realize that God wrote us into His *Story*. Nothing is incidental. Everything has purpose.

The introduction of Boaz is marked by notable piety (v. 4). The exchange between the "master of the fields" and those who labor for him are marked by goodness and warmth. Such an exchange speaks of his character and manner of addressing his "employees." There was something more existing between the two parties that transcends station and status. Boaz's knowledge of those who work for him was such that he sees something or rather someone different (v. 5). The foreman's response spoke of Ruth's remarkable history and her present industry (vv. 6, 7). His communication was marked by genuine warmth and reception (vv. 8, 9). Ruth was sincerely startled by his generosity (v. 10).

Ruth pressed for an answer and Boaz explained (vv. 11, 12). Again Boaz displayed deep character and marked kindness. He noted her level of sacrifice and devotion to her mother-in-law and then he extended a significant blessing. In the blessing Ruth's own faith became apparent and prominent ("May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge"). She was clearly a woman of faith. Ruth was truly taken aback (v. 13).

The *Story* appears to take on remarkable romantic overtures. Boaz invited Ruth to sit with him, dip her bread in the wine

vinegar and partake of his roasted grain (v. 14). Something was happening even if we are unable to appreciate the full implications of it. In addition to this public display, he spoke privately to his men to insure she got enough grain for herself and her mother-in-law AND Boaz does not wish for her to know of his kindness.

What are we to learn from this? First, God is always working either openly or behind the scene, but He is always working. No aspect of life falls outside of His attention. Second, there is nothing mundane as to where we work or what we do. God has you exactly where He wants you. Third, God's kindness comes to us through many venues and often they go unnoticed. Fourth, as individuals, we are fulfilling God's *Story*. There is tremendous comfort knowing that he is watching out for us.

G

The Surprise

Read Ruth 2:17-23

Here is the encounter between Ruth and Boaz. It is significant and marked by his open affection for her. His generosity and kindness are simply too much to go unnoticed. After finishing her day's work, she returned to Naomi who responded with shock and surprise. She could not believe just how much Ruth gathered and began questioning her as to where and with whom she worked (v. 19). Naomi utters a blessing. This was no small act when contrasted against her deep bitterness and anguish of soul. Ruth did not know the man nor did Naomi know with whom Ruth worked. The answer from Ruth was simple and straightforward, and Naomi's response was one of joyful outburst and revived faith (v. 20). Not only did Naomi note Boaz's generosity, but also his place as a "close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers" (v. 20b).

Ruth tells Naomi of his open invitation to stay until they finish harvesting all the grain (v. 21). The narrator closes the thought by noting two things: the end of the harvest and Ruth's continued devotion to Naomi.

There are multiple layers to the *Story*. Here we are introduced to the idea of "the kinsman-redeemer." What is the kinsman-redeemer? What is the significance of such a person in light of the death of Elimelech and his two sons? Here two ideas intersect: first that of the Jewish Levirate Marriage and then that of the kinsman-redeemer. Following

are two explanations of this idea. Both will enable us to expand our understanding of this important action.

The *Goel* (Kinsman-Redeemer)

Kinsman-redeemer" is the translation of one Hebrew word: *goel*. "The kinsman" is who the man is. He is a relative. The "redeemer" is what the man does.¹

Listen to the following explanation of the Levirate Marriage from the New World Encyclopedia.

In Judaism, levirate marriage, known as *yibbum* (pronounced "yee-boom"), is a marital union mandated by the Torah in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, obliging a brother to marry the widow of his childless deceased brother.

When brothers live together and one of them dies childless, the dead man's wife shall not be allowed to marry an outsider. Her husband's brother **must cohabit with her**, making her his wife, and thus performing a brother-in-law's duty to her. The first-born son whom she bears will then perpetuate the name of the dead brother, so that his name will not be obliterated from Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Marriage with a brother's widow was normally forbidden among the Jews (Leviticus 18:16; 20:21), except for the case of *yibbum*. The advantage to the brother who agreed to marry his sister-in-law was that he would be the sole benefactor of his brother's estate instead of splitting it with the family. The disadvantage would be that if the levirate union

resulted in male issue, the child would be named after the deceased brother and considered to be his offspring.

Examples of levirate marriage include the marriages of Tamar and Onan the son of Judah (Genesis 38:6-10). In this case, Onan was also cursed to death for attempting to avoid conception after the marriage was consummated. Another levirate-type marriage in the Hebrew Bible was the later union of Tamar with her father-in-law Judah after Judah had refused to allow her to marry his youngest son after Onan's death (Gen. 38:8).

The story of Judah and Tamar served to emphasize the importance of levirate marriage in the days when the Israelites were still a family kinship group. However, in later times a provision was made so that parties might legally opt out of *yibbum*. In such cases, a ceremony known as *halizah* would be performed, involving a symbolic act of renunciation of their right to perform this marriage. Jewish law (*halakha*) has seen a gradual decline of *yibbum* in favor of *halizah*, to the point where in most contemporary Jewish communities *yibbum* is strongly discouraged.

A famous instance involving a case analogous to both *halizah* and *yibbum* is recounted in the Book of Ruth. Here, after the death of her husband, Ruth is rejected by an anonymous closer relative, but is accepted by her husband's remaining kinsman, Boaz. In Ruth 4, Boaz carefully insures that the closer relative formally waives his right to act as Ruth's redeemer before

himself claiming the right. This *Story* from the Book of Ruth describes a custom involving a wider kinship tie than normal levirate marriage, since neither *Boaz* nor the closer relative were technically subject to the laws of *yibbum* or *halizah* under either Talmudic law or Deuteronomy.²

Although under no obligation, Boaz freely and willingly took upon himself the role of kinsman-redeemer in order to do for the house of Elimelech what they could never do for themselves. And his motive . . . love.

God always does this **surprising** work. He always shows Himself at the most inopportune times. When we least expect it, He is there. The “funny” thing is He is always there. He has not nor will He ever leave us or forsake us. In the midst of deep bitterness of soul and anguish of spirit, God enabled and empowered Naomi to rise from the dead and once more birth hope. Friend, God is working, and He will show Himself mighty so that His people will never perish but have everlasting life.

¹http://apps.sebts.edu/president/wp-content/uploads/old%5CResource_246%5CLevirate%20Marriage%20-%20outline.pdf

² http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Levirate_Marriage

7

The Invitation

Read Ruth 3:1-18

Naomi recognized the provision of God in allowing Ruth to harvest in the field of one who might function as a kinsman-redeemer. Yet Naomi must act and act she did. Ruth, in obedience to the direction of Naomi, washed herself and surrendered to the will of Boaz. It would appear Ruth's forwardness toward Boaz was somewhat unexpected and could imply or carry overtones of impropriety. She acted in obedience to her mother-in-law and from the open affection and generosity of Boaz. Boaz was careful to protect Ruth's honor. He gave her a token of his intent and sent her back to Naomi (v. 15). Once Naomi did her work of preparation, she "waited" (v. 18). Naomi understood the Proverb, "The horse is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the LORD" (Prov. 21:31). The truth of waiting is built on a strong foundation (Exod. 14:13, 14; Psalm 46:10, 11).

¹³ "But Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear! **Stand by and see** the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. ¹⁴ **The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.**" (Exod. 14:13, 14).

¹⁰ "**Cease striving and know that I am God;** I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us; The

God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah” (Ps. 46:10, 11).

We wait, for God controls the *Story*. Boaz knew the function of the kinsman-redeemer and knew his standing regarding his opportunity to redeem. It is openly stated that Ruth’s character and activity were widely known among the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Boaz was already entertaining the idea of redeeming the house of Elimelech. He knew that another was in front of him, thus blocking his way from fulfilling his desires. He loved Ruth and wanted her as his wife. Although Naomi schemed, plotted and planned, although Ruth willingly went and placed herself in a compromising position, it was Boaz who was preemptive in his pursuit of her. He knew what needed to be done and had already placed the wheels in motion in order to secure his beloved for himself.

Think where our *Story* began. It was marked as a tale of woe and misery.

The last time we met this reference to emptiness was in Naomi’s despair of 1:21 - “I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.” Her empty days are over!¹

Now the tables seem to have turned. Significant hope, healing and wholeness appear to raise their heads to the horizon of help. God is working and He has not forgotten His people.

Of interest is the Targum’s expansion: “Until you know how it is decreed from heaven and how the

matter will be made clear.” Divine agency is made explicit in this part of the sentence, as contrasted to Boaz’ agency in the balancing second half of the sentence. Are we not to see the same hidden hand behind ‘how the matter will fall out’ as controlled the ‘luck’ in 2:3?²

He calls us to prepare the horse and this preparation is always marked by waiting and trusting. Right now, God extends to you glimmers of hope in the various twists and turns of the journey. God is never late, seldom early, but always right on time. We must learn to wait knowing that what God intends to do He will do.

¹ David Atkinson, *The Message of Ruth*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, 105.

² Edward F. Campbell, Jr. *Ruth*, *The Anchor Bible*, 129.

The Redemption



Read Ruth 4:1-12

Earlier in our *Story* we were told by Boaz there was a kinsman-redeemer who was closer than himself. Our current narrative unfolds the means whereby Boaz is able to take the role of kinsman-redeemer, but only by following social protocol. The Book of Ruth is a picture of contrasts against the dark scenario painted for the reader in the Book of Judges.

Boaz as an ethical and moral man stood in stark contrast to those depicted throughout the Book of Judges. He presented his case to the ten elders of the city at the gate. The structure and forum of this event contrasted sharply with what is read in Judges 5:8.

“New gods were chosen; **Then war was in the gates.**
Not a shield or a spear was seen among forty
thousand in Israel” (Judges 5:8).

Boaz carefully crafted his invitation for the nearest kinsman to redeem the property (v. 4). Perhaps knowing the makeup of the individual, he took “the bait.” Once hooked, Boaz introduced the idea of having to marry Ruth in order to insure property of Elimelech would stay within his family (v. 5). When the kinsman realized how such an action would put his own house in jeopardy, he forfeited his responsibility, followed protocol, and thus enabled Boaz to redeem the house of Elimelech. As it relates to the kinsman’s reasoning, Adam Clarke offers this comment.

The Targum gives the proper sense of this passage: "And the kinsman said, on this ground I cannot redeem it, because I have a wife already; and I have no desire to take another, lest there should be contention in my house, and I should become a corrupter of my inheritance. Do thou redeem it, for thou hast no wife; for I cannot redeem it."¹

It is perhaps just as right for the one to transfer the responsibility as it was for Boaz to assume the responsibility. Those who witnessed the event pronounced blessing upon the union and stated, "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman" (vv. 11, 12).

Such a blessing is significant on multiple levels. By referencing Rachel and Leah, they spoke to the prolific offspring and the rise of the nation Israel. It can be remembered how Perez was the father of Salmon who was the father of Boaz. Perez was the result of a levirate marriage. Perez fathered Salmon who married Rahab, the harlot of Joshua 1. Salmon and Rahab gave rise to Boaz. Boaz, now functioning as the kinsman-redeemer to the house of Elimelech, married Ruth. All of this happened against the backdrop of the Book of Judges. As we bring our study of Ruth to closure, consider the following parallel in an ancient form of Chinese drama.

In an ancient form of Chinese drama, plays were often performed on a two-level stage. On the first level, the drama would unfold in the natural sequence of the script, while on the second level the last act of the play would be acted out simultaneously. This gave the audience a distinct advantage—they knew how the *Story* would end. In fact, it was not uncommon for the audience to yell to the actors on level one, warning them that their attitudes or actions were threatening the good outcomes of the final act of the play.²

If Ruth teaches us anything, we should be encouraged to realize how in our darkest moments of disease, death, doubt, and debilitating depression, God is working the *Story* to its fullest and final culmination. Great hope, healing, and wholeness are to be found in knowing that God is working, and perhaps when we least expect it, He will move in surprising ways.

The Book of Ruth opens with **three funerals** but closes with a **wedding** and a **birth**. There is a good deal of weeping recorded in the first chapter, but the last chapter records an overflowing of joy in the little town of Bethlehem.³

Our next and final paragraph quickly draws the book to its primary point and enables us to trace the woman's seed in fulfillment of the Genesis 3:15 promise.

¹ *Adam Clarke's Commentary* on Ruth 4:6.

² *Our Daily Bread*, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI.

³ http://www.preceptaustin.org/ruth_41-10.htm#4:5

9

The Promised Seed – His Journey

Read Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:1-17

The last few verses bring the book of Ruth to a close by telling “the rest of the *Story*.” The whole point and singular truth was to display God’s faithfulness in preserving the seed promise which was ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

Every great *Story* has a great ending, and Ruth’s *Story* has one of the best. The writer doesn’t reveal the “punch line” until the last few verses, where we read that God blessed the romance and marriage of Ruth and Boaz by placing them in the line of the Messiah. Their son Obed was the grandfather of David.¹

Author Heather Goodman expressed insight into God’s faithfulness toward His covenant promise in the following way:

Though the *Story* treats Ruth as the heroine, the *Story* revolves around the redemption of Naomi. The book begins and ends focusing on Naomi. This reveals God’s character in His faithfulness toward His covenant promise of protecting His chosen people, His loving kindness in providing for the helpless widow, and His sovereignty in the surprising twist of using the Moabites to provide for Naomi. The sub-theme focuses on Ruth’s redemption and God’s mercy in grafting the Gentiles into His chosen people for redemption. The heart of the *Story* is God’s provision, both in expected ways (providing for

Naomi and ultimately Israel through Ruth's line) and in unexpected ways (providing for Ruth, the Moabitess). While Naomi receives provision and blessing, Ruth is God's instrument for this. It is the Abrahamic covenant in reverse: instead of the nations being blessed through Israel, Israel is blessed through a Gentile.²

I must confess biblical genealogies do not excite me with any degree of significance. In my past readings, I would often skip over or skim through the names. It has only been recently that genealogies have taken on a more noteworthy role. Here is why: **Biblical genealogies chronicle for the reader the promised seed's journey.** Nowhere is this more readily seen than in the genealogy of Joseph. The book of Ruth ends with a simple genealogical statement. Let's step back from the Book of Ruth and take a look at the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew. Notice the parallel of the genealogy in Ruth to its parallel in Matthew 1.

| Ruth 4:18-22 | Matthew 1:3-6 |
|---|---|
| <p>¹⁸ Now these are the generations of <u>Perez</u>: to Perez was born <u>Hezron</u>, ¹⁹ and to Hezron was born <u>Ram</u>, and to Ram, <u>Amminadab</u>,²⁰ and to Amminadab was born <u>Nahshon</u>, and to Nahshon, <u>Salmon</u>,²¹ and to Salmon was born <u>Boaz</u>, and to Boaz, <u>Obed</u>,²² and to Obed was born <u>Jesse</u>, and to Jesse, <u>David</u>.</p> | <p>³ Judah was the father of <u>Perez</u> and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of <u>Hezron</u>, and Hezron the father of <u>Ram</u>.⁴ Ram was the father of <u>Amminadab</u>, Amminadab the father of <u>Nahshon</u>, and Nahshon the father of <u>Salmon</u>.⁵ Salmon was the father of <u>Boaz</u> by Rahab, Boaz was the father of <u>Obed</u> by Ruth, and Obed the father of <u>Jesse</u>.⁶ Jesse was the father of <u>David</u> the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.</p> |

In this short snippet, the author is intentional in who he includes. For the author of Ruth, the primary intent is to provide genealogical validity to King David. Ruth's pregnancy is seen as having been enabled by the Lord. The child is viewed as a fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 (v. 14 [as were all children]). This idea of the seed promise is so ingrained within the woof and fiber of the nation that it is incapable of being extracted from it. The hope and desire of the nation would be found in One who is "famous" (v. 14), whose name and fame encircle the globe (Compare Matthew 4:23-25 with Isaiah 11:9). The One born is to be "a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age" (v. 15). The accolades laid on Ruth are significant. To be seen as "better than seven sons" (v. 15) was enormously significant. David comes from the tribe of Judah from which the ruling scepter arises (see further Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Psalm 60:7; Hebrews 1:8).

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen. 49:10).

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; **A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel,** and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth" (Num. 24:17).

Matthew picks up this strain and expands on it as to the culmination or fulfillment in Joseph, whose lineage is shown to be of Judah's seed. The Joseph narrative intentionally ties

the birth of Jesus into Davidic royalty. Jesus is Judah's scepter.

Yet the genealogy does more than just tie us back to David or Judah or Abraham. The genealogy enables us to track the seed's journey. Nothing in the Scripture is ancillary to the primary. Each piece has its place in the larger whole. All of these tie directly back to Genesis 3:15.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, **and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head,** and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Every genealogy enables us to mark the seed's journey. The second aspect of every genealogy is not only to note where the seed is in relation to promise, but also to note how the circumstances surrounding the seed's preservation are varied and precarious.

For example, every king of Judah enjoyed the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of mediating for God and His kingdom. No ruler in the ten northern tribes had this unique gifting. Yet not all the kings of Judah were morally or spiritually good. Nonetheless, despite their dark existence, God preserved His seed in fulfillment of promise.

When we break this down in Ruth and then in Matthew, this idea is equally pronounced. There are four notable characters inside of these few short verses: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba.

The genealogy of Jesus that we find at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew is a male lineage. Only four women from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) are included in this long lineage, one of whom is Ruth.³

Ruth also teaches that Gentiles could believe in the true God (three out of the four women mentioned in Christ's genealogy in Matthew 1 were Gentiles—Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth). Ruth explains how a gentile woman could become a member of the royal lineage of David and shows the divine origin of the Davidic dynasty (4:18–22).⁴

Tamar played the harlot and slept with her father-in-law in order to provide an heir (Gen. 38). Rahab was a harlot by vocation (Josh. 2:1) and Ruth was a Moabite (Gen. 19:30–38; Deut. 23:3), a descendent from an incestuous relationship. Finally, there was Bathsheba whose moral indiscretion ended with the death of her lawful husband and first born child (2 Sam. 11, 12). None of this is included to negate culpability on the part of the individual. All of it speaks to the enormous mercy and grace of God whereby He withholds judgment from the guilty and gives merit to the unworthy. All of this marks the seed's journey.

In the midst of horrific sin and its inevitable consequence, God continues to triumph in the fulfillment of promises kept. This is the beauty of the *Story*. God will always win, and no matter how tainted and convoluted the swill is, there is a beauty to the movement of God in how lost sinners are redeemed for the Master's use. He may use whatever He desires to accomplish His inevitable end.

In one chapter, Ruth moves from widowhood and poverty to marriage and wealth (2:1). As we mark and celebrate the advent of God's promise to provide the seed which will crush the serpent's head, we thank Him for the abundance of His mercy and grace. In mercy, He withholds from us the just desserts of our transgressions against Him, and in grace He provides for us the sole means of entering into His family once more. Oh let us praise and thank His name.

¹ http://www.preceptaustin.org/Ruth_commentaries_2.htm

² "A Literary Analysis of the Book of Ruth," Study By: Heather Goodman http://bible.org/article/literary-analysis-book-ruth#P58_15377

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Ruth

⁴ <http://lockportalliance.org/LiftedUp/Introduction%20Ruth.pdf>

10

The Promised Seed - The Arrival

Read Matthew 1:18-25

In the New Testament, we see how the ultimate kinsman-redeemer is Jesus Christ, who redeemed us from sin by shedding his blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19). In many respects, Boaz typifies Christ. Donald A. Leggett writes, "In the actions of Boaz as **goel** we see foreshadowed the saving work of Jesus Christ, his later descendant." Dr. Leggett goes on to explain, "As Boaz had the right of redemption and yet clearly was under no obligation to intervene on Ruth's behalf, so it is with Christ. As Boaz, seeing the plight of the poor widows, came to their rescue because his life was governed by Yahweh and his laws, so also of the Messiah it is prophesied that his life would be governed by the law of God and that he would deal justly and equitably with the poor and with those who were oppressed (Ps. 72:2, 4, 12, 13; Isa. 11:4)" ¹

The Book of Ruth gives us a snippet of the seed's journey. It marked where we were at that point in time. The Book of Matthew picks up where Ruth left off, pinpointing the specific moment when the promise of Genesis 3:15 finds fulfillment. Not only does it pinpoint the person, but it invites us into the very specific elements surrounding the actual event. It is intimate and personal.

The seed's journey up to this point is carefully laid out for the reader in the first seventeen verses of Matthew. It is with verses 18 and following that we encounter the scandal of His birth. Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph. Yet prior

to their actual wedding, she was found to be with child. Joseph knew he was not the father and the idea of a virgin birth by means of the Holy Spirit as a means of explaining his/her predicament was not considered a viable option for Joseph.

Although Joseph had Davidic blood coursing through his veins, he was a man of integrity and calmness in his own right. His deep love for Mary was notable in his desire not to disgrace her publicly. In his time of great need and profound personal loss and dismay, he was visited by an angel of the Lord. Both his willingness to deal with the matter privately and God's mercy in sending an angel of the Lord to explain Mary's condition are equally grace-filled acts.

Although the angel explained to him how Mary had become pregnant, it is still profound and unimaginable. How does one explain a virgin birth? Why would God involve Himself in the conceiving of a child? Why would natural law be so severely circumvented?

Yet the angel continues, "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." This alone is significant, but not entirely outside the scope of God's intervention within the history of the nation. This One who is to be called Jesus was also in fulfillment of promises spoken by prophets of old, "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

As shadow, Ruth's portrayal of the kinsman-redeemer takes significance from the substance, not the other way around. The antitype or fulfillment infuses meaning to the type or shadow. The kinsman-redeemer had to be . . .

1. A **blood relative**.
2. He needed the **necessary resources** to carry out the responsibilities.
3. He had to **be willing** to carry out the responsibilities.
Thus, the kinsman-redeemer would . . .
 - a. Buy back lost property
 - b. Buy back indentured slaves
 - c. Perpetuate lost bloodlines
 - d. Avenge murdered relatives

A magnificent silhouette of the Master appears here, which prefigures his redemptive grace with centuries of anticipation. As our Redeemer, He was made flesh and came in human form (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-8). By his willingness to identify Himself with humanity (as Boaz did with his family), Christ has finished the work of redeeming us from our condition. Even more, Ruth's inability to change her situation typifies the absolute human defenselessness (Rom. 5:6). Boaz's disposition to pay the complete price of Ruth's restoration (4:9) anticipated the payment that Christ offered for our salvation (1 Cor. 6:20; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

The common denominator of all circumstances is simply what the kinsman-redeemer did for his relative which the relative could not do for himself.

Although Joseph was not promised that his son would sit on the throne of David, whose kingdom will know no end, he

was promised that his child would be the Savior from sins. By his son's presence, God will be among His people. His son's legal right comes from his line, and He would be the physical descendent through Mary, thus having every right to sit on David's throne.

All of this occurs in a dream. In obedience to the Lord he loves and the woman to whom he is betrothed, he receives Mary unto himself and she becomes his wife. The text is careful to note how he did not know Mary sexually until after the birth of their virgin born son who is both Savior and God incarnate.

We must not deceive ourselves into thinking everyone accepted and received this unusual *Story*. Both Joseph and Mary were scorned by their pagan community. Yet both of them stood in the integrity of their heart-of-hearts. They were people of faith and believed the promise. We must not believe their lives were any different than ours. There was struggle in the ebb and flow of daily existence. Yet undergirding all of this was the subtle yet steeled girders of a tried and tested faith.

There is so much more to speak of when considering the *Story*, but here is where Matthew leaves us in the inaugural fulfillment of a promise reaching back to the very dawning of life. Jesus is the Savior of sinners and in His birth God resides/tabernacles among His people. Oh what wonderment is provided for all who have seeing eyes and hearing ears. May our joy find a resting place in the provided Son.

¹ (*The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth*, Mack Publishing Company, 1974, p. 298).
<http://www.gci.org/bible/hist/ruth3>

In the *Story* God wrote, He created a world in which His script would be played out. His *Story* includes individuals whose wills can reject His will and thereby cause sin to exist. Their rebellion places them in a position of shame, fear, and guilt. All of their attempts at rectifying the problem end in failure. Failure begets failure. Something or someone must come to their rescue. Fortunately, God's *Story* not only includes a villain, but also provides a Hero. The Hero of God's *Story* was foretold as a deliverer who brings deliverance. This individual would be foretold and visualized in prophecy, promise, picture, type, shadow, and figure. The foretelling created hope and caused the true believers to live in expectancy and anticipation. They looked and longed for the Hero's arrival.

God's person, His Hero has arrived, and He has initiated the culmination of God's purpose for

