

# **Commentary on the Book of Ruth Bible Study Notes and Comments**

**by David E. Pratte**



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*Commentary on the Book of Ruth:  
Bible Study Notes and Comments*

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**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”  
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

# Comments on the Book of Ruth

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Notes to the reader: To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. You can find study questions to accompany these notes at [www.gospelway.com/classbooks](http://www.gospelway.com/classbooks). The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

# Ruth Chap. 1

## Introduction

### **Author**

Unknown

### **Theme**

The character and devotion of Ruth, great grandmother of David

### **Main Characters**

Ruth, Naomi, Boaz

### **Time period**

These events occurred during the period when judges ruled (1:1). We are not given a more specific time frame than this. Apparently, we do not need to have information that is more specific, else God would have given it.

For me personally, the book of Judges is one of the most depressing books of the Bible, as the people of Israel again and again disobeyed God's law and had to be punished. Yet interestingly, the book of Ruth occurred during the period of the Judges, yet it is one of the most beautiful and uplifting stories of the Bible.

(For those who wish to pursue the question of exactly when this story occurred during the period of the Judges, you may wish to read Bob and Sandra Waldron's introduction to the book. However, in my view the evidence is not conclusive.)

### **Sources consulted**

*In the Days of the Judges*, Bob and Sandra Waldron

## Chap. 1 - Naomi and Ruth Return to Israel from Moab

### **1:1,2 – Elimelech's family moves to Moab**

The story begins by introducing us to the family of Naomi. Naomi lived with her husband and her two sons in Bethlehem of Judah in the days of the judges. Naomi's husband was named Elimelech, and her two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion.

Because there was a famine in the land, the family moved to live in the country of Moab. There they remained for a number of years. The Moabites lived east of the Dead Sea, especially between the Arnon and Zered rivers.

### **1:3,4 – Elimelech died; his sons married Moabite women**

While the family lived in Moab, Naomi's husband died leaving just her and her two sons. Next we are told that the two sons married women of Moab. Mahlon married a woman named Ruth (4:10), and Chilion married a woman named Orpah. We are then told that they lived there for 10 years.

### **Why did these Jews marry non-Jews in light of the passages forbidding intermarriage to people of other nations under the law?**

God had repeatedly warned the people of Israel not to marry people of the lands where God would lead them. See Exodus 34:10-16; Deut. 7:1-5; Josh. 23:12,13; Nehemiah 9:30; 13:23-27; Ezra 9 & 10; etc. (and see other references and notes on the passages in Ezra and Nehemiah). Note in particular that Ezra and Nehemiah criticized Jewish men of their day specifically for marrying women of Moab (Ezra 9:1,2; Nehemiah 13:23). The original instruction as given by God (Exodus 34:10-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-5), however, does not mention Moabites. And it specifically states that the law applied to Israelites when God brought them into the land of their possession (Canaan). In Numbers 25:1,2 it was Moabite women who seduced the men of Israel to commit idolatry even before they entered Canaan. In any case, it is specifically clear from those contexts that the problem of such intermarriage was that these foreigners would worship other gods and would lead the people of Israel away from serving the true God.

Possible explanations are:

(1) Perhaps Mahlon and Chilion sinned here. Nothing in the context requires that they be viewed as upright or godly men. Naomi appears to be godly, at least by the time she leaves Moab, but we are told nothing about the godliness of her husband or sons. (It is possible from the language even that Naomi's sons married Moabite women after their father had died. Perhaps he no longer had influence over their decisions and Naomi could not influence them to avoid the error.) Still, this leaves us with no explanation for why Boaz married Ruth, since he was apparently a godly man and knew she was a Moabite.

(2) Perhaps the Old Testament prohibited intermarriage, not with people of all other nations, but only with people of the nations that had dwelt in Canaan. Those nations were known to be excessively idolatrous. God cast them out of the land and gave it to Israel because the iniquity of those nations was "full." They surrounded Israel and so would be a continual temptation to them. These reasons did not apply to other nations, and the prohibition is nowhere stated regarding them. In particular, such reasons might not apply to Moabites, since they were distantly related to Israelites.

However, this does not explain why Ezra and Nehemiah rebuked men of Israel for marrying Moabite women. Could that have been a revelation added later on, after the Moabites had continued proving their idolatry?

(3) Perhaps the prohibition applied specifically to men of Israel living in Israel (Canaan). They were not to allow the wickedness of the people of the land to bring their influence among God's people living in the land. Could it be that this did not apply to Israelites living in other lands? Of course, the idolatry of people in other lands would still be a great temptation – perhaps even greater because it would be even more pervasive. However, at least that kept this evil influence out of the land of Israel.

(4) One conclusion that appears clear is that the prohibition applied only to women who were idolatrous, not to women who had converted to the true God and His true law (a “proselyte”). In particular, by the time Boaz married Ruth, she had proved beyond doubt to all the people who knew her that she served the true God and was known for her godliness. (Note that Orpah, on the other hand, is said to have gone back to the god of her people – 1:15.)

### ***1:5-7 – After her sons had died, Naomi determined to return to Judah***

After this period of time had passed, Naomi's sons also died, so that she was left without husband or sons. Then she determined that she would return to the country of Judah, because she had heard by this time that the famine had been relieved and the people now had food. So, she arose with her daughters-in-law to leave the country of Moab.

### ***1:8,9 – Naomi then urged her daughters-in-law to return to their parents' homes***

Naomi told her daughters-in-law that they had dealt kindly with her, especially in being willing to return with her to Judah. However, she believed that it was better for them to return to the families of their parents. She asked a blessing from the Lord upon them that He would deal kindly with them even as they had dealt kindly with her and with her dead family members. She expressed the hope that the Lord would grant each of them rest in the house of her husband. This would appear to imply that she hoped that they would remarry.

So, the ladies kissed one another and wept. This shows that they had become quite close to one another in the period of time that they had lived together as a family. Naomi was sending them back, not because she did not care for them, but because she believed it would be best for them.

The Waldrons point out that when a woman married, she became part of her husband's family. Even if the husband died, she was still ex-

pected to continue as part of that family, and it would be their responsibility to care for her. But in this case, Naomi had no one to care for her, let alone to care for her daughters-in-law. So, if the daughters would return to the homes of their parents, they would have someone to take care of them, and may eventually be able to remarry.

***1:10-13 – Naomi explained to her daughters-in-law that she had no sons for them to marry***

At first, both Ruth and Orpah expressed the determination to stay with Naomi and return with her to her people. But Naomi explained to them that she had no sons for them to marry. In those days, as we will see as the story progresses, if a woman became a widow but had no children to inherit her husband's property, it would become the responsibility of one of her husband's brothers (or other relatives) to marry her and raise up children to inherit the dead husband's property. But Naomi is explaining that she had no sons for these young ladies to marry.

Obviously, both of Naomi's sons had died and she had no other sons. She asks the rhetorical question of whether or not she had sons in her womb to grow up that the girls might marry them. Of course, the answer is that she had no sons. And she explained she was too old now to have a husband and bear other sons in the future. And besides, if she did have other sons, the girls would have to wait for them to grow up before they could marry. So, Naomi expressed her great grief at the difficulties of their circumstances, but she believed it was best for the girls to return to their parents' homes.

***1:14,15 – Orpah then chose to return to her own family, so Naomi urged to Ruth to do likewise***

After this urging from Naomi, the women wept again, but then Orpah did as Naomi had suggested and returned to her own people. Ruth, however, determined to remain with Naomi. So, Naomi once again urged Ruth to return to her own family even as Orpah had done.

I find it strange that the passage says that Orpah had returned, not only to her family, but also to her gods. And perhaps even stranger, Naomi appears to be encouraging Ruth to do the same thing. Why would Naomi urge the girls to go back to their families, if she knew the result was that they would go back to the worship of false gods?

Perhaps the girls had been with Naomi's family long enough that she knew they had experienced many opportunities to learn about the true God. Even so, if they were willing to return to their families and their false gods, it would indicate that they had not developed a faith in the true God. If they had not developed a faith in the true God by this time, then it may not have been good for them to dwell among the people of Israel. So, could this have been a sort of test of the girls' faith? Or could it be that these years had been such a traumatic time

for Naomi, because of the famine and the deaths of her husband and sons, that she was so distraught she was not thinking clearly? In her time of great grief, could it be that she herself was wavering in faith?

***1:16-18 – Ruth then beautifully expressed her devotion to Naomi and to the true God***

In her beautiful and poetic response, Ruth urged Naomi not to ask her to leave or to go back. She insisted that she would go wherever Naomi would go and lodge wherever Naomi would lodge. She was willing to accept Naomi's people as her own people and the God that Naomi worshiped as her own God. She affirmed that she would continue with Naomi until death and even be buried where Naomi would be buried. In what amounts to a promise before God, she affirms that nothing but death would part her from Naomi.

So, with such moving words, Ruth assured Naomi that she had no intention of leaving. She was completely devoted to Naomi and would continue with her even to the point of death. And specifically, she was prepared to leave her own people and accept the people of Israel as her people. And even most important, she had come to believe in the true God and was determined to accept God as her own God. This devotion explained her determination to remain with Naomi. It is especially essential to the subsequent story to understand that Ruth had come to a true faith in the true God. So on hearing this response, Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, so she ceased asking her to leave.

This speech is often quoted in wedding ceremonies as a beautiful expression of the devotion of a husband and wife. Obviously, it was spoken originally as the devotion of a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law. Nevertheless, it does express the beauty of strong family ties, and as such expresses very well the devotion of a husband and wife.

***1:19-24 – Naomi and Ruth arrived at Bethlehem***

Having returned from Moab to Israel, the ladies arrived at Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. Naomi's family had been gone for at least ten years. She had faced many hardships. No doubt she had changed in many ways, including appearance. But the people she had known in years past recognized her and greeted her with excitement.

They asked if she was Naomi, perhaps in wonder at the changes in her. In any case, she responded asking them to call her, not Naomi, but Mara. Naomi means "pleasant," but Mara means "bitter" (see NKJV footnotes). She explained that God had dealt bitterly with her. She had left home full with many blessings, but she had returned empty, having lost all the family she had when she left. So she thought a better name for her would be "bitter," because God had chosen to afflict her. She doubtless did not really intend to change her name, since she is called



“Naomi” through the rest of the story. But she was simply expressing her deep grief.

So, the women returned and dwelt in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest (late March or early April). The harvest becomes important as the story proceeds.

# Ruth Chap. 2

## Chap. 2 - Ruth Gleans in the Field of Boaz

### ***2:1 – Introduction to Boaz***

Next, the account introduces us to the other major character in the story. His name was Boaz, and we are told that he was a relative of Naomi's husband. This relationship becomes of great significance as the story proceeds. We are also told that he was a man of great wealth. At this point we are simply introduced to him.

### ***2:2,3 – Ruth goes to glean in the field belonging to Boaz***

Ruth and Naomi obviously were poor at this point in the story. Naomi's family had left Israel in the first place because of the famine. Then in Moab all the males in the family had died. This meant that there were no men to provide income for the family. In God's plan for the family, the men are intended to be the primary workers to provide family income, while the women care for the home. But here the men had died, so the women were left to find some means of income for themselves.

Ruth suggested that she go into the fields and glean the grain in whatever field she might find where people would allow her to glean. Naomi agreed for her to go. So, Ruth went and gleaned in the field after the reapers.

To understand the story, it is helpful to understand the concept of cleaning, especially as taught under the Old Testament law. The law required that, when people would harvest their crops from their fields, any grain that fell to the ground must be left. This was a way of providing for those who were poor. It was understood that those who lacked for themselves would be free to go into the fields and gather whatever grain had fallen to the ground. This was called gleaning. This law applied to grain in the fields or to grapes in a vineyard or olive trees, etc. See Leviticus 19:9,10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

As Ruth went to glean, apparently by chance she happened to glean in the field belonging to Boaz, the relative of Naomi's family. Now of course we will see that this was not really so much by chance. The providence of God was at work in the story. But here we begin to see the connection between Boaz and the well-being of Naomi and Ruth.

### ***2:4-7 – Boaz becomes aware of Ruth gleaning in his field***

Remember that Boaz was a wealthy man. He lived in Bethlehem and doubtless had many possessions. Included were fields where the

workers at this time were gathering in the harvest. So, Boaz went to visit the laborers and see how the work went. Apparently in those days it was common for people who owned farm fields to live in a village or city, but their fields would lie surrounding the city. So, the owners from time to time would go out to visit the workers in the field as Boaz did in this case.

Boaz greeted his reapers with kindness and even with spiritual concern. He asked for the Lord to be with them, and they responded by asking the Lord to bless him. What a blessing it is for laborers to have an employer who cares about them, and for employers and employees both to respect the will of God regarding work and regarding the treatment of one another. We begin to see that Boaz was not only a wealthy man but also a godly man.

As he observed the harvest, Boaz of course noticed Ruth working in the fields, so he asked the servant in charge of the reapers about her. The servant explained that she was the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi, who had returned from Moab. She had asked to glean after the reapers, and she had worked diligently throughout the day taking only a short rest in the house.

Note that we learn here that Ruth was still a young woman. It was not clear to me from chapter 1 exactly how long Ruth had been married before her husband died. But in any case, she was young enough when she married that she was still a young woman at this point in the story.

Now Boaz was a relative of Naomi's husband and no doubt knew something about Naomi and her fortunes. Probably he even knew that she had gone to Moab and had returned. In any case, at this point he had been introduced to Ruth to whom he was related by marriage.

### ***2:8,9 – Boaz urged to Ruth to continue cleaning only in his fields***

Having learned who Ruth was, Boaz treated her with kindness. He urged her to not glean in any other fields except his. Evidently he believed he had enough of a harvest that she could provide her needs completely by working in his own fields. But he was also interested in protecting and providing for her.

So, he urged her to stay close to his female servants who were working in the fields. She should observe which field they would reap and she could follow. He assured her that his instructions to his menservants would protect her, so that they would not molest her in any way. And when she became thirsty, she could even go and drink from the water vessels that had been provided for the workers.

All this was unusual kindness to a gleaner. Boaz probably did this to some extent from the kindness of his nature, but also because of the things he had learned about her (see vv 10-12).

## ***2:10-13 -Boaz explained to Ruth his appreciation for her up-right conduct***

When Ruth heard the kind words that Boaz had spoken to her, she bowed down before him to the ground. She asked him why he was being so good to her, that he had shown such favor and taken such notice of her, especially since she was a foreigner. At this point she knew nothing about him or his relationship to her. But she did know that she was from another country, so such kindness was surprising to her.

But Boaz responded that he did know about her. He said he had received a full report about how she had been so good to her mother-in-law since the death of her husband. Furthermore, he knew how she had left the land of her birth as well as her parents in order to come and live among a strange people. He called for the blessing of God to be upon her to repay her and give her a full reward for the work that she had done, since she had sought refuge under the protection of the God of Israel.

Note again that the response shows that Boaz himself was a devout religious man. It probably also implies that he was aware of Ruth's spiritual devotion to God. If she had sought refuge under the wings of the God of Israel, this would imply that she believed in the true God.

Ruth responded that she sought favor in the sight of Boaz because of the kindly words that he had spoken to her. She realized she was not one of his maidservants, and yet he had treated her kindly as though she was.

Boaz had not explained to Ruth what his relationship to her was. He had only explained that he knew about her godly character and her good treatment of her mother-in-law. But surely if he knew all this about Ruth and Naomi, then he also knew that he was a near kinsman to Naomi and therefore to Ruth. He may not have known at this point exactly how close the relationship was, but he was aware of the relationship and of the consequences according to the law in ways that Ruth would not have been aware of.

## ***2:14-16 – Boaz continued to show kindness to Ruth***

As the day continued, Boaz continued to make provisions for Ruth in ways of special kindness. When the mealtime came, he called upon her to come and eat with the reapers. She could eat of the bread and dip her bread in the vinegar. He even passed parched grain to her to eat so that she was completely satisfied with her meal. She even kept some back which, we will see, she took home to Naomi. We may not think that dipping bread in vinegar would be tasty, but at least one commentator suggested that such a procedure is helpful for those who are exerting themselves in hard labor.

When the meal was completed and Ruth rose up again to glean, Boaz went further and instructed his young menservants to allow her

to glean even among the sheaves. They were not to rebuke her for approaching so close to the grain. In fact, he instructed them to deliberately allow grain to fall from the bundles and leave it so that she could pick it up.

All of this went far beyond the normal treatment of those who would glean in a field. It would be one thing for grain that fell accidentally to be left there for the poor to glean. But it was another thing to allow them to glean even among the sheaves of grain as they were being harvested. The law did not require this, let alone was it required that the workers would deliberately allow grain to fall. Obviously, all this was an expression of the kindness of Boaz toward Ruth.

***2:17,18 – At the end of the day Ruth returned home to Naomi***

So, Ruth continued working in the field all day. At the end of the day she beat out the grain that she had gleaned, so it amounted to about an ephah of barley. The Waldrons say that an ephah amounts to about 20 to 25 pounds. That would be a significant amount of grain to glean in one day, and this was after she had removed the husks.

So, Ruth returned home to Naomi and showed her the results of her day's work. She also gave Naomi the food that she had left over after she had finished her own meal. Please notice, exactly as Boaz had said, that Ruth was very kind and generous with her mother-in-law. Ruth had worked hard all day long, yet she was willing to completely share the fruits of your labors with Naomi.

***2:19,20 – At Naomi's request, Ruth told her that she had worked in the field of Boaz***

Naomi was obviously impressed by the generous amount of grain that Ruth had been able to glean. So, she asked where Ruth had gleaned, and even pronounced a blessing on the one who had taken notice of her. She apparently realized that such a generous amount of grain could only have come if someone had been quite nice to Ruth. So, Ruth informed Naomi that she had worked in the field of a man named Boaz.

As we have mentioned, Ruth would not have known about their relationship to Boaz. But Naomi knew. She explained to Ruth that Boaz was a relation of theirs, even a close relative. Then she pronounced a blessing on the Lord because He had not forsaken them, either the living or the dead, but had shown them kindness. The living would refer to Naomi and Ruth who were still surviving, whereas the dead would refer to her husband and Ruth's husband, because they now had a relative who was being generous to their family. But the significance of the near kinsman also would relate to the inheritance of the dead men in the family.

***2:21,22 – Ruth also explained that Boaz wanted her to continue to glean in his fields***

Ruth then continued to explain that, in addition to what she had already told Naomi, Boaz had also told Ruth to stay close to his workers throughout the rest of the harvest. This meant that Ruth would have a means to continue to provide for herself and Naomi. They had not been blessed for just one day, but had hope for continued blessings throughout the rest of the harvest.

Naomi agreed that this was good, so she urged Ruth to continue to work only in the fields of Boaz with his maidservants. People should not see her in any other field. It is not clear at this point how much Ruth would understand about the role of a near kinsman, but obviously Naomi was beginning to understand where this might lead. The subsequent story will explain it.

***2:23 – Ruth continued to work in the fields of Boaz throughout the barley and the wheat harvest***

Apparently, all that has been discussed in this chapter up to this point happened in Ruth's first day working in the fields of Boaz. The story simply summarizes the rest of the harvest by saying that she did work in the fields of Boaz among his young women, not just for the rest of the barley harvest, but also for the rest of the wheat harvest. Meanwhile she continued to live with Naomi, no doubt sharing with her the fruits of her gleaning.

This is a brief summary. However, we can properly read between the lines that this period of time would have continued for several weeks. In the meantime no doubt Boaz would continue to observe Ruth and her work. Probably he continued to do some investigation in regard to the background of his relationship to Naomi's family. In any case, as the story proceeds it becomes clear that he knows a good bit about Ruth and about his responsibilities as a near kinsman.

## Ruth Chap. 3

### Chap. 3 - Ruth Requests Boaz to Fulfill the Role of a Near Kinsman

#### ***3:1,2 – Naomi instructs Ruth that Boaz is a near kinsman***

As the harvest began drawing to a close, Naomi informed Ruth that she was determined to seek security for Ruth. She knew a way to provide for Ruth's well-being, which would of course also provide for Naomi. This depended upon Boaz. Naomi informed Ruth that Boaz was a relative - that is, a near kinsman. Ruth may not have understood the significance of this, but both Boaz and Naomi would have understood.

#### **The role of the near kinsman**

In order to understand the events of this chapter, one must have some concept of the role under the Old Testament of a near kinsman. In this case, two things were involved. First was the right to redeem property that had been sold by a relative. And second was the responsibility to raise up seed to a dead relative who had no children to inherit. These concepts are unfamiliar to us in our society, so we need to understand them to understand the story.

It must be remembered that ancestry was especially important among the Jews, especially in order to inherit land in the promised land of Canaan. It was very important to families to make sure that their possession in Canaan remained in the family.

1) Raising up an heir to a brother who died childless – If a man died without a child, his property would pass out of the family. To avoid this, the law had provision as explained especially in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (see also Genesis 38:8). The law said that, in this case, the brother of the dead man should take the dead man's widow as his wife. Then the firstborn son that she would bear would inherit in the name of the dead brother, so that his name would not be blotted out of Israel. This is sometimes called “Levirate marriage.” The law provided that, if the man did not want to perform this duty, he may refuse, but he was subject to being humiliated before the elders of the city.

2) The law also provided that, if a man's property passed out of his possession - such as by being sold in time of financial distress - his relative could redeem the property to keep it in the family and especially in the tribe. See Numbers 36:9; 27:9-11; Leviticus 25:8-55, especially verses 23-34.

In the present story, Ruth's husband had died without child. Apparently, because of the famine and the death of Naomi's husband and

Ruth's husband, their family property was also in danger of passing out of the family possession. As a near kinsman, Boaz could redeem the property and could marry Ruth in order to raise up seed to Ruth's husband. However, we will see that there was another relative even closer than Boaz, which complicated the plans.

This was the time of the winnowing of the barley harvest at the threshing floor. So, Naomi was sure that Boaz would be there.

***3:3,4 – Ruth was to go to Boaz at the threshing floor when he laid down for the night, and she was to lie down at his feet***

Naomi instructed Ruth to wash herself and anoint herself and put on her best garment. No doubt this was to make her attractive. Then she was to go to the threshing floor and wait until Boaz had finished his meal and had lain down for the night. She was to go to the place where he lay down, uncover his feet, and lie down at his feet. Naomi said that he would understand the significance of this and would instruct Ruth further.

***3:5-7 – Ruth agreed and did as was instructed***

As Naomi had instructed, Ruth agreed and went to the threshing floor. After Boaz had finished his meal, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Ruth watched where he lay down, and she approached softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

The passage says that after Boaz had eaten and drunk, his heart was cheerful. This does not say that he was intoxicated. "Had drunk" is simply the past perfect form of drink. He had eaten and he had drunk. As a result, his heart was merry or cheerful. People are often happy after they have had a good meal, especially at a time of harvest when people naturally rejoice at the bringing in of the crop.

***3:8,9 – When Boaz awoke during the night, Ruth asked him to do the role of a close relative***

Boaz did not realize that Ruth was lying at his feet until he awoke at midnight. As he turned over, he realized a woman was lying at his feet, so he asked who it was. Ruth identified herself and asked Boaz to fulfill the role of a close relative and take his maidservant under his wing. Knowing the law regarding the role of a near kinsman, Boaz would have understood exactly what Ruth was asking for.

***Did Ruth here act in an immoral manner?***

Some skeptics have argued that Ruth here attempted to seduce Boaz to an immoral sexual relationship. Others have tried to justify Ruth's conduct on the grounds that she and Boaz had the right to a sexual relationship because of the law of the near kinsman.

However, I see no reason to conclude that there was any attempt to seduce Boaz to a sexual relationship in what Ruth did. The law of the



near kinsman said that he was to marry the widow of the dead relative. (The NIV, for example, says he shall “take her and marry her” - Deuteronomy 25:5.) While the exact wording may not be completely clear, I see no reason to conclude that the near kinsman and the widow would be justified in a sexual relationship before they were married. So far as I know, God has always restricted the sexual relationship to marriage.

It is clear from the story as it proceeds that there was no sexual relationship in this event. Instead, Boaz told Ruth to lie at his feet until morning. Furthermore, if a woman was seeking to seduce a man, why would she lie down his feet? That would hardly be a chosen position from which to seduce a man. Furthermore, the entire context of the story emphasizes that Boaz and Ruth were both known for their moral uprightness.

On the other hand, why did Naomi even suggest this approach, if there was no suggestion of sexual seduction? Why did Naomi and Ruth not simply openly - perhaps even publicly - approach Boaz and ask him to do the role of a near kinsman? The passage does not explain, so I can only offer my suggestions.

It may be that Naomi did not want to openly approach Boaz, since this might become an embarrassing situation in case Boaz was not willing to perform the duty of a near kinsman. It was possible for the near kinsman to refuse at the cost of great personal embarrassment. If this happened, it would not solve Ruth's problem, and it would subject both Boaz and Ruth to public embarrassment. Though Naomi knew Boaz to be a good man, that did not necessarily mean he would want to marry Ruth.

And there was the especially complicating factor that Ruth was a Moabite woman. This could be a great hindrance to any man, especially in light of the prohibition against marrying outside the nation of Israel. We have discussed the fact that marriage to Ruth would be legitimate, since she had converted to the true God (see notes on chap. 1). Nevertheless, there might have been social stigma or other hindrance to such a union in Boaz' mind.

Perhaps Naomi also knew there was another relative who was closer than Boaz, yet she preferred Boaz as a husband for Ruth because she knew his character. Perhaps the idea was that, if Ruth dressed up to look her most attractive and approached Boaz in secret, he might realize that she was an attractive woman to marry. So he would be encouraged to make the effort to arrange to marry her, yet he would not be pressured by an open request.

Of course, it is possible that Naomi had some other idea in mind that I have not thought of. In any case, I believe that these possible explanations show that the matter may be properly explained without any suggestion of sexual immorality.

### ***3:10,11 – Boaz gave a favorable response to the request of Ruth***

Boaz responded to the request of Ruth by pronouncing a blessing upon her and telling her that he was aware that she was a virtuous woman. In fact, he states that all the people in the town were aware of her virtue. This would explain, not only his desire to marry her as a godly wife, but also his knowledge that it would be proper for him to do so.

He states one specific evidence of her uprightness in that she had not followed after young men, poor or rich. The meaning of this is not specifically explained, but perhaps it relates to the role of the near kinsman. Rather than caring kindly for Naomi, and rather than following the rule of marrying a near kinsman to raise up seed to her dead husband, Ruth might have pursued finding some other young man according to her own pleasure. Instead, she remained true to her responsibility to Naomi and to her deceased husband.

Based on his awareness of Ruth's virtue, Boaz assured her that he would comply with her request. He was willing to seek to marry her and fulfill the role of the near kinsman.

### ***3:12,13 – Boaz informed Ruth that there was another relative who was an even closer relative than he was***

Boaz assured Ruth that he was willing to perform the duty of a near kinsman. However, there was someone else who was more closely related to her than even he was, and according to the law that man had to be given the first opportunity to redeem the property and marry her. So, Boaz called upon Ruth to lie down and remain at his feet until morning; then he would check with this other relative to see if he was willing to perform the duty of a close relative. If so, the matter would be resolved in that way. But if the other man was not willing to perform the duty of a near relative, Boaz gave her his word before the Lord that he would be willing to do so.

### ***3:14,15 – In the morning Boaz sent Ruth home with a generous gift of barley***

Ruth remained at Boaz' feet until morning, as he had instructed. Note that this position assures us that nothing immoral occurred. But they arose early in the morning before it was light enough outside for other people to recognize one another. Boaz make sure that no one would know that a woman had come to the threshing floor that night. The reason is not explained, but presumably it was to protect Ruth. Nothing immoral had happened, as they both knew, but he wanted to make sure that her reputation was protected.

Before she left, he gave her a gift. He told her to hold out the shawl that she had been wearing, and he filled it with six measures of barley. She then took this with her to the city. The word "ephah" was added by the translators. The Waldrons suggest that would be too great an

amount for Ruth to have carried in her shawl. Apparently, we do not know exactly what size the measure was, however it was a generous gift.

***3:16-18 – When Ruth returned home, Naomi assured her that Boaz would seek to resolve the matter that day***

Ruth then returned to Naomi and told her all that happened. She showed Naomi the gift of barley, explaining that Boaz had told her not to go home empty-handed to Naomi. All this reassured Naomi that Boaz was serious and would pursue the matter diligently. She urged Ruth to wait patiently till they learned the outcome. She was confident that Boaz would not rest until the matter had been resolved even that very day.

# Ruth Chap. 4

## Chap. 4 - The Marriage of Ruth and Boaz

### ***4:1,2 – Boaz meets with the other close relative and with the elders of the city***

As Naomi had predicted, Boaz wasted no time meeting with the other near kinsman to make the necessary arrangements. Important matters of business were generally in those days conducted at the gate of the city. People had to come in or go out through the gate, so Boaz would be likely to meet the near kinsman there.

So, Boaz went to the gate of the city to wait, and eventually the near kinsman came as Boaz had hoped that he would. Boaz asked him to come aside and sit down. Then he arranged for ten of the elders of the city to come to serve as witnesses to the agreement. The elders were the city leaders. If the arrangement was made in their presence, then there would be qualified witnesses whom no one could dispute.

### ***4:3,4 – Boaz began by discussing the property that had belonged to Naomi's husband***

Boaz informed the other near kinsman that Naomi had returned from Moab and had sold a piece of property that had belonged to her husband Elimelech. As discussed earlier, the close relatives would have the right to redeem the property. So, Boaz informed the relative of his right to buy back the property that had belonged to Naomi's husband.

He asked the kinsman if he wanted to redeem it, which would be his right to do if he so chose. But if he was not willing to redeem it, then Boaz was next in line. The relative said that he was willing to redeem the property.

### ***4:5,6 – Boaz then informed the relative that he would also be required to perform the role of the near kinsman to Ruth to perpetuate her husband's inheritance***

Again, as we have discussed in chapter 3, the near kinsman would also have the responsibility to marry Ruth to raise up an heir to her dead husband. So Boaz informed the relative that, if he chose to buy the field from Naomi, he would also be responsible to perform the role of the near kinsman so that Ruth's dead husband would have an heir to continue his inheritance. Having heard that, the close relative declined to redeem the inheritance, because he said he would ruin his own inheritance. So, he called upon Boaz to redeem it for himself.

It is not completely clear to me how it would ruin his inheritance to marry Ruth. The Waldron's explain that, if he redeemed the field

and married Ruth, Ruth's child would inherit the redeemed property. In that case, the money he spent to redeem the field would actually reduce the inheritance that he would have for his own children. Of course, that would simply be the consequence of fulfilling the responsibility of the near kinsman. But apparently, he was not willing to do so.

In any case, the result was that the opportunity came to Boaz who was next in line. Boaz was not only willing to redeem the property, but he had already agreed that he was willing to marry Ruth if he had the opportunity. It is obvious that he had come to highly respect her. Being an honorable man, he was willing to do what the law expected of him and what by this time he apparently desired to do.

#### ***4:7,8 – The arrangement confirmed***

The custom in those days was to confirm an agreement of redeeming or exchanging by one man giving his sandal to the other. So, the relative took off his sandal and gave it to Boaz. He affirmed that Boaz then had the right to redeem the property and, by implication, to marry Ruth.

Deuteronomy 25:5-9 said, if the near relative would not marry his brother's widow to raise up an heir to the dead brother, the woman should remove his sandal and spit in his face as a sign of humiliation. But here it appears that the exchanging of the sandal was a way of confirming any act of redemption or exchange. Perhaps the removal of the sandal in Deuteronomy 25 was a sign that formalized his refusal to marry the woman, as in other agreements, but the spitting in his face was what humiliated him.

In this case there was no need to humiliate the man, since he and Boaz had both agreed on an alternative arrangement to provide for the redemption and the inheritance.

#### ***4:9,10 – Boaz called upon the elders and the people to witness the transaction***

These verses explain why Boaz called the elders to be present when he met with the near relative. He called upon the elders and the people to witness the transaction that had been completed. He said they were witnesses that he had purchased all that had belonged to Naomi's husband Elimelech and to Naomi's dead sons Chilion and Mahlon. He had redeemed their property.

In addition he had acquired Ruth, who was the widow of Mahlon, to be his wife. He reminded them all that this was according to the law, so he could perpetuate the inheritance of those who had died, that their inheritance would not be cut off among the people. This explains again the purpose of the law of the near relative marrying the widow of one who died without descendant.

***4:11,12 – The people not only witnessed the transaction, they also pronounced a blessing upon Boaz and Ruth***

The people and the elders at the gate agreed that they were witnesses to the transaction. But their response also shows that they knew there was more to this than simply a legal transaction. They pronounced a blessing upon Boaz and Ruth in their marriage. They expressed the hope that Ruth would be like Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob through whom the nation of Israel had begun.

They called upon him to prosper and become famous in the city of Bethlehem. Then they expressed the desire that his offspring through Ruth would cause his house to become like that of Perez, the son that Tamar bore to Judah. Judah, of course, was the head of their own tribe, since they were of the tribe of Judah. And Tamar had born Perez to Judah in fulfillment of the law that the widow should raise up seed to her dead husband (albeit carried out in an immoral manner).

This response shows that they had great respect for Boaz and had developed a great respect for Ruth. They saw in this marriage what we also ought to see in it as an expression of the beauty of the bond of matrimony between two godly people. And they saw it as a blessing, not just to the men who had died, but also to Ruth and Boaz.

***4:13,14 – Ruth then gave birth to a son***

So, Boaz and Ruth became man and wife, and in this marriage relationship they gave birth to a son. Any child would have been a great blessing, but in this case it was a special blessing to have a son to carry on the family name and inheritance.

Then the women pronounced a blessing upon Naomi, that the Lord had not left her without a close relative. They called upon his name to be famous in Israel. Verse 15 shows that this refers primarily to the child that was born.

***4:15,16 – Ruth and her son were a great blessing to Naomi***

This child who had been born would be a restorer of life and a nourisher of Naomi's old age. Notice the people recognized this was a blessing, not just to Ruth and Boaz, but also to Naomi. Without Ruth and Boaz, Naomi would have been left, not only without descendant, but also without a family of any kind. She would have no one to take care of her in her old age. But now her future care seemed to be assured. It was as though she had been restored to life that she had lost.

They specifically praised Ruth as the one who brought this about. Having obtained a godly husband who would provide for Ruth and Naomi, and having brought a child to be a descendant, Ruth had shown faithfulness to Naomi better than many sons would have done. So, the women said that Ruth had been better to Naomi than seven sons.

Then we are told that Naomi took the child and held him to her bosom and became a nurse to him. I assume this means that she brought them up and cared for him.

***4:17-22 – The child who is born to Ruth and Boaz was the grandfather of king David***

Apparently, the custom in those days was for neighbors to suggest a name for a child who was born. So, in saying that a son – that is an offspring – had been born to Naomi, they gave him the name of Obed. The name means one who serves; and as we have seen, Obed would become important as a blessing to Naomi and the family.

The story then closes by telling us that Obed was the father of Jesse, who was in turn the father of David, one of the greatest kings that Israel ever had. We are then given a genealogy from Perez, the son of Judah, all the way down through David. Note that the genealogy lists Boaz as the father of Obed. So that even though Obed was the legal heir of Naomi's son, he was also the legal heir of Boaz.

This shows that the story was not just an account of a lovely romance, though it certainly was that. It was not just an account of God's blessings upon a needy and godly family, though it certainly was that. Nor is it even just a story showing the importance of the family bond, though it is certainly that. More important, it is a record of how God brought into the world the line of David, which became the line of the kings that ruled over Israel.

No doubt, this was the important point to those who would have read the book in the Old Testament. But for those of us who know the rest of the story, there is an even greater significance, because David was the ancestor of Jesus Christ. So this story, like so many others in the Old Testament, becomes especially important to us because of its relationship to our salvation through Jesus. This story shows the plan of God in bringing into the world the one who would be the great ancestor of our Lord and Master. As such, it serves a major role in the Bible story.

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