



“The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon”

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion to the Book of Ruth

*“So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading”*

Nehemiah 8:8

By
Bill Daniels

Preface

Years ago I heard a series taught through the book of Ruth. It seemed to me the study involved little more than relating the story, without finding much in the way of meaning or application for our lives. That set me on a quest to discover reasons why God included this little account in His Book of books. This Reading Companion is some of the results of that happy search. Thus the original title of this writing, “A Harvest of Applied Truths from the Book of Ruth”.

Among the most crucial things in life are the decisions we make. The way we decide to think today will surely have an impact on our actions tomorrow. The things we decide to do at every juncture will tend to chart the course of our life. Decisions and their results are a key feature of this blessed little book of Ruth. It’s one aspect that makes it such a vital study. And though an ancient writing, yet we find here instruction that could not be more relevant to modern life, virtues and vices still with us today.

Oh may the Lord use my humble efforts toward your gain and growth. Such pleasure is mine in hearing of one helped. May you find promise and warning here to guide your will and way.

Bill Daniels

Our **Reading Companions** are simple commentaries, covering various books of the Bible, providing easy to follow help in understanding what you read in your Bible, without becoming overly technical. These Bible study books are earnestly taught, practically applied, and have been a blessing to many.

Reading Companions are available in this series on;

Genesis
Joshua
Ruth
I Samuel
II Samuel
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Daniel
Jonah
Habbakkuk
Haggai
Zechariah
Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
Hebrews
Revelation

As well as; “Through the Beloved Book of Books
A Survey of the New Testament”

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	3
<i>Decisions; Foolish & Wise – Cursed & Blessed</i>	
Chapter 2	47
<i>The Lord of the Tide Begins the Turning</i>	
Chapter 3	69
<i>Arm of Flesh and Heart of Gold</i>	
Chapter 4	101
<i>Behold the Goodness of the Lord</i>	
Appendix	141
<i>Choices and Their Results</i>	

Introduction

It's a common malady of those who make their profession in the Bible, and study and teach from it often, to assume too much of their audience. With this in mind, it has been my aim to take less for granted throughout this humble effort at explanation and application of this priceless book of Ruth. Yet to explain every biblical illustration would become tedious to both writer and reader. So I'm hoping that you either have a basic awareness of the Bible already, or are a keen learner. Let me encourage you to take the time to look up the references provided and familiarize yourself with the background if you find yourself unclear on the import of illustrations given.

How I have come to love the message of these few chapters. But more, I have come to love and trust more completely the God of grace found here, quietly working in the lives of the three main characters, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. My earnest labour in these pages is wholly toward your benefit, that you might come to understand and love, as I, the message of truth found in the book of Ruth, and the Lord of the message.

It was a day when *“every man did that which was*

right in his own eyes". Those are the very descriptive words staring at us just prior, there at the end of the book of Judges (21:25). Such is the context in which we find this little book. A fittingly contrasting backdrop for such a gem as this and the sterling character of some found within its message. For we shall find the lives of Boaz and Ruth such a sweet-smelling breath of fresh air amidst the stench of a nation of people who lived to please themselves.

We will find Elimelech and Naomi presented in a more negative light in the book of Ruth. I suppose they were a product of their day. Ah but let's not be overly lenient on them. Nobody can fairly blame their day, or any other influence for that matter. God will hold each responsible for his own decisions. And this book is all about decisions – both good and bad. Be encouraged. There appear to be more good choices than bad within these few chapters of this little book of Ruth. I want you to see them all, and the kind of results each decision brings.

Chapter 1

Decisions; Foolish & Wise – Cursed & Blessed

1:1 Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife, and his two sons.

1:2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.

Elimelech and family left the land of Israel because there was a famine in the land. They travelled east and crossed the Jordan River, entering into the country of Moab to the east of the Dead Sea. Was it appropriate that they flee from the land of blessing, even to escape the effects of famine? I suppose the tragic results to follow answer that question quite effectively. Most certainly not! In fact, it would appear that never was the voluntary, unsanctioned departure from the land of promise appropriate for God's people. Oh such moves were certainly used by the Lord, even as He's so able to turn all tragedies to triumphs, but never were they right.

Whether Abraham to Egypt (Gen. 12) or Isaac to Philistia because of famine (Gen. 26) or David to Ziklag (I Sam. 27) or the remnant to Egypt (Jer. 44) or even Samson to Timnah (Judges 14), the departure from the land of promise always brought sorrow and shame. Apart from the judgment of the national captivities, whenever one was *commanded* by God or *forced* to leave the land of Israel, as Joseph sold to Egypt, the sojourn was blessed. But whenever freely chosen, the emigration was cursed by God, for it represented man's effort to find solutions outside of God's place of blessing. The move may have been well meaning. There may have been good reasons for it from a human perspective. It may have made logical sense, as in Elimelech's case. But such departure from the Promised Land by God's people always represented man's refusal to trust God in and through the trial. It was the avoidance of hardship by flight, rather than the endurance of it by faith. Elimelech and family should have remained in the land to be a part of the answer. He should have waited for the Lord's clear direction. Notice the contrast in Boaz, who remained in the land and was preserved through the famine.

Please understand that with the barrenness of this famine over the land of Israel, the Lord was only

doing what He had promised He would do. In Deut. 28:23-24 the Lord had warned that if the children of Israel would not listen to His words or obey His commands He would bring the destruction of famine upon them. This famine was sent and meant to prick the hearts of God's people. They were to understand that God was judging their sin (remember the context – Judges 21:25). Such hardships are meant to display, and then discipline or destroy godlessness, and to preserve the godly. Even as Israel's initial, intimidating contact with the Canaanites sifted Joshua and Caleb out of the Israelite leadership to be preserved, while the ten other spies were destroyed with the rest of the faithless nay-sayers (Num. 14).

Please my friend, don't ever be so foolish as to allow the pressure of hardships to force you to inappropriate reactions. Don't grow weary and grumble or give up when the way gets rough. Don't let anxiety ever lead you to rush ahead of God. Don't ever let the "famines" of life push you out of the place of blessing, as Elimelech chose to allow.

Let me illustrate with some practical examples. Divorce is hated by God (Mal. 2:16), and in no circumstance is it the right or best choice. Don't ever allow the "famine" of the most barren

relationship to force your hand to sign for divorce, Christian. If such an eventuality is forced upon you through the decision of your spouse and no pursuit of your own, then it must be accepted with grace. But don't ever allow yourself to be found the initiator of such a godless alternative. The same could be said of suicide and dishonesty and any other compromise with evil. Don't ever let the most difficult circumstances drive you to such improper responses. *It is never right to do wrong!* I've heard young people say that they *had* to live together unmarried. Financially, it was their only viable option. But it is never right to do wrong, no matter how impossible may appear the other alternatives. I've heard folks say that they *had* to stop tithing. Financially, they simply were not able. But it is never right to disobey God. These are all examples of Elimelech's error. The folly of avoiding hardships through inappropriate, less-than-God's-best sorts of responses. We'll call them "arm-of-flesh" responses, for they reflect man's effort at finding solutions to difficult circumstances through methods that leave God out (N.B. II Chron. 32:7-8, where "*an arm of flesh*" is unfavourably compared with "*the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles*").

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was unable to have children, so he prayed until God answered and gave him sons

through his wife (Gen. 25:21). But when his father's wife and his son's wife were also barren, they went in to the servant girls to produce children by that means! Which was the answer of faith, and which the arm of flesh?

Now, what kind of testimony do you suppose Elimelech and his family were to their neighbours in Moab? They fled to an ungodly Gentile nation to find food because they couldn't find enough sustenance in the very "house of bread" (the literal meaning of their home town – Bethlehem). And what kind of a testimony do *we* reflect when we go to the world to find our sustenance and satisfaction? I fear we're so full of the diversions of work and leisure, sport and spas, trinkets and gadgets and other material things, sensual pleasures and novels, movies and bird watching and all the other temporal things of this passing world. Does God not mean that we should find our satisfaction in Him? Are we not much like Elimelech and family? What do we talk about and thrill over? Wherein is our joy and completeness? How close to the surface is our wonder and delight in God and in His Word? How great is our yearning after things close to His heart? Is it not true that *many* of God's children have left the "house of bread" to seek for joy among the dry husks of the

1:3 *And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons.*

1:4 *And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.*

“other things” (Mark 4:19) of this world? “*The church doesn’t provide enough entertainment for my youngster,*” grumbles the carnal parent, “*so I let them go to the world (discos, raves, movies, teen hang-outs, rock concerts, etc.)*”. I wonder what Jesus’ teen years were like? I think we can safely assume that He didn’t need or desire the world’s mouldy crumbs to feed His soul. He, like godly young David, would have been found worshipping His Father in psalms and labouring over His Father’s words. He would have been given to pleasing His father, both earthly and heavenly. His heart and mind would have been full of the heroes of faith, rather than the worldly heroes of Hollywood and laser lights.

How long were they to be there? Don’t miss the gradual downgrade here. First, they “*went to sojourn in the country of Moab*” (vs. 1). The word translated “sojourn” here means to tarry or wait, to stay briefly. They were only going for a temporary visit, you see. They were merely going to Moab *until*

the famine was ended, and then they would return. But then we read in verse 2 that they “*continued* there”. They stayed on! They remained or lived there! What happened? Well, we’re not told of their reasoning. Perhaps it doesn’t matter. From God’s perspective the reasons we use to lead ourselves away from His perfect will are irrelevant. The issue in His sight is simply whether we choose to do right or not. Perhaps for this cause their reasons for continuing there in Moab are not recorded.

But now, alas, we discover in verse 4 that “*they dwelled there about ten years*”. They didn’t go back at all, and it would appear now that they didn’t intend to. They settled there and made it their home, in the same way (same word) that Abraham “dwelled” in Haran, until God urged him on to the land of promise by taking his father (Gen. 11:32). It was only meant to be a stopping place along the way for Abraham, but somehow it got changed from a means to an end. And God had to step in and turn Haran back into a means. He’ll do the same with Moab. Watch and see!

We see a similarly frightening decline in Lot’s experience. First he “*lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where . . . even as the garden of the Lord*”

(Gen. 13:10). He looked with interest. Then he *“chose him all the plain of Jordan”* (Gen. 13:11), even though he could see that it was no place to bring up children (13:13). Ah but those well-watered plains would be a profitable place to raise cattle. This seems to have been pre-eminent in Lot’s reckoning (who cares if we can’t find a decent church there, the money’s good!). Then *“Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom”* (13:12). But it’s not long before we find him dwelling right *in* Sodom (Gen. 14:12). And finally *“he sat in the gate of Sodom”* (Gen. 19:1), suggesting a place of responsibility in an irresponsible town! Such examples describe a pattern of gradually deepening roots in an inappropriate environment.

What lesson can we learn from this pattern? Consider how we may intend to be involved only temporarily in things, places, people, etc., which are inappropriate. It’s only a brief sojourn into the things of the world, you see. We’re not planning to get too deep. We’re only momentarily leaving God’s perfect will. *“I’m only here until. . .”* But the subtlety of it catches us. We find the flavour quite nice (*“bread of deceit is sweet to a man. . .”*). And somewhere along the way Satan subtly snatches away that “until”. The vile visit becomes the vile

habit. The wrong relationship deepens, requiring greater entanglements with unrighteousness. The dishonesty breeds the need for further, continued dishonesty. The fleeting compromise with error soon fixes our residence and robs us of all ability to live in truth. Whenever you find yourself thinking or saying, “*I know that this is probably wrong or compromise or improper or outside of God’s perfect will, but it’s only until. . .*”, please, please recognize the grave danger! Unless you are brought to repentance and flee from such folly, Satan will cunningly rub out that “*until*”.

This same principle would apply, as well, to the good we know to do, and yet we put off the doing of it, *until. . .* “*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17). It is as sinful to postpone obedience to God’s Word as it is to momentarily enter into the disobedience of it. Are you quite certain my Christless friend that one of these fine days you will repent and believe on Jesus Christ? You haven’t done so yet because you’re waiting until. . . until who cares what. *Oh believe now!* Or watch how subtly Satan shall drift away that “until”. And you shall perish at the last in your disobedience to God’s call to do the good when you knew it to do. Are you quite resolved my Christian friend that one of these sunny summer

days you will be baptized? *“Him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”*

Now, was God there in Moab? Did Elimelech and family leave God entirely behind when they chose to stray from His perfect will and place of blessing? No, of course not. We who are His children may choose to turn from His perfect will, but He never leaves us nor forsakes us. As Psalm 139 makes so wonderfully clear, no child of God could ever stray so far as to stray right away from Him. *“The eyes of the Lord are in every place. . .”* (Prov. 15:3). The Lord knows all about us. He knows where we are spiritually. His thoughts are always upon those who are His own. He is still in control, and He knows how to bring us back to Himself.

Yet it is an exceedingly unfortunate thing that some of God’s own children are foolishly stubborn enough to resist and quench His gracious work in their lives. As the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, such rebellious sons spend their heavenly inheritance on “riotous living” in this life, and as a result find no reward in His presence. Having placed their faith in Christ alone they shall enter heaven’s glory. Yet having only “wood, hay and stubble” to show for the miserable stewardship of their earthly existence, they enter “yet so as by fire” (I Cor. 3).

1:5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Elimelech died while they were living in Moab, and his two sons married Moabite women. Then heartbreak followed heartbreak when those two sons also died, leaving three childless widows. Naomi, that poor wife of Elimelech, lost all of her men. She was left with only her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Tragedy pursued like the pale horseman of the apocalypse, offering some confirmation of the wrongness of their flight to, and continuance there in Moab.

Now, before we move on, I want you to notice how the inappropriate choices of those parents led to the inappropriate choices of their sons. The flight of Elimelech and Naomi to Moab led their sons to marriages with Moabite women. Such mixed marriages with heathen women were forbidden by God of His children, unless the foreigner had come to faith in Jehovah. Remember Isaac and Rebecca's grief at Esau's foolish marriage choices (Gen. 26:34-35). Look well how the parents' choices affect the children's choices either for good or evil. No man is an island. Our decisions influence our own destiny *and* that of those around us, especially those

1:6 *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread.*
1:7 *Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.*

closest, those we would say we love.

Do right, Dad! Choose right, Parent – always, always, always – if only for the sake of those you love. For their eyes are open to your ways and you are making an impact. Your decisions are sure to have a ripple effect through following generations (Ex. 20:5). *“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself* (separate Myself from impure and improper things, and dedicate Myself to God), *that they also might be sanctified through the truth”* (John 17:19). But see how God turned such a circumstance, tragic in so many ways, to good. Ruth was saved by God’s grace!

Naomi now arises as one of the primary characters of this account. She has come to the bottom with a thud, and can only look up. She is left with so very little from a human perspective. See how the Lord, in His grace, brings us down that we might look up.

Crisis times in our lives are often times when we make the decision either to follow the Lord or to leave Him. The widow of Zarephath was brought to such a decision in the crisis of the famine (I Kings 17). Would she obey the prophet's words and feed him first with her last bit of food? She made the right decision, the decision of faith! And how God greatly blessed her with a limitless food supply throughout the famine!

Upon evaluating her situation, Naomi was much like that prodigal son of Luke 15. She, like he, was alone in a foreign land where she considered the abundance of her Father's provision in her own land ("*. . . the LORD had visited His people in giving them bread*" – vs. 6). She realized the position to which she had descended. She recognized where she ought to be. Even as the prodigal, who being at the very end of himself finally "*came to himself*". Even so Naomi "*arose. . .that she might return*". Always there come such life-changing decisions to the blessed. That moment of saying, "*yes Lord*", "*I will*". Blessed moment of heart turning, opening the door to the entrance of God's gracious working! How the tide of the prodigal son's circumstances turned with that decision. So it was with David at Ziklag, when finally he turned back to the Lord in that prayerless place (I Sam. 30:6). It took the

crisis of the loss of loved-ones, goods, and comrades to turn David's heart back to the Lord there, and then to return him to the land of promise, that place of blessing where he belonged. So it was with Abraham in Haran. It took the loss of his father to move his heart, and then to move his feet onward to that place to which the Lord had told him to go. Blessed crisis moments that drive us back to the Lord! So with the thief on the cross, who came to the end of himself and found Christ there (Lk. 23). So with the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). Even so with biblical child discipline; the ministry of the rod is meant to bring the crisis, a storm in their southern hemisphere, a mighty crashing in their lower decks, prayerfully seeking to bring on that wise decision in their young hearts, "I will do right". Victorious Christian living is all about right decisions. And God, in His loving grace, will bring horrendous pressure to bear in order to bring us to the blessing of those right decisions. How I praise Him for His faithful love! Such hard lessons are sent as messengers of mercy to teach us to never again consider the route of disobedience to Him or departure from Him, or even hesitancy to do His perfect will.

Please don't give up on believers who are languishing outside of the Lord's will. Though they

may be in the wrong place, not living out who they are, God is so very able to touch them and move them back to His place of blessing.

Let's stand back now and apply these thoughts to Naomi's situation. Let's take a look for a moment at the larger picture, surveying how the Lord dealt with these women. Famine drove this family to the wrong decision of emigration from the land of promise. From that point there is a downward spiral. Naomi's husband is dead. Both of her sons unfortunately married Moabite women. These marriages both prove fruitless as to offspring, for there are yet no children (grandchildren) after perhaps years of marriage. Now both of her sons are also dead, and Naomi is left with only her Moabite daughters-in-law. Her family has been stripped from her through untimely deaths, and a barren decade of Naomi's life has slipped quietly away.

Oh can you see the hopelessly impossible circumstance in which Naomi finds herself as she contemplates a return to the land of Israel? Her daughters-in-law probably won't go with her should she return to Bethlehem. They are Moabites, and will certainly want to stay in their homeland with their families. Thus, Naomi will likely return *alone*.

She's old, too old to hope to secure another husband or bear more children. The probability of having to glean in the fields to survive looms before her (Deut. 24:19-22). She feels her age and wonders if she has the strength for such labours, and for how long. The possibility of marriages for all three women in the land of Israel is quite hopeless (vs. 12 &13). There is no provider, no heir, no prospect of a companion, and not even a caring God, as Naomi interprets her situation, and as we shall see later. If she returns to Bethlehem now, it's even too late in the year to hire out the one thing she possesses, her husband's land. They're already harvesting there, as we'll see in chap. 2. Planting season was months ago. *Everything* seemed to be lined up against her and impossibly hopeless, at least from a human perspective! Circumstances seemed weighted toward keeping her in this less-than-God's-best place (how skilled Satan is at keeping you where you never should have even visited). Perhaps Naomi felt trapped, boxed in, with no way out.

How like the unsaved man, when finally coming to an honest assessment of his situation before God. He finds no solutions to the dilemma of his sin. Death and eternity loom before him as an unwelcome yet undeniable reality. The budding

wisdom in his soul has awakened his awareness. He foresees the evil but knows no way to hide himself. He knows that his groping in the darkness has produced no answers, and he has come to recognise with an equal certainty that it *never will*. He has faced the facts but he finds no answers. Until the glorious hope of forgiveness and cleansing from sin dawn upon his troubled soul through the enlightening entrance of God's Word. And he knows that this is his hearts need, that Jesus Christ is the answer for which he has sought. He knows that the Lord is calling him to a place of blessing – *“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you **rest**”* (Matt. 11:28). But what will he do? To be sure, circumstances will all seem to point to his remaining right where he is, in his personal prison house of sin. There will be a thousand and one reasons arising in his thoughts, leading him to *not* turn to the light of God's forgiveness in Christ. His pride will seek to confirm him in his fruitless wanderings. But, again, *what will he do?* *“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light”* (Eph. 5:14). *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”* (Acts 16:31).

Consider that on top of all of Naomi's outward misfortunes, inwardly she was so discouraged. Yes,

she had clung to her faith in God, but only tenuously it would seem. Even He she perceived as against her. Naomi's was no Job sort of response, who when he lost all, fell down and worshipped. She is bitter concerning the Lord's dealing with her (vs. 13, 20 & 21). She is empty and friendless.

Do you see how the Lord brought her low? Do you see how He humbles us and presses us with the vice of circumstances? Crisis times and the pressure of afflictions brought upon us are meant to sift and shape and turn us. Such experiences are the cutting wedge, forcing us to one side or the other, either to the Lord or rebelliously further away. And the true nature of our hidden heart within becomes evident to all.

But look, *look*, look! at Naomi's decision in the crisis! She determined in her heart, "I WILL GO BACK". One of the key issues the Lord is highlighting in this book is this decision in Naomi and its import. "*I will go back to the land of blessing!*" The Lord said, in Jeremiah 50:6, "*My people hath been lost sheep. . .they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place.*" Naomi remembered, and resolved to return!

BLESSED DECISION!!

Now let's sneak a little preview of things we shall yet examine in greater detail, and note the turning of the tide of circumstances trailing behind Naomi's wise decision. Even as Haggai's encouragement when the people of Jerusalem made the decision to make God's concerns their first priority, "*And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward. . .*" (Hag. 2:15). Mark your calendars, he was saying, and watch the pathway of blessing open before you, like the Red Sea before Moses, from this day of wise decision for the Lord!

One of Naomi's daughters-in-law *did* determine to go back with her. Do you see? God *immediately* encouraged Naomi's heart by giving her a companion in Ruth. She would not return alone after all! And such a companion!! One with a genuine, sincere, and uncomplaining spirit. Further, we find that they were provided for (abundantly – 2:19) all summer, through Ruth's willingness to go to the fields and glean. Then, the Lord brought Boaz to their aid, not only as kinsman redeemer, but also as a willing husband for Ruth. This was the very thing Naomi thought she would never see, and the very thing Ruth thought she was giving up by committing herself to the Lord and to the land. How Naomi must have mourned for Orpah as she saw God's blessing unfold in His land,

and her counsel turned to folly. Oh the pain as she thought upon her carnal advice to that girl, leading her to stay in Moab.

And such a husband God gave to Ruth! Boaz was a good and godly man. He was a temperate man, who wouldn't take advantage of Ruth when he had the opportunity there on the threshing floor (3:6ff). He was intelligent and prosperous and observant and caring and thoughtful and generous. And on top of all of this, Boaz was in the very line of the Messiah. Marriage to him brought Ruth into this blessed heritage! In one man came redeemer, relationship (marriage – “rest”) and the provision of resources. Even so when Christ takes us to Himself (as Boaz took the Moabite worldling). In Christ we find Redeemer, relationship (“rest”) and untold resources – yea, indeed we are made complete in Him!!

And look, as we come out the end of the book we find a baby boy on Naomi's lap (4:16)! Ruth and Boaz have so quickly produced a grandson and heir to Elimelech's land, something Naomi had been denied for a decade with both of her sons, and had come to fear that she would never see.

Do you see how everything later fell into place, when all was so disjointed and unmeshing before.

Before what? ***Before the decision!!*** Before Naomi's determination to go back to the land of promise, to the place of blessing. See how God, who had seemingly aligned everything against her before, has turned all to blessing – displaying that He was for her all along. Oh blessed decision!!

We find in vs. 7 that Naomi got up and put her hat on and got moving, even as the prodigal son (Lk. 15:17-20). Her faith decision was followed by action, demonstrating that it was *true* faith. The “Hall of Faith” of Hebrews 11 repeatedly shows the same pattern;

- “*By faith Abel offered . . .*” an acceptable sacrifice (vs. 4).
- “*By faith Noah. . .moved with fear, prepared an ark . . .*” (vs. 7).
- “*By faith Abraham . . .obeyed; and he went out . . .*” (vs. 8).
- “*By faith Abraham . . . offered up Isaac . . .*” (vs. 17).
- “*By faith Moses . . . refused . . . choosing . . . esteeming . . .*” (vs. 24-26).

Do you see? Always their faith was demonstrated in some appropriate action. If you believe God's

1:8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

1:9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

words, your actions will show it (James 2). If you say that you've decided to live for Him, I shall rejoice when I see the active evidence of it in your life.

These being the first recorded words of Naomi in vs. 8, we immediately begin to learn more of this mother. She speaks freely of the Lord, thus demonstrating her faith in Him (*"the LORD deal kindly with you"*, *"the LORD grant you. . ."*). We see her awareness of a personal God. Yet one must ask what wisdom can be found in her advice to her girls? She insists that they return to their people and to their gods (vs. 15). I suppose we can understand something of what Naomi is thinking. She seeks what she thinks is best for their future. She wouldn't want to coerce them into coming along, only to lead them to marital drought. Maybe there is a sense in which she speaks faithfully from the perspective of how she believed things to be at that time.

Yet, surely we must conclude that there is a fearfully worldly slant to Naomi's perspective! She knows that there will be no hope for them of "*rest . . . in the house of her husband*" (marriage) in the land of Judah. From a human perspective, I suppose Naomi is correct. They would be far more likely to find another husband in Moab than in Judah. And indeed, Naomi is thinking from a human perspective. She's advising according to the way she sees things, with no real hope in the Lord.

Is marriage everything then? Does this "rest", which Naomi so highlights, take precedence over eternal rest, which only the true God can provide? Of course not! She's thinking according to the folly of conventional wisdom. In this sense Naomi is like the typically carnal parent. She seems more concerned about the *earthly* well-being of these girls than about their heavenly well-being. Like the parent who will insist that their child go to school each day, but won't insist that they go to church. "*Yes, well, we don't want to force religion down their throat,*" they declare, while forcing academics down the same aperture. Wherein is the consistency? And which is of greater importance, academic merits or the knowledge of the Holy One? I see such parents springing for the finest education, coaching, training, or preparation they can afford

1:10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

for their child, with very little serious thought toward their Bible training or their walk with the God of heaven. They will avidly encourage their child to excel in education and sport, but not in spiritual things. They will shuttle their precious charge to school daily and to events and matches and tournaments every weekend, but they're too busy to drive to church. What snaps into *your* mind when you consider *your* child's preparation for life? Their fitness for *life*, or their fitness for *eternal life*?

Here too, we must take careful note that the most well-intentioned advice from a caring friend or relative can be jolly wrong and utterly disastrous! Just because there is genuine concern behind it, doesn't make the advice worthy of a following. Only God's Word, and biblical counsel derived from it, can provide the wise guidance through life which we need.

In verse 9 is revealed the heart-wrenching emotion of this event. They kissed and hugged each other and wept uncontrollably. The girls were determined

1:11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?
1:12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;
1:13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

to return with Naomi (vs. 10). But their mother-in-law continued her efforts to persuade them to stay.

How solemn and convincing are Naomi's words! Ruth and Orpah are simply not likely to find a man in Judah who would be willing to marry a Moabite widow. There would be some hope that Naomi could promise husbands to them if she had more sons. But there were no prospects for that possibility either. Even if she were able to find a husband, marry, and have sons immediately, would they be willing to wait two decades while the boys became men? Of course not! Again, from Naomi's perspective a man or husband is the great hope for these girls. Why? It seems she would sell out their souls and lead them to forsake the true God in order to attain to this "rest." Sounds frightfully like the attitude of many modern teen girls and young

women, who seemingly can think and talk of nothing but boyfriends and marriage. I fear many of them, as well, sell out their souls (certainly their principles) in their desperate effort to arrive at such “rest.” Naomi is thinking horizontally here. Such earthly concerns take precedence over and crowd out God’s concerns in her reckoning.

Perhaps something could be said for attempting to drive one from an expressed commitment, knowing that if you cannot drive them from it then their commitment is more likely to be genuine. Even as the second soil in Christ’s parable of the sower (Matt. 13). Pictured there is one who, having heard the word, immediately received it with joy. But persecution arising because of his commitment to the word quickly separated him from it, displaying the hollowness of his first resolve. Here is the value of religious persecution. It scours off the hollow hangers-on – the clinging molluscs that serve only to slow the ship’s progress. The Lord is not opposed to sending such grip-exercisers. Consider His handling of Jacob at Peniel and the carnal clingers of John 6. Consider Elijah’s unsuccessful effort to put Elisha off before his translation (II Ki. 2). John said, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us”* (I John 2:19). One who truly belongs to God will tenaciously refuse to be driven away from Him or from His blessing.

It could be that some such thought of resolve-testing guided Naomi's actions here. But given her evident spiritual condition, I shouldn't think so. Would she not have been wiser to attempt to persuade these girls to receive the truth at all cost and not to forsake it, as the pure voice of wisdom speaking from Proverbs (Prov. 8)? "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*" (II Cor. 5:11). What would it profit her daughters-in-law to gain the desired "rest", yea the whole world, and then lose their own souls? Quite honestly I struggle to find much of value in Naomi's counsel.

We begin in vs. 13 to see something of Naomi's impression of the Lord. We see this attitude further expressed in vs. 20 & 21 of this chapter – "*the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me,*" and "*the Almighty hath afflicted me.*" She saw the Lord as against her, and indeed He was, from the perspective of circumstances.

Let's take a moment now to review a bit, and draw a realistic sketch of the nature of this first main character introduced to us in this chapter.

Naomi

Naomi surely must have been a believer in the Lord.

We hear her speaking personally of the Lord. We see the Lord dealing personally with her. In Hebrews 12, the Lord makes it clear that He *“scourgeth every son whom He receiveth”* (vs. 6). And in fact, *“if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”* The Lord’s hand of chastisement was clearly upon Naomi as she was brought to the end of herself. A lucid demonstration that she was indeed a child of God.

As well, she bore fruit in the life of Ruth. And it was indeed Naomi’s fruit, for Ruth spoke of “your God” (vs. 16), not Mahlon’s. There must have been some aspect of Naomi’s faith that was evident to Ruth.

And as we have already considered, there is a wisdom in this woman. Once she was free to make her own decisions, Naomi undid the folly of the men of her house. She picked herself up and headed back to the land of blessing.

Yet, we must remember that just because a life is recorded in the Bible does not make it exemplary. God documents the lives of people in His Word, warts and all. There are indeed negative factors in Naomi’s life as well. And we are not wise to

overlook such warts, or to look upon them through rosy lenses. Her's was not exactly a victorious "Christian" life. She was not happy with her lot. She was, as she renamed herself in vs. 20, "Mara" – *bitter*. She felt everything was against her, even the Lord. It seems Naomi's gaze was more downward, avoiding the eyes of the Lord. She had yet to sincerely look to Him. She spoke *of* Him, but not *to* Him. Naomi had yet to see the value, indeed the great blessing, of afflictions. I'm afraid she couldn't agree with the Psalmist when he proclaimed, "*Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O LORD. . .*" (Psalm 94:12). "*Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn Thy statutes. . . Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*" (Psalm 119:67, 71 & 75). The Psalmist praised and Job worshipped (Job 1) in affliction, but Naomi grumbled. Notice the contrast in Ruth. She was similarly suffering in the very same setting, yet never do we hear a whinge from her. Naomi's was no humble, serving, accepting, dependent submission. We're left with the impression that she was happy with God, as long as He suited her purposes. Her's was an I-want-it-my-way attitude, which can only be an expression of self-will. "*In everything give thanks*", is far from Naomi's will at this point in her life.

Now let's not paint her in such terribly grotesque hues that we disassociate her from ourselves. She was, in fact, much like us, wasn't she? But on the other hand, let's not make the mistake of some, diminishing the ugliness of Naomi's self-will, and painting her character overly bright. We must not justify the rebellion so evident in Naomi's heart, yet we must not lose God's intended mirror effect of her life. Anytime we argue with God and become bitter over circumstances, we express this same self-willed rebellion, and imply that we could improve upon His ways. Micah 6:8 reads, *"He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* Many a Christian, in less exacting circumstances than Naomi's, would read that last phrase as she did, *"...and to walk grumbly with thy God."* Can you understand that "humbly" and "grumbly" are mutually exclusive terms? They cannot both be true when walking with God. Naomi felt emotionally down and oppressed by the circumstances of life, and by God. And so there was no praise on her lips.

But there was more in Naomi than an uncooperative self-will. There was also a definite worldly orientation. Naomi was very true to life. We

1:14 *And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.*
1:15 *And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.*

have already considered her speech of vs. 8-13, where she sought earthly, marital “rest” over *eternal rest* for her daughters-in-law. Yes, perhaps she had the best interests of Ruth and Orpah at heart, but without a heavenly perspective to be sure. Marriage, or marital happiness, is *not* bigger than God. Yet Naomi encouraged these girls to forsake the true God for the hope of marriage! This is a human solution to a divinely brought problem. And it represents the same arm-of-flesh approach evident in Naomi’s husband when fleeing to Moab to avoid the drought. As the leader, so the followers.

Orpah

Now the Lord turns our attention to the response of the daughters-in-law. First, Chilion’s widow, Orpah. Orpah wept again with Naomi, so earnestly wishing things could be different and that they did not have to separate. Yet upon hearing of the difficulties that lay ahead in Bethlehem, and

considering Naomi's persistent advice, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned "*unto her people, and unto her gods.*" She counted the cost and came to the decision that the price was too great. *How tragic!*

Orpah was like that rich young ruler whom Jesus loved (Mark 10:17-22). There was a yearning in him for eternal life. Yet with such anguish of soul he walked away without the assurance of it. The price was too high! There was a price limit, above which he simply would not go. Can there exist such a price limit in the heart, and one still find life eternal? Such ones are unwilling to renounce *all* to acquire such a pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45-46). Job declared that there was no price too high when he said, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him*" (13:15). Though He take everything, including my life! Many have an affection for Christ or a degree of interest in eternal life. Yet without eyes of faith to see the promise of God, to see the unseen One, to see the surpassing worth of Christ, oh the cost of following Him appears too great. And you can be sure that the evil one will be there to highlight the grave disadvantages of surrender to Christ as well, even as temporal concerns seemed to loom so menacingly before Orpah, like great Goliaths across the border. But faithful David wasn't put off by his

glowering Goliath. He strode forward full of faith and confidence in God (I Sam. 17). By faith David marched right through Goliath, and into God's blessing, and into a towering place in Israel's history.

Moses wasn't put off. He possessed every advantage dwelling in Pharaoh's house – station, learning, talents, wealth, and inheritance, yea everything the world had to offer. There was no visible reason for him to forsake what he had and join himself to the despised Jewish slave race. There was, in fact, every reason not to, from a human perspective. But through faith the vision of Moses soared far above the human perspective. Through faith he could see beyond the momentary earthly advantages. *“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible”* (Hebrews 11:24-27). Moses forsook all earthly advantage that he might have the “greater riches” of God's blessing. By faith Jacob saw those

“greater riches” and was willing to live down to his name (“Jacob” literally means “supplanter” or “tripper”) and deceive to get them (Gen. 25 & 27).

Orpah had lived with God’s people, tarnished though their testimony might have been. She had *“tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come”* (Heb. 6:5). But she fell away because she had never personally received or believed on or committed herself to the Lord. She at first would go, but the prospect of hardship soon put her off. Like the second soil of Christ’s parable (Matt. 13) mentioned earlier. The seed fell on stony ground and immediately sprang up. But having no “root in himself”, it quickly withered away when hardships arose “because of the word”. Such a faithless response displays such a one as a mere professor, but no true *possessor* of eternal life.

Many such individuals warm the church pews of our land. They profess to be saved and know all the right words to say, but never having personally committed their lives to Christ they have received no eternal life from His hand. They enjoy the society of the church, but they are no less a child of hell than a blatant, God-denying heathen. Their church involvement and “religious” life does not make the slightest impress upon their standing

before God. And come persecution or some other raising of the price tag on commitment to Christ and they will walk away. A severe enough trial will surely sever them, for their commitment was never to God from the beginning, but only to themselves. When it's a genuine faith, grounded firmly in the Lord, the threat of *death itself* cannot shake loose its hold on God.

Orpah had something of a commitment to Naomi and Ruth (though no loyalty to the true God). We can see it in the anguish of this separation. Could I perhaps dare to suggest, however, that *Orpah's commitment to herself was greatest of all?* Observe that she was on her way to Bethlehem with Naomi. This indicates that there were no new marriage prospects for her pending there in Moab at that time. There was no budding relationship with a man then existing, and holding this widow to Moab. Yet Naomi's winning argument had only to do with the *possibility* of marriage. Orpah's love for a *man* did not turn her back to Moab, her love for the *institution* of marriage did! Do you see? The possibility of marriage was more important to this woman than her love for Naomi, Ruth, and the true God. She was committed to *marriage*, not to a man! Many young people today have the very same back-to-front perspective. They're a marriage looking for

a partner, just like Orpah with her face turned back to Moab! Instead of loving people for their virtues and character qualities, and committing themselves to the best for others, the gaze of such ones is on the institution. The former attitude, with long patience, waits for God's best. The latter takes what it can get, for the institution is all-important. I'm afraid every such self-serving heart shall mourn at the last.

I wonder how Orpah fared. Oh I fear not so well. She drops from biblical attention and we never hear mention of her again. She joins the forgotten ranks of the faithless, with the ten other spies who encouraged a "no" vote at Kadesh-Barnea, and the rich young ruler of Christ's day, and Esau, and Ishmael, and the other young Jewish men brought to Babylon with Daniel and his three friends, those who were willing to compromise over the matter of the king's food. All such are fallen by the way, out of sight and forgotten as the focus of God's attention carefully follows the exploits of the faithful ones, such as Ruth. Don't miss the fact that the entire remainder of this book largely revolves around Ruth and the results of her decision of faith. Note well how God sits up and takes notice, and follows with great interest that brave soul who decides to live for Him by faith in His word.

- 1:14 . . . *But Ruth clave unto her.*
- 1:15 *And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.*
- 1:16 *And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:*
- 1:17 *Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.*
- 1:18 *When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.*
-

Ruth

Now let's consider the very different response of Mahlon's widow, Ruth. Here is the second main character in this blessed little book. Ruth's was such a different, refreshing spirit. She was undaunted by any of the difficulties described by Naomi. She clung to Naomi in loyalty and she clung to the true God. She had counted the cost and she had made up her mind. *Blessed girl! Blessed decision!* She knew the essence of her future might be that of caring for a bitter old woman into her sunset years. But she knew it was the right thing to do. She made a vow and she invoked the punishment of the Lord upon herself if she should not carry it out. Whereas the weight of

Orpah's commitment was inward, toward herself, the weight of Ruth's commitment was outward, toward Naomi and to the Lord.

How did Ruth know that it was better to commit herself to Naomi and her God rather than to return to Moab and their gods of wood and stone? Surely it was in the same way that Moses knew it was better to forsake the apparent advantages of Egypt, *"choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God"*. By faith in the Word of God – *"as seeing Him who is invisible."* How did Noah know it was better to be in the ark? How did Abraham know it was better to leave his own country, and wander in a strange land? By faith in the promise of God! Even so, how do we know it's better to do right when we have so little desire to do so, and such intense desire to do wrong? By faith, believing God's promises of ultimate blessing for obedience and His warnings for disobedience. How do we know it's worth it to be honest when seemingly all around us are varying shades of deceivers? Or to be pure when pure is so completely out of fashion? Or to *not* seek divorce when just about everybody counsels otherwise? Or to forgive when others continue to hurt us? Or to continue ministering when there is so little apparent fruit? Or to continue giving when there is no visible blessing,

and so little left to live on? How do we know that to die as a believer is gain? *By faith in the Word of God!!* The world would proclaim us fools in this regard. From their perspective we are throwing to the dustbin of speculation much of what little potential joy we have in life when we choose to live for God and not for ourselves. Conventional wisdom insists that we would be wise to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But they have no eyes of faith to see beyond the present, to the One who is invisible. By faith, Ruth saw the true God through the mist of the multiplied false ones. And by love, she valued service to Naomi as greater than self-service. Blessed girl! Blessed decision!

Ruth insisted that Naomi cease to speak to her about returning, for her mind was made up. She would go with Naomi. She would stay with Naomi. She would adopt Naomi's people and God as her own. She would die and be buried where Naomi died, extending her commitment even beyond Naomi's death. She resolved to never return to Moab. She was in with both feet! This was a declaration of her love, faithfulness, and friendship. Ruth was no fair-weather friend, to be sure. The remainder of the book revolves around this young woman. Witness again, how God takes notice when a brave soul decides to live by faith!

1:19 So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Oh we live in a day when this kind of true friendship and faithful commitment is largely unknown, even in marriages, ministries, and missions. Many a missionary only ever crosses the ocean with one foot, harbouring the same mental attitude that many bring into marriage, *“We’ll try it for a while”*. Invariably such self-styled ministers soon pack up and head back home – usually not soon enough! But then we were warned that such a self-centred day as ours would come (II Tim. 3:1-5).

A true friend loves at all times, under all circumstances (Prov. 17:17), and sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). Jonathan was such a true friend to David, loving him as his own soul (I Sam. 18:3 & 20:17). He was committed to David’s best, even to his own detriment. It was a kind of love neither the world nor Jonathan’s father, Saul, could ever understand. So pure was his love that David eulogized at Jonathan’s death, *“thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women”* (II Sam. 1:26). And surely the love of true friendship is

1:20 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

1:21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

willing even to lay down its life for its friend (John 15:13).

It's helpful if we understand the meanings of the names used there in vs. 20. Naomi's name means "pleasant", or "my pleasantness". This new name, "Mara", which she sardonically suggests, means "bitterness." *"Don't call me pleasantness, call me bitterness!"* Her reason why she is the very personification of bitterness she makes utterly transparent; because *"the hand of the LORD is gone out against me"* (vs. 13), *"for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me"* (vs. 20), *"the LORD hath brought me home again empty"* (vs. 21), *"the LORD hath testified against me"* (vs. 21), and *"the Almighty hath afflicted me"* (vs. 21). It's clearly all the Lord's fault that her life is so empty and her heart so full of bitterness. But consider! Would Naomi ever have returned to Judah had the Lord not taken the men? And see how the fiery pressure of the

hardship produced a sparkling gem in Ruth. No trial ever “*for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous*” (Heb. 12:11) to be sure, but would we have left our comfort and security for the Lord had it not come? We must remember that suffering is one of God’s chosen tools to lead to life eternal and to promote life abundant in His children. Naomi is refusing to see this. And we must remember that we often bring trials upon our own heads by stepping out of God’s perfect will. Naomi is not acknowledging her family’s guilt in this regard. And we must remember that not only does God send hardships to *move* folks, but also to *prove* folks. In Job’s situation, not only was the Lord busy about His gracious work of purifying Job, as the wise Husbandman pruning His vines (John 15), but He was also proving Satan wrong (Job 1 & 2). God was demonstrating to the wicked one (and to all the wicked) the nature of a redeemed heart. Such a heart is transformed, not just convinced. It’s alive, where before it was dead. It’s not the same old heart fitted with a new opinion, but a new creature through new birth. Such a heart of faith cannot be bought at any price. As with Job, our own hardships can be both prunings and the proving of some heavenly question unknown to us.

God is sovereign. Nothing happens to us except

1:22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

what is permitted by Him. And what He allows is ever consistent with His gracious and loving nature. His hurts are meant to help! Please understand. God's trials are ever the skilled and caring cut of the surgeon's scalpel in the blessed hand of the beloved Physician – never the slash of the mugger's blade. As someone once said, *“Trials can make us bitter or better. It's the ‘i’ that makes the difference.”*

Did you notice that quiet little comment concerning the timing? It was the beginning of the barley harvest when these two arrived in Bethlehem. Perhaps it was a detail that went unnoticed by Naomi in her grumpiness, but I see the Lord's gracious hand. They were empty, with no means to support themselves. But the Lord saw to it that their return was at the beginning of the harvest season. It was a time when the poor could glean in the fields and find sustenance. And this gracious little detail would prove to be the answer in more ways than one.

“The LORD recompense thy work,
and a full reward be given thee
of the LORD God of Israel,
under whose wings
thou art come to trust”

(Ruth 2:12)

Chapter 2

The Lord of the Tide Begins the Turning

2:1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

2:2 And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

We are immediately introduced to the third main character of this book. Here in this man, Boaz, we find the channel the Lord is going to use to so bless and transform the lives of Ruth and Naomi. We shall learn much of this man in this chapter, but much more in the next two. Boaz was a near kinsman or relative of Naomi. He was also “*a mighty man of wealth.*”

There it was again! Did you catch that? “*Ruth the Moabite*” (vs. 2). We just saw that same title two verses ago. Did you notice how when Ruth was still in Moab she was just “Ruth” (1:4, 14 & 16)? Now, in Bethlehem, she’s “*Ruth the Moabite*” (cf. 2:6). An unwelcome reminder that she’s a foreigner here.

There's a stigma attached to her such as she has never known before. This could only serve to increase her loneliness in a foreign land. And it highlights again, the contrast in how folks receive trials. Do you suppose the circumstances were any harder for Naomi than for Ruth? Hasn't Ruth lived with the disgrace of barrenness through the years of her marriage? Hasn't she lost a husband as well as Naomi? Hasn't she also, with Naomi, given up the hope of future marriage ("rest")? Hasn't she lost Orpah as well? And now she has lost her country and her kindred and her father's house, even as sojourning Abraham. And alas, she has become "*Ruth the Moabitess*". She's in a foreign setting with an unhappy mother-in-law and she's just as "empty" as she. She's forced to consider the prospect of gleaning in the fields for survival with the rest of the poverty class of her adopted country. Ruth is not exactly riding the crest of abundance, ease, and hilarity. Yet there is a conspicuously missing element in this account. What we don't find is moaning from Ruth's lips! Never do we see her living in the past. Never do we see her pouting about losses, though she has sustained many. Never does she appear to chafe under the stigma of her foreignness or the indignity of gleaning. She's like Joseph in his Egyptian hardships. Never stewing or brooding over the many injustices he

*2:3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field
after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part
of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the
kindred of Elimelech.*

endured. As Proverbs, perhaps we could illustrate the attitude of such a spirit with the ant. Destroy its work and it simply starts over, without hesitation, without moping, without raging, unhindered by despair. Ruth didn't sit around and wait for Naomi to serve her. She said, *"Let me now go to the field, and glean. . ."* She picked herself up and got busy serving her mother-in-law.

Now let me take a moment to explain the concept of gleaning, for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with it. The practice of gleaning was a system established by the Lord for the sustenance of the poor within the nation of Israel. We see the Lord's instructions in this regard in passages such as Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22 and Deut. 24:19-22. You would do well to look up and read these brief portions toward a better understanding of what's happening here in this chapter of Ruth.

Simply stated, when it came time for a Jewish landowner to harvest his crops, the Lord

commanded that he was not to harvest his fields entirely clean of all produce. He was to leave the dropped stalks lay and the corners uncut. He wasn't to go back over the trees of his orchard or the vines of his vineyard a second time to collect what he had missed or wasn't yet ripe the first time through. These remnants of his harvest he was to leave *"for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow"*. Folks who had fallen upon difficult times, but who were willing to work for their bread, could then enter a landowner's fields after his harvesters and collect or glean what remained. Those who were unwilling to work would go hungry, and rightfully so (II Thess. 3:10).

As Ruth headed out to the countryside to glean in the fields, we read in vs. 3 that, *"her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz."* I think the Lord perhaps smiled as He included that word "hap" in His sacred text. In the Hebrew behind the English translation here, the phrase is literally, *"her hap happened"* or *"her chance chanced"*. Ruth happened to begin gleaning in a field which belonged to Boaz, that man who was in fact a close relative to Naomi (vs. 1 & 3). It was not Ruth's own scheming that put her there. In her simplicity, she knew nothing about the family connections which would later become so

2:4 *And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.*
2:5 *Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?*
2:6 *And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:*

momentous. She was only hoping for a landowner who would be gracious enough to allow her to glean in his field. But *God* is gracious! And in His loving providence He led Ruth in her choice. Behold, how when one determines to live for the Lord things begin to fall into place. “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God . . .*” (Rom. 8:28). God is the One who controls our circumstances, though it may not appear that way sometimes. We need be busy only about our business of service to Him and mankind, and He will surely provide, guide, and bless. Through God’s loving leadership Ruth *happened* upon the field of her relative, Boaz. And Boaz *happened* to come by that field that day. And Boaz *happened* to notice Ruth.

This servant of Boaz (vs. 5) had taken note of Ruth’s humble courtesy and diligence. She had graciously

2:7 *And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.*

2:8 *Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:*

2:9 *Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.*

asked permission to glean, though the Lord had already given her the right to do so in His Word. And she had continued diligently through the heat of the day, resting only briefly. That foreman had been watching closer than Ruth probably realized. He knew who she was, where she came from, and to whom she was related. And he hadn't missed the evident indicators of her character. Far more is seen and understood by others than we might suspect or perhaps wish for!

Observe that the first words of Boaz to Ruth in these verses are words of provision and protection. *"Stay with my fields, and I'll see that you have enough,"* he says in essence. *"Feel free to help yourself to the water drawn for the workers. And by the way, don't worry, I've taken the precaution of*

warning the men away from you. No harm shall come to you in my fields.”

Such words of practical care for a lowly foreigner – a “*Moabitish damsel*” (vs. 6) – a Gentile. Why is it that Ruth’s background doesn’t seem to put Boaz off in the least? Why would he so care for a stranger? As we come to know Boaz, I think we shall find this approach to Ruth consistent with his character. He proves to be a man with a respect for God and His Word. And God has spoken often in His Word concerning kindness to others, even to foreigners, and especially to near of kin, which Ruth has become to Boaz.

But there could be another reason for the tender heart of Boaz toward this “*Moabitish damsel*”. A comparison of Ruth 4:18-22 with Matt. 1:4-5 will show Boaz’s mother to be Rahab the harlot (Josh. 2 & 6:22-25). Rahab was a foreign woman (Canaanite) of godless lifestyle who placed her faith in the Lord and was saved from death in the Israelite conquest of Canaan. How the Lord must have turned her life around. For we surely see something of her character in this godly son of hers before us. What a joy it is to see God break into lives given to evil, issuing from an ancestry of evil, and to turn the tide of life and posterity to

2:10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

righteousness through faith. Here was a woman from a wicked nation, with a history of sexual immorality, transformed by faith to become the mother of godly Boaz in the land of promise. And placed, by grace, into the very bloodline of Christ (Matt. 1:5). How good the Lord is! How gracious His work! Boaz regards his Gentile mother who had genuinely come to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel (vs. 12), and he delights to see the same in Ruth.

In vs. 10 we find such humility in Ruth! Humble *curiosity* to be exact. Ruth was wise to not expect Boaz's grace. She did well to be surprised with it. She had been hoping for mere tolerance at the very most. And now she finds herself the recipient of unexpected and unmerited blessing from this unknown man.

I'm reminded of godly David, bowing before King Saul, humbly equating himself with a dead dog and a flea (I Sam. 24:14). I'm reminded, as well, of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, bowing with

2:11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

surprise and relief before David's kindness, and enquiring, "*What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?*" (II Sam. 9:8). In our modern self-esteem soaked societies such a response seems very strange indeed. But it's the apt response of a humble, unassuming heart. "*Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me?*" Such is the expression, as well, of a self-effacing heart when finally the unmerited grace of Christ breaks in upon the soul. We are indeed unworthy of the *least* of His favour.

Ruth was surprised with this favourable treatment by Boaz, and she was certainly a grateful recipient of his grace. But she was also very eager to know "why" she had received such unusual treatment from him. The surprising answer comes in vs. 11. Ruth discovered that Boaz had been fully briefed concerning her behaviour. Her reputation had preceded her, certainly to this man's awareness. He had surprisingly clear and extensive knowledge of

her background, circumstances, and activities. Perhaps we too would be surprised to know what others know or have correctly deduced concerning us. For those unhappy souls with much to hide, this can be a startling thought. Proverbs, that beloved book, puts it well; *“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold”* (22:1). *“Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right”* (20:11). It’s intriguing that Boaz had made it his business to know what he knew about Ruth (I suspect she was quite intrigued as well). He reveals to us that a bit of research had been done. He had been mindful of Naomi, and had been following from a distance the progress of that relative of his. Such a contrast to that nearer kin, whom we shall meet in chapter 4 – that one who was oblivious to Naomi’s plight when he should have felt responsible. The attentive thoughtfulness of Boaz is an illustration of the Apostle Paul’s words to the Philippian believers, *“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others”* (2:4). Paul is not talking here about inappropriate nosiness, but rather thoughtful considerateness, even as we see in Boaz. Naomi was in need, and Boaz was kin, and he rightly felt responsibility. He also is a reflection of God in His watch care over His own. Perhaps not as tangible

*2:12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward
be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose
wings thou art come to trust.*

to Naomi as a present, providing husband, yet still aware and poised and ready to fly to our care.

In his thoughtful following of Naomi's progress, Boaz had learned of a sincere daughter-in-law who had forsaken all to follow Naomi and the Lord. His heart was warmed toward this faithful, young servant even before this meeting. Her labours in his field that day only confirmed the truth of the reports. And all of this outside of Ruth's awareness, until this moment. The Lord was providing for her, lining up His answers and sending them winging to her need, from the moment of her turning! – even as the angel sent off with answers for Daniel the very moment he set his heart to begin to pray (Dan. 9:23; 10:12). And as Boaz understood and was pleased with Ruth's faith and servant heart, much more so the Lord.

How genuinely Boaz wishes the Lord's very best upon Ruth in verse 12. *"May your gracious kindness be fully repaid by the Lord."* How little did Boaz realize at that point just how greatly he

2:13 Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

himself would be used by the Lord to answer his earnest wish for Ruth.

“Under whose [the LORD God of Israel’s] wings you are come to trust” – How little did Ruth realize at that point that she would soon use a similar phrase to propose marriage to this man (3:9). Having come to happy refuge under the Lord’s “wings” (a common word picture of a hen spreading her protective wings over her chicks, Deut. 32:10-12; Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:1,4; Matt. 23:37), the God of grace would soon lead her to “rest” under the protective “skirts” of the finest of husbands.

From Ruth’s first contact with Boaz, it was to know his kindness and protection and provision. Boaz went far beyond just what the law required in bestowing favour upon Ruth. Even so Christ with us, yet with no such good reputation preceding us, and thus moving Him to so care for us. Boaz loved the lovely. But Christ loved the unlovely when He

2:14 And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed and left.

chose to love you and me, granting favour where only judgment was due. Oh blessed wings of refuge!

Again, Ruth's response in vs. 13 is to acknowledge the kindness of Boaz and her own unworthiness to expect such. There was no prideful response to his words of praise, only continued humility and thankfulness. Indeed, gratitude is an expression of humility. Thanklessness the expression of a proud heart.

Naomi seems never to have an encouraging word for Ruth. At least we never hear of it. In her self-pity, she appeared to be too inwardly focused to be a blessing, or to notice the blessing of Ruth's life. Such a contrast we find in this kind and thoughtful man who warmed Ruth's heart with well-spoken praise. She was so grateful! In the barrenness of her situation she was hungry for encouragement – *"for that you have spoken friendly (lit. to the heart) to your handmaid"*. The words of Boaz were indeed,

2:15 *And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:*
2:16 *And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.*

“fitly spoken. . .like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” (Prov. 25:11)

Do you see in vs. 14 how swiftly the generosity of Boaz expands? There is nothing like sincere appreciation to stir a willingness for greater favours from others. Gratefulness moved with multiplied greater power than harassment could ever boast. And is the Lord any different? Might it be that genuine gratitude would go farther toward moving Him as well? Oh there is a lesson here. Cicero once said, *“There is no quality I would rather have, and be thought to have than gratitude. For it is not only the greatest virtue, but even the mother of all the rest.”* So, less of moaning, both to others and before the Lord, if we would move them! And more of sincere thankfulness for blessings received!

It seems Boaz cannot do enough for this grateful soul now. *“At lunchtime come and eat with us”*, and Boaz (the boss) served her, and she had enough to

2:17 So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley.

eat and had leftover, and “*let her glean even among the bundles*”, and even “*purposely drop handfuls of grain for her to collect*”. Everything short of handing her a 20 kg sack of grain or sending it home with her on a wagon. But don’t miss the fact that Boaz didn’t do that. Ruth was abundantly provided for, yet it wasn’t just handed to her. She had to labour. It was that way with the manna in the wilderness as well. The Lord didn’t just put the “angel’s food” in their mouths. He made it abundantly available for those willing to go pick it up. In fact, so many things in the Christian life are that way. There are abundant answers to prayer – “*handfuls let fall of a purpose*”– for those willing for the labour of praying them in. Jesus said there is “much fruit” for those willing to go get it. There are baskets full of wisdom from His Word for those willing to beat it out. The Lord is not going to just issue you a sack-full or deliver it to your house on a wagon. His provision is there in every way, for the willing “*workman, that needeth not to be ashamed*” (II Tim. 2:15).

When Ruth “beat out” or threshed what she had

2:18 *And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.*

2:19a *And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? And where wroughtest thou? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee.*

gleaned at the end of the day, she ended up with about an ephah, or roughly $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel of barley (22 litres or approx. 13-14 kgs or 30 lbs). It was more than enough for their daily need! It was enough to feed her and Naomi for about *five days*! Her cup runneth over! Boaz, like the Lord, provided “*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*” – far beyond just the legal requirement!

When Naomi saw the weight of Ruth’s gleanings combined with her leftovers from lunch (“*that she had reserved after she was sufficed*”), she was amazed. She knew it immediately as an unusually large amount for one day’s gleaning. You didn’t get rich by gleaning. You survived. But this! This was a veritable bonanza for one day’s work! And Naomi at once took in the significance of the situation. She knew that Ruth could not have come on to such a boon without somebody taking special notice and care of her. Who? Who could it be? And Ruth,

2:19b And she showed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.

2:20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

ignorant of any special significance, innocently told of her kind benefactor.

With the mention of the name, Boaz, over that skirt full of grain, I think something happened in Naomi's heart. For the first time the awareness of a God who was *for* her broke through to her conscious understanding. For so long, she had been so full of sorrow and bitter anger. And much of it levelled against God, whom she viewed as among her adversaries. She had been so self-focused and unaware of a God of grace. But God hadn't been against her. He had been *for* her all along. And now, for the first time, that truth had finally dawned upon her troubled soul. And a thrill of anticipation and thankfulness and hope shivered through her.

Heaven had seemed so closed and opposed and distant and unconnected and unconcerned – so

dark and clouded. And now for the first time the golden rays of sunshine were beginning to break through. How happy the moment when Naomi realized that the Lord was still there for her, graciously guiding Ruth to the field of their near kinsman.

A similar dawning came to Job at the end of his book. With the Lord's stern words of reproof Job realized that the Lord was still there for him and still cared for him and was not against him at all, though it had certainly seemed that way. In Naomi's case, because of unwise decisions in the past had the dark hours come. In Job's case, because of his exceptional righteousness did hell's fury break loose upon him. Thus is God's way with His children. Sometimes the bright mountaintop experience of heart-warming closeness to the Lord, as the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Sometimes the dark, clouded valley of His seeming cold indifference. And we search as the Shulamite, pleading, "*Have you seen my Beloved?*" Sometimes those darkest hours for the reason of our own sinful choices (Isa. 59:1-2). Sometimes for the reason of our exceptional righteousness do we become hell's target. But always because God is accomplishing His eternal purposes. And always for our best! And so we patiently walk on by faith, not by sight. Not

alternately elated and devastated, according to present circumstances. For we know that long and varied and difficult is this road to the celestial city, with many a valley and mountain. Rest assured, believer, that regardless of current conditions on the ground, the Lord is above it all, ever mindful and labouring for our very best. Job couldn't see it at all times, but he discovered it to be true at the last. Naomi, for a long time, didn't see it, but the Lord is beginning to draw back the veil that she might perceive how gracious His work in her behalf.

Now let me take a moment to explain what Naomi means by her comment concerning Boaz here. She said, "*the man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen*" (2:20). In the books of Moses, those first five books of the Old Testament, the Lord explained to the children of Israel that He held them responsible to take care of their relatives. Some of the details of the nature of that care are given in such chapters as Lev. 25, Num. 35, and Deut. 25. Simply stated, if a family member should fall upon some type of hard times, God expected their relatives to step in and help, especially the nearest relative or kinsman such as a brother or uncle (Num. 27:8-11). If he had the ability to help, then he must help, if he would be pleasing to God. The same principle carries into our relationships with

*2:21 And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also,
Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they
have ended all my harvest.*

our brothers in Christ within the local church.

Naomi now saw in Boaz, a kinsman observing his responsibility to care for her and Ruth in their destitute state. As well, she saw promise for the future. For if this man had begun to so honour the Lord and them, then he would not let them perish. With this revelation, I'm sure Naomi lost something of that all-alone feeling. Suddenly there was now a thoughtful man taking care of them, and behind him, a thoughtful God. How the wheels of blessing had begun to turn with the turning of their hearts!

We of course see a picture of Christ in this man Boaz as well. For Christ became like us, our kinsman according to the flesh, in order that He might place Himself in a position to help us in our destitute state. It was the very purpose of the incarnation (Christ taking upon Himself human form and nature) of Christ. The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way; *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He (Christ) also Himself likewise took part of the same; that*

*2:22 And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.
2:23 So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.*

through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14,15).

So through the long weeks of two harvest seasons, that of the barley and the wheat, Ruth followed the same workers through the fields of Boaz. He had plenty of time to observe this sincere, diligent servant. Perhaps daily they were together at the mid-day meal (2:14). I’m guessing, but I have a notion that their encounters through the summer became times which they both came to cherish.

Now before we chase the text further, let’s step back again for a moment and consider our gracious God. Naomi had fled with her family from God’s place of blessing, and she had stayed where she didn’t belong. She, with her family, had chosen a human (arm-of-flesh) solution, when they should rather have trusted the Lord under the pressing

circumstances of the famine. God, in response, had brought His loving hand of discipline upon her life. She, in her pride, had run herself into a pit of self-pity. Now God could have said, *“Fine! I’ve dealt faithfully with you. You’ve resisted My way, and I have rightly brought resistance upon yours. And then you go grumbling into yourself like an immature child. Fine! You come crawling back when you’re ready to admit that you are wrong and I am right!”* But no! That’s not God’s response. That’s not His way. Do you see His patient, mature, caring grace toward her? He let her fume for a while. Then He sent her a gift – His blessing through Boaz. *He* takes the initiative. He *deserved the gift!* She was in the wrong. He knew that. But still, *He* made the moves. *He* is the One with the continual, unrelenting desire for reconciliation and restored fellowship. While we deserve none of it!

*“O to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I’m constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee!”*

Chapter 3

Arm of Flesh and Heart of Gold

- 3:1 Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?*
- 3:2 And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.*
- 3:3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.*
- 3:4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.*
-

Naomi is a study in human nature. There's a term we learned in our Bible college missions class. It's the word *syncretism*. It means to combine two or more differing systems of belief or worldviews into one new one – changing the essential nature of the originals, of course. In the context of missions, for example, it's a common tendency for national people to *combine* the new biblical belief system introduced by the missionary with their old pagan ideas. They essentially keep their old beliefs and

ways of doing things, but add a Christian flair to them. Obviously this is unacceptable to the Lord when it comes to moral issues of right and wrong. He wants all of our heart's devotion. And He continues to labour in us, through the sound teaching of His Word, to establish a holy people of His own, zealous of *good* works.

I'm afraid we see this sinister syncretism in Naomi. She tends to think and move in accordance with God's Word. But she's combining with it that same old carnal, arm-of-flesh approach of which we have seen too much already. Naomi was thinking again of God's requirements upon His people to take care of their family members, as we considered earlier. There is another very interesting little aspect of that care which the Lord describes in Deut. 25. Let me summarize.

The Lord instructed His people that if the circumstance should arise that a man marries, but then dies before a child is born to him, then God expected that man's brother (or nearest male relative) to marry the widow. Folks refer to this as the "Levirate" law, taken from the Latin word, *levir*, meaning "husband's brother" or "brother-in-law". The stated purpose of this levirate marriage was that the firstborn child from this union might

“succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel” (Deut. 25:6). The child would carry the name of the deceased brother, and apparently would inherit his land.

It was of this law that Naomi was thinking. She would have known that there was actually a relative nearer to them – one nearer than Boaz (3:12). One who would have had first responsibility and opportunity to fulfil the levirate law, and in other ways provide for their needs as he should. But Naomi had decided to approach Boaz. Perhaps because Boaz had already shown his kindness in caring for them. And perhaps because she knew enough about that nearer kinsman to know that he was not likely to be as accepting of Ruth, *the Moabitess*, as Boaz had proven to be. And perhaps because she knew that the mother of Boaz was a Gentile, contributing to his more favourable disposition toward a foreigner. And perhaps because she could see exceptional virtues in Boaz, which drew her to him, even as Ruth must surely have been drawn. And perhaps because, with the experience of years, she could sense a mutual interest growing between them. And so Naomi would “seek rest” for Ruth in marriage with this man, Boaz. And as well, the harvest was past now (2:23), taking with it the possibility of gleaning, and

perhaps introducing a measure of urgency to Naomi's thoughts.

Now look upon Naomi's method described in vs. 2-4, and consider it well. Boaz was threshing out the grain from his harvest at the threshing floor. He was spending his nights there until the job was finished, as a guard against thieves. And Naomi sent Ruth on a nighttime visit to his bed. Now many writers would try to tell us that there was nothing evil or improper in this midnight approach to Boaz – that this was in fact an accepted Jewish custom of that day. But I'm thinking it reflects a custom much older than Naomi's day. If indeed this was an appropriate Jewish custom, where is the biblical support for such a view, displaying to us that there was no impropriety here. True, we find the source for Ruth's words to Boaz (3:9) in Ezek. 16:8, but certainly no justification for her going to the man's bed at night. Naomi had the requirements of the Law of Moses behind her. Why didn't she put the case to Boaz in broad daylight, rather than sending Ruth to his bed? And if this was a proper approach, then why did Boaz feel it necessary for Ruth to leave before morning light, that *"it not be known that a woman came into the floor"* (3:14)? Why wouldn't he assume that folks would just conclude that they were practicing that

accepted Jewish custom of the day? Unless he was fearful that folks would assume they were practicing a much more ancient custom.

I'm afraid this accepted-Jewish-custom theory is a fabrication of those who would like to see Naomi in a much too positive and unrealistic light. Naomi was very human, and as we have previously observed, quite carnal in her perspectives. She was thinking like the world here, for she had lived long among the worldly, immoral Moabites (Num. 25). And she took it upon herself to show Ruth a thing or two about how to hook a man. It seems quite apparent that Naomi was attempting to secure a marriage between Boaz and Ruth through immorality. That's what this threshing floor set-up is all about. Naomi was thinking like many the foolish, empty-headed type of female. Give him a bit of what he wants, right? Then, while merrily humming wedding tunes, go and get yourself measured for your wedding dress (better hurry though, before those measurements begin to change). Naomi has one foot in the hammock of faith and the other still on the ground. There is an appreciation in her for the Lord's laws but yet no real trust in Him. She still sees the need for throwing in the added, humanly devised catalyst for good measure. Still the arm of flesh. Still a God

who needs help! Naomi has yet to see a watching, caring God who is willing and able to help, such that all the powers of earth and hell cannot hinder His will and blessing.

Now, perhaps you're a practically minded sort who would say, *"Maybe so preacher, but let's drift back down to earth. This method you're knocking is one that has endured the test of time. It works! Many a woman has landed herself a man by just that means"*. "Is that so?", I would query in my simplicity. "And did she keep him?" "Does she now wish she could unkeep him?" Like all compromise of God's truth and purity in order to gain a desired end, there may be short-term benefit but there will most certainly be long-term heartache. Some may feel the means is justified by the end, but it also determines the kind! What *kind* of a man is going to be attracted by that means? One to grow old with? If you want to catch an eagle you must use live bait. As an eagle soars over the land, it has eyes only for what has life. If you want to catch a vulture then use carrion. A vulture has a nose only for what stinks! *The means you choose to use will determine the kind you find!*

If you want to draw a keeper, then I wouldn't recommend Naomi's method. The Lord graciously

overruled her folly, for she was surely running in opposition to His Word at that point.

The Lord had said in Exodus 22:16, *“And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed (engaged), and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife”*. Essentially the same thought is related in Deut. 22:29. I certainly hope Naomi wasn’t thinking of this very law, with thoughts of forcing Boaz to marriage, wanting to take no chances. We can’t be sure. Her mind and methods seem not to be the picture of propriety.

Naomi was aware of God’s will as expressed in His Word. She was aware of, and thankful for, His instructions concerning the responsibility of near relatives to care for the destitute. She was aware of the benefits of God’s “Levirate Law”. She was grateful for His instructions concerning gleaning for the relief of the poor. She was happy for God’s commands where they suited her purposes. But she was prepared to ignore them when they didn’t! She appears to go deaf when He forbids the very thing she promoted here in chapter 3. Again she expresses her self-will in this, just as she did when grumbling about the way God was running things back in chapter 1. How very much like us, hey? Happy for His will when it lines up nicely with our

3:5 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do."

own. But willing to ignore His will when it doesn't meet our approval – when our emotions or desires are crossed, or our finances are touched.

But would Naomi devise such schemes toward a man who had been so good to her? Would she attempt to so abuse him (and Ruth)? A man who had exceeded the law's requirement for kindness toward her? Yes! For she had handled God the same. She had abused the Lord and His Word. He who had been so surpassingly good to her! He who had far more abundantly exceeded the requirements of the law (which cries out for her judgment, and mine) with His matchless, patient, loving-kindness toward her. And yet she would use Him – counting on His words where she finds advantage, and disregarding them when they stand in her way. She is so very true to life. And she essentially ignored all the good things of the Lord's continued sustaining grace, and grouched about the distasteful parts.

Now one wonders why Ruth would agree to such a carnal method as this that Naomi has put forward.

Ruth would certainly have been justified in resisting her mother-in-law on the grounds of preserving her integrity and moral cleanness. Let me offer some suggestions as to why Ruth went along with this. Perhaps we should remember what she was – a fledgling believer, having only recently come out of an immoral Moabite society. She was perhaps still uncertain of rights and wrongs, still wearing the grave clothes (John 11:44; Jude 23), and still dependent to a certain extent upon the standards of another, her only mentor, whose standards were less than perfect. Or perhaps she saw it as a submission issue (remember Rachel’s astonishingly quiet submission to her father’s deceptive scheme to turn her own wedding night into her sister’s – Gen. 29). Perhaps Ruth was not yet fully aware of her right and responsibility to resist even an authority figure where a moral issue is concerned. And maybe she knew Boaz enough by now to know that he wouldn’t take advantage of her. Or perhaps there was in her a whisper of a wondering – a willingness to confirm her expectations of him. Would he not take advantage of her when presented with the opportunity? Would he care for her best with genuine love? I think Ruth probably knew that Boaz would be wise and observant enough to recognize Naomi’s hand in this little manoeuvre. But, as well, I suspect that she was very curious to

see how he would handle the situation. I think Ruth loved this caring man. Perhaps she was willing to go along with this ploy in order to prove this one she loved.

Now please understand! Just because this tactic is found in the Bible and may have turned out for the best in this case, this does not mean that God endorsed this method for proving a man's love! God used Naomi's evil method, just as He later used those captivities by wicked nations, to accomplish His purpose.

And Boaz passed the test! When he would not take advantage of her when given the opportunity – as Ruth perhaps suspected he would not – as Naomi suspected he would – then I think Ruth was more completely certain that she wanted *this one*. *He* would love her! *He* would want what was best for her, regardless of his own interests. Oh what fear must have filled Ruth as she considered that kinsman nearer than Boaz! But then again, maybe not. Perhaps she was beginning to trust the Lord's hand, and could safely leave it with Him.

To those of the gentler gender, I certainly would not recommend the method employed here, but I would recommend something of the principle of it. You

don't have to go to his bed to know what he's willing for. Just how far he would go with you if you let him becomes all too evident in a thousand little ways as a couple spend time together. And if it becomes clear that He is willing to take advantage of you and use you physically, then *walk away!* He doesn't love you. "*Believe them (him) not though they (he) speak fair words unto thee*" (Jer. 12:6). He doesn't want what's best for you. In fact, He loves himself at your expense. Can't you see that he wants to use you for himself? *God's* kind of love is willing to sacrifice my interests and pleasures and happiness for your best and God's glory.

Please consider a short passage in I Corinthians 13, the real meaning of which is often lost in the beauty of its expression.

"Charity (love – agape) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth" (vs. 4-8)

With these thoughts in mind, let's turn our gaze back upon Naomi for a moment. I find myself wondering what on earth kind of creature Naomi was wanting for her daughter-in-law! One who would serve himself on Ruth? Didn't Naomi wish for Ruth a man who would love her and want what was best for her? Then why tempt Boaz to sin with Ruth? What's behind this? What was moving Naomi? She had said, "*Shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?*" But her actions were moving in a very different direction than such a benevolent wish upon her daughter-in-law. Was it really *Ruth's* well-being of which Naomi was thinking? Could her own well-being have played a part in her thoughts? Perhaps I'm being a bit heavy handed on Naomi. It could be that her major concern was for Ruth, sans a heavenly perspective, as we've seen before. But we have also previously noted a willingness in her to use to her advantage those who have been good to her (the Lord and Boaz). Could there be some practical consideration, here at the end of the harvest season, of her *own* "rest" and provision, which would certainly be more firmly secured in Ruth's marriage to this man?

Folks, by their choices and actions, often leave the faint trail of their thoughts and intentions. Perhaps we find a small clue in Naomi's suspicions of Boaz.

It would appear she suspected that Boaz would serve himself at Ruth's expense that night on the threshing floor. People who live for themselves suppose others think as they do. Naomi appeared to be assuming that Boaz was a self-server at heart. Like herself perhaps? I have a notion she was surprised when Boaz didn't bite. The world (and worldly Christians) will never understand the higher motivations of the God-pleaser – that one who will sacrifice his immediate, fleshly pleasures for the glory of God and the good of others. Just as Potiphar's wife probably could not fathom why Joseph would turn down such a choice opportunity.

Now lest you think I'm being unfairly harsh on Naomi, let's be honest and acknowledge that we are often of the same nature as she. Christian or otherwise, we can be just as ugly inside, especially if we've lived in the world for a time, separated from godly input and fellowship as Naomi had. And it is indeed an ugly picture. But is it not an honest one? By the Lord's own testimony the human heart is *"deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"* (Jer. 17:9). I suppose the ugliest feature is faithful Ruth becoming something close to *bait*. Shades of Ahab willing to let faithful Jehoshaphat be the king for the day because the hated prophet said the king was going to die that day (I Kings 22). It's a case of

*3:6 And she went down unto the floor, and did according
to all that her mother in law bade her.*

using a “loved one” for one’s own advantage. Divorce and custody cases often result in children being used in the same way. If the truth was known however, and the record carefully examined, I’m afraid we would all be found guilty of aspects of this very same crime.

Naomi demonstrated a basic human goodness. There was a measure of motherly love and caring in her. And there was a measure of faith. But the whole was pervaded by the inroads of sin. She demonstrated a healthy dose of self-will. It was *her* way or she was bitter. She was earthly minded in her care, with arm-of-flesh methodologies. She was moving according to selfish motives, using others in the process. There was something of a commitment to the Lord, yet she was not loving the Lord with everything, neither was she loving her neighbour as herself. She was using God’s word when it served to her own advantage, and ignoring it when it ran against her way. *And she was real!*

Yet always the Lord is quietly and patiently behind the scenes, caring for her and dealing with her for

3:7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

3:8 And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.

3:9 And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

her good.

Threshing floors were often elevated places (a breezy hilltop perhaps) where the shocks of grain were brought at harvest's end. It's here where the sheaves were spread, trampled, and beaten to shake the grain loose from the stalk and chaff. Then came the process of winnowing, when the beaten mass was repeatedly thrown up into the wind, the lighter chaff blown to the side and the heavier grain falling separately. And the resulting pile of grain was the reward for the year's toil.

The harvest was a time of abundance and therefore of great joy. But it was also a time of danger, when others might try to relieve one of his abundance and joy. The possibility of thieves is what put Boaz on a bedroll beside his heap of grain that night – and every night, for that matter, until the threshing was

finished and his grain was safely stored in his barns.

It was there that Ruth found Boaz. And in obedience to her mother-in-law's request, she came softly when he was asleep, and lifting the blankets, climbed under at his feet. I shouldn't think she slept a wink. Her heart racing every time his breathing changed or he stirred in his sleep, there she waited until Boaz awoke. Finally at midnight he woke with a fright to discover "*a woman lay at his feet.*" The obvious demand, "*Who are you!*" The obvious response, "*I am Ruth thine handmaid.*" But then Ruth followed with a bold request that Boaz further fulfil the role of the caring near kinsman, and marry her ("*spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid*"), as Mahlon's childless widow, in order to preserve Mahlon's name and provide an heir for Elimelech's land.

The phrase Ruth uses, "*spread . . . thy skirt over thine handmaid*", is drawn from Ezekiel 16:8, and refers to the protective nature of the marriage relationship. It's similar to the word picture Boaz used in describing her commendable faith in the Lord (2:12).

Ruth was in his bed, boldly proposing marriage to

3:10 And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.
3:11 And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

him because he was in the position of near kinsman. But surely it was more than just a matter of the position this caring man held in relation to her. Surely it was a matter of the heart for Ruth.

Can you picture the cogs beginning to turn in the mind of Boaz, after the adrenalin of the initial fright began to subside? At first blush the packaging of the carnal opportunity is quite evident. But it wouldn't have taken him long to see Naomi's hand in the gift-wrapping. He knew Ruth's virtuous nature (vs. 11) – that this situation would not have been by her design. And he knew that he would not (could not) take advantage of this dear young woman. In an instant his interest in protecting her and her reputation quickly filled his heart, overwhelming any interest in using her to his own fleshly fulfilment. Oh but there is *emotion* here! In her words and in his. Is there any doubt that Boaz was impressed? There is such intensity in his

words. He was so encouraged because in this request, she “*showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning.*” Again, as always, Ruth heard heartening words of praise from this man. Please understand the meaning of, and reason for his encouraging words to her. The word translated “kindness” here is that great old Hebrew word meaning “loving-kindness” or “loyal devotion or commitment”. Boaz referred to her abiding devotion. Beyond her loyalty to Naomi. And beyond her self-sacrifice in leaving home and parents and coming to a strange land. And beyond her faith and commitment to the Lord (2:11-12). This that Ruth was proposing showed an abiding devotion to the name of her dead husband. Ruth was saying, “*Marry me, for you are our kinsman redeemer, and raise up the name of my dead husband upon his land*” (Deut. 25:5-10; cf. Ruth 4:9,10).

Now look again at the response of Boaz. He was saying in essence, “*Your loving, loyal devotion surpasses even that which I suspected. You could have made yourself available to younger men, whether rich or poor.*” Perhaps implying that he reckoned she could have had her pick (among “rich or poor”). Perhaps indicating that he was quite a bit older than her (“my daughter”), and not among

those “young men” she might have sought out. Had he suspected (feared?) she would eventually seek a husband among the younger? Is there a ring of relief in his words in vs. 10? I have a notion that this request Ruth has brought was the very possibility Boaz had wished for – *prayed* for. But alas, he’s so old, and she so young. And she, a Moabite, could not be expected to give attention to the Jewish levirate customs. How could he expect her to want to honour the Lord and her dead husband in that very “Jewish” way? But, wonder of all wonders, here she is with that very request! In his response, Boaz is joyfully acknowledging Ruth’s self-sacrifice and humility to want him over younger men, and to want to honour the name of her dead husband, but more, to want to obey the Lord. For the Lord had *commanded* there in Deut. 25:5, “*the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife.*”

It is an exceedingly unfortunate thing that the faithfulness exemplified here is so very rare in our world today. That this young woman, having come under the sheltering wings of the Lord, *would actually be willing to obey Him there!* That she would accept the responsibilities with the privileges and blessings! This was no Naomi. This was no

Christian of convenience, willing to honour the Lord's will if and when it was convenient, and to ignore it if it was not. Here was a godly man looking for and waiting for exactly what Ruth was proving to be – a virtuous woman – a woman of *excellence*! And here was a moment of further discovery. Their great, great grandson, Solomon, would one day express so very well the thoughts of Boaz's heart. "*Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies*" (Prov. 31:10). Boaz knew a crown when he saw one (Prov. 12:4)! What a winning combination! A loyal, obedient young woman, and a man wise enough to recognize the value of such traits, and to love her for them. Boaz had found a gem worth waiting a lifetime for. It's what he knew in that moment. He was overwhelmingly impressed as only a godly man could be impressed with such loyal love. I have a notion that the last thing in the world he wanted at that point was to lose such a gem. But there was a notable obstacle standing in the way, threatening the loss of his prize. There was in fact a kinsman nearer than he, who had the first option to redeem.

What do you do when there is a flaming desire in your heart to do something, to have something or someone, but it's not right (not yet)? A teenager longs for the freedom to make his own decisions,

*3:12 And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman:
howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.
3:13 Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that
if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman,
well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not
do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the
part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie
down until the morning.*

but he's still under the privileges and restrictions of his parents' leadership. What he wants is not right (not yet). A young man or woman has a longing to love and be loved in the security of a marriage relationship. But their heart tells them that the one they're with is not right for them. Will they compromise their commitment to what's right in order to have *now* that for which their heart longs? Or will they wait on the Lord for His perfect timing and choice? A young man and woman love each other, and long to express their love in a physical relationship. Will they wait until their bed is undefiled in marriage? It's not right (not yet). A man longs to be on a sound financial footing, with no debt, or owning his own house. Will he cheat and cut corners, delving into the shady in order to get where he wants to be? Or will he patiently labour month-by-month, wisely sacrificing and saving toward that hoped-for end?

Do right!! Though it be the hardest thing you ever do – *DO RIGHT!* As Ruth at the border of Moab. As Christ at Gethsemane, determined to do right though it was the hardest thing He ever did. Even so Boaz here at the threshing floor. The last thing he wanted now was to lose this precious young woman. But there was a relative closer than Boaz to Naomi and Ruth, and that man rightly had first option to serve as the near kinsman. Look well how a godly man responds to life's hard decisions. Boaz could have simply agreed to take Ruth as his wife, determining to sidestep that nearer relative, taking from him his first option. But it wouldn't be right! Though his heart shuddered at the thought of losing Ruth, Boaz knew that *it wouldn't be right*. He ardently pledged (*"as the LORD liveth!"* – vs. 13) to do for her all that she requested. But he would follow the proper procedures, ensuring first that nearer relative's satisfaction. Jacob & Rebecca would have done well to respond in the same way when it came time for Isaac to bless his firstborn (Gen. 27).

We can be fairly sure of two things. Neither of them slept the rest of that night. And both of them were earnestly praying, *"Thy will be done – but Oh Lord, please let it be this one!"* Ruth's anxious waiting begins. Who will her husband be?

Let me underscore two very noble decisions on the part of Boaz, displaying the finest of character. Though he kept Ruth there through the night for her safety, he would not touch her until she was his to touch. He would not take advantage of her, taking from her what was not yet his to have. That was his first noble decision. His second was like the first. As he would not take advantage of Ruth, even so he would not take advantage of that nearer relative. He would protect that man's rights as well, though it must have been the hardest thing he ever did. There was in Boaz such a refreshing, ruling principle of unbending rectitude. Joseph showed the same nobility, faithfully protecting Potiphar's right, and standing firm against his wife's persuasive efforts (Gen. 39:8-9). Like Boaz, Joseph would not take what was not his to have.

Here is the stirring question temptation always puts to us. Will I do what's right or what's wrong? Will I follow my head or my heart? Will I follow reason or emotion? Will I be sensitive to God's ordinances or my hormones? Will I do what I ought to do or what I want to do? Will I be a lover of pleasure or a lover of God? Decide, my heart! And then when you wake up tomorrow morning, decide again! Remember God's faithful promise, *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:*

but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). While walking with Christ we often find ourselves looking into the fetching eyes of temptation. And as Peter and John to the Jewish leadership, we boldly say to her, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye!” Our purpose must ever be as Christ’s over-arching, guiding principle expressed at His baptism – “to fulfil all righteousness”.

A study of the “upright” in the beloved book of Proverbs is a fruitful effort indeed. One of the words used to describe the upright man there is the word “integrity”, as in Prov. 11:3, “*The integrity of the upright shall guide him*”. A bit of research into the word “integrity” and the Hebrew word behind it, reveals the thought of honesty or unreserved loving submission. It carries, as well, the idea of innocence – the absence of any mischief or evil purpose. No subtlety or subterfuge. An open book, reading only of benevolent purposes. Such was this man Boaz. In the same chapter we have such a contrast in character between he and Naomi (note the similar contrast between Gen. 38 & 39). She was wielding the artifice and working the

stratagem, while he was simply committed to the best interests of others. He could not take what he wanted even if it was *mostly* right. It had to be *entirely* right before it would be right for him, even though such a righteous standard menacingly threatened his hope of ever receiving that for which he so dearly longed. *He would do right* – till the stars fall! God honours such open-faced doers of right. He never honours unrighteousness, even if for good causes. The end never justifies the means.

Let me return for a moment to the contrast of Jacob and his mother, Rebecca, lest we make the mistake of pointing to these as examples of God's blessing upon guile. God honours *faith*. And He honoured the faith that moved Jacob and Rebecca, even to devious means. But, to be sure, the Lord punished their deception. It was a treacherous conspiracy devised and executed by these two against a blind husband and father (Gen. 27). A desperate effort to steal the blessing which Isaac intended for his firstborn, Esau. And with the result that these two co-conspirators never saw each other again after the separation forced by their own wiles. Rebecca's part was strongest in the scheming approach against her own husband and firstborn son. And not only did she never lay eyes on her favourite son again in this life, but she never had opportunity to

hold those thirteen grandchildren he brought home with him many years later (Gen. 35:27). That mother of Jacob must have longed to see him and to know how he fared. She died still longing! And we just don't even hear about Rebecca again after her deception. We're not even told of when she died, though we're informed of the death of her "nurse" (Gen. 35:8).

Rebecca demonstrated the same arm-of-flesh attitude of Naomi. Her technique revealed her view that God needs help of a darker stripe in order to accomplish His purposes. Note how it was Isaac's frailty which precipitated the deception (Gen. 27:1, 2), yet he out-lived his wife, and lived to meet his grandchildren.

Do you see it? God honoured their faith, but He punished their lack of integrity. By God's grace may we wisely choose the way of integrity – honest and innocent of evil design. Such was this man Boaz. He would faithfully serve and honour Ruth and this unnamed relative because it was right! And he would trust the outcome to God. The love of Boaz is like that of God's, of whom he serves as an illustration – loyal, trustworthy, openly and consistently committed to the best for others.

3:14 And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.

Boaz requested of Ruth that none know of her visit to his bed during the night. This for the sake of her reputation as well as for his own. Yes, it's right to be concerned with more than just a good conscience. We must also protect our good name. Though with a clear conscience we may know the reality of what has or has not taken place, we are wise to give further thought to what others know – to appearances. Be holy, and *appear* so. Boaz didn't want his or her life complicated by village gossip. These two knew that nothing immoral had taken place, but it certainly could have appeared otherwise. Busybodies are not normally very careful about the confirmation of facts and the collection of precise details. Appearances are good enough for them.

Methinks I can hear the objector, “*But they knew they remained pure, and God knew,*” says he, “*who cares what others think?*” God cares, and so should you! The Lord gives command to us in Rom. 12:17 to be careful to “*provide things honest in the sight of all men.*” The Greek word translated “provide” there

means to give forethought to, or to consider ahead of time. We are to give forethought to what we do. We are to give careful consideration whether our actions appear honest to all others (*“in the sight of all men”*). This very same thought is expressed in II Cor. 8:21, where we read, *“Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”* The Lord insists that Christians seek to conduct themselves in such a way that the world will find them blameless. Oh I can hear the young troubled soul, *“But God knows what I am inside!”* To which we must reply, *“Great! You’re almost there! Now obey God, and make sure that people know it too!”* Take the necessary precautions. Make the necessary provisions. If you’re a righteous man, then *look* like it! Leave no room for doubt. If you’re a righteous woman, then look like it. Don’t dress it up like a tart or a witch or a woman in love with the world or herself. Don’t dress it up in ways you know are designed to display and entice. Let it be obvious whose side you’re on. If you’re a righteous young man, then look like it. Don’t dress and talk and act like you’re rebelling against society or the status quo or the older generation or your parents or whoever else should dare get in your way. Appearances do matter to God, and they did to Boaz.

3:15 Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

That Boaz would urge Ruth to keep quiet about her presence there and send her away under cover of darkness, confirms the inappropriateness of what some would suggest was a harmless Jewish custom. And it confirms the immoral nature of Naomi's intent and advice. She meant it for evil but God turned it for good.

With his noble response, Boaz sent two subtle rebukes back to Naomi. The first, for her carnal approach, sending Ruth to his bed – a fleshly morsel which he refused to bite. The second, for approaching *him* rather than that nearer relative whom Naomi would surely have known about.

As well, Boaz gave a gift for Ruth to take to Naomi. Perhaps it was a thank-you for her involvement. Perhaps it was an assurance to Naomi of his thoughtful determination to see to her needs into her old age. She needn't have worried. Perhaps he saw the urgency in her scheme (the harvest season and opportunity for gleaning having passed). His

3:16 *And when she came to her mother in law, she said,
Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that
the man had done to her.*

was a gracious gesture in the context of her scheming efforts. I think there were things Boaz would like to say to Naomi. She had sidestepped that nearer relative, and Boaz said, *“No thanks, I’ll clear it with him first.”* She had not fully trusted God, but rather felt the need to *help*, and Boaz said, *“I’ll trust God for the outcome.”* Naomi had presumed that Boaz would take the immoral offering, but she had underestimated his virtue. His response, displayed in his actions, was, *“Nee dankie. I won’t touch her until she’s mine to touch.”* Naomi had sought to tempt, and he would not be tempted. In this sense she played Satan’s tune. The same one Potiphar’s wife played so well. But Boaz, like Joseph, would not dance to the devil’s music. And like God, he responded with grace to the evil-doer. He blessed Naomi still with six measures of barley.

The women had gotten the ball rolling and had now only to wait. Naomi predicted that Boaz would resolve things quickly. Perhaps she knew his reputation as a man of his word. Perhaps she was

3:17 And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.
3:18 Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

only now beginning to really perceive what was in this man. And I'm sure she could sense his intensity. By God's grace, whatever the outcome, Ruth and Naomi would be taken care of.

“Blessed be the LORD,
which hath not left thee this day
without a kinsman”

(Ruth 4:14)

Chapter 4

Behold the Goodness of the Lord

4:1 Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

We very soon discover what Boaz had been carefully thinking through while lying awake all night with Ruth at his feet.

“The gate” was an open area inside the city walls but near to the gates into the city. In those days this venue was the city forum or the court of law. This was the location where the affairs of the people of the city were dealt with. Apparently many eastern towns still use such a place. Obviously it would have been one of the most public areas of the city. A place where folks were most likely to pass by. That’s why wisdom chooses this location to stand and cry out her invitation (Prov. 8:3).

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown made this comment

about such hearings; *“No preliminaries were necessary in summoning one before the public assemblage: no writings and no delay were required. In a short conversation the matter was stated and arranged – probably in the morning as people went out, or at noon when they returned from the field”*

This would have been a smaller, closer society. One more bound by honesty and integrity, and thus with far less need for regulations and legal documentation than today. It’s interesting to see that by the time of Jeremiah’s day, there was more legal work required in a land transaction (Jer. 32). Moral decay and dishonesty breeds bumf, like a dung pile breeds flies.

“Ho, such a one!” Boaz shouted, as that nearer relative came by. Now Boaz would certainly have known the man’s name. But the biblical author, under inspiration, chose not to include it. In fact we *never* learn the name of this nearer kinsman. The choice of Hebrew words used in this greeting seems to reflect a purposeful avoidance of the name. A deliberate namelessness assigned to this man. This is an interesting little feature. Perhaps in order to highlight Boaz’s faithfulness to Mr. Anyman. It doesn’t matter who he was, Boaz would honour his right as the nearer kin. Perhaps as well

4:2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.
4:3 And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's:
4:4 And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

to show something of the same which we considered with Orpah. This man, like her, passed off the stage of history into oblivion. And he namelessly, when he chose not to honour God or His Word or His people. We'll come back to this thought later.

“*Come sit*”, Boaz said. And the man sat with Boaz. Boaz quickly gathered ten elders together to join them. This apparently was the approved custom for such a proceeding. And a public hearing was under way, fully as formal as it needed to be. In verse 3 the issue was clearly announced. Naomi was named and identified, and she is seeking to sell the land of our brother Elimelech. In verse 4 Boaz makes the proposition, “*You’re the nearest relative and I’m next. Are you willing to buy the land? And if not then tell me.*” Thus obviously giving the implication that Boaz stood ready to buy if this man

would not. This was an important implication, for it would provide a way out for this man later. It seems that Boaz had carefully thought through his approach.

There's a good deal of uncertainty as to all that was involved in fulfilling this function of kinsman redeemer. But the details would appear to be as follows (keep in mind that this nearer relative is apparently unaware of Ruth's part in the equation at this point);

- Naomi was selling the land in order that she might live off of the proceeds.
- God required that the land be passed to a relative of the landowner (Num. 27:8-11). Such a requirement presumably protecting against foreign ownership and monopolies. The nearest relative having the first option.
- The land would actually return to Naomi in the next year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-17), if she were still living. So the kinsman, in essence, was buying the use of the land, or was paying in advance for something of the fruit that the land would produce.
- Once Naomi died the land would become the permanent possession of the purchasing

kinsman and his heirs since Naomi had no heir.

- There was no consideration of levirate marriage with Naomi in the deal since she was past childbearing age (1:11).
- The near relative would be expected to give a good price for the land. The deal was not to be so much for his advantage, but toward the provision for a destitute widow in the community. It was more a concession than the chance of a lifetime, but with an eventual return when Naomi died.

Were these all of the contingencies involved? No. Of course Ruth was a factor as well. But this man apparently was not even aware of her at this point. Mr. Nameless certainly had not made it his business to be conscious of and providing for those for whom he should have felt responsible. Boaz graciously gave this man first *opportunity* here. But this fellow had thoughtlessly not taken first *responsibility* upon himself to provide for Naomi and Ruth through the harvest. Boaz might have used this record of neglect as justification for fulfilling Ruth's midnight request himself. But still Boaz gave first opportunity to this man. And graciously he withheld comment on the man's neglect. In this

4:5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

man's negligence, Boaz had shown himself the far better shepherd.

So the initial response of this nearer relative was to agree to buy Elimelech's land and to make provision for his impoverished widow (vs. 4). Convention would force his hand. Guilt for past neglect would add its weight. It would appear quite heartless to his community if he were not willing to go this far. And of course there would be the added eventual plus of the additional land to his name. And so the man said, *"I will redeem it"*.

Then, once Boaz had the man's agreement concerning the land of Elimelech and his widow, he threw in the added detail of Ruth, that girl he so loved.

How suddenly and significantly the situation changed. Let me explain;

- Suddenly it dawned on this man's realization that there was also a widow of childbearing

age involved, and that the levirate law would indeed come into effect.

- Agreement to act as the kinsman redeemer would also mean marriage to Ruth and her support (and that of her mother-in-law).
- If a child should result from that marriage (which in fact would be the main purpose for that union – Deut. 25:6) the child would inherit all of Elimelech's land.
- There would likely be no eventual score of an enlarged property.
- There would only be the upkeep of a wife (whom he didn't even know) and her eventual children.
- From a human (and heartless) viewpoint there would be no gain, only loss. There would be all of the expense of the previous scenario, and more. And most probably no eventual payback.

But there was one all-important factor which this man was neglecting. God had commanded the doing of it!! (Deut. 25:5). And where God's Word is simply obeyed, God's blessing resides. Remember the lesson of the Sabbatical Year (Lev. 25:1-7 & 20-22) and of tithing. All steps of faith in God's Word, yet

4:6 *And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself,
lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my
right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.*

appearing to be dead loss from an earthly perspective. God said to care for a widow and to seek to provide an heir for a brother's land. And in fact, the Lord laid a considerably heavy dose of public scorn upon the poor bloke who refused to do it (Deut. 25:7-10). As with all of God's will for us, God says to do it regardless of the potential loss, and to trust Him to bless on the other side of the doing. He says to do it though it involves great personal sacrifice. He says to do it as an expression of His own heart, for how often He spoke of caring for widows and the fatherless (Deut. 14:28, 29; 24:19-22; 26:12-15). His people were not to consider such to be burdensome commandments or irksome responsibilities – *“not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”* (II Cor. 9:7). Rather call it *opportunity* or *right* or *privilege*! The privilege to bless. The opportunity to reflect God's ways – to bless others even as He blesses us.

There have been many suggestions made as to why this man backed out. For some reason he was fearful that he would “mar” or jeopardize his own

inheritance. Whatever might have been the details of his concerns, they surely had something to do with *selfishness*, for he was more concerned with *his* concerns than those of Naomi and Ruth. And his reasons surely had something to do with *faithlessness*, for he was unwilling to trust God for the outcome and for His blessing. And his decision was certainly *disobedience*, for God had given command to see to it.

It's never right to do wrong! No reason, no matter how seemingly valid, could ever justify disobedience toward God. God has never granted to any excuse the power to make wrongs right. Since we don't really know what this man's fears were (and we don't really need to), perhaps we're safe to conclude that God has purposely left a degree of ambiguity over the fears that moved this man away from a kinsman role. Let's call it "*any-fear*". When a God-given right or opportunity or privilege or commandment or responsibility is refused for *any-fear*, we can be sure that God's blessing is refused with it. This unnamed kinsman was far too concerned about his own substance when he should have been far more concerned with the things close to God's heart, such as the care of those in need. This was not just the putting off of an irksome responsibility now. It was the pushing

away of eventual blessing – the very blessing of God! And God knows how to bless! He does it well. He is so very skilful at expanding a man's substance when he is willing to honour the Lord with it (Prov. 3:9-10). And He is equally skilled at whittling away at a man's substance when the man is given to holding it too close (Prov. 11:24-25). By the way, something of the Lord's set of whittling tools is listed in the book of Haggai (1:10-11; 2:17).

“Redeem thou my right to thyself”, the nearer kinsman said to Boaz. *“Be my guest.” “It’s too much trouble, let somebody else do it!”* This the all too common cry over the shoulder of the South African man as he runs from ministry (and from the Lord's blessing). What a gold mine of opportunity this man missed in his flight from irksome responsibility! A truly excellent woman! His name listed in Matthew's lineage of Christ? But his unfortunate decision and loss was the result of a much earlier selfish negligence. How thoughtlessly unconcerned he had been toward these widows all summer long. It's all part of the same spirit within him. The spirit of Esau, who despised the things God esteemed highly (Gen. 25), saying, *“what profit shall this birthright* (tithing, ministry, service, church, sacrifice, etc.) *do to me?”* (vs. 32). And the Lord counters, through the Apostle Paul, *“Look not*

every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

What will you do with God-given responsibilities (privileges)? Would you respond as this near kinsman? *“Oh, but it’s too heavy.” “It’s too irksome.” “It doesn’t fit with my programme, or what I want out of my life or for my children.” Or, “I’m afraid! Any-fear has gripped my heart.”* Fear had a momentary hold on Queen Esther’s heart as well, when Mordecai suggested she use her place of privilege to thwart Haman’s evil designs against their people. Queen Esther responded (Esther 4:11), *“All the king’s servants, and the people of the king’s provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or women, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.”* And Mordecai immediately shot back, *“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as*

this?” (vs. 13, 14).

If you refuse your God-given opportunity, you will have perhaps missed the very purpose for which God put you there. If you let this opportunity slip by, understand – there will be no further purpose for you being there. You may escape Haman’s plans, but you won’t escape God. Thankfully, Esther’s faith did not allow her to give up her right and privilege to stand in the gap for God and for His people. And she went down in history. Even so Boaz did not turn down his right. These are names remembered in every following generation. But nobody even knows the name of that near kinsman who refused to stand in the gap for the Lord and for Naomi and Ruth. Esau gave up his right and went down in infamy. Orpah gave up her opportunity to do right by the Lord and passed off the stage of history into oblivion. She had an inheritance in God’s promised land, but “any-fear” wrested it from her (she’s the only family member not named in vs. 9-10 of this chapter). Don’t ever, for any reason, under any circumstances, allow “any-fear” to keep you from any aspect of God’s perfect will for your life!

How God blessed Boaz through this young woman!
He found in Ruth a woman of virtue, or excellence.

In their great, great grandson's book, it would be recorded that the price of such a one is far above rubies. God blessed Boaz with children as well, by she who had been barren before. And He placed this faithful couple into the very line of Christ. And God made Boaz that great example of Christ, the Great Kinsman Redeemer. And He put their names and their story into His sacred Book of books.

And how God blessed Ruth through this man. A true Cinderella story. The gleaner marries the owner! Even as King Solomon's pursuit of the poor Shulamite (Song of Solomon), or young David stepping from the sheepcote to the throne, or the carpenter's son, born of the poorest of families in a cow barn, yet shown to be Emmanuel!

Now let's get back to the hearing at the gate and consider the proceedings from the perspective of Boaz. It's obvious that Boaz desperately wanted a refusal on the part of this nearer kinsman. He didn't want the land. He wanted the *girl!* But perhaps even more than this, Boaz could see the God-given responsibility to care for these widows and for the name of their dead upon the inheritance. He cared for the things God said to care for, because he cared for God and His Word. But Boaz knew some things, which offered guidance

to his approach here at the gate. He knew that this nearer kinsman could not shirk his God-given right to serve as kinsman redeemer and levirate without disobeying God and bringing God's displeasure upon himself and losing God's blessing. Boaz could not wish this upon any man. He had cared for this unnamed "any-man" by coming to him and honouring his right. Boaz would not take that right from him. He must have his permission, and that expressed publicly (again, a matter of appearances). And further, Boaz would not trick that right from him, as Rebecca and Jacob with Isaac and Esau. He had already shown himself unwilling for anything underhanded. Nor would he tempt him, as Jacob with the birthright of hungry Esau. Boaz could have begun the other way around at the gate. He could have expressed his appreciation for Ruth and his desire to marry her. He could have first made the man feel as though he would be barging in on a blossoming love story by exercising his right. And then make mention of the land aspect. But this would be coercion. Boaz knew that he could not bring any pressure to bear on this man to influence his refusal. For to refuse would be to make a serious mistake, indeed it would be to sin. And Boaz could not by any means encourage the man to make that mistake. He would become a tempter, and of the same stripe as Naomi.

Such an odd situation, to want the best for a man yet long for him to make the wrong choice! But to in any way *encourage* him toward that wrong choice would be to tempt him to evil. This Boaz could not do. This was probably why he did not even clearly state his own willingness to act as the kinsman redeemer if this one was unwilling. Look again at the careful words of Boaz in verse 4, “*but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know.*” Only a subtle implication there. Do you see? Boaz faithfully gave the man an uninfluenced, unhindered choice. Only the facts of the situation laid out before him, without any pressure one way or the other.

Now there was something else that Boaz could deduce. He could see the selfish orientation of this nearer relative. This man, as we know, had cared nothing for the plight of these widows, when they were his to care for. And he apparently had not even known Ruth featured, or at least had not considered her God-given right to his hand in marriage. He was full of *his* things, *his* precious inheritance, *his* crops, etc. His was perhaps a known reputation in the area, for one’s character permeates all of his existence. He was probably the type who would leave little of the gleanings of his field for the poor, but took all for himself. Such

character would become well known in a community. Thus Boaz, knowing the man, could perhaps reckon on such a one bailing out when he saw nothing in it for himself – *if* he could get out of it easily, with his honour intact. For there was something else that Boaz knew.

Boaz was aware of the fact that this man could not shirk his God-given right to serve as kinsman redeemer without a good deal of public disgrace (see Deut. 25:7-10). The worst scenario Boaz could imagine would be for this man to feel boxed in – forced by public pressure to take this woman Boaz loved, when he really didn't want her! This man had not cared enough for Ruth to even know she existed. He was not thoughtful. He was not caring. He was not giving. He was not alert and aware and mindful of others. How could Boaz wish this one on Ruth, for whom he not only *had* been caring, but longed to have for his own that he might *ever* thoughtfully care and provide for her. This man would never really care for Ruth as Boaz longed to do. So Boaz *must* give the man a way out. He must provide him with a face-saving alternative. How did Boaz accomplish this? By first subtly implying his willingness to take the redeemer role. He then mentioned only the land, only Naomi's name. And by this means he drew from the man a public

expression of his willingness to redeem the land and care for Naomi. Essentially, “*Yes, I am willing to take my responsibility to care for the old woman*”. The man would have had his own community against him if he was not willing for this much, but he had publicly expressed his benevolence. However, the entrance of Ruth into the consideration was a very different matter. Many in the community would sympathize with his hesitation concerning the Moabite widow, especially with Boaz standing by with an implied willingness. And Boaz understood this.

Boaz’s heart is involved, but he was using his head! This man cannot back out without disobedience, so Boaz gave him an uninfluenced, unpressurized choice. Boaz could not be the tempter, yet he could not tolerate the thought of this beloved woman of excellence, uncared for in a forced marriage with an inconsiderate, selfish husband. And this man could not back out without disgrace, so Boaz gave him a face-saving exit. He drew out a public expression of the man’s benevolence concerning Naomi, yet gave him the out of implied willingness with Ruth in the picture. Perhaps a bit of a tactical manoeuvre. But please understand that this was not another example of an arm-of-flesh methodology as we’ve discussed earlier. The approach of Boaz involved

nothing illegitimate – no unholy practice or alliance. Just a dose of sanctified horse-sense! Because we trust the Lord doesn't mean we can't use our heads. The Lord didn't mean for the silly thing to serve only as an ear-hanger.

Such a contrast in shepherds! How Boaz cared for Ruth – for her very best. As we saw in chapter 2, he had studied her and knew her before she even knew of him. Whereas that nearer kinsman didn't even seem to know she existed. Even so the Lord who is my Shepherd. Before I knew Him, He loved me! Boaz had cared for Ruth and Naomi all summer, while the closer kin did nothing. Wherever we find Boaz speaking with Ruth (chap. 2 & 3), it was to praise her and encourage her for her excellent virtues. Mr. Nameless never even knew what he missed. Only Boaz knew and could fully appreciate the value of that young woman. He loved her by desiring the best for her. He would not use her or abuse her, even when the opportunity to do so was thrown right into his bed. He prized and praised her virtue, and he honoured and protected it as well. *This was true love!* As Ahab and Jezebel, but at completely opposite ends of the spectrum, seldom have there been two who so perfectly deserved each other.

A subtle (perhaps not so subtle) theme of this book is the matter of choices and their effect upon us. I'd like to trace that theme in the area of morality. First from Ruth's perspective.

Ruth came from Moab. Do you remember where the nation of Moab began? In a cave, in the mountains above Zoar, southeast of the Dead Sea. The incestuous union between Lot and his oldest daughter there resulted in a son whom she named "Moab". *"The same is the father of the Moabites unto this day"* (Gen. 19:37). Moab was both the son and grandson of a man with a dark record of bad choices (we considered the downward spiral of Lot's foolish choices on pages 9-10, and here was where they ultimately led). Moab and his descendents eventually migrated off to the east of the Dead Sea, forming the nation called after his name. With such a notorious beginning it's not surprising to see the resulting nation become what it became. *Immoral!* Their religion centred on the vile Babylonian fertility concepts. And it was the approach of sexual immorality, used by the Moabite women, which appeared to almost win the day (from a human perspective) for Moab and Balak and Balaam against the nation of Israel. *"The people (of Israel) began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices*

of their gods” (Num. 25). Theirs was a subtle way, a crafty attempt to seduce, rather than a military confrontation. *“For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you . . .”* (Num. 25:18). It was Balaam’s council, but the Moabites proved responsive students. When every other nation sought a military solution, these used the approach of the immorality of their carnal religion. It was in them, their way from their origin.

This was Ruth’s near ancestry. It was the way of her people. But God changed Ruth! By His grace, He delivered her from such filth by faith. And the carnal influence of generations fell away like the scales from Paul’s eyes. And now Ruth stands before us as a stunning testimony of God’s transforming power! One more in tune with the Lord than her new-found “Christian” environment. She was saved by faith, and saved to the core! A virtuous woman, walking in God’s transforming grace.

Boaz was an Israelite, yet the record of his heritage was little better than Ruth’s. Pharez is given as an ancestor of Boaz in 4:12. Perhaps you remember that Pharez was one of Tamar’s twins – *by her father-in-law, Judah* (Gen. 38; Matt. 1:3). Tamar had posed as a prostitute in an effort to trick her

father-in-law into making her pregnant. It proved successful and twins resulted from the union, the firstborn being Pharez. This was the immoral ancestry of Salmon, the father of Boaz. The mother of Boaz was Rahab the harlot (Matt. 1:5). She was a Canaanite woman given to immorality, who had lived in Jericho until it was destroyed by the conquering Israelites (Josh. 7). But Rahab's faith saved her life from destruction with the city, and her soul from destruction in hell. And God changed Rahab! We see the evidence of His transforming work in Rahab's godly son. Ruth and Boaz were only one generation away from immoral ancestry, yet regardless of their *heritage* God changed their *hearts* through faith. These two both stand before us as beaming testimonies of what God can do and undo. We find Boaz to be carefully, uncompromisingly pure in this area of his life. And God brought this transformed-by-faith man and this transformed-by-faith woman together from their respective, very different, but similarly filthy backgrounds. And He allowed their fidelity to be tested and displayed (and written in the Book) there on the threshing floor of Bethlehem. How this story of blessing would have crash-landed if Naomi had been successful with her approach. But Boaz would not heed temptation's beckoning regardless of immoral ancestries, for he was changed. They

refused temptation's tug regardless of who encouraged it, for they were wiser. They would not be drawn into the wrong regardless of their desires, for God has spoken. Praise God they stood firm and remained pure and made the right choice and obeyed God.

Now see where the wisdom of their righteous choices led. God had stepped in and plucked these two out of the cesspool of humanity and transformed their lives. A truly godly couple given to godly decisions, raising a godly family in a godless world. Certainly the influence of Boaz and Ruth would have been felt personally by their children and grandchildren. They would have likely still been living in Jesse's (grandson) day. But their influence would have extended far beyond their physical lives and into David's day. Pure, righteous, sincere, godly leadership carries far! Genuine godliness, like genuine godlessness, pays dividends and sends arrows (Psalm 127:4) into many following generations.

Now let's turn our attention to that little shepherd boy – Jesse's youngest son – the great grandson of Boaz and Ruth. Do you see him there in the pasture writing psalms in worship to the Lord? Do you hear him singing and making melody in his

heart to the Lord? Do you see him proving his faith with the lion and the bear? I wonder if Boaz and Ruth lived to see David's birth. Perhaps they were like old Simeon in the temple with the baby Jesus in his arms (Lk. 2). Perhaps they prayed for David even before he was born. But you can be sure that their influence in many ways carried into the life of that godly young "*man after God's own heart*". A man who would lead the nation to the very pinnacle of their golden age. A man whose dynasty God would establish forever. A man whom God would use to write many of the Psalms. For he was a man eminently notable for sincerest piety. Don't be surprised with the rise of godly King David. Partly he was a product of his ancestry. The refreshing river of his righteous influence gathered something of its force from the seemingly small springs of threshing floor and Moabite border type decisions made decades before (and compare how both David and Solomon began well, but then faltered in this same area of immorality, paying *ugly* dividends in following generations).

"The generation of the upright shall be blessed" (Psalm 112:2). The very best thing you could ever do for the generations following you is to walk with God. To determine by God's grace to be a righteous man or woman, making righteous choices for God's

4:7 Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel.

4:8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.

glory. Because every conscious choice either to sin or to surrender to God's will has a corresponding ripple effect (*tidal wave* in some cases) into the coming generations. Oh may we look with clearer eyes at the Lord's instruction in righteous living in His Word. If our heart is truly after God and His things, then it will be after the furtherance of His glory both in our own day and in the generations following. We will be earnestly looking to send straight arrows of influence through our children and children's children beyond the days of our own existence. It all begins with our own daily decisions to live for God.

The deal was closed. And as was the custom in that day, the nearer kinsman removed his shoe (Deut. 25:9, 10) and gave it to Boaz. Apparently the action symbolized the transfer of the nearer relative's right and responsibility and position to Boaz (as Esau handing his birthright over to his

brother). This nearer kin symbolically gave up the right to stand in his place (shoes) and to walk on the land as his own. And so the right of redemption passed to Boaz. He got the land. But more importantly he got the crown! For so the Lord describes a virtuous woman (Prov. 12:4). And all was done in a legitimate fashion and following appropriate channels. No arm-of-flesh methods were needed. They never are if we're always willing to be satisfied only with what the Lord wants for us. He needs no help sending to us what He wants us to have.

Even so Christ received the right of redemption, through His sacrificial death and resurrection. He won from Satan the right to the kingdoms of the earth (He got the land). And He won to Himself the redeemed of the earth – the church (He got the bride).

Notice again that all family members are mentioned in verses 9 & 10 except Orpah. In God's reckoning she has slipped into anonymity with the nameless kinsman, never to be heard of again in God's book. She had decided to live for herself rather than for God. What a tragic choice!

Now look well in verses 11-12 at the response of the

- 4:9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.*
- 4:10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.*
- 4:11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:*
- 4:12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.*
-

community to this man and woman of sterling character. All the people who had gathered with the elders expressed their unanimous approval and benediction. Understand it! Look upon it and receive instruction. Boaz and Ruth had quietly and maturely commanded the respect of their community. They had cared for the best for others. They honoured the rights of others. They were not pushy and demanding. They were not self-servers or sensual. They were sincere servants of the Lord (and of others), and their trust was firmly in Him. They insisted on doing things the right way. And look at the payback of respect from the community!

They earned the unreserved blessing of their people and leaders. This was a valuable achievement. It still is today. This is what Boaz was seeking by going about things the right way, and how God blessed.

“What do your church leaders think about this?”
What do your parents think?” These are not outdated, irrelevant questions. They are questions of importance to God. Needest thou proof? Reflect on the following verses as a sampling; Eph. 2:2, 3; 4:11; Col. 3:20; I Pet. 5:1-6; Heb. 13:16, 17. I’m afraid you really are fighting *the Lord*, when you fight parents and church my young friends.

And note the details of this united benediction of their people. The community wished fertility upon Ruth in her marriage, that she might be like Rachel, who also had been barren for many years but then finally bore children. And even like Leah who produced many children. Their wish so very soon began to be answered (vs. 13).

As well, they wished upon Boaz that he would *“do worthily in Ephratah”*. The Hebrew word translated “worthily” here can also mean “virtuously” or “with valour, worth, wealth or ability”. The same word has already been used of both Ruth and Boaz (2:1 –

translated “wealth”, and 3:11). It would seem that this aspect of their united wish was already reality.

Their people also desired fame upon Boaz in Bethlehem. Little did they know that from this union would come Israel’s greatest king (David), and the eternal King of kings. Famous? Oh my!! They’re in the Book! These two would put Bethlehem on the map, for both David and Christ would be born there. How God abundantly answered the united benediction and prayer of their community!!

Here is such an important reason to wait upon the Lord for the blessing of the elders (church leaders and parents) upon your decisions and directions. God’s book of wisdom, that beloved book of Proverbs, constantly encourages the wise reader to seek such counsel. Whether it was the accumulated knowledge of the Lord’s ways and wisdom in those elders of Bethlehem, or the witness of the Holy Spirit in and through the people, or perhaps simply God responding in answer to their united request, look well how God’s blessing certainly came upon this couple just as their community had wished.

Wait on the Lord concerning what you would

propose to do until your community can rise up and pronounce “blessed” upon your endeavours. A person with an I-don’t-care-what-my-church-or-parents-think attitude is not right with God, nor are they walking in His way. They shall surely reap what they sow under that banner, and a bitter harvest it shall be! God has vested an authority and responsibility in legitimate, God-honouring churches and parents – a responsibility which one is a fool to deny.

Quite frankly, I am so heartsick and fed up with foolish, air-headed, “Christian” young people who are desperate for marriage, and go slinking off, only to pitch up later, married to some pagan bloke who has no interest in spiritual things – baby on their hip, and clueless as to how to keep their faltering marriage together. They’ve carefully managed to ignore or avoid the wisdom of God through the wise counsel of their leaders to their own hurt. Like Balaam, madly running after his passions (II Pet. 2:15-16), even so these have gone running off after their own pleasures without a thought to God’s benediction. They invariably reap a harvest of sorrows. This is one of the great heartaches of my own ministry. *“These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit”* (Jude 19).

4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

By contrast, Boaz and Ruth waited for and received the blessing of their community and the blessing of God. That barren Moab sojourn had carved at least ten years out of their lives, and sent men to their graves. *But God*, within a handful of weeks has poured out His full blessing. Because now it was in *God's* place and in *God's* time and in *God's* way.

Did you hear that? “*The LORD gave her conception.*” The obvious implication is that the Lord kept conception from Ruth before, through all of those barren years of marriage to Mahlon. The Lord was the One who kept back that which He now gave to her. That barrenness, which must have seemed such a tragedy to Ruth at the time, was merely the Lord's hand in the way until the time was right. Had she had her wish then, and children through Mahlon, the blessing of Boaz would likely have been forfeited. The frustrating, dark barrenness of her youth was merely the shadow of an approaching, future blessing from the hand of God. When the Lord saw fit, His blessing arrived.

Naomi moaned about the Lord's administration, and sought to undermine it. But note again how we never hear Ruth moaning. She patiently waited while serving. Can you, *will* you wait for the Lord's time? Do you reckon you ought to be married? Engaged? Going steady? Are you anxious to be on a better financial footing? Do you long to be free to make your own decisions? Please allow me to encourage you toward a Ruth/Boaz heart. Leave it with the Lord and wait. Commit yourself before Him to consider only legitimate means. And in the meantime, be the servant of all, and of the Almighty. When His blessing comes, you will be so glad you waited for His timing, and so glad you clung to His way to achieve your goal.

"The LORD gave her conception." There is another implication here worth consideration. *The Lord* gives conception. Conception and children are *His* gift. *"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is His reward"* (Ps. 127:3). Oh how this speaks volumes! When conception is given the Lord gave it! And when arrogant man steps in and interrupts that process through abortion, not only is it the heartless murder of the defenceless, but as well it is the slapping away of the hand of God – a fearful flushing away of what He has decreed and placed. Much like one turning up his

4:14 *And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.*
4:15 *And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.*

nose at the free gift of eternal life. Woe upon arrogant man!! “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11). Oh but let them not fool themselves into thinking that sentence will *never* fall. Conception and children are God’s gift, and should be valued highly. Under no circumstance should one ever be so foolish as to push His hand away or trash His gifts.

Here we find another blessing or benediction (we find several in the book, 2:12, 20; 3:10; 4:11, 12). This time upon the child born to Boaz and Ruth. The “kinsman” and “restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age” must surely be a reference to the baby born, coming off the end of verse 13. The child would grow up to take over for Boaz in providing for Naomi in her old age.

And look at the high praise for faithful Ruth at the end of verse 15. She is described by the women of her adopted community as one who *“is better to thee than seven sons”*. Seven sons were considered the perfection of blessing (as Job 1:2 & 42:13; also I Sam. 2:5). And here Ruth is ascribed a value even higher than such a perfect prize! How often Ruth is praised in this book (but never by Naomi – the one who benefited most by Ruth’s life). Even as the honour that comes to the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, her husband and her children rising up to praise her.

Do you remember back when Naomi returned from Moab so bitter at the Lord’s heavy hand on her life? She was so full of her own woes that she didn’t even seem to see the blessing of Ruth. Her daughter-in-law was left standing quietly in the background, while Naomi grumbled about the Lord’s (just) dealings with her. But that one who was silently enduring in the background then – that one who so faithfully, peacefully, and consistently served, now finds blessing for her virtue. And Naomi is blessed with her. Naomi’s noisy moans (chap. 1) and carnal ways (chap. 3) have gotten nowhere. But Ruth’s quiet, consistent servanthood has won the respect of her community and the blessing of God. And Naomi, the empty one (1:21), is now full through

Ruth. “Mara”, the bitter one (1:20), is now blessed. And that one so blind to the good hand of God, is now beginning to taste and see that the Lord is gracious.

And further, Ruth the Moabitess rose to a place of recognition and honour in this very Jewish community. All saw and acknowledged her noble character. The value of Ruth’s qualities was not missed, though never once did she blow her own horn. She didn’t need to. Never once did she demand her own recognition. She didn’t have to broadcast what she was. It was evident to all. And here is the public acknowledgement of it. What I am, what you are, doesn’t need our own advertisement. It will be all too evident – to God and to people.

In the book of Proverbs the Lord laments that, “*Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?*” (Prov. 20:6). The hardest thing some will ever do is to accomplish a notable deed or to live in some praiseworthy fashion and never make it a point to in some way broadcast it. Can you trust God enough to allow your good deeds to be known only to Him? Can you trust Him enough to let Him make it known in His time? To insist upon the arm-of-flesh approach that God

4:16 *And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom,
and became nurse unto it.*
4:17 *And the women her neighbors gave it a name,
saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they
called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the
father of David.*

needs me to advertise me is to expose my own “pride of life.” *“Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.”* (Prov. 27:2).

I am so very encouraged by the lives and testimonies of Boaz and Ruth. My earnest prayer and labour is toward the encouragement of your heart with the same. They were both quite like us – simple people making simple decisions (though difficult in their context). They were just a man and a woman doing what was right, in a nation that didn’t care about right anymore. They were determined to do right by God and by man and in every situation, regardless of how they felt or what they wanted to do, or what others thought or did. And how God worked through them and used them. They’re famous. They’re in the Book!

More than anything else, Boaz and Ruth were servants. As servants of God, they were concerned

about what He said. As servants of people, they were concerned about what honoured others. And they found the blessing of God and of their people. They found a good reputation.

I think perhaps we further see this honour coming back to them in verse 17. Interestingly, the women of the community were the ones who came up with the name for Ruth's firstborn son. They named him "Obed". This name is actually the participle form of a great big Old Testament Hebrew word meaning "servant" or "slave". It's a word that was used when referring to one who was a servant of the Lord. It's a word describing a servanthood that labours – a servanthood not in name only, but one with its boots on. Messianic prophecies often use this word, describing Christ as "*the servant of the Lord*" – that One whose attitude is displayed so well in Psalm 40:8, "*I delight to do Thy will, O My God*". Could it be that Naomi's neighbours were placing on that boy the very word that so typified his parents?

This same word is often used to describe David (Jer. 33:21, 21, 26; Ezek. 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25 – "*David My servant*"). David, as a child tending his father's sheep, was just a young boy making the simple but hard decisions to do what was right. He was equally the servant of his earthly father and of his

heavenly Father. He was no hireling shepherd (John 10:12-13). Young David risked his life for his father's sheep against loss through the lion and the bear (I Sam. 17:32-37). And by means of such faithful courage he was prepared to trust and obey his heavenly Father against that greater predator in Goliath. David early established for his life the principle of the faithful servant – *“when it represents loss for my father (Father) go after it at all cost!”* David truly was the descendent of Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth.

Those whom God uses, show their mettle in the simple, day-to-day circumstances of life. When one, out of a sincere commitment to God, begins to make the wise, right, hard decisions in the little responsibilities, God can trust him with the greater tasks. *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much”* (Luke 16:11). I often think of a quotation, which lodged in my brain many years ago – *“He who is too ‘big’ for the little jobs is probably too ‘little’ for the big jobs”*. He who waits for the big responsibilities, but is too “big” for the little ones, will likely never see the big ones. He's too little of heart and humility and dependence. The making of great men and women of God is in and through the little responsibilities of

life. Boaz and Ruth became great before us in this way. Joseph made right decisions for God and for the honour of men (Gen. 39:8-9) in the sweaty, day-to-day, nitty gritty of life. And these were the right choices that led to the later, greater opportunities. And when he was misrepresented and unfairly imprisoned, he quietly went about the business of being useful to the Lord right where he was (Gen. 39:21-23). And when the butler forgot about his plight, he again patiently carried on serving the Lord (Gen. 40:23).

Timothy was saved through Paul's ministry on his first missionary journey. Some years later Paul again came through the area where Timothy lived, and he found "*a certain disciple*" who was "*well reported of by the brethren*". So much so that, "*him would Paul have to go forth with him*" (Acts 16:1-3). And from that time Timothy has become famous to all who love the Lord and know His Word. He became a servant. He got saved and got going. He bloomed where he was planted. He didn't sit and pine for the big opportunities and responsibilities. He became faithful in the smaller arena of his local church. And by the time Paul came back through the area, Timothy's reputation was known among the brethren. His own church community could commend him as a faithful man. Timothy was the

very stuff Paul (God) was looking for, for he knew that one faithful in the smaller arena would respond likewise in the bigger. And truly the bigger responsibilities are never really anything grander in essence than the smaller ones.

It was to faithful Timothy that Paul wrote, *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (II Tim. 2:2). “Faithful men”*. Faithful ones like Timothy, and Joseph, and David, and Boaz and Ruth – all in the Book, that we might follow their examples.

There’s no time like now to get started. *Do right – in everything!* Make the decision! Make the hard decisions that God wants of you. Pursue Him. Be in attendance in church, and be attentive. Pursue the Lord for ministry opportunities, and then pour your very heart and soul into them. Try anything for the Lord, yea, everything! Dare to witness for Him. Dare to stand for the truth. Speak up for the Lord. Challenge the sinner, the cultist, and occultist. Be observant of the needs of others and meet them. Open your eyes; the fields are white with opportunity. The battle is raging – step into it. “Goliath” is scorning – stand up to him. Our Father’s sheep are being scattered and consumed.

Where it represents loss to our Father, *go after it at all cost.*

The situation may appear hopeless, even as it did to Naomi and Ruth in Moab. But if there is right to do, watch God turn the hopeless happy in the doing of it!

Appendix

Behold the sharp contrast between beginning and end of this precious book. From barrenness, bitterness, death, and loss, to birth, life, and blessing! Why the change? Choices! Dumb decisions leading to sour circumstances, having given way to wise choices heralding the blessing of God. Let's summarize with a list.

Choices with Corresponding Results

Choices	Results
Elimelech & Naomi chose to leave the Promised Land for Moab, and to stay there.	Elimelech died. The boys chose Moabite wives. The marriages were barren of children. The sons died. Naomi was left destitute and bitter.
~~~~~	~~~~~
Mahlon and Chilion chose to marry heathen wives.	Barrenness and death.

## **Choices**

---

Naomi decided to return to the land of promise.

-----

Orpah decided to stay in Moab with her people and gods.

-----

Ruth chose to cling to Naomi, and to the Lord.

## **Results**

---

In Ruth, God immediately gave Naomi a companion and one who would become such a blessing.

Naomi's fortunes began to turn for the better.

-----

Orpah is never heard of again.

-----

The clouds of hopelessness soon cleared away.

God provided for her and Naomi through the harvest.

God gave her a wonderful husband.

God made her fruitful and famous.

## **Choices**

---

.....

Boaz chose to honour  
the Lord and Ruth  
and that nearer  
kinsman.

## **Results**

---

God placed Ruth into  
the line of Christ.

God blessed her and  
made her a blessing to  
millions through the  
centuries.

God filled her cup to  
overflowing.

.....

God gave Boaz the  
desire of his heart.

God blessed him with  
a woman of virtue.

God made him a type  
of Jesus Christ, our  
caring Kinsman  
Redeemer.

## **Choices**

---

The nearer kinsman chose to disobey God, disregarding his responsibility to Naomi, and his opportunity to serve as kinsman redeemer.

## **Results**

---

He passed from the stage of history and into oblivion, unnamed and unknown.

God's blessing went to another man.

He missed the blessing of a virtuous wife.

God is indeed sovereign. Yet in His sovereignty, He has allowed that our choices make a difference. Our decisions will most certainly affect our lives and the lives of others, both now and into the future.

**Resolved!** – *I will choose to do right!!*

