

The Book of Ruth

The time of the judges was the worst of times, yet the book of Ruth describes the best of those times. Godly character is more dramatically evident in the bad times. Bad times are no excuse for ungodly behavior, for it's the times of darkness when godliness should shine as a brilliant light. The story of Ruth and Boaz should encourage us to live godly lives in today's dark days of unbelief, disobedience, and disregard for the Word of God.

Chapter 1

Verse 1—*Now it came about in the days when the judges governed*—which ties this verse to the immediately preceding verse of Judges 21:25, *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

—*that there was a famine in the land*—a judgment by God for the people's apostasy in worshipping the idols of the Canaanites (see verse 6; 1 Kings 16:30; Jeremiah 3:3).

—*And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons*—What was right in his eyes was to leave the Land of Promise and go dwell with the Moabites. He left the land of chastisement for the land of condemnation. The Moabites were descendants of Lot via incest by his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). When the Israelites were coming out from Egypt, the Moabite king hired Balaam to curse them. Balaam would not curse the Israelites, but he counseled the king to harm Israel by having the Moabite women seduce the Israelite men (Numbers 25). The Mosaic Law stated that the Israelites should *never seek their [Moabites] peace or their prosperity all your days* (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Remember in Judges 3, the Israelites were subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for 18 years before Ehud stabbed Eglon to death and delivered the Israelites. For the Israelites, marriage to any foreigner was forbidden (Exodus 34:12-17), unless that foreigner converted to the God of the Israelites.

Verses 2-3—*The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites [ancient name of Bethlehem area] of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.*

Verses 4-5—*They took for themselves Moabite women as wives*—it sounds like this happened after Elimelech died—*the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died [childless—see 4:13], and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband [and no grandchildren].*

Verse 6—*Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food*—according to the Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 28–30), when the people worshipped the idols, God would send a curse, when they repented and worshipped God, He would send a blessing.

Verse 7—*So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah*—At first this sounds like a good idea. But what would the Israelites in Bethlehem think when Naomi returns with two Moabite women?

Verses 8-10—Naomi's first attempt to persuade Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab: *And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the LORD grant that you may find*

rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” Didn’t work.

Verses 11-14—Naomi’s second attempt: *But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters!*—Her first reason is that Naomi is too old to have more children, as the custom of the Israelites for the brothers to marry their brother’s widow and raise children for the dead brother’s inheritance, called a Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

—*Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?* Even if Naomi did have more children, would these young women wait until Naomi’s children were adults before they would get married again? That’s 20 some years at least.

— Naomi doesn’t mention that it is very unlikely that an Israelite would marry a Moabite. Also, the Moabite women would probably be mistreated by the Israelites because Moab is their enemy. And who would choose to marry a widow?

—*No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me*—Naomi thinks God is dealing harshly with her. So anyone associated with her would also be under that harsh treatment by God. Also, from Naomi’s perspective, their presence would remind her of her dead husband and sons, and it would remind her that when the going got tough in Israel, they left for a foreign land.

—*And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.* This time, it worked with Orpah. She stays in Moab, and she becomes an unknown.

Verse 15—Naomi’s third attempt, to Ruth alone: *Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods—*Naomi uses Orpah’s decision as leverage in her argument. This is the worse thing Naomi could say. How could an Israelite encourage someone to return to their false idol gods, which would condemn them for eternity? (See Exodus 20:3; 23:13, 24; Numbers 25:1-5). The best thing that could happen to them would not be to find a husband and have children, but to go to Israel and identify with Israel’s God, and be part of God’s chosen people.

—*return after your sister-in-law*—Now Naomi is even more forceful and issues a command.

Verses 16-17—*But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you—*Ruth insisted that Naomi quit urging her to turn back.

—*for where you go, I will go—*wherever that will be

—*and where you lodge, I will lodge—*she will live where Naomi chooses

—*Your people shall be my people—*Naomi’s people (the Israelites, enemies of the Moabites) will be Ruth’s people

—*and your God, my God—*Ruth is rejecting the idol gods of the Moabites and choosing the God of the Israelites

—*Where you die, I will die—*This is not a short-term commitment. This is until Ruth dies.

—*and there I will be buried—*Some, like Jacob and Joseph, want their bones returned back to their homeland. But here, Ruth says, even after death, she will remain in Naomi’s land of Israel.

—*Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me*—In typical covenant form, she pronounced a curse on herself, if she does anything other than the covenant she is making with Naomi.

Verse 18—*When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her—*This finally stops Naomi from trying to convince Ruth to turn back to Moab.

Thoughts and Applications—I wonder if the times of the Judges were so bad at this point, that God had to bring a woman from Moab, a foreigner, to Israel—someone who actually chose Him over the idol gods. God is looking for that one person who will choose Him (like Noah, Job, and Abraham). Most people are like Orpah, they don't want to give up their lifestyle or their "gods."

Verse 19—*So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"*—It had been 10 years since Naomi had left. Obviously, she had changed, not just physically, but also in her spirit, after losing her husband and two sons.

Verses 20-21—*She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi [pleasant]; call me Mara [bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"*—Naomi measured God only in terms of food and family. It's interesting—If she was "full," Why did they leave Israel? Now she has food, but thinks she is empty because she has no family. Now she only has Ruth, whom she sees as a liability. How wrong Naomi was!

Thoughts and Applications—It's always tempting to look at what you don't have and complain about that, rather than be thankful to God for what you do have. Also, we have commands against bitterness. *Let all bitterness...be put away from you...* (Ephesians 4:31). *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled* (Hebrews 12:15).

Verse 22—*So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest*—So all these statements have been explained in chapter one. And we have a hint of what's ahead in chapter two—it's the beginning of the barley harvest.

Thoughts and Applications on Chapter 1

1. There is no clear link to a particular time or particular judge or particular event recorded in Judges. The genealogy of 4:21-22 puts Ruth as the great-grandmother of David, so it would seem that Ruth happens near the end of the book of Judges.
2. We get the sense from the text that most of the people of Bethlehem stayed there during the famine and did not go to Moab as Elimelech and his family did. The people, from ten years ago, remembered Naomi when she returned.
3. It seems that the famine, as well as the deaths of Elimelech and his sons, were divine discipline (Leviticus 26:18-20; Deuteronomy 28:23-24). One reason the author does not stress that in this book is because it is God's grace and mercy, not His judgment, that are emphasized.
4. Moab was not the place of God's promised blessings. Israel was.
5. Most, if not all, of Naomi's actions, attitudes, and advice were wrong. She felt God had dealt with her in a harsh way. She had little or no conviction of her own sin or the sin of her husband in going to Moab. There is no evidence of repentance or of faith (on Naomi's part).
6. Naomi does have one thing right—the chances of her daughters-in-law getting a husband and having children to preserve Elimelech's line were next to zero. Of course, the more humanly impossible the situation seems, the more God's power can be demonstrated.
7. All this seems to show Israel's poor spiritual health at the time. Naomi is not a woman walking by faith, but by sight. She is not living according to the law but disregarding it.
8. What we, the readers, know (and Naomi doesn't know) is that God is about to do a wonderful thing for her, based only on His grace.

9. The contrasts are interesting:
- Between Ruth and Orpah: Both are Moabite women, close to the same age. Both married Israelite husbands, both had no children, and were both now widows. Both were related to Naomi in the same way. Both were committed (at least at first) to going with Naomi back to Israel. Both at first refused to listen to Naomi to leave her and return to Moab.
 - Other than weeping, the similarity ends. Orpah is silent. She seems to have no great spiritual interest in Israel or in the God of Israel. She gives in to Naomi's reasoning and chooses what appears to be in her own best interest—to return to her god and her people and find a husband. She was still a Moabite idolater at heart.
 - Ruth, however, has a spiritual interest in Israel and the God of Israel. She does not give in to Naomi's reasoning, and chooses to leave her people and their gods and go to Israel and serve Naomi and the God of Israel.
 - Between Naomi and Ruth: Ruth's actions are similar to the Abrahamic Covenant (*go out from your country, your relatives, and your father's household to the land I will show you—Genesis 12:1-3*). Boaz said of Ruth, ... *you left your father and your mother, as well as your homeland, and came to live among people you did not know previously...may your acts of kindness be repaid fully by the Lord God of Israel, from whom you have sought protection (Ruth 2:10-12)*. Ruth became a true Israelite.
 - Naomi, however, disregards the Abrahamic Covenant. She left the land where God promised to bless them. She approves of the marriage of her sons to non-Israelites. She urges her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab, to their relatives, to find Moabite husbands. She encouraged them to stay in a land that was cursed by God. Naomi, from a land of God, of the Mosaic Law, of the promises and miracles of the Living God, fails miserably. What a contrast to Ruth. Naomi is not some kind of heroine. She is not at all like Ruth or Boaz. In fact, she is the backdrop against which Ruth and Boaz are contrasted.
10. One final word about Naomi. She seemed to act based on pragmatism rather than faith and obedience to God's Word. Another way to see pragmatism, "doing what seems right in our own eyes," indicative of the times of the judges. Naomi gave Ruth and Orpah pragmatic counsel, based on what could be seen, not based on the Word of God. Naomi did not doubt the existence of God or His power. Instead, she concluded that God was using His power against her, and there was nothing she could do about it. She views God as harsh and uncaring. She does not acknowledge sin on her part, so she doesn't repent. Her emphasis was on the here and now: bread to eat, marriage, and children. These things are important, especially to women. But they are not the essence of what life is about. God is to get the glory. He is working out His plan. We are to be obedient to His Word, for *we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose, ...to become conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:28-29)*.

Chapter 2

Verse 1—*Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz*—This is information for us, the readers, but Ruth doesn't know that he's a kinsman. Knowing this ahead of time, though, gives us impact to the next verses.

Thoughts and Applications—The translation “great wealth” is the Hebrew words *gibbor chayil*, translated “courageous warrior” (of Gideon in Judges 6:12) and “brave warrior” (of Jephthah in Judges 11:1). It seems like the same author wrote Judges and Ruth. Therefore, Boaz would be better described as a “great warrior,” which, as a large landowner, indicates he is also *a man of great wealth*. One of the judges, Ibzan was from Bethlehem (Judges 12:8). Bethlehem is just down the road from Hebron, the territory of Caleb and his son-in-law, and first judge, Othniel (Judges 3:9). I conclude that, contrary to other areas of Israel during the time of the judges, this area was defended against the Canaanites by “courageous warriors,” like Boaz, Caleb, Othniel, and Ibzan.

I have the impression that Boaz is an older man, at least older compared to the young Ruth. Probably not as old as Naomi, though. He is a respected leader in Bethlehem.

Can't help but compare Boaz to Elimelech, who fled to Moab when times got tough. Boaz stayed in the Land. Elimelech did not prosper but died, along with his sons. Boaz seems to have done pretty good, even through the hard times. Elimelech was content to live among the Moabites, the enemy of Israel. Boaz would regard Moab as the enemy and not as a safe haven.

Verse 2—*And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi*—Notice Naomi is passive. It's Ruth who takes the initiative and approaches Naomi with the idea.

Thoughts and Applications—Why didn't Naomi suggest it, seeing they needed food? Why didn't she approach Boaz, as a relative? Also, why doesn't Naomi warn Ruth of the danger of going into the fields alone as a young woman? Boaz immediately recognized the danger and made provisions to protect Ruth. We don't know why Naomi acted like she did, except she is a bitter woman (those who usually only think about themselves and not others). But other than her permission to Ruth, Naomi is absent until the end of this chapter. She did not glean, she didn't even accompany Ruth for some kind of protection. It seems like she just sat home and let Ruth provide for and serve her. It seems like we have the same choice—be a Naomi (wait to be served—especially as we get older. The time will probably come when that is necessary, but don't choose it if you don't have to) or be a Ruth (take the initiative).

—*“Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor”*—Ruth is a woman of great courage and willing to work and take the initiative. Under the Mosaic Law, the poor could glean in the fields, grain the reapers left on purpose for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22).

—*And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”*

Thoughts and Applications—While it's true that Naomi and Ruth are poor at this point, I think there needs to be a distinction made between “the poor,” of whom Jesus said, *“For you always have the poor with you”* (Matthew 26:11) and those in need. You can't cure the “poor” problem. (Of course, out of Christian compassion, you should help a poor person who may be in your life.) Rather, it seems like Ruth's situation is more like the story of the Good Samaritan. There was a man, robbed, left hurt beside the road. He had an immediate need of help. He was not a “poor” person. There is no indication that Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi were poor in Moab. But in Bethlehem, they were in need, and Boaz was God's instrument to meet that need, much like the Good Samaritan was. Helping someone (especially a fellow believer) who has a temporary physical or financial need is different than a humanitarian goal of eliminating the poor from the society.

Verse 3—*So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she “happened” to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz*—I put “happened” in quotes because she was guided by the providential hand of God, much like Esther was.

Thoughts and Applications—Notice she was not praying for God’s guidance or seeking it. She just went out and did the right thing. God leads us, but we don’t know what He is doing (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Our job is to be obedient to His Word. He’ll lead us to where He wants us to be. He’s able to do that!!

—*who was of the family of Elimelech*—This is very important to the story.

Verse 4—*Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, “May the LORD be with you.” And they said to him, “May the LORD bless you”*—Boaz and his reapers spoke the language of faith in Israel’s God. Words we have not seen in the last few chapters of Judges.

Verse 5—*Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?”* Or, “To whom does this young woman belong?” (NET Bible). A woman was usually under a man’s authority and care—a father or a husband.

Verse 6—*The servant in charge of the reapers replied, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab*—This may be a derogatory statement by this servant—she’s not one of us, she’s not an Israelite.

Verse 7—*“And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while”*—The servant did admit that Ruth was a good worker, gleaning since the morning. And she had asked permission to glean. She didn’t assume it was her right.

Verse 8—*Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my daughter*—Boaz takes on a father’s role as protector of Ruth because she is alone (of course, Boaz knows he is a relative of hers, maybe that caused him to take care of her). It’s Boaz’s compassion and responsibility that is seen here. I don’t think there is any romance involved—that’s how **our** culture works. Boaz’s motives are pure. He never imagined she would consider him as a possible husband (3:10). When Ruth chose to come with Naomi, it was understood to both of them that Ruth was giving up on the possibility of ever finding a husband and having children.

—*Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids*—His first words to Ruth are to provide her with his protection. He told Ruth to not go to anyone else’s fields, and being with the other women would also be a protection.

Thoughts and Applications—Naomi (unrealized by her, calling herself “bitter,” saying God had afflicted her) experienced God’s lovingkindness when Ruth insisted she return with Naomi. Now Ruth is also experiencing God’s lovingkindness in the person of Boaz. We never know the impact of our actions to others as we serve them. God uses our obedience to Him and His Word in the lives of others, to carry out His plan. Paul wrote, *What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building* (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

Verse 9—*“Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you*—Evidently, there is a physical (even sexual?) danger from

the servants to the poor people who glean. Poor people are obvious targets for evil. They have no resources for protection or food. And remember, these are the times of the judges, where women were often in danger and mistreated. The servants would heed their boss's command.
—*When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.*”

Verse 10—*Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor [Heb. Strong’s, “to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior”] in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”*—Ruth’s first response to this kindness is humility. Boaz’s response is a total surprise to Ruth. She’s a foreigner, she surely did not expect even courtesy, let alone kindness.

Verse 11—*Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know—*So even though Boaz did not know Ruth on sight, he had heard about her, and the report was very good.

Thoughts and Applications: Your reputation is worth more than your money. *A good name is to be more desired than great wealth...* (Proverbs 22:1).

Verse 12—*“May the LORD reward [repay] your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge”*—Like a chick under the wings of its mother hen (Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; Matthew 23:37). A phrase used of God protecting His people. Here Boaz is affirming that Ruth is now considered one of God’s people. Soon Boaz will be used by God to answer his own prayer.

Verse 13—*Then she said, “I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants”*—Boaz’s words could have led to pride, but instead, Ruth continues in humility, comforted by Boaz’s kind words, though she thought of herself as less important than Boaz’s servants (Israelites).

Verse 14—*At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left—*A poor gleaner would not be invited to eat with Boaz. His kind words of verses 11-12 are followed with kind actions—he even served her.

Verse 15—*When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her—*Ruth did not linger over the meal. She got right up to continue gleaning. Boaz said she could glean among the sheaves, not just at the edges of the field. The servants were not to say any insults to her (that she was poor, that she was a foreigner, etc.).

Verse 16—*“Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her”*—They were even to purposely pull grain out of their bundles to leave for her to pick up. Again, he instructed them to not say any rebukes or insults to her.

Verse 17—*So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley—*In the evening, she took the stalks of barley and beat them, allowing the grain to fall out of them. She collected an ephah of barley, about half a bushel, weighing about 30 pounds. That was a lot of food, enough for about ten days.

Verse 18—*She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied*—Besides the barley she gleaned, Ruth brought Naomi her leftovers from lunch with Boaz.

Verse 19—*Her mother-in-law then said to her, “Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed”*—Naomi is shocked. She asked Ruth where she had gleaned. Ruth had way more grain than she would have typically gotten from gleaning. Naomi prays a blessing on the person, before she even knows who it is.

—*So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz”*—Again, we see that Ruth is totally ignorant of who Boaz is. To her he is a kind man.

Verse 20—*Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead”*—As God was the source of her sorrow, He is now the source of her joy. Even Elimelech, who is dead, could live on through Ruth’s children. —*Again Naomi said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives”*—The word translated “relatives” is the Hebrew word *goel*, meaning “kinsman-redeemer.” A kinsman-redeemer is a relative who could act as a redeemer of property and persons. He could act as a *levir*, a Latin term for brother-in-law. Boaz could redeem by fulfilling the levirate law, which required a brother of a deceased man to marry his widow and raise up a son to his name (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Though Boaz was not a brother to Mahlon, Ruth’s dead husband (Ruth 4:10), he was a close relative to the family and could act as a *levir* if he wanted to. It seems that because of Boaz’s kindness to Ruth already, Naomi senses that Boaz is willing to do this. No mention of the closer relative (3:12).

Verses 21-22—*Then Ruth the Moabitess said, “Furthermore, he said to me, ‘You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.’” Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field”*—More good news. Boaz invited Ruth to glean near his servants for all the barley harvest. Naomi was quick to encourage Ruth to do so. NOW Naomi warns Ruth of the danger of gleaning in other fields, where someone could attack her (remember, it is still the times of the Judges—where there are especially low morals, especially regarding women). But it seems too little too late.

Verse 23—*So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest (March-April) and the wheat harvest (June-July). And she lived with her mother-in-law*—Ruth worked in the fields for about 4-6 weeks. The harvest would soon end. What would happen to the widows after the harvest was over?

Thoughts and Applications

- Ruth—is a shining light. She is humble, she is a hard worker, she cares for Naomi.
- Boaz—knows of Ruth’s situation as a foreigner, and is impressed that she would leave her home, her family, her country to join God’s people in Israel. And he knows all Ruth has done for her mother-in-law Naomi. He is generous with his praise, and his protection and provision for Ruth.
- Naomi—Doesn’t go out to glean, to accompany Ruth. She doesn’t warn Ruth about the dangers of gleaning until AFTER Ruth comes home. She seems focused on herself and her needs.
- God—Providentially brings Ruth to Boaz. Could it be there is no God-fearing woman in Bethlehem, so God had to bring a foreigner there, who chose Him and His people, who was a woman of character: hard working, kind, generous ... to produce the line of King David and the Messiah.

Chapter 3

Verse 1—*Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?”*—Now we see Naomi taking the initiative with Ruth. Naomi says she’s seeking security for Ruth, and to Naomi, that means *to find security in the home of a new husband* (1:9, NET Bible). And she claims this is so that *it may be well with you*, but, of course, what is well for Ruth, would also be well for Naomi.

Verse 2—*“Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were?”*—It seems, from these verses, that Ruth has not taken advantage of her knowledge that Boaz is a relative during all these weeks of gleaning in his fields. It’s Naomi who comes up with this plan.

—*Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight*—From other passages (Genesis 38; Deuteronomy 16:13-15; Hosea 9:1-2) it seems that the threshing, at the end of the harvest, was a time of celebration, like at the time of shearing the sheep. It was mostly the men who were there, and if a woman were present, it would be assumed she was a prostitute (such as Tamar in Genesis 38). As Naomi’s plan unfolds, it appears that is exactly what Naomi has in mind for Ruth and Boaz. For Ruth to take advantage of Boaz during this night of celebration, to cause an immorality.

Verse 3—*“Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor*—Ruth is to wash herself, put on perfume and her best clothes, and go down to the celebration at the threshing floor. Naomi thought these things would be effective in seducing Boaz. In the end, he doesn’t even mention them. It’s Ruth’s character that impresses him.

—*but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking*—when Boaz has had enough food and wine, and *his heart was merry* (v. 7)—Naomi obviously anticipates that the wine would have a dulling effect on Boaz’s judgment. (See Genesis 9; 19; 2 Samuel 13:28; Esther 1:10-12; 2:12-17.)

Verse 4—*“It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do”*—

Thoughts and Applications: In an attempt to nullify the sexual intent by Naomi, some say this is a harmless request for marriage, as practiced in that culture. However, that cultural practice is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible. Others say that Naomi is asking Ruth to change from her mourning clothes to regular clothes, indicating she is ready to marry. However, we don’t know how long it’s been since her husband had died. She could have been out of mourning when they came to Bethlehem. Also, there is no word of her mourning while gleaning in the fields or in the conversation with Boaz in chapter 2. Also, if her clothes indicated she was mourning, there would not be the danger of being molested in the fields, as Boaz had feared. Also, if she was changing from mourning clothes, that would be better conveyed during the daylight, rather than at night under the blankets.

Verses 5-6—*She said to her, “All that you say I will do.” So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her*—It seems like Naomi intended there be some sexual entrapment of Boaz. But Ruth and Boaz manage to come through the situation with their morals intact. Notice that Naomi “commanded” Ruth to do this.

Thoughts and Applications: When you read about the beginning of the Moabites, with Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19)—get Lot drunk and lie with him. Or Balaam’s advice to the king of Moab—have the Moabite women seduce the Israelite men (Numbers 25). It sounds a lot like Naomi and nothing like Ruth.

Naomi's pragmatic solution was wrong because:

1. Naomi proposes to solve a problem in secret that should have been dealt with in public. Is the solution to Ruth's situation best handled in the bed of Boaz in the middle of the night? Boaz did deal with the situation, but it was in the city gate during the day.
2. Naomi's proposition was Godless. In her advice, there is not one word of reference to God. This is not surprising, since Naomi's earlier advice to Ruth was to remain in Moab, marry a Moabite man, and continue to worship Moabite gods. Naomi's advice for "security" was to get a husband, no matter how you do it, not by placing trust in God. And Naomi said the most likely place that would happen for Ruth was in Moab.
3. Naomi's plan was to appeal to the lowest instincts and impulses of Boaz, not his higher sense of duty. Why else would there need to be wine, the dark of night, and an "under cover" encounter? Why else would there need to be bathing, perfume, nice clothing, and climbing into bed with Boaz after *his heart was merry* with wine? Naomi was encouraging Ruth to seek a husband in a questionable and compromising manner. But Boaz refuses to become intimate with Ruth that night. And he gives the nearest of kin the opportunity to do the right thing the next day.
4. Naomi's plan was impulsive and irreversible. Marriage was consummated by the sexual union of a man and a woman. Once that happened, there was no easy way out (for example, Jacob with Leah in Genesis 29). If Boaz had sex with Ruth, he would be forced to be the kinsman-redeemer.
5. Naomi's plan deliberately bypassed the excluded the nearest kin, giving preference to Boaz instead. It seems that Naomi preferred Boaz. At least, she thought there was a better opportunity to force the marriage with him. Also, later we find out the closer relative did not want to redeem Ruth (4:6). Maybe Naomi already knew that.
6. Naomi's scheme needlessly put the reputation of two godly people at risk. Naomi's plan was to put Ruth and Boaz in the same bed in the middle of the night, with workers nearby. If anyone had seen them, they would have assumed the worst (see v. 14).
7. Naomi's plan wrongly implied that Ruth needed to take the initiative in the matter of redemption and levirate marriage, as though Boaz would not have done so on his own. Boaz should have had the freedom to assume the leadership role in this matter, as he does the next morning. Naomi's plan suggests that apart from her meddling and Ruth's feminine wiles, this redemption would never have happened.
8. Naomi's plan assumes that the end justifies the means. What Naomi hoped to achieve was a good goal, one that actually happens in chapter 4. But her way of bringing this to pass is vastly different than the way Boaz chooses to accomplish this.
9. Naomi's plan only dealt with the matter of finding a husband for Ruth, yet as is seen in chapter 4, another pressing issue was the redemption of her property. Boaz knew the property was a key issue in the redemption.
10. What Naomi wanted done, with no witnesses, was set aside by Boaz for a transaction that had numerous witnesses (4:9-11).
11. Naomi's purpose was not just to see Ruth married, but to also have the birth of a child. In 4:13, we're told that God enabled Ruth to conceive (obviously closing her womb when married while living in Moab). Would God have opened Ruth's womb to conceive if her marriage was brought about in a dishonorable way?
12. Nowhere in the book of Ruth is Naomi praised. Ruth is praised several times, and Boaz is praised. The older women do not praise Naomi, they praise God for the way He has blessed Naomi.
13. Naomi is *doing what seems right in her own eyes*, while Boaz and Ruth are committed to doing what's right in God's eyes.

Verses 7-8—*When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet*—So far, Ruth has done what Naomi commanded. But she didn't do what was implied by Naomi—to sexually seduce Boaz.

Verse 9—*He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid*—When Ruth said she was a "servant" in 2:13, she used the word for a lowly maid, which is what she considered herself at the time. Now she uses a different word. "Maid" is one who is higher in the social strata than a lowly maid. This is a class of maid who would be considered eligible for marriage.

—*So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative [go'el—kinsmen redeemer]*—Lit. "spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." These are very important words. Ruth is using the words of Boaz's prayer in 2:12, "... *the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.*" Ruth is asking Boaz to be God's answer to her prayers by redeeming her. Ruth understood that the provisions for the poor in the Mosaic Law, and for widows (redemption/levirate marriage), were all part of God's protection under His wings. So she phrased her request with these appropriate words.

Verses 10-11—*Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence"*—Boaz already knew about Ruth from previous experience. He was aware of her conduct and character from what she did as well as what was spoken of her in the city. And what she did this night did not change his opinion of her. He commends her as a *woman of excellence* (reminding us of Proverbs 31:10). Obviously, she did not only seek for own physical desires, else she would have looked to someone younger. She was seeking the interests of her mother-in-law and her deceased husband and father-in-law because she was asking for the redemption of not only her but their family property. Also, notice that Boaz doesn't flatter himself. He knows others would be more attractive to a young widow like Ruth, which makes her request another evidence of her godliness.

Verse 12—*"Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I*—In keeping with the Mosaic Law, Boaz acknowledged that he was not the closest relative, not first in line to redeem Ruth, as much as he obviously would like to do that. I wonder if Boaz had been thinking about this already. He seemed to know the answer really quick. Another tension in the story. Will the closer relative redeem Ruth and Naomi?

Verse 13—*"Remain this night*—Dangerous to send an unescorted women out into the night (although Naomi didn't have any trouble doing that to Ruth).
—*and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning"*

Verse 14—*So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor"*—His servants were used to these commands from him. Notice, he did not name Ruth. Evidently some may have seen *the woman* but didn't recognize her as Ruth.

Verse 15—*Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.*

Verse 16—*When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did it go, my daughter?” And she told her all that the man had done for her.*

Verse 17—*She said, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, ‘Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed’”—This is new information. We didn’t read that he said that. This food seems to symbolize Boaz’s commitment to care for Naomi, not just Ruth.*

Verse 18—*Then she said, “Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.”*

Thoughts and Applications

1. Godly character is evident in ungodly settings. The circumstances were not ideal, but both Ruth and Boaz acted in a godly way.
2. Men are to be the moral leaders in their relationship with the opposite sex. Naomi had instructed Ruth that she was to do whatever Boaz said. If Boaz had not been a man of character, things may have turned out very different under the covers and in the darkness. Boaz protected the purity and reputation of Ruth.
3. Beware of ungodly counsel that comes from people who appear to be pious and have our best interest at heart. Naomi appears to be seeking what is best for Ruth—a husband and an heir. But she did not give godly counsel. We should first evaluate the counsel given by another by considering their personal relationship with God. Naomi was not a woman walking close to God. By her own confession, she was bitter, accusing God of being unduly harsh with her—that should cause us to see all kinds of red flags! Ask the question: Is the counsel I’m being given from the words of Scripture or the opinion of the counselor? False teachers and counselors appeal to our fleshly desires. Truth from the Word of God commands us to put to death fleshly desires, not indulge them.
4. Beware of taking shortcuts. Naomi was taking a shortcut to get Boaz and Ruth married. A shortcut is an ungodly or faithless action we take to avoid pain and suffering, hard work, trusting God, or waiting—to solve the problem the easy way, instead of God’s way. For example, Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham to have a child. A good example would be David refusing to kill King Saul at En-Gedi, in spite of the counsel of his men.

Ruth and Boaz came from very different racial, cultural, political, and social backgrounds. Boaz came from the top of the socio-economic scale. Ruth was at the very bottom (she was lower than one of Boaz’s servant girls). Boaz was obviously an older man, and Ruth was much younger. As a Moabite, Ruth would be looked down upon by the Israelites.

However, it seems like they were kindred spirits. Both shared a common faith in the God of Israel. Both were committed to living according to God’s Word, rather than according to what seemed right in their own eyes. Both had a compassion for the poor—Boaz left grain for the poor to glean, and Ruth helped her mother-in-law by working hard in the field as a gleaner. Both were committed to looking after Naomi. Both were people of godly character. These are the things that make for a godly marriage.

In 2:1, the author described Boaz as the Hebrew words *gibbor chayil*. In chapter 3, he used the words *ishshah chayil*, *a woman of excellence*, to describe Ruth. It seems like the author is deliberately connecting the characters of these two people together. Boaz is what a godly man is—a protector and provider. Ruth is what a godly woman of excellence is (Proverbs 31).

Chapter 4

Verse 1—*Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down—*As predicted by Naomi (3:18), Boaz was quick to settle this matter, only in a biblical way, according to the Law. Before long, behold, the *close relative* comes through the gate, and Boaz invites him to sit down. The word *behold* indicates this was a “divine appointment” arranged by God. Boaz probably is thinking he has to wait for this relative to arrive, but *behold*, there he is!

Thoughts and Applications: The identity of this *close relative* is not known. It does add tension to the story—is Ruth going to end up with him instead of Boaz?

Verse 2—*He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down—*Again, this is the biblical way. It’s the “court” of the city, the witnesses.

Thoughts and Applications: Notice the contrast to Naomi’s plan of secrecy, under the covers, and in darkness. Boaz handles the matter in broad daylight, in the town gate, before ten elders of the city and probably other witnesses nearby.

Verse 3—*Then he said to the closest relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech—*Surely, after all these months, this man knows of the situation of Naomi and Ruth and had done nothing about it. Now, however, Boaz is confronting him with the situation. He has to do something—either redeem the property (and Ruth) or publicly renounce his right to do so.

Thoughts and Applications: While Leviticus 25:47-55 is about a poor Israelite who has to sell himself into slavery and not about the particular situation here in Ruth, what is interesting is the order of priority of the kinsmen: brothers (oldest to youngest), uncle, cousin, more distant relative.

Verse 4—*“So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.’” And he said, “I will redeem it”—*Oh, no!!

Thoughts and Applications: This was the provision in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 25:23-28).

Verse 5—*Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance”—*Of course the relative wants the property—but it comes with Ruth and giving Elimelech and his sons and heirs, Chilion and Mahlon, children to inherit their family property.

Thoughts and Applications: This was the practice even before the Law. Judah gave Tamar, the widow of his oldest son Er to Onan, his second son. When Onan died, Judah was afraid to give Tamar to his youngest son Shelah, thinking he would die, also (Genesis 38:8-12). This then became part of the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Verse 6—*The closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it”—*Whew!! The closer relative refuses to redeem the property and Ruth. He says it will somehow *jeopardize my own inheritance* (like maybe his wife wouldn’t like him sleeping with a young, beautiful Ruth!!). This relative seems to have been looking out for just himself and not caring about Naomi and Ruth and their situation of needing help.

Thoughts and Applications: Just as Orpah faded into the unknown, so this close relative, who is unnamed will fade into the unknown. There are choices to be involved in what God is doing. It’s something each of us has to decide. Are we going to walk with God or not? First thing to discern

is—does it conform to the Word of God? If it doesn't, *Avoid such men as these* (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Verse 7—*Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel—*

Thoughts and Applications: The words *this was the custom* are very important. When the Bible wants us to know the customs of the land and time, it tells us what the customs are. If the Bible is silent about the customs, then don't get it from sources outside of the Bible. If God wanted us to know the customs, He would tell us in His Word. It is very popular today to interpret the Bible based on this extra-biblical sources regarding customs, etc., showing that, to these people, the Bible is not sufficient.

Verses 8-9—*So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal.*

Thoughts and Applications: Deuteronomy 25:7-10 describes a similar situation under the Mosaic Law. If the brother doesn't want to marry the widow, she's to go to the elders in the city, *remove his sandal from his foot, and spit in his face*. Then his family is disgraced. Ruth's situation is different. It may be indicative of the times of the judges, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Rather than being disgraced, the closest relative was simply doing what was right in his own eyes.

Verses 9-10—*Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today"*—twice (here and in verse 5), Boaz emphasizes the fact that he will be raising up children who will inherit the property of Elimelech and Mahlon.

Verse 11—*All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses—it's legal—May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel—*These were the two wives of Jacob (Israel). They, and Ruth, will build up the nation of Israel, which is fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant. It's especially interesting seeing Ruth is a Moabite woman. But, like Rahab her mother-in-law, she was a woman who chose the people of Israel to be her people, and Israel's God to be her God. A true Israelite.

Thoughts and Applications: Just another observation—both Rachel (Genesis 30:1) and Leah (Genesis 30:9-13) had times when they were unable to conceive, as Ruth did not conceive during the years she was married to Mahlon. These people were praying for God to open Ruth's womb, as He did with Rachel and Leah.

—and may you [Boaz] achieve wealth in Ephrathah [territory around Bethlehem] and become famous in Bethlehem—

Verse 12—*"Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman"*—Tamar had twin boys, Perez and Zerah (Genesis 38:27-30). Zerah was considered to be born first, but the lineage went through Perez to Boaz (Ruth 4:18f). Also, there is a Levirate connection between the two women.

Verse 13—*So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son—*It's interesting that she was married for years before to Mahlon, but had no children. God opens and shuts the womb. And a son was the most desired of children, because he carried on the name and inheritance.

Verse 14—*Then the women [most likely, the women of the village mentioned in 1:19-21] said to Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today—their praise is not for Naomi but for God. It’s like they are correcting Naomi, who said earlier that God had treated her harshly (1:19-21).*

—*and may his name become famous in Israel*—It’s not this son Obed, but Obed’s grandson, King David, who will become famous in Israel.

Verse 15—*“May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age—Naomi now has the next generation, who will provide and protect her in her old age.*

—*for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him*”—Praise for Ruth’s love of Naomi. Ruth provided for Naomi.

Thoughts and Applications: Too often we define “love” as warm fuzzies. *Agape* love is doing the best for the other person. If we do what is best for another (a mother-in-law, for example), we are loving them. We don’t have to feel warm fuzzies. We have to do what is right.

—*is better to you than seven sons*—generally speaking, a woman is more nurturing than a man. Not that they don’t want to be, but they often don’t think of what to do. And women do know what to do.

Verse 16—*Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse*—it seems that Naomi becomes very close to this boy. A comfort to her after losing her husband and own sons.

Verse 17—*The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi!” So they named him Obed*—meaning “servant.” It’s strange that the town names him.

—*He is the father of Jesse, the father of David*—the father of Jesus Christ, the Messiah

Verse 18—*Now these are the generations of Perez*—born to Judah, in the land of Israel. Taken to Egypt with Jacob’s family (Genesis 38:29; 46:12).

—*to Perez was born Hezron*—also born in the land of Israel and taken to Egypt with Jacob’s family (Genesis 46:12).

Verse 19—*and to Hezron was born Ram*—in Egypt

—*and to Ram, Amminadab*—in Egypt. Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon (Exodus 6:23).

Verse 20—*and to Amminadab was born Nahshon*—who left Egypt with the Israelites, the leader of the tribe of Judah during the wilderness wandering (Numbers 2:3; 7:17; 10:1; 1 Chronicles 2:10)

—*and to Nahshon, Salmon*—less than 20 years old at the Kadesh Barnea decision, so entered the Land with Joshua, conquering Jericho (a thought—possibly one of the 2 spies sent to Jericho).

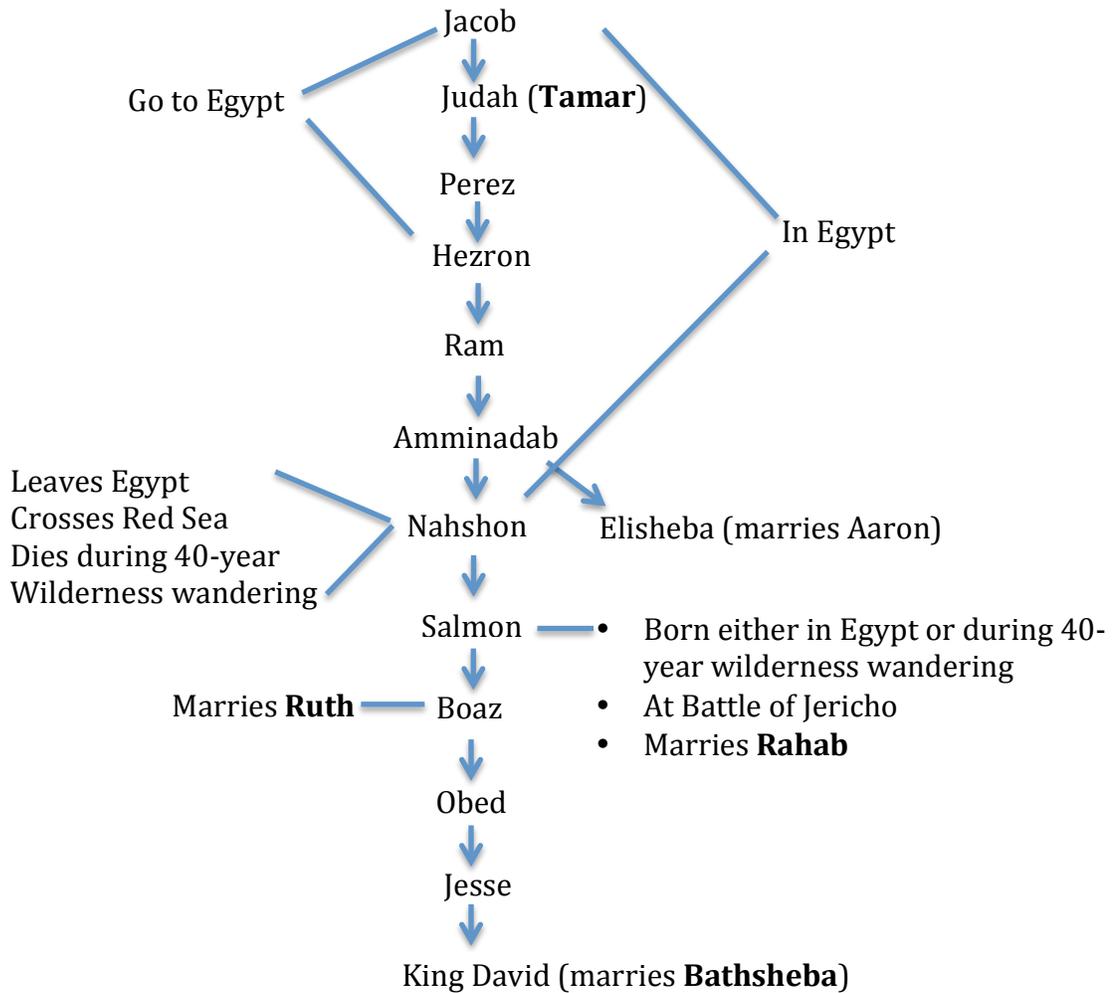
Marries Rahab

Verse 21—*and to Salmon was born Boaz*—Rahab was Salmon’s wife and Boaz’s mother (Matthew 1:5), making Rahab Ruth’s mother-in-law

—*and to Boaz, Obed*—Ruth was the wife of Boaz and Obed’s mother

Verse 22—*and to Obed was born Jesse,*

—*and to Jesse, David*—the seventh son of Jesse (1 Chronicles 2:15)



Thoughts and Applications on Ruth:

1. Even in the worst times, God always preserves a remnant. The times of the Judges are dark, evil days. Yet Ruth and Boaz shine as a remnant, preserving the line of the Messiah to come.
2. The fulfillment of God's purposes and promises depend on the goodness and greatness of God, not on the goodness of men. To Naomi, all hope is lost. But God was working.
3. In Ruth, we see the impact of the godliness of Boaz and Ruth. The relationship between Boaz and his workers (2:4), the reputation of Ruth (2:11), resulting in praise to God (4:11-17). How different it would be if Naomi's bitterness had prevailed.
4. Hard economic times are being experienced today. Christians are tempted to compromise by blending in with the godlessness of our pagan culture today, much as Naomi and her family went to Moab for a solution to their famine.
5. We can either trust God, whatever our situation, and be obedient to Him, or we can respond as Naomi did, with bitterness and complaining. Remember, there are no accidents or victims. God is in control and He has you where He wants you to be, in order to bring glory to Him and to help you mature as a believer (James 1:1-4).
6. A thought about the nearest relative. When he could have Naomi's property, her "stuff," he wanted it. But when it came to having Ruth's child, he wasn't willing. It somehow interfered with his plans. Some people, sadly many Christians, see children as interfering with their plans and it is a price they are not willing to pay. The birthrate of Christians is very low. Whereas, both Jews and Muslims are reproducing followers of their religions.
7. Doing what's right in your own eyes results in destruction—both for you and for your family. There is great freedom in trusting God and being obedient to His Word. You will be wiser, more at peace, have greater character and hope.