

I Am Ruth¹ (#14)

Story form by Ron Banuk

The story of Ruth is one of the most touching short stories in the Bible. It is the story of salvation for Jews and Gentiles by redemption for those who show lovingkindness to their neighbor out of loyalty to the God of Israel. The story told in 85 verses is found in four chapters—each a scene on God’s panoramic stage. The book is sandwiched between Judges and 1 Samuel for reasons of contrast and completion. The title, like *Ester*, is about a woman and like *Job* is about a Gentile.

The story opens under somber skies during the 360-year period of the Judges when *every man did that which was right in his own eyes*² and when almost all of Israel and Judah were Canaanized like the pagans who occupied the Holy Land prior to Joshua’s conquest. It was as though the God of Israel had come and gone. Some place the period during the reign of Judge Gideon from 1191 to 1151 B.C. because it was in this period that the Midianites and Amalekites *entered into the land to destroy it and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass*³. But there was good reason for this devastation. Had not the Lord written in Torah: *But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments...ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it*⁴. Later in Hosea’s time, the Lord would say: *And also, I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered*⁵.

So, it was with this biblical knowledge that a prominent Bethlehemite left the region in search of those fields that the Lord had let rain fall. His name was Elimelech (Ay’-lee-mell’-eck) meaning my God the king⁶. Rabbinic tradition says that Elimelech, Tov, and the father of Naomi, were brothers to Salmon, the son of Nahshon⁷. Tradition continues that Elimelech was a very wealthy landowner who stood in the gates and once boasted that if a famine were to come, he could feed all the people of Bethlehem. But, as the famine began to wax, the people noticed his own maid with basket in hand looking for food in the market. This rich man was shortening their supplies. In anger, the townsfolk then clamored at his door for grain. Realizing that he could never feed all the hungry, he quickly made plans to leave Bethlehem. So, it was with cries of anguish in his ears, that he and his family fled the land.

¹ Much of the commentary herein comes from Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum’s three-tape series on Ruth. This may be ordered from Ariel Ministries 1541 Parkway Loop, Suite D, Tustin, CA 92780, 714-259-4800.

² Judges 17:6

³ Judges 6:3-6

⁴ Leviticus 26: 14-16

⁵ Amos 4:7

⁶ Similar Words: Elijah = my God Jehovah; Elisha = my God is salvation; Eliphaz = my God is gold.

⁷ Babba Batra 91A. Genesis Rabbah 92B. Neilkutz Shimmonim 599. Nahshon was the fifth descendant of Judah.

His wife was named Naomi meaning pleasant, but his two sons were obviously sickly from birth for they were named Mahlon (Mach'-lone) meaning puny and Chilion (Kill'-ee-on) meaning wasting away. Nine hundred years earlier, to quote Scripture, *there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there*⁸. Elimelech also went to sojourn using the same Hebrew word *ger* meaning his initial intent was to return, i.e., to live there temporarily as an alien. He discovered that God had sent rain to the fields of Moab just 30 miles distant as the crow flies, but 75 miles with camel and donkey. Their caravan had to descend 3750 feet to the Dead Sea and climb 4500 feet into the Ammonite mountains descend with a local guide into the Ammonite Grand Canyon and rise onto the Moabite high plains.

The Bible then says that *they remained there*. Perhaps it was the trauma of the initial journey, or the shame incurred by leaving the land, but it appears that Elimelech changed his mind and decided to remain with the Moabites, the descendants of Lot by his older daughter⁹. The leader of the household died soon after his incursion into the new land and rabbinic tradition says that Elimelech's death was God's judgment for not returning. After Elimelech died, his two sons married Moabitish women: Orpah whose name means nape of the neck from *oref* and Ruth whose name means to associate from *rahah* or to befriend from *reut*. These were not Hebrew names. It was later in history that Ruth became a common Jewish name. There is a strong rabbinic tradition saying the two sisters were daughters of Eglon, the king of Moab. If this is true, then the story takes place at least 40 years before the time of Gideon. Some rabbis say that the reason the sons took wives after their father's death was because he would not have permitted it were he alive. Either Samuel or a post-Samuelian author writes negatively of the situation. In saying *they took wives*, he does not write *nasa isha*, but uses the term *lakach isha* which is used negatively nine times in Scripture.¹⁰ This is the reason for the debate among the rabbis as to whether the women converted to Judaism before marriage.¹¹ After ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion died leaving behind childless widows. At this point, it must be remembered that one of the curses for *not hearkening unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes*¹² was: *Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body* from Deuteronomy 28:18.

So, what went wrong? From a Biblical standpoint, the family transgressed Moses' congregational laws which says: *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation ... Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever* from Deuteronomy 23:3-6. Since the family dwelled among them as *ger* (strangers) for an extended period of time, they were beholding to the peace and prosperity extended to them by the Moabites. And unlike Abram, they were not called out from their land, so the Lord judged them with death. But was it right for the sons to marry Moabite women? The Law of Moses

⁸ Genesis 12:10

⁹ Genesis 19:30-38

¹⁰ In Judges 21:23 *lakach isha* is used to tell how the Benjamites after their civil war were not allowed to marry among the daughters of Israel (Judges 21:18) and so were coaxed into taking the women who danced at the annual festival in Shiloh. See also 2 Chronicles 11:21; 13:21; 24:3.

¹¹ Zohar Hadash 180-182. Midrash Rabbah Ruth 1:4.

¹² Deuteronomy 28:15

specifically forbade marriage to Canaanites: *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son, for they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods*¹³. Concerning the Moabites, however, the only restriction was that they could not enter into the congregation until the eleventh generation *because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee*, which is from Deuteronomy 23:4. So the marriages were legal, assuming that the women converted to Judaism prior to marriage, but leaving *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel) without God's beckon and intermingling with the Moabites was not.

From traders plying the caravan routes, Naomi *had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread* as stated in Ruth 1:6. By mentioning the name of the Lord, this showed she realized that the famine was sent by God who now beckoned her return. So, she sought to dismiss her childless daughters-in-law admonishing them to return, not to their father's house, but *each to her mother's house*. Now this was unusual. There are many references in Scripture to a woman returning to her father's house¹⁴, but only three of one returning to her mother's house¹⁵. Behind the request was the wish that they once again be given in marriage from their mother's house. This is verified by the following verse with Naomi's wish that *they may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband*. And to a woman, rest (*manoach*) implied marriage. But they resisted. So, Naomi was forced to deliver a second and more forceful admonishment, this time saying that she had no sons in her womb—an obvious allusion to a levirate marriage.¹⁶ The custom of the surviving brother carrying on the family name of his deceased brother by marrying his widow originally applied only to brothers living together but was later extended to include the clan. So, if Naomi had given birth to a son, one of her daughters-in-law could have eventually married the young man. But this was not to be. Her daughters-in-law still resisted, and Naomi was forced to issue a final admonition saying that even if she conceived that night, would they be willing to wait until the boys were grown? With the third reproof, Naomi fulfilled Jewish tradition by attempting to dissuade a would-be proselyte to Judaism three times. Orpah then lived up to her name, showed the nape of her neck, returned home to her gods, and became a wife. She did nothing wrong—only the expected in light of the circumstances. Ruth, on the other hand, chose to remain a daughter, clinging to Naomi for the same reasons that Orpah had left, viz., that Naomi would have no husband or sons. To Ruth this meant she would need someone to look after her.

Ruth then speaks for the first time and utters what are now called the Golden Words of Literature: *Entreat 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: 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.*

¹³ Deuteronomy 7:3-4

¹⁴ Genesis 38:11. Leviticus 22:13. Numbers 30:16. Deuteronomy 22:21. Judges 19:2-3.

¹⁵ Genesis 24:28. Songs 3:4; 8:12.

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 25:5-10

These words are found in Ruth 1:16-17. With that statement, Ruth became either a convert to Judaism or, if she had converted at marriage, a convert seeking the land of Judah. The five specific areas where Ruth promised to parallel the life of Naomi were neither arbitrary nor completely spontaneous. This was Ruth's response to Naomi's explanation of the rigors of Jewish law and the harsh life she would face in a foreign land where neither would have a husband as rest. The rabbis say that her name which was the numerical equivalent of 606¹⁷ became 613 with her Halakhic conversion when she took on the 7 Noahide Laws¹⁸ because 613 is the total number of laws in Torah (Pentateuch). Ruth's golden words conclude with an oath: *the Lord do so to me if...* This formula is seen eleven¹⁹ times in Scripture and demonstrates Ruth's recognition of Jehovah. It is notable because she uttered this on soil controlled by Chemosh,²⁰ where the Moabites thought foreign gods were ineffective. So, Ruth was thinking like a Jewess and not a Moabitess.

The Golden Words of Literature, also give us a glimpse of a pre-Christian born-again experience. When Jesus said to Nicodemus: *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* in John 3.3, he never bothered to explain the term "born again" because it was a well understood term among the Jews. In Hebrew, *yivaleid min ha-mayim*, means to be born of water and is a mid-wife term describing the breaking of the sack of water at childbirth. By the time of Christ, there were six ways a Jew could be born again. Six is the number of incompleteness. Jesus introduced the seventh way one could be born again and the only way that could merit one salvation. That formula is hidden within John 3:16, the most famous verse in Scripture:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3:16

Accordingly, two things must happen: 1) the Savior must first die for our sins, and 2) one must believe only in Jesus Christ. In Ruth's day, since the Messiah, had not yet died for our sins, those dying righteous, were contained in Abraham's Bosom²¹ until Jesus' descent into Hades. During the period of Judges, there were five ways to be born again: 1) to be a convert to Judaism, 2) bar mitzvah at age 13, 3) marriage at age 18, 4) becoming a priest at age 30, and 5) becoming a high priest at age 50. Each experience was inaugurated on a definite date, and place. Ruth had that experience. But was it salvatory? Here many Christians split. Covenant theologians would say that salvation was always through a professed belief in the Messiah, while Dispensationalists would say that the content of one's faith concerning the Messiah varied with each period of the Old Testament. Exactly what Ruth knew about the

¹⁷ Res = 200, Taw = 400, Waw = 6.

¹⁸ 1) Do not worship idols. 2) Do not blaspheme God. 3) Do not murder, abort, or euthanize. 4) No homosexuality or rape. 5) Do not steal. 6) Establish laws and courts of law. Require 2 or 3 witnesses for the death penalty. 7) Be kind to animals.

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; 25:22. 2 Samuel 19:13. 1 Kings 20:10. 2 Kings 6:31.

²⁰ See Numbers 21:29 and 2 Kings 3: 27.

²¹ *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.—Luke 16:23*

Messiah is uncertain, even though she would contribute to the Royal Line²². What is known is that she embraced *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) with *hesed* (lovingkindness) thus fulfilling the exhortation of the prophet Hosea:

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings--
Hosea 6:6 RSV.*

After a perilous 75-mile journey back to the land of Judah, the territory of Ephratah, and the town of Bethlehem, two women entered the market place anxious and seeking rest. One was forty and dressed in clothes of mourning, the other seventy and with a familiar face. Naomi had returned. But Scripture says that Ruth also returned.²³ How could that be? Since Ruth had never been to Judah before, the meaning is to return (*shuv*) to Jehovah. It was early Spring, and the town was abuzz with Naomi's return. The Hebrew word used is *hum* meaning to roar. In announcing her return, she disingenuously said she should be called Mara meaning bitter and not Naomi meaning pleasant because of what *Shaddai* had done to her. In this discourse, Naomi used two names of God quite effectively and some would say poetically in the following sequence: *Shaddai*²⁴, *Jehovah*, *Jehovah*, *Shaddai* or Almighty, Lord, Lord, Almighty in English.

The following day, the whole town was in mourning, for according to rabbinic tradition, the wife of a very wealthy landowner, a man referred to as a *gibor*, a man of valor, and a *chayil*, a wealthy leader, had died the same day the two women entered the town. This man who stood in the gates was the son of Salmon. His uncles were Tov, Elimelech, and Naomi's father. He was Boaz now an 80-year-old widower and he was *moda*, kinsman, as a cousin to Naomi. So, the same day Ruth entered the gate, Boaz' wife died. The hand of God was at work.

It was April, the beginning of the Barley Harvest. The wheat harvest would follow in May and June, but the women were already destitute. They needed food. Naomi had land, but it was too late to plant. Her land came from her sons who inherited it from their father. But with their death, the land reverted to her with one technicality. Since Ruth had returned with her and had been wife to an heir, Ruth had legally become part of the land. If the land were ever redeemed, the new owner would have to redeem not only the land but also Ruth.

The immediate issue was hunger. It was the custom that a destitute person could beg or glean. The law on gleaning is reiterated three times²⁵ in Torah. In Deuteronomy it says: *When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands* (Dt 24:19). And elsewhere it admonishes making *clean riddance of the corners of thy field* in Leviticus 23:22. For Naomi, the wife of a formerly very prominent and

²² Perez (by Tamar), Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz (by Rahab), Obed (by Ruth), Jesse, David, Solomon.

²³ Shuv—to return: So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her--Ruth 1:22

²⁴ Shaddai is used predominantly in the Book of Job

²⁵ Leviticus 19:9; 23:22. Deuteronomy 24:19.

wealthy landowner, to beg for food or to glean in the fields would have been very humiliating. Ruth was sensitive to the older woman's feelings and offered to glean for the both of them. Naomi accepted Ruth's *hesed* but did not tell her where to glean. And the following verse literally says Ruth "chanced chanced²⁶ upon the fields of Boaz" meaning it was not chance at all, but the providence of God that guided her to his field. This might be translated by chance per chance.

There is a Messianic interpretation to Verses 2:2-3 where Ruth goes into the fields to glean. Some rabbis say that Ruth's gleaning from extreme poverty was a foreshadowing of that poor man riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9) that would descend from her—the Messiah. This was, of course, a pre-Christian rabbinic interpretation not seen in modern midrash. It is also interesting that of the two back-to-back verses that show the first and second comings of the Messiah (Zechariah 9:9-10 and Malachi 3:1-2), no rabbi has ever made the connection that one Messiah would come twice.

When Boaz came to his field, he greeted the farmhands with: *The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee* (Ruth 2:4). This was not the typical greeting for the period of Judges, nor for any other period, for that matter. This salutation indicates that these people were true believers in Jehovah, i.e., the remnant.²⁷ At any one time in Israel's history, only a fraction believed. The same is true today to an even lesser extent where the remnants are Hebrew Christians. In the future, just prior to the Millennium, a small remnant (Romans 11:5) will grow to encompass all remaining Jews (Romans 11:26) after the national confession.

Boaz quickly asked his foreman, a man he trusted, respected, and relied upon, about the Moabitess. Apparently, the foreman (*naar*) had told Ruth to wait by the side or in the house until the boss arrived, for her request was very unusual. Normally the reapers or harvesters used a scythe or sickle to cut the tall barley shoots. They were followed by the binders who bound up the sheaves. Finally, the women were allowed to pick up or glean what was left. But here, Ruth asked that she follow behind the reapers so as to be ahead and among the binders. For that request, she needed special permission from the boss, and so it was that Boaz in a show of *hesed*, gave it to her straightaway along with instructions for her not to leave his field and for his servants not to touch her. And after allowing her to drink from the water jars, Ruth fell down on her face and asked why he noticed her. In Hebrew, there is a play on words here. The literal expression is to notice the unnoticed and the expression is used only of foreigners²⁸. Ruth was a foreigner known as *nochri*. As such she enjoyed no

²⁶ Chanced chanced: This is a pleonasm using redundancy to express a point. The only other occurrence of this in Scripture is in Ecclesiastes 2:14 and 15. Here the implication is that it was not chance at all, but the providence of God. An English rendering might say by chance per chance.

²⁷ 1 Kings 19:15-18. Isaiah Chapters 7-12 called The Book of Immanuel. *Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.*—1 Kings 19:18

²⁸ See 2 Samuel 15:19 for Ittai the Gittite. See Judges 19:12 for the Jebusites. See 1 Kings 11:1,8 for the wives of Solomon. See Ezra 10:2,10 and Nehemiah 13:26-27 for the post-exilic wives.

covenantal rights²⁹ and none of the courtesies given to the *ger*. She was a Moabitess and not a Jewess. Boaz answered how word of her gallant *hesed* for her mother-in-law, his cousin, had reached his ears. He then uttered an ironic statement: *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). Irony is the humor of Heaven, for Boaz would soon be answering his own prayer.

Perhaps the irony of the situation is a mask for a requisite to prayer. That necessary ingredient to successful prayer is that the petitioner be willing to stand in the gap for whom he prays. The petitioner must be willing to be a part of God's answer to prayer. Pray that a homeless person outside your window not be hungry and there may be a knock at your door for the bread you just baked. Prayer is not cheap.

At noontime, Boaz invited her to eat with the workers. She sat beside the reapers, not with them, and was served personally from the hand (*tzbat*) of Boaz. He gave her a morsel of bread called *pat* which she dunked in *chometz* and ate. Chometz was a mixture of wine and vinegar forbidden to Nazarites³⁰ but very popular among the indigenous. Twelve hundred years later, this drink was mixed with oil and offered to Jesus on the cross.³¹ She then roasted grain called *qali*. This was prepared by culling over-ripened grain still attached to the stalks, binding them into bundles, and holding the bundles to an open fire until the chaff is burnt off and the grain is roasted. What Ruth did not eat, she saved for Naomi. Then Boaz furthered his act of *hesed* by telling the reapers to purposefully grab some of the sheaves and throw it her way as she gleaned among the reapers and binders.³² In the evening she threshed about 40 pounds of barley. So, she returned home not with sheaves, but with grain and *qali*, which she had saved, from lunch.

After returning to her temporary dwelling in Bethlehem³³, both ate. Later when Ruth informed Naomi where she had gleaned, Naomi made the shocking reply that Boaz was a relative (*karav* or *qarob*) and one of their closest relatives (*gaal*). Here she used the term kinsman redeemer (*gaal*) for the first time. Since it was the time of the Judges and the remnants were few, Ruth was told not to go to another field where she would not be safe from the men of Ephratah their jeers and their advances. So, Ruth continued gleaning in her mourning clothes until the end of the Barley harvest³⁴ during the Feast of Weeks in April and possibly to the end of the wheat harvest in late June. So, Ruth the foreigner experienced the bountiful *hesed* of Boaz and ultimately

²⁹ See Deuteronomy 14:21 where an animal that died without being killed could be sold to the *nochri*. See Dt 14:3 where the stranger (*nochri*) is not given a 7-year release. See Dt 23:20 where the Jew is allowed to lend usuriously to the *nochri*.

³⁰ Num 6:3-4

3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.—Numbers 6:3-4

³¹ They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink—Psalms 69:21.

³² This was probably done in the following manner by a right-handed reaper: The reaper would grab a bunch of standing sheaves with his left hand and with his right hand he would swing the sickle felling a swath and freeing the clump in his left hand which he would then drop behind him.

³³ Bethlehem: house of Bread where the Messiah is the Bread.

³⁴ The Barley harvest lasted from the Feast of First Fruits to the Feast of Weeks. See Leviticus 23:10-15, Deuteronomy 16:8-10, and 2 Samuel 21:9.

of God. Boaz was acting out of respect for his niece, Naomi, and God out of respect to his son, the Messiah.

Finally with the conclusion of the barley harvest, Naomi decided that the time was ripe for Ruth to shed her mourning clothes and to seek rest (*manoach*) under the wings of Boaz, the widower. By sending Ruth to Boaz, Naomi was renouncing her claim on the man, a kinsman redeemer (*gaal*), and gave it to Ruth. That night, Boaz would be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. The threshing floor was usually a flat area about 30-foot square near a hill. Here the sheaves would be stored and beaten or trodden. Winnowing would take place in the evening from 4 to 7 PM when the West winds would blow. During this time the beaten grain was thrown into the wind to be separated from the chaff.³⁵ The grain was stored in heaps, the straw went to the animals, and the chaff became fuel to roast *qali*, etc. Since this was the first harvest after years of famine, Boaz and his *naar* would be personally sleeping by the heaps guarding them from clansmen many of whom had morals typical of the period of Judges.

Knowing this, Naomi told Ruth to anoint herself and to put on raiment, something David would do after completing his mourning.³⁶ Her scheme was to have Ruth wait until Boaz, the *moda*, had lain down weary from the day's work and merry with spirits.³⁷ Ruth was then to lay not at his side as a whore, but by his feet as a servant would do. Sexual relations were not planned, but the setting was unmistakably romantic. In fact, whores had been known to ply their trade by the threshing floor.³⁸ Ruth was then told to uncover his feet so that the late evening chill would awaken the man and a private conversation could ensue. Regarding this incident, the rabbis saw Messianic overtones and compared the incident to that of Tamar and Perez.

Everything went as planned. Late in the night, the old man shivered, bent forward, apparently to draw up his cover or skirt, when he noticed a woman. "Who art thou?", he said. Ruth then delivered her proposal: "*I am Ruth thine handmaid (amah): spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman (gaal)*". With that statement, Ruth had overstepped Naomi's instructions. Naomi used the term *moda* meaning relative, but Ruth used the term *goel (gaal)* meaning kinsman redeemer. This meant that Ruth was not just asking for a levirate marriage as Naomi had planned, i.e., to give her daughter-in-law rest, but she was asking for redemption which involved land, marriage, inheritance, bloodline, and ancestral rest.

With this request, Boaz was impressed. He then implied that Ruth had or could have received marriage proposals from the young, rich, and poor men of the village, but chose instead him from lovingkindness (*hesed*) born of loyalty to Naomi. Then acting according to the law, Boaz mentioned that there was a closer relative than he, and that he must be asked first. The closer man was Boaz uncle who was Elimelech's brother or Naomi's *levir*. (A *levir* is the brother of a woman's husband.) Then under oath, he promised to redeem Ruth if Tov, the closer relative, declined. The issue was

³⁵ Isaiah 41:15-16

³⁶ 2 Samuel 12:20. See Ezekiel 16:9.

³⁷ Judges 19:6

³⁸ *Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people: for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God, thou hast loved a reward upon every cornfloor [threshing floor].—Hosea 9:1*

not a levirate marriage³⁹ and ancestral rest, but the more general issue of redemption of which marriage and ancestral rest were components.

The question can be asked here why Naomi did not advise Ruth to go directly to Tov. It can be surmised that she either did not know of his existence, or knew him, but not that he was a closer relative than Boaz. What can be said for sure at this point is that it was Ruth and not Naomi who had the keen sense that Boaz would redeem her.

Then acting responsibly, he advised Ruth to spend the night (*lun*) at the threshing floor until gloaming. The Hebrew word for night used here is *lun*, which has no sexual connotation like the word *shachav*. So, if the author had wanted to hint of a sexual union, it would have been very easy to do so. But he did not. They had to be discreet here, because if he were suspected of having relations with a Gentile, he would forfeit his right to redemption.⁴⁰ As a token of his love and a sign that he would keep his oath, he gave Ruth six measures of barley weighing approximately 40 pounds by modern estimates. The number six was significant in that it represented the number of incompleteness. But the gift was for Naomi, his cousin; it was not for Ruth.

When Ruth arrived at her residence, Naomi asked: *Who art thou, my daughter?*-- meaning: Are you to be married? Then seeing the six measures of barley, she knew that the matter was soon to be settled.

Boaz then went to the city gate where important legal transactions were made and called Tov aside. Here he is referred to anonymously as John Doe or *paloni almoni*.⁴¹ Then ten elders or a quorum (*minyán*) were called to sit in judgment. Each elder had to be over at least ten men. The need for ten came from rabbinic tradition concerning the evil congregation in Numbers 14:27. Boaz then announced that Naomi who returned from Moab, was destitute, and had to sell the land, which belonged to Elimelech. A public offer is then made to Tov to buy and redeem the land. His response was: *I will redeem it*. This was the financial picture that Tov was presented with: Technically he would have bought the land and owned it. Naomi would have received money for her retirement and Ruth's sustenance. Tov would have profited from cultivating the land like he would on any other plot of land and Naomi would have received a cash settlement like she would have from any other buyer. So just what would the redeemer have done? He would have provided the ancestral rest needed by Elimelech. There was a Hebrew tradition that the soul of the dead would not have peace in the afterlife if living descendants were not on ancestral soil because he would cease to exist in the memory of the clan. In an Old Testament Biblical context this was the ultimate tragedy. So, in other words, the land had to remain within the family.

Then Boaz made the startling announcement that Ruth, the Moabitess and widow of the deceased, was part and parcel of the land saying: *What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the*

³⁹ The opposite of a levirate marriage is a sororate marriage. Here the man will marry his wife's sister if she dies or is barren. This was never a Jewish custom.

⁴⁰ This later became rabbinic law and was possible true at that time.

⁴¹ 1 Samuel 21:2 and 2 Kings 6:8.

dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance (Ruth 4:5). The first reference to the word “dead” concerns Ruth’s former husband and the second is Elimelech. It was Elimelech’s name that was to be raised up by this transaction.⁴²

Immediately, Tov reversed his position and said: *I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it* (Ruth 4:6). He no longer could redeem the land because the financial picture had completely changed. Now he would not own the land but would merely hold it in trust for Ruth’s offspring, but the money would still be paid to Naomi for the sale of the land. Furthermore, Naomi would now be his responsibility since she was Ruth’s mother-in-law. Lastly, Ruth’s offspring would not only receive title to the land, but the child would be entitled to a share of the estate that Tov’s children would receive upon his death. It was such a bad deal from his standpoint that he removed his sandal and gave it to Boaz. This was the ancient tradition of showing that without shoes you will not be able to walk on⁴³ and hence claim the right to the land that he was transferring to his kin. In the text, this custom of removing a sandal is explained because it had disappeared from the land when the author recorded the events.

Upon Tov’s refusal, Ruth made no motion to spit in his face because this situation was quite unlike the laws of the levirate marriage⁴⁴ described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10⁴⁵. Like Orpah, Tov did the expected, but Boaz practiced hesed saying: *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. 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* (Ruth 4:9-10). It is here that we finally learn that Ruth was married to Mahlon.

The people then wish that Ruth become like Rachel and Leah in building the House of Israel and like the House of Perez that Tamar bore to Judah.

Scripture then says that *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* (Ruth 4:13). Rabbinic tradition narrates that Boaz died after consummation of the marriage on his wedding night. So for the second time in this story, we see the torch of life passed by chance per chance on the same day first from Boaz’ wife to Ruth and then from Boaz to Ruth’s son.

Then an unusual local Jewish custom is encountered when the women, and not the father or the men of the village, name the child. He is called Obed meaning servant

⁴² The meaning of Verse 5 is dependent on Verse 3 which speaks of *our brother Elimelech*.

⁴³ See Genesis 13:17 and Joshua 1:3 where land is claimed by walking on it.

⁴⁴ Leviticus 25:25-31; 47-55. Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Job 19:25.

⁴⁵ *If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, 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, and perform the duty of an husband’s brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother’s wife, then let his brother’s wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband’s brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband’s brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother’s house—Dt 25:5-9*

as was Ruth and the Messiah.⁴⁶ Naomi then took the child cradled it in her bosom (*chek*), but did not take it to breast, and raised it as her own. And the women said: *There is a son born to Naomi*. Legally the boy was hers. Biologically it was Ruth's. This is probably the first instance of surrogate motherhood in literature with Ruth bearing the child for Naomi. The women said to Naomi that the Lord has not left you without a redeemer (*goel*) today. So, Naomi's redeemer⁴⁷ was neither Boaz nor Ruth, but Obed. And to Ruth they paid perhaps the greatest honor given to a woman in Scripture in saying that she was better to Naomi *than seven sons*. Jewish tradition says that the boy was born circumcised, and Ruth lived to see David's famous son, Solomon.

Then the real reason for writing the book of Ruth is given. In neither Judges nor Samuel is the genealogy of the Messiah given. After the death of Solomon, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah split. The ten tribes to the north followed the House of Ishbosheth, Saul's⁴⁸ son, while Judah followed the House of David through Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and the grandson of David, Samuel's anointed. The purpose of the book, written during this turgid seven-year period, is to show that the genealogy of the Messiah was through the line of David, and that although it was tainted with Gentile blood in four instances, it was legitimate by the Law of Moses.

In the New Testament, there are two genealogies for the Messiah. In the book of Luke written by a Jew⁴⁹ for the Gentile, the genealogy of Mary written in ascending order is given while in the book of Matthew written for the Jew, the genealogy of Joseph, Jesus' legal father is written in descending order. They are identical from Abraham to David. In that path we see:

- 1) And Judas begat Phares and Zara of **Thamar** (Mt 1:3)
- 2) And Salmon begat Boaz of **Rachab** (Mt 1:5a)
- 3) And Boaz begat Obed of **Ruth** (Mt 1:5b)
- 4) And David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias (**Bathsheba**)

Since Jewishness was determined in Scripture by the father, which is contrary to today's custom, these four women were grafted into the olive tree without corrupting the bloodline of the Messiah.

The rabbis maintain that the reason for writing the book of Ruth was to show that even though David had a Moabitess in his bloodline, he was not disqualified from being king for two reasons: 1) Ruth had become a legal convert to Judaism and 2) the prohibition on marrying a Gentile⁵⁰ was applicable only to the male line and not the female line, which Ruth represented.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum states that the reason for writing this book was to show the hegemony of the House of David over the House of Saul. If this is true, then it was

⁴⁶ Isaiah 53:1

⁴⁷ Ruth's redeemer or *goel* (*gaal*) was Boaz.

⁴⁸ Saul and three of his sons were killed in the battle of Gilboa—2 Sam 2:8. Only Ishbosheth survived.

⁴⁹ Acts 20:6-7; 21:10; 26:7; 27:9. These four verses prove that Luke was a Jew.

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 7:3-4 for Canaanites and 23:4 for Moabites.

most likely written during the seven years of the divided kingdom between David and Ishbosheth. In this case, hegemony would be shown by comparing the evil deeds of Gibeah, which represented Ishbosheth's ancestry, to the law-abiding ways of Bethlehem, which represents David's ancestry. The book of Ruth would then be an appendix to the book of Judges, which decries the evils of Ishbosheth's Gibeah and extols *hesed* among the remnant in David's Bethlehem.

Personally, I think four reasons can be given for the writing of the book of Ruth: 1) The first is the most obvious and portrays a delightful and historical story of *hesed* among God's remnant. 2) The second holds to the rabbinic that even though David had a Moabitess in his bloodline, he was not disqualified from the throne. 3) The third was to show that even though both the House of David and the House of Ishbosheth were qualified for the throne, Ishbosheth by blood and David by both blood and consecration, David's ancestry gave him hegemony since he came from the Godly town of Bethlehem. 4) The fourth and final reason is prophetic Messianic allegory. It has been said: "On every page, the Messiah." It is this allegory that knits the entire story together.

A simile is a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another usually with the words "as" or "like": *the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire*—Exodus 24:17.

A metaphor is a figure of speech comparing one thing to another as if it were the case: *the LORD thy God is a consuming fire*—Deuteronomy 4:24.

A parable is an extended simile: *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field*—Matthew 13:31.

What then is an allegory, but an extended metaphor. The story of Ruth is an extended metaphor superposed over the fabric of a true story. The story takes place in the past, the allegory in the future. Naomi represents mother Israel while Ruth represents the Gentiles. Ruth, the Gentile, became aware of Yahweh by oral statements from the Jewish Tenach just as today's Gentile has both the Old and New Testaments written by Jews. Naomi did not point Ruth to the kinsman redeemer (*goel*), the Messiah, here Boaz, because she did not recognize the Messiah.⁵¹ It was Ruth who found the Redeemer, by chance per chance, and, going full circle, reintroduced the Redeemer to Naomi. But Ruth did not meet the Redeemer directly until, she was introduced to him by his *naar*, or trusted servant, in this case, the Holy Spirit. Later in the field, during the noon meal, and later at the threshing floor, Boaz gives Ruth many blessings and gifts all because of his love for Naomi. Today, many of the blessings the Gentile believer receives is because of God's love for the Jews. Paul supports this theme by saying: *Through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness—* Romans 11:11-12. Here Paul says that if the rejection of the Messiah has resulted in blessings for the Gentile, just think how many more blessings he will receive when the Jew returns to the Messiah. In the story, Ruth becomes the bride of Boaz, Naomi

⁵¹ In fact, she apparently did not know that Tov was a closer relative than Boaz.

is taken into his household, and Ruth is given more praise than any other woman in the Bible as she is said to be *better to thee than seven sons*.

Knowing how allegory works, one can now answer whether Ruth sat or worked while waiting for Boaz in Chapter 2 Verse 7.

What is remarkable in this book is the slow transformation of Ruth, the Moabitess. She is

- 1) *nochri* foreigner Ruth 2:10
- 2) *shipah* lower servant Ruth 2:13
- 3) *amah* maid servant Ruth 3:9
- 4) *issah* wife Ruth 4:13.

It is after having progressed to the third level, that Ruth makes a statement that could well have been the title of the book: *I am Ruth*—Ruth the Gentile, Ruth the church, Ruth the believer, Ruth the woman.

The entire book of Ruth is a stunning example of Gentile salvation predicted in the Tenach (Old Testament) with the minor prophet's proclamation: *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call* (Joel 2:32). It shows that God's *hesed* is not limited to the after life but as in the book of Job, the story of a Gentile, the rewards in this life are there also. This is because it is by chance per chance that God's providence exists in our lives as believers, and even in the course of affliction we as believers know: *that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose* (Romans 8:28).