

'Ruth the Moabitess'.

The subject of this document is the story and the character of 'Ruth the Moabitess', as she is described no less than five times¹ in the book which carries her name.

That book has three main characters: (i) a destitute widow,² (ii) a Gentile foreigner,³ and (iii) a descendant of a prostitute.⁴ And what a story it tells!

We have two short readings, both taken from chapter 1.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

The first reading commences at verse 7.

She [Naomi] set out from the place where she was [in Moab] with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house.⁵ May the Lord deal kindly with you ... may the Lord grant that each of you will find rest⁶ in the house of her husband!' ...

The second reading begins at the latter part of verse 14.

And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And Naomi said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law'.

But Ruth said, 'Do not plead with⁷ me to leave you, to return from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death separates you and me'.

And when Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said no more.

And those words of Ruth must rank as one of the greatest declarations of devotion and commitment in the whole of Scripture.

INTRODUCTION

This young Moabitess is one of only two women given the honour of having had their names attached to books of Scripture, the other being Esther, a young Jewess who lived many centuries later⁸ (not in Israel, but in Persia).

There are many fascinating points of comparison and contrast between the recorded stories of these two young women.

A. Ruth and Esther: comparisons.

1. The biblical books which bear their names begin with the very same term:

(i) '*It came to pass in the days when the judges judged*'.⁹

(ii) '*It came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus*'.¹⁰

These are the only two occasions where this expression commences a book of Scripture.

2. Neither book is directly quoted in the New Testament.

3. Both of the stories exhibit clear cases of God's working providentially behind the scenes, bringing His will and purpose to pass through *seemingly* coincidental happenings. By way of example only:

(i) in the one story, Ruth *chooses* for herself the right 'part' of a certain field in which to glean,¹¹ and

(ii) in the other story, Esther is *chosen* as the successful candidate in an empire-wide royal beauty contest.¹²

4. Early in both accounts, the young women were located in countries in which they were complete strangers.¹³

5. When in those foreign lands, both young women found 'favour' in 'the eyes'/'the sight' of men of high standing,¹⁴ following which they were both urged by a shrewd older relative¹⁵ to make a vitally important request to these influential men.¹⁶

6. Both of the young women complied with the directions which they were given,¹⁷ and, in the event, both of their requests were granted.¹⁸

7. In both instances, the granting of the request had profound and far-reaching implications.¹⁹

For the granting of the two requests played an essential part in preserving from extinction the 'messianic line', a line which can be traced back to the Garden of Eden itself²⁰ and which would terminate in the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus:

(i) The one request (that in the Book of Ruth) preserved that 'messianic line' from extinction by continuing that line when it seemed that it had come to a dead-end;

(ii) The other request (that in the Book of Esther) thwarted the attempt by Israel's enemies (and, no doubt, through and behind them, the sinister design of the great overlord of evil himself²¹) to wipe out that line completely.

8. Both stories largely hinge around events which took place during a critical night:

(i) in the case of Ruth, when the man of high standing woke up suddenly from his sleep at midnight,²² and

(ii) in the case of Esther, when the man of high standing failed to get any sleep at all.²³

9. Both stories focus largely on cases of intermarriage between an Israelite and a Gentile:

(i) in the one instance, the marriage between Boaz and Ruth²⁴ (a 'young *Moabite* woman' as she is described²⁵) and

(ii) in the other, the marriage between Esther and Ahasuerus²⁶ (a famous *Persian* king²⁷).

10. To this day, these two Old Testament stories are read publicly by the Jews during two of their annual Feasts:

(i) the Book of Ruth during the Feast of Pentecost, and

(ii) the Book of Esther during the Feast of Purim.²⁸

B. Ruth and Esther: contrasts.

And yet, although they have much in common, the two stories differ significantly.

1. The one story (that of Ruth) is set sometime *before* Israel's **first** king (Saul) was anointed,²⁹ whereas the other story (that of Esther) is set sometime *after* Israel's **last** king (Zedekiah)³⁰ was carried away, blinded and bound, to Babylon.

2. Ruth was a *Gentile who married a Jew*, whereas Esther was a *Jewess who married a Gentile*. Ruth chose to enter into her marriage, whereas Esther was given no choice about entering into hers.³¹

3. Ruth was a *foreign widow*, who, on her marriage to a Jew, became an important person in the land of Israel, whereas Esther was an *Israelite orphan*, who, on her marriage to a Gentile, became an important person in the land of Persia.

4. The faith of Ruth enabled her to overcome a personal tragedy, whereas the faith of Esther enabled her to overcome a national crisis.

C. 'The days when the judges ruled'.

Before we proceed, we need to remind ourselves how remarkable it is to find a book in our Bibles:

(i) which bears the name of someone who came from a pagan, immoral and idolatrous nation,³² a nation with which God's people in her days (the closing period of Old Testament history) were expressly forbidden to associate.³³

(ii) which, uniquely in Scripture, bears the name of somebody who herself provided an essential link in the genealogy of the Messiah.³⁴

The very first verse of the book sets Ruth's story 'in the days when the judges ruled',³⁵ a period, I believe, of some 320 years,³⁶ spanning from the days of Othniel to the days of Samuel and his ungodly sons.³⁷

The main section of the Book of Judges (from chapter 3 to chapter 16) records, in varying degrees of detail, the history and exploits of twelve individuals³⁸ who can be said³⁹ to have 'judged' (who 'served as leaders', that is⁴⁰) in Israel for differing periods of time and in different areas of the Promised Land, culminating in the tragic death of Samson.

The remaining four chapters (from chapter 17 to chapter 21) are devoted to two distressing and shameful stories, which pull back the curtains on the appallingly low spiritual conditions and moral standards which prevailed during the period of the Judges.⁴¹

D. Departures from 'Bethlehem-Judah'.

The story of Ruth is linked back to the two stories which occupy the closing chapters⁴² of the Book of Judges by the repeated reference to one specific location, namely, to 'Bethlehem-Judah'.⁴³ Each of the three stories opens by telling of someone who 'left' Bethlehem-Judah to find a home elsewhere.⁴⁴

We read, in order:

(i) of a young Levite⁴⁵ who became a bogus priest, equipped with his private sanctuary complete with idolatrous images;⁴⁶

(ii) of a local girl who became the concubine of different Levite and who was brutalised, raped and killed⁴⁷ ... a sordid tale which almost resulted in the extinction of a whole tribe in Israel;⁴⁸ and

(iii) of a man named Elimelech.⁴⁹

In all likelihood, given some of the names mentioned there, the first two stories are set early in the days of the Judges,⁵⁰ with the third story (that of Ruth) taking place rather later.⁵¹

The first two stories, with their many examples of godlessness and unrighteousness, serve only to tarnish and bring discredit on the reputation of the town of Bethlehem-Judah,⁵² whereas the story of Ruth, with its splendid examples of godliness and righteousness set by Boaz and herself, serve rather to redeem and to bring honour to its name.

It would be hard to miss that each of the three double-references to Bethlehem-Judah⁵³ follows hard on the heels of the Spirit's thrice-repeated explanation for the days of lawlessness which largely prevailed throughout the Book of Judges; namely, that 'in those days there was no king in Israel',⁵⁴ an expression which occurs nowhere else.

And it would be equally hard to miss that the story of Ruth ends in a way which stands in marked contrast. For the very last word of the book is a name⁵⁵ ... the name of Ruth and Boaz's great-grandson ... the name of a man destined to become Israel's greatest human king, spoken of by God Himself as 'a man after my heart, who will do all my will'.⁵⁶ That name is, of course, 'David',⁵⁷ a name which would later become associated with 'Bethlehem-Judah'.⁵⁸

E. David and the Lord Jesus.

And with that one word (the name, 'David') the Holy Spirit has built a verbal bridge between 'the days when the judges ruled'⁵⁹ and the establishing of God-appointed kingship in Israel, as recorded in the following book, the First Book of Samuel.⁶⁰ And, not only that, but by means of that name, the Holy Spirit points us forward to the coming of Him who would be known as 'the Son of David',⁶¹ to our Lord Jesus Himself.

And it is precisely there that Ruth's enchanting life-story fits into the main Bible storyline. For, as we noted above, this young Moabitess proved to be the channel through whom God preserved intact that 'messianic line' which stretched *from* the Garden of Eden,⁶² *through* the likes of Abraham,⁶³ Judah⁶⁴ and David, *to* the long-awaited Bruiser (the Crusher) of the Serpent's head, the Saviour of the world.⁶⁵

Ruth's life and personal history play a critically important part, therefore, in the outworking of God's grand and eternal purpose.

THE POWER AND PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Not that we can claim to know much of 'Ruth's life and personal history'. For, as far as the biblical record goes, *from* the time we first meet her properly on the road from Moab to Bethlehem *to* the moment when she steps down from the stage with the birth of Obed, everything takes place in little more than twelve months or so.⁶⁶ But, given the crucial role which Ruth played then, ***this brief period must rank as one of the most important years in the whole of Bible history.***

The Jewish writer, Flavius Josephus, concludes *his* record of Ruth's story with the words, 'I was ... obliged to relate this history of Ruth, because I had a mind to demonstrate the power of God, who, without difficulty, can raise those that are of ordinary parentage to dignity and splendour, to which He advanced David, though he were born of such [lowly] parents'.⁶⁷

Without doubting in any way that (in the words of Josephus) the 'power of God' was demonstrated in the 'history of Ruth', I have to say that Josephus misses entirely the main lessons of Ruth's life and experience; not least, in the marvellous and mysterious way⁶⁸ in which God's providence was then at work in the lives of His people and 'at work', as so often (and, indeed, as normally) out of human view.

'God's power' was evident, then, not so much in raising up 'those that are of ordinary parentage to dignity and splendour' (such as in the case of David) but in working providentially throughout the story, without which working there would have been no David at all!

GOD AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES

At no point in Ruth's history do we read of any miracle or of any angelic visitation.⁶⁹ And, although God is *mentioned* by name and title in almost a quarter⁷⁰ of the book's eighty-five verses, in point of fact, we read of God's *intervening* on only two occasions:

- (i) once towards the beginning of chapter 1, when He puts an end to the famine in Israel,⁷¹ and
- (ii) once towards the end of chapter 4, when He blesses Ruth with conception.⁷²

Not, of course, that these were unimportant interventions. Far from it! For (i) the first divine intervention prompts Naomi to return to Bethlehem, which in turn brings Ruth there as well, and (ii) the second divine intervention continues the vital genealogy which gave Israel a David and the world a Saviour.

But, on all other occasions, God's name is heard only on the lips of the various characters. By way of example only, we hear His name when Naomi,⁷³ Boaz,⁷⁴ and the people of Bethlehem⁷⁵ invoke His blessing on Ruth.

In the life of Ruth, we have a case of what we might call 'the invisible hand of God', unerringly directing seemingly ordinary everyday events, which, ***with hindsight***, we recognise to be the gradual unfolding of His great and gracious purpose.⁷⁶

I don't pretend to understand how He did it, but, without over-riding anyone's freedom in any way and without treating any man or woman as a mere puppet on a string, in His own unique and marvellous way, God wove the decisions and actions, not only of Ruth, but also of Naomi, of Boaz and of all others, into the fabric of that purpose.

A CHAIN OF TEN LINKS

And to help us get some feel for how precise were the workings of that divine providence, I want to picture with you those workings as a chain comprised of ten links.

We will find that every one of these links proves absolutely necessary to get us from 'the days when 'there was *no king* in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes'⁷⁷) through to the name of *the king* after God's own heart.⁷⁸

And, in turn, that king himself forms a link in a much longer chain ... in a vitally important chain which extends across more than a millennium to the coming of '*the King of Kings*',⁷⁹ our Lord Jesus.⁸⁰

Let us take a brief look at each of the links which make up the ten-link chain which I trace through the Book of Ruth.

1. A famine in Israel, and Elimelech's decision to go to Moab.⁸¹

The story begins with an account of a famine in Israel and a man's decision to seek greener pastures in the neighbouring land of Moab.

Although famines were far from unknown in the land of Israel,⁸² we can be sure that it was no mere chance which caused a certain Elimelech, together with his family, to decide 'to jump ship' and to seek refuge in a land of proverbial fertility.⁸³ For, without that decision, there would have been no chain at all!

2. The marriage of Elimelech's son Mahlon to Ruth the Moabitess and the death of the three Israelite menfolk.⁸⁴

Although Elimelech apparently intended to stay for just a short period in Moab,⁸⁵ in the event he ended up settling there.⁸⁶ It was while there that his one son, Mahlon, 'just happened' to meet, and to marry, a young Moabitess by the name of Ruth. And it was when there that both Elimelech and his two sons 'just happened' to die.⁸⁷

And so it is that a book which *closes* with one marriage and the celebration of the birth of a baby boy, *opens* with two marriages and the funerals of three grown men.

3. The Lord's ending the famine in Israel and Naomi's consequent decision to return to the land of Judah.⁸⁸

When the Lord 'visited His people' and ended the famine in Israel (so that there was now bread again in 'the House of Bread', the meaning of the place-name, 'Bethlehem'), Elimelech's widow Naomi 'just happened' to take the opportunity to return to her former home.

4. Ruth's devotion and attachment to Naomi.⁸⁹

Our fourth link comprises Ruth's firm attachment to Naomi.

In spite of Naomi's *fourfold plea* that Ruth should 'return' with her sister-in-law Orpah to her homeland and family,⁹⁰ the young Moabitess 'clung' tenaciously⁹¹ to Naomi⁹² and, with her *sixfold pledge* of loyalty,⁹³ blessed all later generations with one of the most beautiful expressions of determined devotion ever recorded.

5. The timing of Naomi's and Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem.⁹⁴

Naomi and Ruth 'just happened' to arrive at their destination (Bethlehem) 'at the beginning of barley harvest'.

This timing was to prove critical. For, apart from this, there would have been no 'gleaning'⁹⁵ (by Ruth or anyone else) and no opportunity, therefore, for Ruth to meet Boaz. And the chain would simply have broken at this point.

6. Ruth's seemingly 'accidental' choice of the right 'part' of the right field.⁹⁶

And when Ruth did go gleaning, she 'just happened' to choose the right 'part' of the right 'field'.

Literally translated, the text reads, 'her chance chanced on (or 'she happened to happen on', if you prefer) the part of the field belonging to Boaz'.

Little did Ruth realise that morning how much was to rest on her seemingly arbitrary choice. But a very big door was to swing on this very small hinge!

I have read that Rowland Bingham, founder of the Sudan Interior Mission, was once seriously injured in a car accident. He was rushed to hospital in a critical condition and the following day, when he regained consciousness, he asked the nurse what he was doing there.

'Don't try to talk now, just rest', she replied. 'You have been in an accident'.

'Accident!' Mr Bingham exclaimed. 'There are no accidents in the life of a Christian'.⁹⁷

And Ruth's arrival in the 'part of the field belonging to Boaz' was most certainly 'no accident'; rather, it was a God-ordained appointment!

One seventeenth century commentator expressed it well (if rather quaintly), when he asserted that the 'divine hand **leads Ruth blindfold** to the field of Boaz'.⁹⁸ I suspect that Naomi would later have said a hearty 'Amen' to that.⁹⁹

7. Two strands: (a) The timely arrival of Boaz, who 'just happened' to be both in the Messianic line and a close relative of Naomi's, and (b) the favour shown by Boaz towards Ruth.¹⁰⁰

(a) The timely arrival.

'And behold, Boaz came'.¹⁰¹ 'Behold', that is, *right* on cue, the *right* man arrives.

It is not difficult to identify other occasions recorded in Scripture which provide examples of the 'perfect timing' of God's providence. Evidence that God's clock keeps strict time is provided, for instance, in:

(i) Genesis 24: Abraham's servant prayed, "Let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink', and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—let her be the one you have appointed" ... 'and it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah ... came out'.¹⁰²

Sure enough: Rebekah was 'the young woman'!

(ii) 2 Samuel 15: David prayed, "O Lord ... turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!" ... 'And it happened when David had come to the top of the mountain ... there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him'.¹⁰³

Sure enough: Hushai was the man to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.¹⁰⁴

(iii) Esther 6: Following Haman's erection of the fifty-cubits-high gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai,¹⁰⁵ 'that night the king could not sleep'.¹⁰⁶

Sure enough: everything hinged around Ahasuerus's insomnia 'that night', during which the Lord (who Himself neither slumbers nor sleeps¹⁰⁷) began to turn the tables and to bring to nothing all of Haman's schemes and intentions.

To return to our story, Boaz 'just happened' to:

(i) feature in the Messianic line: 'Salmon begat Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz begat Obed by Ruth, and Obed begat Jesse ... and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ',¹⁰⁸ and

(ii) be a near relative of Naomi's: 'Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "... The man is near of kin to us, one who has the right to redeem us"'.¹⁰⁹

As Naomi was quick to note, Boaz was 'one who has the right to redeem us'. He was, that is, 'a kinsman-redeemer'.¹¹⁰

The background to this particular description, 'kinsman-redeemer', lies in the Law of God.

When the Promised Land was first apportioned between the tribes of Israel, each family took great pains to ensure that its allocated portion (its 'inheritance') remained within that family. Yet, adverse circumstances (such as extreme poverty) could sometimes cause the land to be sold outside of the family.

The Law made provision for this by giving male family members both the right and the responsibility to repurchase any family land which was sold. The nearest relatives to the original owner of the land were known as 'kinsman-redeemers'.¹¹¹ And, in Naomi's case, Boaz 'just happened' to qualify for that role!

(b) The favour shown.

Boaz displays special favour and kindness to young Ruth.¹¹²

It is possible that, in showing kindness to the *non-Israelite* stranger,¹¹³ Boaz may have been partly influenced by the fact that one of his ancestors was Rahab, the *non-Israelite* prostitute from Jericho in Canaan.¹¹⁴ Certainly, Boaz took account both of Ruth's past history and of her kindness to Naomi.¹¹⁵

But Boaz was not required to respond in the exceptional way that he did. And, clearly, had he not shown the remarkable favour to Ruth which he did, 'the chain of providence' would have ended at this point.

But, before we pass on, we cannot but note the delightful expression which Boaz uses to describe Ruth's relationship to the Lord. He pictures her as a young bird snuggling up under its mother's wings for shelter and protection: 'the God of Israel', he says to her, '*under whose wings* you have come to take refuge!'¹¹⁶

8. Ruth's willingness to carry out Naomi's instructions about proposing marriage to Boaz and his (qualified) acceptance of her proposal.¹¹⁷

With her words, 'All that you say to me I will do', Ruth consents¹¹⁸ to carry out Naomi's rather audacious scheme.

Naomi's stratagem was that, in accordance with an accepted custom,¹¹⁹ Ruth should propose marriage to Boaz,¹²⁰ on the grounds, in particular, that he was 'a kinsman-redeemer'.¹²¹

And I must stress, in passing, that there is no question of anything improper (still less immoral) having taken place in the threshing floor that night!¹²²

Boaz readily confirms that he was indeed a 'kinsman-redeemer' to both Ruth and Naomi,¹²³ but he is compelled to point out that Ruth's proposal of marriage raised two serious issues:

(i) it would involve him in more than his simply marrying her.¹²⁴ It would involve his also (as the very description 'kinsman-redeemer' implied) 'redeeming' Naomi's land and inheritance. He would be required, therefore, along with acquiring a wife for himself, to buy the family property.¹²⁵

(ii) There could well prove to be 'a legal impediment' to what Ruth and Naomi had in mind in that there was another male relative (another 'kinsman-redeemer') who was 'nearer' than Boaz and who must, therefore, be offered first refusal.¹²⁶

But Boaz makes it clear to Ruth that, in the event of the 'nearer' relative's unwillingness to proceed with 'the package deal', he stood very ready to do so: 'If he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you'.¹²⁷

9. The refusal by the 'nearer' kinsman to exercise his prior right to purchase Naomi's land and to marry Ruth.¹²⁸

Having met Boaz previously in *the harvest field* in chapter 2,¹²⁹ and at *the threshing floor* in chapter 3,¹³⁰ we now follow him to *the town gate* in chapter 4.¹³¹

Here the elders of the town 'witnessed' the unnamed 'nearer' kinsman's refusal to sign up to the full deal; in particular, to his marrying a widow.¹³² This he chose not to do because it would have meant that their first son would inherit the redeemed property in the name of *the deceased* and not in his name¹³³ and that, therefore, the property would wind up ultimately in the hands of Elimelech's family, rather than his own.

So, 'Thank you but no thank you'!

And, waiving his right to acquire both land and wife, the 'nearer' kinsman, so to speak, simply walked off the stage of the inspired text. Or, perhaps we should say, he 'hopped' off the stage. For the man had first to remove one of his sandals and hand it to Boaz, an ancient custom signifying that he relinquished his right to walk as owner over the land which was now up for sale.¹³⁴

10. Ruth's conception and the birth of a son.

Our final link brings us to the closing section of the book, which focuses, as I guess we would expect, to no small extent, on 'happy' Naomi.

I say 'happy Naomi' because this dear lady certainly no longer wants to be addressed as '*Mara*', her self-chosen name (meaning '*Bitter*') back in chapter 1, which name had broadcast her then belief that the Lord had dealt most 'bitterly' with her.¹³⁵

Now she is well and truly '*Naomi*' (meaning '*Pleasant*') again and ready, I have no doubt, to herald that in the present 'the lines have fallen to me in *pleasant* places'.¹³⁶

But, Naomi apart, the spotlight falls on three persons; a *bridegroom*, a *bride* and (sometime later) a *baby*.

Ruth has come a long way; from the *field* of Boaz,¹³⁷ to the *feet* of Boaz¹³⁸ and, now, to the *family* of Boaz;¹³⁹ from want to wealth; from poverty to plenty.

But, more important for our study, Ruth, who had continued childless for many years when married to her first husband,¹⁴⁰ is now blessed by the Lord with conception.¹⁴¹ And, through her baby boy, Ruth is destined to become the great-grandmother of King David¹⁴² and, through him, herself to form a link in that golden chain which, as we noted earlier, stretches right on to the coming into the world of 'the Son of David',¹⁴³ our great Kinsman-Redeemer,¹⁴⁴ the Lord Jesus.

THE CHARACTER OF RUTH

'What kind of young woman is this', we must surely ask, 'who was privileged (i) to have her name attached to one of the books of our Old Testament and (ii) to have her name included in the opening chapter of our New Testament?'

What beautiful traits of character, that is, do we find portrayed in the life of this converted Moabitess?

And I say 'beautiful *traits of character*' deliberately. For we are told nothing of Ruth's *physical* attributes and appearance. As far as the record goes, there is no evidence that she could match the good looks (both in face and in figure) of a Rachel,¹⁴⁵ of an Abigail,¹⁴⁶ of a Bathsheba,¹⁴⁷ or of an Esther.¹⁴⁸ But we can say that Ruth possessed something of far greater value and importance than mere physical beauty; she possessed beauty of character.¹⁴⁹

And, when I scan through the biblical record, there are **nine** qualities and virtues which stand out to me above all others.

1. Ruth's devotion and kindness to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

I note Ruth's characteristic thoughtfulness and consideration which she showed for a lady now too old to remarry and to bear children¹⁵⁰ and, therefore, presumably too old to stoop and to toil in any field. And this young Moabitess displayed complete disregard for herself when, in going herself to do the gleaning,¹⁵¹ she spared Naomi any reproachful or pitying gazes which might have been directed at her by those who had known her in her former days.¹⁵²

Yes, the women of Bethlehem were certainly right when they spoke to Naomi of Ruth's 'love' for her.¹⁵³ Interestingly, this is the only time that the word 'love' occurs in the whole book.

And I note that Boaz himself explained to Ruth that, as far as he was concerned, his kindness to her simply replicated the kindness she had shown to Naomi.¹⁵⁴

And words fail me to speak of Ruth's six-fold pledge of loyalty to her then-desolate mother-in-law.¹⁵⁵

2. Ruth's great personal courage.

And we know that Ruth's devotion to Naomi involved her in no small cost. It meant that she left her own people to live in a foreign land, where, at best, she would be considered *an outsider* (as she was made painfully aware¹⁵⁶) and, at worst, given the history of Israel's past military and religious encounters with the Moabites,¹⁵⁷ she would be considered *an enemy*.

And I observe that, when the narrative reports her gathering and then bringing her hoard of grain to Naomi, two small asides¹⁵⁸ serve to remind us that for a single woman to engage in such work (particularly, I suspect, in the days of the Judges) would possibly expose her to considerable *physical* danger:

(i) Boaz said to Ruth, ‘... have I not charged the young men *not to touch you?*’¹⁵⁹

(ii) Naomi said to Ruth, ‘It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field *you be assaulted*’.¹⁶⁰

3. Ruth’s willing submission to Naomi.

In this connection, we observe that

(i) Ruth would not so much as venture into a field to glean without the prior consent of her mother-in-law,¹⁶¹ and

(ii) later, when confronted by Naomi with her audacious and somewhat hazardous plan, Ruth simply replied, ‘All that you say I will do’.¹⁶²

4. Ruth’s moral purity.

The fact that Naomi was prepared to urge on young Ruth the action which she did¹⁶³ is no small indication of her confidence in Ruth, as well as in her own near relative, Boaz.

Naomi was assured that Ruth was made of very different stuff from some other young Moabite women of the past¹⁶⁴ and, indeed, made of very different stuff from the elder daughter of Lot, from whom Ruth was distantly descended.¹⁶⁵

5. Ruth’s courtesy.

Courtesy is a quality in evidence from the moment that Ruth first enters the property of Boaz.¹⁶⁶

The Law of God provided for several categories of people who were authorised (during harvest times in Israel) to glean¹⁶⁷ the ears of cereal grain which (i) were located at the perimeters or corners of the fields, (ii) fell from the hands of the paid reapers or (iii) were simply overlooked and forgotten.¹⁶⁸

These categories were mainly the *poor*, the *stranger* (the foreigner, that is)¹⁶⁹ and the *widow*.¹⁷⁰

We know that young Ruth met each of these criteria. And yet, though possessing all three qualifications, she took nothing for granted and never presumed to exercise her rights as a poor widow from a foreign land.

In contrast, she made a point of, very respectfully, requesting prior permission before ever starting to glean, a point duly noted by the servant overseeing Boaz’s property.¹⁷¹

And I note also the respect which she showed, in a manner appropriate to her day, to Boaz as the owner of the property where she laboured.¹⁷²

And you and I do well to remember that courtesy and respect cost no more in our day than they did in Ruth’s!

6. Ruth’s diligence when busied with her chosen task.

Not only was Ruth content to be the breadwinner for herself and Naomi¹⁷³ but she soon proved that she was no stranger to hard work. We find that she made a favourable impression on her very first day by toiling all through its hours, stopping for only one short period, when the scorching heat of the mid-day sun compelled her to take cover in some shelter or lodge in the field.¹⁷⁴

And I note that, having started ‘at the beginning of barley harvest’,¹⁷⁵ she worked right through until the end of wheat harvest,¹⁷⁶ in all likelihood, a period of three months.¹⁷⁷

7. Ruth’s modesty and meekness.

When Ruth spoke to Boaz of her own unworthiness (on the very first occasion they met)¹⁷⁸, although we wouldn’t realise it from our English translations, she actually engaged in a subtle play on words.

We probably read her words as 'Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, a stranger?' But, in point of fact, the words rendered 'take notice' and 'a stranger' sound very much alike in Hebrew.¹⁷⁹ We might, therefore, loosely translate her question as, 'Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should *take notice* of me, *the unnoticed*'.

But the main point for us to register is Ruth's modesty and self-confessed lack of status or importance.

And it is lovely to find that Ruth never makes any attempt to speak well of herself; others do that for her. Well does the Proverb say, 'Let another praise you, and not your own mouth'.¹⁸⁰

Again, even when, later, she is made aware of Boaz's relationship to Naomi and herself,¹⁸¹ we do not read that she made any effort to exploit this to her own advantage or to win any special favours for herself.¹⁸²

8. Ruth's 'good testimony' in the eyes of all around her.

Although she wasn't an overseer in a local assembly¹⁸³ and although her name wasn't Demetrius,¹⁸⁴ Ruth had a 'good report' from everyone!

(i) At their very first meeting, Boaz could speak to Ruth of his having been told by others, not only of her kindness to Naomi since the death of her (Ruth's) husband but also of how (Abraham-like¹⁸⁵) she had left her father's house and her native land to emigrate to a place and a people which she had not known before.¹⁸⁶

(ii) In the closing chapter of the book, 'all the people who were in the gate',¹⁸⁷ together with 'the elders' of the town, go so far as to pronounce a blessing on Ruth, which, in one sense, raised her to the level of Rachel and Leah, who, together with their handmaidens, were the great mother figures in Israel.¹⁸⁸

(iii) And then, in the same chapter, the women of Bethlehem make it clear to Naomi that, in their estimation, Ruth was 'better' to her than seven sons.¹⁸⁹ And this, please note, in a culture in which sons were highly prized and this, indeed, *after* Ruth had given to Naomi, in effect, 'a son' of her own.¹⁹⁰

But, between Boaz's first meeting with Ruth, and these two closing commendations, Boaz assures Ruth that all his fellow townsmen had come to recognise her as 'a virtuous woman'¹⁹¹ ... as 'a woman of noble character',¹⁹² 'a woman of excellence',¹⁹³ 'a woman of worth',¹⁹⁴ as the words have been variously translated.¹⁹⁵

Interestingly, that description of Ruth as 'a virtuous woman' is the same as the description given of the 'ideal wife' in the closing section of the Book of Proverbs.¹⁹⁶ That is the passage which assesses the value of such a wife as being 'far above rubies',¹⁹⁷ far above, that is, any jewels¹⁹⁸ or precious stones.¹⁹⁹

And, without a doubt, Ruth could easily have sat for a portrait of that 'ideal wife'.²⁰⁰ Small wonder that Boaz married her! Following which, her husband, would, I am sure, have happily risen up to praise her in the words of that same inspired eulogy, 'Many women have done virtuously ('worthily, excellently'), but you excel ('you surpass', 'you eclipse') them all'.²⁰¹

And all this can be said, remember, about a young woman who came from a dark pagan background ... who came from among 'the people of Chemosh'²⁰² ... 'Chemosh' being the principal deity of the Moabites,²⁰³ to whom young children, among others, were sacrificed as offerings.²⁰⁴

But, happily for baby Obed, *his* life was safe, for his mother had long since 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God'.²⁰⁵

Last, but by no means least, I draw attention to

9. Ruth's faith.

On top of Ruth's evident trust in her mother-in law, the text of Scripture underscores her trust in the Lord, and, in particular, in the Lord as her refuge and protection.

Ponder carefully the words of the blessing which Boaz pronounced upon Ruth at their first meeting: 'A full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come to take refuge*' ... or, as the King James Version and the Greek Old Testament render his closing words, '*you have come to trust*'.²⁰⁶

CONCLUSION AND THE SHADOW OF GOD'S WINGS

In drawing our study to a close, I can confidently assert that 'the God of Ruth has not abdicated!'

We rest in the knowledge that 'the Lord, the God of Israel' is as much on the throne today as He was over three thousand years ago.

But, as Ruth in her day, so we too in ours see very little of the magnificent tapestry which God is weaving.

And the Lord wants us to trust Him through the very darkest of times. Contemplate today words attributed to Corrie Ten Boom:

'When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer'.

And you and I can rest assured that, although, again as Ruth, we may not always be able to grasp the Lord's ways with us,²⁰⁷ we can always grasp His hand held out to us.

I have drawn attention more than once to the words of Boaz concerning, 'the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge' ... 'under whose wings you have come to trust'²⁰⁸.

And, speaking personally, I find it fascinating that we owe all four Bible references to 'the shadow of God's 'wings' to the pen of Ruth's great-grandson, David, in one or other of his psalms.²⁰⁹

Many of us have long enjoyed singing the words of a nineteenth century hymn²¹⁰ which develops the picture of the believer abiding safely, as it were, 'under' the Lord's 'wings'.

The opening verse of Mr Cushing's hymn reads:

Under His wings I am safely abiding,
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,
Still, I can trust Him; I know He will keep me,
He has redeemed me, and I am His child.

Yes, my brother, my sister, whatever adverse circumstances we are called on to pass through today, we are each able to say

'Still, I can trust Him'.

Notes

¹ Ruth 1. 22; 2. 2, 21; 4. 5, 10; cf. 1. 4; 2. 6.

² Ruth 1. 3, 21.

³ Ruth 1. 4.

⁴ Matt. 1. 5.

⁵ We know that Ruth's father was alive when she left Moab, Ruth 2. 11. In that returning to a 'father's house' (Gen. 38. 11; Lev. 22. 13; Judg. 19. 2-3) would have been more usual, the reference here is probably to the women's quarters of the home where marriages might be arranged (Gen. 24. 28, 67; Song 3. 4; 8. 2).

⁶ 'Rest' here probably refers to the security in Ancient Near Eastern culture that marriage provided for a woman.

⁷ See '*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*', Volume 3, pages 575-576, number 7003. This is the word of Isa. 53. 12 (translated '*made intercession*').

⁸ Ruth's brief story is located sometime between 1370 BC and 1050 BC (probably towards the earlier part), whereas Esther's story occupies from 483 BC and 478 BC.

⁹ Ruth 1. 1.

¹⁰ Esther 1. 1.

¹¹ Ruth 2. 3.

¹² Esther 2. 2-17.

¹³ Ruth 1. 19; 2. 10; Esther 2. 5-7.

¹⁴ Ruth 2. 10 with verse 1, and Esther 2. 17 with chapter 1 verse 1.

¹⁵ A mother-in-law, and an older cousin, Esther 2. 7, respectively. (The word 'daughter' is used to describe both Ruth and Esther; Ruth 2. 2, 22; 3. 1, 16, 18 {cf. 1. 11, 12, 13} and Esther 2. 7, 15.)

¹⁶ Ruth 3. 2-4, 9, and Esther 4. 8-16; 7. 2-4.

¹⁷ Ruth 3. 5; Esther 4. 15-16.

¹⁸ Ruth 3. 11, 13; Esther 8. 3-8.

¹⁹ Ruth 4. 10, 13, 17 with Matt. 1. 5, 16; Esther 9. 1.

²⁰ Gen. 3. 15.

²¹ Cf. Rev. 12. 1-5.

²² Ruth 3. 8.

²³ Esther 6. 1; literally, 'the king's sleep fled'.

²⁴ Ruth 4. 13.

²⁵ Ruth 2. 6 ESV.

²⁶ Esther 2. 17.

²⁷ A name better known in its ordinary Greek form of 'Xerxes', who reigned over Persia from 485 BC to 465 BC.

²⁸ 'Anti-Semites have always hated the book (of Esther), and the Nazis forbade its reading in the crematoria and the concentration camps. In the dark days before their deaths, Jewish inmates of Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, and Bergen-Belsen wrote the Book of Esther from memory and read it in secret on Purim', Gordis, *'Megillat Esther'*, pages 13-14, cited by Edwin M. Yamauchi, *'The Archaeological Background of Esther'*, *Bibliotheca sacra*, April-June 1980, page 112.

The high esteem in which the Book of Esther is held among the Jews can be gauged from the well-known saying of Maimonides that 'in the days of the Messiah the prophetic and hagiographical books will pass away, except the book of Esther, which will remain with the Pentateuch', *'McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia'*, the article 'Book of Esther: Canonicist'.

²⁹ 1 Sam. 10. 1.

³⁰ 2 Kings 25. 7; 'the monarch with a wishbone but no backbone!' The earthly sovereignty of the house of David was not restored again after the captivity; 'thus says the Lord God, "... take off the crown"', Ezek. 21. 26.

³¹ See 'was taken', Esther 2. 8, 16-17.

³² Num. 25. 1-2.

³³ Ezra 9. 1-2; 10. 10-11; Neh. 13. 23, 27.

³⁴ Matt. 1, 5, 16.

³⁵ Ruth 1. 1.

³⁶ This spans from the date of Othniel's defeat of Cushan-rishathaim (1367 BC) to the time when Saul became king (1050 BC). The '320' years in the main text is slightly rounded.

³⁷ See 1 Sam. 7. 6, 15; 8. 1-2. Although Samuel was born around the same time as Samson (about the beginning of the Philistine oppression), he outlived him by over 40 years.

³⁸ Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson. This list excludes, of course, Eli (1 Sam. 4. 18), Samuel and Samuel's sons, whose stories are all told in 1 Samuel.

³⁹ Ehud, Gideon and Shamgar are not actually called 'judges' in Scripture, nor are they specifically said to have 'judged'. But I see no reason to exclude them.

⁴⁰ See Leon Wood, *'The Distressing Days of the Judges'*, page 4.

⁴¹ A time of apostasy, warfare, decline, violence, moral decay and anarchy ... a time of moral and political chaos in Israel.

⁴² Josephus apparently reckons the Book of Ruth to be an appendix to Judges and does not count it separately in enumerating the total number of books in the Canon; he cites 'thirteen books' as covering 'from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes', Flavius Josephus, *'Contra Apion'*, Book 1, Section 8.

⁴³ Judg. 17. 7-9; 19. 2, 18; Ruth 1. 1-2.

⁴⁴ 'The man *departed from* the town of Bethlehem-Judah', Judg. 17. 8; 'He said, "We are *travelling from* Bethlehem-Judah", Judg. 19. 18; 'a certain man *went from* Bethlehem-Judah', Ruth 1. 1.

⁴⁵ By name, 'Jonathan' or 'Jehonathan', probably a grandson of Moses; see 'the son of Gershom, the son of Moses', Judg. 18. 30 RV, JND, ESV.

⁴⁶ Judg. 17. 8, 12; 18. 19-20.

⁴⁷ Judges 19.

⁴⁸ Judg. 20-21.

⁴⁹ Ruth 1. 2.

⁵⁰ See note 45 above. Also, in the second story, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, was still high priest, Judg. 20. 28.

⁵¹ Only three generations separate Boaz from David, Ruth 4. 13, 17.

⁵² The first story concerned mainly religion (a private sanctuary, images and improper priestly activity), and the second concerned mainly sex and violence.

⁵³ Judg. 17. 7-8; Judg. 19. 1-2; Ruth 1. 1-2.

⁵⁴ Judg. 17. 6; Judg. 19. 1; Judg. 21. 25.

⁵⁵ The close of Ruth shows that the book was written not earlier than the beginning of David's reign, which event made his genealogy a matter of great interest. An interval of perhaps 100 years elapsed, therefore, between the events themselves and the biblical record of them. Clearly, by the time that the book was written, the custom mentioned in Ruth 4. 7 (of taking off the shoe/sandal) had fallen into disuse, so that the writer felt it necessary to explain the custom.

⁵⁶ Acts 13. 22; cf. 1 Sam. 13. 14. David was *God's* choice of a king for His people, in contrast to Saul, who Scripture makes clear was *the people's* choice.

⁵⁷ Ruth 4. 21-22.

⁵⁸ 1 Sam. 17. 12; cf. 1 Sam. 16. 1, 18-19; Luke 2. 4; John 7. 42.

⁵⁹ Ruth 1. 1.

⁶⁰ 1 Sam. 16. 1. Interestingly, the Book of 1 Samuel contains no record of David's genealogy. The story of Ruth provides the all-important bridge between a time of near anarchy in Israel and the time of established monarchy there.

'The real issue in the biblical texts is what *kind* of monarchy was to exist or to be exercised, not whether Israel should have a monarchy or not ... from the beginning, God had designs for kings in the lineage of Abraham', David M. Howard, Jr., *The Case for Kingship in the Old Testament Narrative Books and the Psalms*, Trinity Journal 9:1 (Spring 1988), page 20.

⁶¹ Matt. 1. 1; 9. 27; 12. 23; 15. 22; 20. 30-31; 21. 9, 15. The association of the Lord Jesus with David spans from the first chapter in the New Testament to the last chapter, Rev. 22. 16; cf. Rom. 1. 3 and 2 Tim. 2. 8.

⁶² Gen. 3. 14-15.

⁶³ Gal. 3. 16.

⁶⁴ Gen. 49. 10.

⁶⁵ John 4. 42; 1 John 4. 14.

⁶⁶ As far as I can see, the whole of the recorded story of Ruth was all over in little more than twelve months:

(i) Time of travel from Moab to Israel ... up to 10 days.

(ii) Time from the beginning of barley harvest to the end of wheat harvest ... three months.

(iii) Time for the marriage proposal, its acceptance, the marriage and the conception of a child ... not long.

(iv) Time to the birth of Obed ... nine months.

⁶⁷ Flavius Josephus, '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book 5, Chapter 9, Paragraph 4.

⁶⁸ Compare the words of William Cowper's hymn:

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform ...*

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
*Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

⁶⁹ In the Book of Judges, the angel of the Lord appears (i) to rebuke idolatry, Judg. 2. 1-4, (ii) to call Gideon, Judg. 6. 11-22, and (iii) to consecrate Samson, Judg. 13. 3-21.

⁷⁰ 'God' occurs three times, and 'Lord' eighteen times.

⁷¹ Ruth 1. 6.

72 Ruth 4. 13.

73 Ruth 1. 8.

74 Ruth 2. 12.

75 Ruth 4. 11.

76 There is no event in the Book of Ruth where a secular historian would recognise God's intervention or supernatural activity. Yet this is precisely the point; God brings about His plan by directing seemingly ordinary events in unseen ways.

77 Judg. 21. 25.

78 Ruth 4. 22 with 1 Sam. 13. 14.

79 Rev. 19. 16.

80 Matt. 1. 6-16.

81 Ruth 1. 1.

82 Famines are recorded, for example, in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Elijah; Gen. 12. 10; 26. 1; 47. 4, 13; 2 Sam. 21.1; Luke 4. 25.

83 Isa. 16. 6-10. 'The fertility of [Moab] in ancient times is indicated by the numerous towns and villages known to have existed there ... the land [was] good pasture ground for cattle and sheep', *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, article 'Moab: The Land'.

84 Ruth 1. 2-4.

85 'To sojourn', Ruth 1. 1.

86 'Remained/continued there', Ruth 1. 2.

87 We must not overlook the importance of the three deaths. Obviously, if Mahlon had not died, there would have been no marriage between Ruth and Boaz. But neither would there have been that marriage if Chilion had not died. Because, according to the Law, it would have been for Chilion to marry Ruth that the firstborn should continue Mahlon's name, Deut. 25. 5-6. It is impossible to speculate what would have happened if Elimelech had not died but it is unlikely that Ruth would have accompanied the couple back to Bethlehem (even if they had gone back) or that she would have then gone gleaning.

88 Ruth 1. 6.

89 Ruth 1. 7-22a.

90 Ruth 1. 8, 11, 15, 16.

91 'Kept close'. This is the word used in Ruth 2. 8, 21, 23 ('keep close {'fast', KJV}'); cf. the same word in 1 Sam. 14. 22; 31. 2; 2 Sam. 20. 2.

92 Ruth 1. 14.

93 '(i) Where you go, I will go, and (ii) where you lodge, I will lodge; (iii) your people shall be my people, and (iv) your God my God. (v) Where you die, I will die, and (vi) there will I be buried', Ruth 1. 16-17.

94 Ruth 1. 22b.

95 Ruth 2. 2.

96 Ruth 2. 3.

97 Source: <http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org/christia/cancer.htm>.

98 Bishop Joseph Hall, *'Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments'*, page 148.

99 Ruth 2. 20.

100 Ruth 2. 4-20.

¹⁰¹ Ruth 2. 4.

¹⁰² Gen. 24. 14-15.

¹⁰³ 2 Sam. 15. 31-32.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Sam. 17. 1-14.

¹⁰⁵ Esther 5. 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ Esther 6. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Psa. 121. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Matt. 1. 5, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ruth 2. 20; cf. Ruth 2. 1.

¹¹⁰ 'Naomi identifies Boaz as a *gō'ēl* or kinsman-redeemer', Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Volume 1, page 791, number 1457. See also J. M. Flanigan, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth (What the Bible Teaches)*, page 467.

¹¹¹ Lev. 25. 25-34.

¹¹² Ruth 2. 8-16.

¹¹³ 'The young Moabite woman' as she was described to him, Ruth 2. 6.

¹¹⁴ Matt. 1. 5 with Ruth 4. 21. But Rahab was not the mother of Boaz. I say this for the following reasons.

We know that, from the Exodus to the birth of David was 406 years, because it was 480 years from the Exodus to the 4th year of Solomon, 1 Kings 6. 1, and we must take away 70 years for David's life (2 Sam. 5. 4), and 4 years of Solomon's reign. Therefore, it was 366 years from the conquest/end of the wilderness to the birth of David.

If the genealogy of Ruth 4. 21 is complete, we have only four 'generations' to cover the 366 years; viz. Salmon up to the age at which he begat Boaz, Boaz up to the age at which he begat Obed, Obed up to the age at which he begat Jesse, and Jesse up to the age at which he begat David. That is, on average each of these four men must have been 94 years old before he begat his firstborn son! This requires four Abraham-type miracles! Moses saw 70 as the normal life expectancy of a man, Psa. 90. 10, and David died aged 70. The evidence is that there are some 7 or 8 missing generations (giving 11 or 12 in all) each begetting on average at a little over 30 years of age (although some allowance must be made for Boaz's fathering Obed late in life).

As I see it, the wording of Ruth 4. 17 requires direct and immediate descent from Boaz to David. Therefore, the missing generations *must* come between Salmon and Boaz. That is, Rahab was Boaz's quite distant ancestor and not his mother.

'The Greek verb translated "was the father of" ('begat', KJV) ... does not require immediate relationship but often means something like "was the ancestor of" or "became the progenitor of"', D. A. Carson, *Matthew (The Expositor's Bible Commentary)*, on Matt. 1. 3-5.

See further <https://www.addeiglioriam.org/commentary/ot-history/ruth-genealogies.htm> and <https://www.addeiglioriam.org/bible-study-guide/genre/bible-genre-genealogies.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Ruth 2. 10-11, together with the third paragraph of 'Ruth's devotion and kindness to her mother-in-law Naomi' on page 8.

¹¹⁶ Ruth 2. 12.

¹¹⁷ Ruth 3. 1-18.

¹¹⁸ Ruth 3. 5.

¹¹⁹ Ezek. 16. 8. Cf. Deut. 27. 20. 'Spreading a skirt over someone was a customary way of committing to marry and to provide for someone in that culture', Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes*, on Ezek. 16. 8.

'The custom of placing the corner of a garment over a maiden as a symbol of marriage is known among the Arabs', F. B. Huey, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, on Ruth 3. 9.

¹²⁰ Given that the two harvests were now over, Ruth 2. 23, in one sense it was now or never.

¹²¹ Ruth 3. 9.

¹²² Unlike the case of Lot in Genesis 19, this is not a case of a man in a drunken stupor, but a contented man at peace. Given the spiritual climate in Israel in the period of the Judges, many men might have welcomed the night visit of a woman and accepted her presence as an offer of sexual favours. But not so Boaz.

See James Bejon, 'Ruth and Boaz', freely accessible at https://www.academia.edu/39775654/Ruth_and_Boaz.

¹²³ Ruth 3. 12.

¹²⁴ Mahlon's brother was dead, of course, so that there was no brother to fulfil the requirements of Deut. 25. 5-6. Boaz was therefore able to step in and to marry Mahlon's widow (after the 'nearer' relative stood aside). To any Jew, it was a dreadful prospect to die without a son to carry on his name; see Jer. 11. 19; Psa. 83. 4. For, if there were no sons to carry on his name, it would be as if he had never lived; his name would go down into the dust with him.

Although specifically expressed in relation only to brothers, it apparently extended to other male relatives as well, when no living brothers were available to raise up children of the childless relative. Tamar (as Ruth, an ancestor of the Messiah) was rewarded in requesting her father-in-law to be her kinsman-redeemer when no brothers were available, Gen. 38. 11, 14, 26.

¹²⁵ Ruth 4. 3-5. Although (i) the required Levirate marriage (following the death of one of two brothers) and (ii) the required redemption of the property of a poor (not deceased) family member were two entirely separate matters in the Law (Lev. 25. 25; Deut. 25. 5-6), clearly they were tied together in this instance.

Apart from any other considerations, Boaz's statement was not contested by either the other kinsman or the town's elders. This means either that the linking of the two was now generally accepted by all, or that Naomi had stipulated this as a condition of sale of her property. Note, especially, the tying of the two together at the close of verse 5; the marriage was necessary to provide a son who could inherit the property in his father's name.

It is made clear (i) that marrying Ruth involved redeeming the land (Ruth 3. 12-13) and (ii) that redeeming the land involves marrying Ruth (Ruth 4. 5). That is, the marriage rights were tied to ownership of the land of the deceased husband.

'It had become a traditional custom to require the Levirate marriage of the redeemer of the portion of the deceased relative, not only that the landed possession might be permanently retained in the family, but also that the family itself might not be suffered to die out', *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch', Volume II, page 482.

¹²⁶ Ruth 3. 12-13.

¹²⁷ Ruth 3. 13.

128 Ruth 4. 1-10.

¹²⁹ Ruth 2. 4.

¹³⁰ Esther 3. 7.

¹³¹ Esther 4. 1.

¹³² Ruth 4. 9-11.

¹³³ Compare the action of Onan: 'Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother". But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So, whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother', Gen. 38. 8-9.

¹³⁴ Cf. Deut. 11. 24.

¹³⁵ Ruth 1. 20-21. Notice where Naomi focused. In these two verses she refers to herself no less than eight times; "me, me, me, I, me, me, me, me". She had lost her spouse, her sons, her home and her means of income. When life feels empty it is all too easy for us to lick our wounds!

¹³⁶ Psa. 16. 6, where the word 'pleasant' is effectively the same as the name 'Naomi'. See Samuel A. Meier, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Volume 3, pages 121-123, number 5838.

¹³⁷ Ruth 2. 3.

¹³⁸ Ruth 3. 7.

¹³⁹ Ruth 4. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Ruth 1. 2-5. The Hebrew is not clear whether the two sons lived in Moab for ten years or whether they were married for ten years before their deaths. We should note that, if Mahlon had not died childless, there would have been no need for a kinsman-redeemer to raise up a son to carry on his name.

¹⁴¹ Ruth 4. 13.

¹⁴² Ruth 4. 17, 21-22.

Interestingly, with reference to David's ancestry and to the blessing pronounced on Boaz and Ruth by 'the people at the gate', Ruth 4. 11-12, it has been noted:

'There are many parallels between the story of Boaz and Ruth, and the story of ... Judah and Tamar [ancestors of Boaz and David, Matt. 1. 3-6] in Gen. 38:

- Ruth and Tamar were both foreigners who had married into Israel.
- The first husbands of both women died leaving them widows.
- Both women participated in levirate marriages.
- Tamar seduced Judah under the cover of a disguise, but Ruth encouraged Boaz under the cover of night.
- When Judah and Tamar appeared before a public tribunal, they were ashamed and condemned, but when Boaz and Ruth did so, they received praise and blessing.
- In both cases, the husbands were considerably older than the wives.
- Both women, however, bore sons in the Davidic messianic line: Ruth honourably and Tamar dishonourably.

Tamar bore Perez, and Ruth bore Obed'.

Source: Thomas Constable, *op. cit.*, on Ruth 4. 7-12.

¹⁴³ Cf. God's 'Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh', Rom. 1. 3. See also 2 Tim. 2. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Heb. 2. 14-15; 9. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Gen. 29. 17.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Sam. 25. 3.

¹⁴⁷ 2 Sam. 11. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Esth. 2. 7.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Pet. 3. 3-4.

¹⁵⁰ Ruth 1. 12.

¹⁵¹ Ruth 2. 2.

¹⁵² Cf. Ruth 1. 19.

¹⁵³ Ruth 4. 15, 'having a strong emotional attachment', M. F. Unger, W. White Jnr., '*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*', article 'To Love'.

¹⁵⁴ Ruth 2. 10-11.

¹⁵⁵ Ruth 1. 16-17.

¹⁵⁶ Ruth 2. 10.

¹⁵⁷ Num. 25. 1; Judg. 3. 14.

¹⁵⁸ Boaz said to Ruth, '... have I not charged the young men *not to touch you?*', Ruth 2. 9; Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, *lest in another field you be assaulted*'. Ruth 2. 22.

¹⁵⁹ Ruth 2. 9.

¹⁶⁰ Ruth 2. 22.

¹⁶¹ Ruth 2. 2-3.

¹⁶² Ruth 3. 4-5.

¹⁶³ 'When he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down', Ruth 3. 4.

¹⁶⁴ Num. 25. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Gen. 19. 31-37. Interestingly, the action of the old man in Judges 19. 24, of offering to bring out his daughter, and of the action of the Levite in actually bringing out his concubine, v. 25, were both reminiscent of the action of Lot back in Gen. 19. 8.

¹⁶⁶ 'She said, "Please ('I pray you', KJV) let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers", Ruth 2. 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ That is, to gather and take away without charge.

¹⁶⁸ It was God's way of taking care of the poor and needy people of that day. He didn't encourage them to beg or make them recipients of charity. He gave them something to do. They had to work for what they got.

¹⁶⁹ Lev. 19. 9-10; 23. 22.

¹⁷⁰ Deut. 24. 19.

¹⁷¹ Ruth 2. 7a.

¹⁷² 'She fell on her face, bowing to the ground', Ruth 2. 10.

¹⁷³ Ruth 2. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Ruth 2. 7. For a 'lodge', see Isa. 1. 8.

¹⁷⁵ Ruth 1. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Ruth 2. 23.

¹⁷⁷ 'Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman said: "From the beginning of the barley harvest until the end of the wheat harvest is three months"', Midrash Rabbah, Ruth V. 11', <https://betemunah.org/Ruth%20223.htm> and http://images.shulcloud.com/618/uploads/PDFs/Divrei_Torah/midrashonruth2.pdf, page 14.

¹⁷⁸ Ruth 2. 10; Cf. 1 Sam. 18. 18; 2 Sam. 7. 18.

¹⁷⁹ 'The Hebrew has a subtle play on the two words 'take knowledge of me' and 'stranger'; the roots are distinct, but they sound alike', G. A. Cooke, '*The Book of Ruth (The Cambridge Bible)*', on Ruth 2. 10.

'Paronomasia' is the technical expression; a form of word play that exploits similar-sounding words.

¹⁸⁰ Prov. 27. 2; cf. 2 Cor. 10. 18.

¹⁸¹ Ruth 2. 20.

¹⁸² See Ruth 2. 23.

¹⁸³ 1 Timothy 3. 7.

¹⁸⁴ 3 John 12.

¹⁸⁵ Gen. 12. 1, Acts 7. 2-3; Heb. 11. 8. Both Abraham and Ruth were 'strangers', Gen. 23. 4; Ruth 2. 10.

¹⁸⁶ Ruth 2. 11.

¹⁸⁷ The expression, 'all the people that were in the gate', may well indicate that these were the influential folk in the town.

¹⁸⁸ Ruth 4. 11.

¹⁸⁹ Ruth 4. 15.

¹⁹⁰ Ruth 4. 17. Although Naomi had no way of knowing it, the baby which she nursed would not only keep alive her family name but his own name would feature on the pages of both Old and New Testaments.

¹⁹¹ Ruth 3. 11.

¹⁹² NIV.

¹⁹³ NASB.

¹⁹⁴ JND.

¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, the same Hebrew word describes Boaz in Ruth 2. 1. Ruth, that is, was a suitable wife for Boaz. They were two of a kind.

¹⁹⁶ The oracle taught to King Lemuel by his mother, Proverbs 31. 10-31, forms an acrostic poem; each verse begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Such a device aided the Hebrew reader in memorizing the passage.

¹⁹⁷ KJV, NKJV, RV, JND, ASV, JPS, YLT. This translation is favoured by the use of the word in Lam. 4. 7 ... 'they were more *ruddy* in body than *rubies*'.

¹⁹⁸ ESV, ISV, NASB, GNB. The word is translated 'pearls' in the Geneva Bible and in the 'Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament' by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch.

¹⁹⁹ The Greek Old Testament.

²⁰⁰ 'She works willingly with her hands ... provides for her household ... strength and dignity are her clothing ... the law of kindness is on her tongue ... she does not eat the bread of idleness', Prov. 31. 13, 15, 25, 26, 27.

²⁰¹ Prov. 31. 28-29.

²⁰² Num. 21. 29; Jer. 48. 46.

²⁰³ 'Chemosh the abomination of Moab', 1 Kings 11. 7; 2 Kings 23. 12.

²⁰⁴ 'The sacrifice of children as a burnt-offering was part of the worship of Chemosh (2 Kings 3. 27)', J. A. Thompson, '*The IVP New Bible Dictionary*', page 182. 'Chemosh required human sacrifices as god of war; [King] Mesha, after taking Ataroth, offered all the warriors in sacrifice', A. R. Fausset, '*Fausset's Bible Dictionary*', article Chemosh.

²⁰⁵ 1 Thess. 1. 9; Ruth 1. 16; 2. 12.

²⁰⁶ Ruth 2. 12.

²⁰⁷ Rom. 11. 33.

²⁰⁸ 'There is a good deal to be said for the view that the key verse is Ruth 2. 12: "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (KJV). That is what the book is about. It is not without its interest that the initiative is with Ruth in chapter 2, with Naomi in chapter 3, and with Boaz in chapter 4. None of them can be said to be the person about whom the book is written. But the implication throughout is that God is watching over His people, and that He brings to pass what is good. The book is a book about God. He rules over all and brings blessing to those who trust Him', Leon Morris, '*Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)*', page 231.

²⁰⁹ The references are:

(i) 'Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under *the shadow of your wings*', Psalm 17. 8 ('of David').

(ii) 'The children of men put their trust under *the shadow of your wings*', Psa. 36. 7 ('of David').

(iii) 'My soul trusts in you: yea, in *the shadow of your wings* will I make my refuge, until these calamities pass by', Psa. 57. 1 ('of David').

(iv) 'Because you have been my help, therefore in *the shadow of your wings* will I rejoice', Psa. 63. 7 ('of David').

Cf. Psa. 91. 4.

²¹⁰ The lyrics of the hymn 'Under His wings' were written by William Orcutt Cushing (31 December 1823 to 19 October 1902). Mr Cushing once gave all of his life savings (\$1,000) to a blind girl in order for her to receive an education. The tune for the hymn was composed by Ira Sankey. The hymn itself sprang out of Mr Cushing's personal suffering and was largely suggested by the words of Psalm 17. 8, 'Hide me under the shadow of your wings'. See ... <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/william-o-cushing-sought-to-follow-christ-11630395.html>.