

Ruth

Ruth 1:1-4:22

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-02-24

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Introduction

While studying for this sermon I ran across a story about a practical joke that Dr. Samuel Johnson played on the literary critics of London. I loved the story. I wouldn't have expected that the author of a dictionary would have any sense of humor, but he did. He is best known for being the author of, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, which was the standard dictionary in the English speaking world for the next 150 years.

And if you don't know Dr. Johnson's credentials, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* names him as "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history." That is quite an acclamation. And he loved the book of Ruth. He was a tremendous literary author, with wide ranging writings in poetry, essays, plays, biographies, and other forms of literature. So it is no surprise that he was a member of the prestigious London book review club. They would regularly analyze the newest and the best literature. But many of the members of that club were skeptics who couldn't stand the Bible, and thought that it was beneath their dignity to read it. Being a devout Christian, Dr. Johnson was particularly irked by how ignorant and uninformed their slams of the Bible were.

So he thought he would play a joke on them. He excitedly introduced them to a manuscript he had discovered that he wanted them to review. He read the book of Ruth as if it was a recently composed work. Apparently the club was enthusiastic in their praise of the masterpiece. Only after the hubub died down did Dr. Johnson reveal that the masterpiece they approved was in the Bible that they rejected. Apparently Benjamin Franklin played a similar joke on the royal court of France. He did it a bit differently. He changed all the names of villages and people to French names, then read it to the literati in the French court - and royally embarrassed some of them.

But I bring those stories to illustrate that it is hard not to love the book of Ruth - even if you are an atheist. And introducing unbelievers to the book of Ruth might be a great way to get them to read more of the Bible. It has been one of the books that has grabbed many an unbeliever and drawn them into the faith.

I. Background to the text

And there are some ways in which this book doesn't need an introduction. All you need to do is to read it prayerfully and ask God to touch your heart with it. You would have to be pretty hard hearted to not want to bow down with Ruth before our Great Kinsman Redeemer (Jesus Christ) in love and admiration for all that He has done for us.

I believe that the author was the prophet Samuel. As we go through the book we will begin to see the purpose that he had in writing this beautiful piece of literature. It was not just to introduce the readers to the ancestry of King David, but also to introduce the readers to the incredibly generous redemptive purposes of God. You begin to see hints of redemption right from the very first verse - at least if you were a Jewish reader. And we will get to that in a bit.

Ancient Jews believed that this story started during the time of the Judge Ehud (you know - the guy who stabbed the obese king of Moab in the stomach) and this book finishes during the time of Deborah and Barak. They were troublesome days, and later on we will look at a couple of verses in the song of Deborah that describe the social climate of that time.

There are three main characters in the story: Naomi the aged Israelite widow, Ruth the younger widow from Moab, and Boaz the single, eligible, and wealthy Israelite farmer who was beginning to show his age.

Samuel divides the story into four main parts with an ending that suddenly shows God giving meaning and purpose to a story that might otherwise have seemed to be without purpose. And it connects us with the real issues of life so powerfully - survival, marriage, food, friendship, politics, and of course, God's providence. How many times do we go through life wondering where God is, yet later on looking back and seeing that God's hand was there every step of the way. There are some ways in which the book of Ruth describes the providences in each of our lives. So let's dig into the book.

II. An overview of the book

Chapter one begins with an unknown Israelite family that was experiencing extreme hardship during a famine in Israel. Over and over in the Old Testament famines were attributed to God's discipline. So the very mention of famine during the time of the judges is the first hint that chapter 1 is because of God's discipline. Even if you didn't know that it was during the time of Ehud, you might assume that it was in an equally bad time of

apostasy. And we will later see that the judgment, sorrow, and death of this chapter is thematically contrasted with the last chapter which shows blessing, joy, and new birth. I will later show how the typology of the book beautifully portrays the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means to move any sinner from the sorrow of chapter 1 to the joy of chapter 4. There is a redemptive flow in this book. But the hints of verse 1 set up that theme already.

Verse 1 shows that this family came from Bethlehem, a name that means “house of bread” - an irony since Bethlehem was now totally lacking bread. It was a time of famine.

And so, unable to eke out an existence on their farm, Elimelech and Naomi were forced to sell their land and move to the land of Moab, the land of Israel’s ancient enemy. God’s enemies are being blessed more than Israel is. And it immediately makes you wonder, why?

And any Israelite knew that since land could not be permanently sold, Leviticus 25 is probably going to factor into the plot as the story progresses. Leviticus 25 says that the land could be leased for a maximum of 48 years, but if it was leased closer to the year of Jubilee, it would be much shorter. So even the fact that this family left their land immediately clues a Jewish reader into the fact that this book will be dealing with the redemptive issues of Leviticus 25.

So they go to Moab to avoid disaster. Let me read from the Song of Deborah to give you a feel for what life was like for them during those days. This is Judges 5:6-8.

6 “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, In the days of Jael, The highways were deserted, And the travelers walked along the byways. [Or as the NIV has it, “took to winding paths” in order to avoid being seen as a traveler. They were probably trying to avoid all of the bandits. They had to proceed with great caution. Deborah goes on:] 7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, [Why would it cease? Because villages were unprotected. Marauders could come in so easily and kill, rape, and swipe everything you had. So it says, “Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel,”] Until I, Deborah, arose, Arose a mother in Israel. 8 They chose new gods; [She is talking about the Israelites having chosen new gods. The sorrows of Ruth chapter 1 are the sorrows that came upon many Israelites who were being disciplined for their backsliding. So it says, “They chose new gods;”] Then there was war in the gates; Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel. [We saw last week that this disarmament of most of the citizens was because the Philistines had disarmed them, and now Jabin the Canaanite kept them disarmed. Deborah goes on...] 9 My heart is with the rulers of Israel Who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD!

As kinsman redeemer, Boaz must have been one of the rulers who offered

himself willingly in that war.

So Elimelech, Naomi, and two young sons left Israel during a time of turmoil, famine, and political upheaval. It was also during a time of apostasy. So they fled to greener pastures. Christians sometimes look to the world for greener pastures.

But you can't run from God, so disaster follows the family. Her husband dies, leaving her a widow with two sons. She is really stuck. She doesn't dare travel back because a young widow with sons will be a prime target for bandits. Ten years earlier would have been a horrible time to travel.

Her sons grow up and they marry Moabite women. This too is cluing us into the fact that this family was not closely walking with God. Israelites were strictly forbidden from marrying Moabite women in Deuteronomy 7:3 and other passages. So the reader immediately assumes that Elimelech and Naomi were deserving of discipline. What kind of an Israelite family would marry their sons to pagans? Moab had a false religion, and later in chapter 1 we find that at least one of the daughters-in-law returns to her false gods. Which implies what? It implies that when she got married she had been worshiping those false gods. So again, it is hinting that this family had not learned from God's disciplines in Israel. They were thinking like the world and acting like the world on at least some levels.

After ten years, the two sons died, leaving three grieving widows - Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. And because of the vulnerability that widows would have had in a pagan country like Moab, Naomi is searching for answers. She realizes that staying in Moab is no longer an option for her. Widows did not fare well in pagan lands like Moab, and she had no male to protect her. But providentially, in verse 6 she had heard that God had visited His people - a reference to Barak and Deborah delivering Israel from their bondage to Jabin the Canaanite - yet another oppressor. So she decides that her options for survival might be much better in Israel than in Moab, and determines to go back.

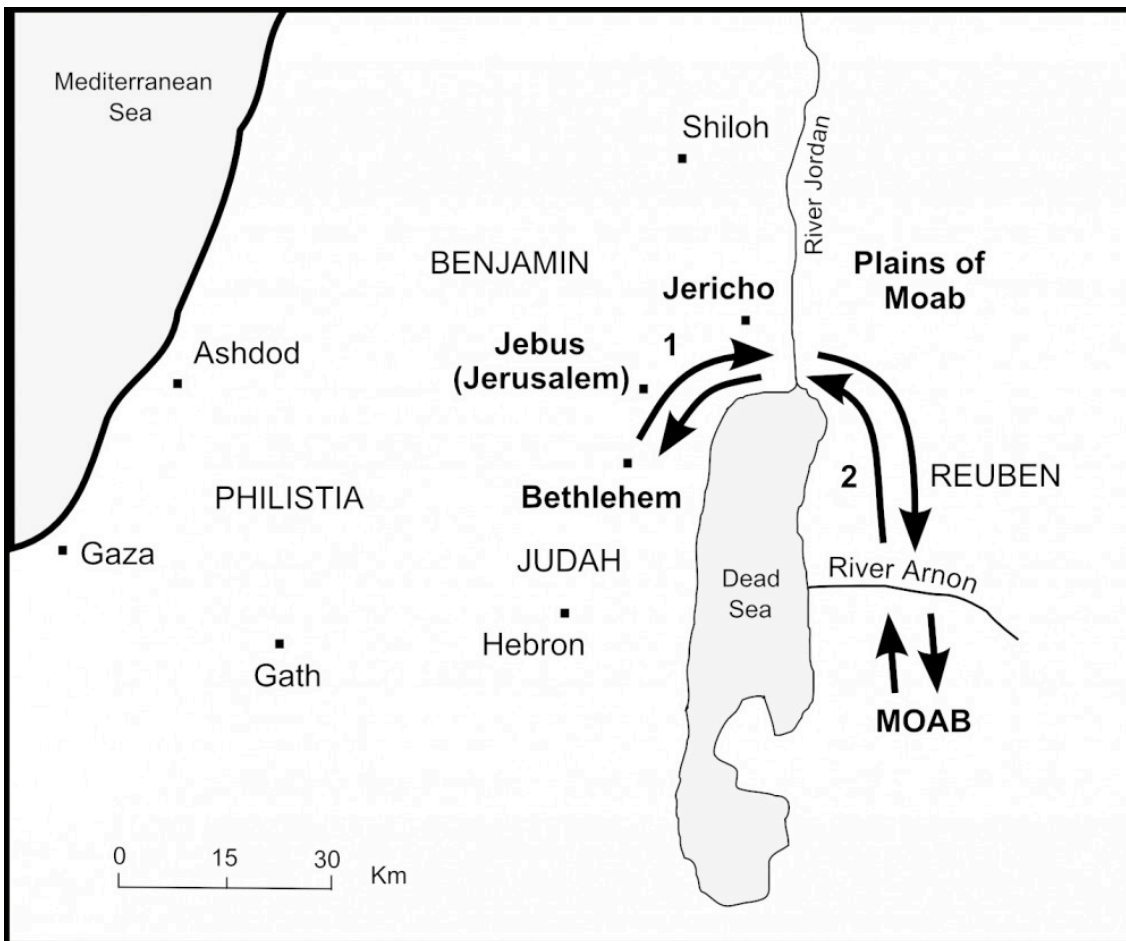
And it is obvious that she has thought about the welfare of her two daughter-in-laws as well - at least from a perspective that lacks faith. She tells her two daughters-in-law that they need to go back to their parents. All three of them needed a male protector. Though she realizes that would involve returning to false gods, she tells Ruth in verse 15, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." That is weird. She is telling Ruth to return to her false gods. What kind of a mother-in-law would do that? But to put the best spin on Naomi that I can, she is

probably looking at life practically and thinking that this is the most merciful choice for them.

And you might ask, “Why didn’t she have them come with her instead?” I can think of at least three pragmatic reasons that might have seemed like good reasons to Naomi. They are not good reasons to me, but she is bitter and not looking at life clearly, and they might have seemed like good reasons to Naomi.

First, it would be a tough life back in Israel - probably much tougher than returning to their parents. Naomi doesn’t even know how many of her old network was still alive, but at least she was an Israelite. Orpah and Ruth on the other hand would have been friendless, without connections, foreigners, facing racism and prejudice. It would have been a much harder transition.

Secondly, the trip was long and possibly still quite dangerous. If Israel had just been delivered by Barak and Deborah, the country has probably not yet completely returned to normal, and the areas they would be traveling through would still have been the most vulnerable and uncertain in terms of safety.



On your map you can see that it is approximately the distance it would take for us to walk from Omaha to Lincoln - as the crow flies. But they couldn't travel as the crow flies. Because of difficult topography, this would have been an exhausting trip for an older lady. It would involve traveling through rugged mountains, crossing the River Arnon and the Jordan River, trying to avoid bandits and others who might attack them. Naomi might have thought that she was too old to be bothered on the trip, and if she died, so be it. But her concern for Orpah and Ruth made her encourage them to stay and try to get remarried. You might find her statement in verses 11-13 rather odd. If an American said those words, it wouldn't make a lick of sense.

11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!" Why would she even suggest that they might think such things? It's because Levirate marriage was built into their culture. Deuteronomy 25 describes

that strange custom - that when a man died before he was able to have a child, the brother of the man was obligated to marry the widow and raise up a son for the dead brother. Just keep in mind that Tamar waited around for quite a while for a younger brother to marry her. So her words have some cultural background to them.

But whatever Naomi's reasons for saying those words may have been, Samuel includes the strange discussion because it sets the stage for the kinsman redeemer theology that will be woven into the fabric of the rest of the book. And we will return to that subject later. But there are so many bits and pieces of kinsman-redeemer theology that are woven into the text. I will only be able to give some hints of it this morning.

In verses 14 and following it is obvious that both younger women love Naomi. Orpah weeps too, but she probably realizes the impracticality of going to Israel, and after hugs and kisses and many tears, Orpah leaves - perhaps to her father's house. From a purely worldly perspective, you can understand that.

But chapter 1 ends with the moving speech of Ruth in verses 16-17, a speech that shows remarkable loyalty and remarkable faith. She has obviously embraced the true God of Israel from the heart, and not merely outwardly.

But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever 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. Yehowah do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me."

Those words not only show the extreme loyalty that Ruth had to Naomi (putting her own mantle of protection over Naomi so to speak), but those words show a greater embrace of the God of Israel than Israel had. She has come under the mantle of God's protection. And this mantle of protection is going to be another theme throughout the book.

It is possible that she converted to the God of Israel only outwardly when she got married, but in these words we see a genuine faith and loyalty to the true God of Israel. What a rebuke this book would have given during the troubled times in which Samuel was writing. Samuel wrote for a much later generation - a generation that needed to learn Ruth's faith for themselves. The people in Samuel's day had become apathetic and were not loyal to the God of Israel. So those are two of the key verses in the book that capture its heart. And if you want only one key verse, it would be Ruth 1:16.

So Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem together. Verse 19 doesn't mention how long it took, or whether they faced danger. Perhaps everything went

smoothly. It simply says, “they came to Bethlehem” and verse 22 adds, “So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her...”

But there must have been friends and relatives who were still alive because the town was abuzz with excitement at Naomi’s return. And news spreads fast in small towns. They ask in verse 19, “Is this Naomi?” The name Naomi means pleasant. But Naomi answers in a rather sourpuss way that shows very little EQ or pleasantness about it. I actually have a hard time relating to Naomi. I just try to chalk her attitudes up to her inappropriate responses to a very tough life.

In any case, she informs her friends that she has changed her name to Mara, a name that means “bitter” in Hebrew. And it is a fitting ending for a chapter that is filled with bitter experiences, judgment, tragedy, death, lost love, and the loss of Orpah. The words that chapter 1 ends with show that Naomi lacked faith in God’s providences. She had become bitter. It is impossible to be bitter if you have an appropriate attitude towards God’s providence.

The story will now look to Ruth for the faith, hope, love, and worldview that Israel should have had and now ought to follow. Ruth becomes a model. And young women - you too can be models for all of us on how to face difficult circumstances with godliness and virtuous attitudes and humility. You too can showcase the joy of the Lord no matter how many Maras or bitter people are around you. You don’t need to be like them.

In chapter 2 the two women try to come up with a plan for survival. Ruth offers to go glean grain. I have often wondered why Naomi didn’t join her in the field to help her glean grain. Was she lazy? Was she a user? We don’t know. I’ve chosen to believe the best about Naomi and think that the brutal journey may have left her feeble. But, for whatever reason, Ruth alone will be the one who is going to support this family.

It just so happens that it is the beginning of the barley harvest - the perfect time to glean. And the season is an important aspect of the story as well since it points to Christ’s redemption. And it just so happens that where she decided to glean was the field of Boaz, who just happens to be an extremely wealthy relative of Naomi. But of course, in God’s providences, there are never any chance accidental happenings. All “just so happens” events are planned by a good God who loves you. We just need to get used to seeing His good hand - even when His hand is spanking us. Or, in the case of Boaz, even when he has been unable to find someone good to marry.

Verse 7 highlights the fact that Ruth had a fantastic work ethic. It is such an

important quality that we should instill in our children when they are young. In Genesis 1-2 God blessed mankind with work and work is indeed a blessing. It is not a curse. Anyone who is lazy, whether young or old, has missed out on the fact that work existed before the fall, and grace restores what the fall has damaged. Grace restores a beautiful work ethic in God's people. Those who do not work diligently are falling far short of the dominion image that God implanted into our souls. So Ruth is a diligent worker. She is a model for all of us to work hard.

And Boaz notices. Guys and girls - the habits of conversation, work, politeness, interaction with your elders, honoring of your parents, and many other things will likely be noticed by others who could be potential lifelong partners. If you want them to attract a good man, become the kind of person that a good man is looking for; become a person worthy of a good man. And guys, if you want to attract a good lady, become a Christ-centered good man that will be worthy of her. It is never too early to begin imitating Boaz and Ruth, who are fantastic role models for us.

Boaz was definitely a man of noble character and remarkable generosity who you immediately see fits the noble character and remarkable generosity of Ruth. They are a match made in heaven. He is generous to all those who came to glean in his field. Coming from Moab, Ruth is blown away - she is not used to such generosity and is overwhelmed by his kindness.

In verse 4 Boaz says, "Yehowah be with you!" That is not an empty blessing. And when he blesses, all his workers and gleaners say, "Yehowah bless you!" We must get used to blessing one another in the Lord.

And Boaz must have been impressed with the diligence of Ruth. She no doubted looked different. And he asks about her. And almost every time I read the dialog between Boaz and Ruth in verses 8-16 I am deeply moved. I identify with Ruth when I bow before my Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus. I feel utterly utterly unworthy of His grace. And it's not by accident that the word "grace" is used in the Hebrew. In the New King James it is translated as "favor" - "why have I found favor in your eyes..." But because Boaz stands as a type of Christ, the Hebrew uses the word "grace," which is a synonym of favor. But even on a human level this conversation is a wonderful display of the beautiful character of both Boaz and Ruth. Starting to read at verse 8:

Ruth 2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. [He knew the dangers that a foreign woman like Ruth could experience. With no one to protect her, she could easily have been exploited by men. I don't recommend that young women be sent off to work or sent off to the college where their home support system and protection

are absent. Sometimes it is unavoidable, just like it was with Ruth. But Boaz knows that it is not a good thing for a woman to be working all alone in her situation. He is already being a generous protector for other gleaners, but shows a special heart for a foreigner like Ruth. So he lets her know that his field is safe. She should stay there. He continues in verse 9...]

9 Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”

Ruth 2:10 So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

Ruth 2:11 And Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

Ruth 2:13 Then she said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.”

Ruth 2:14 Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, “Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed parched grain to her; and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back. 15 And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”

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

Gleaning amounts to picking up bits and pieces of grain that have accidentally fallen on the ground. I have tried gleaning in a corn field, and you wouldn't get much for a day's labor. But God's law encouraged farmers to deliberately let some grain fall for the gleaners, and to deliberately let the edges of the field not be harvested - again, for the gleaners. It was a way of showing generosity to the poor who had a good work ethic. And she obviously had a good work ethic.

An ephah of barley was an enormous amount to have been able to glean. There is no way that she could have gleaned that much without him being generous and her being extremely diligent. There are differences of view on what an ephah constitutes. The archaeologist Scott found a pot that had the words bath written on it, and since a bath is a unit by which an ephah can be measured, he came to the conclusion that an ephah was approximately 3/5ths of a bushel of grain and would have weighed about 29 pounds. That's what you tend to see in modern study bibles. But it actually may be an underestimation. Josephus (who lived in the time of Christ) gives a much more generous definition of an ephah, making it almost twice that size. The smaller size is merely a guess based on one artifact, whereas Josephus, who

was immersed in Jewish culture and was a Jew himself, clearly defines a bath as being almost twice the size that most study bibles say. Either way, it was a lot. She gleaned somewhere between 29 and 50 lbs of barley in one day. I think it was close to 50. Boaz was a great example of ungrudgingly carrying out God's law on charity just as Jesus loved God's law.

When Ruth carried the grain home, Naomi was ecstatic. She was ecstatic not just because of the enormous amount of food, but also because Boaz was their kinsman redeemer. This idea of a kinsman redeemer is rooted in the law and is what makes the book of Ruth such a prophetic statement about Jesus.

A kinsman redeemer was a powerful and wealthy relative who had a responsibility to provide for those in his family who were suffering. He was a protector and even an avenger of blood (which is the same word for kinsman redeemer). But the law also made provision for the kinsman redeemer to marry a widow who had no children, take up the land, and to protect that family. So Naomi has a glimmer of hope.

In chapter 3, Naomi strategizes on how to see if Boaz (who just happens to be an eligible single older man) might be willing to marry Ruth and redeem their land from whomever they sold it to. This is one of the few places in the Bible where the woman proposes to the man rather than vice versa. But God's law made provision for that in the case of the Levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25. There was nothing out of line for Ruth to propose. I think Boaz recognizes that Ruth had crossed some lines of propriety when he told her not to let anyone see that she had been there (that's chapter 3:14). But he also knows that she was just following the suggestions of Naomi, and that this was not intentional. He calls her a virtuous woman. So he is very gracious about the way that he corrects her on how she went about it.

Anyway, back to the earlier part of chapter 3. Ruth trusts Naomi's advice since Naomi is more familiar with the cultural norms there. Sometimes we do need to be careful how much we trust the advice of others. In any case, she follows Naomi's advice and bathes, dresses in her best clothes, and anoints herself. She is not going out to glean. Naomi wants her to make her best presentation.

After everyone has laid down for the night and fallen asleep, Ruth crept in, uncovered Boaz's feet as a symbolic gesture, and lay down at the feet of Boaz. This was not seduction. Seduction would have lain by his side. This was at his feet, and as such was a symbol that she was willing to come under his dominion, his lordship, and his protection. And that too is a beautiful

picture of our coming to Christ. We come under His Lordship when He redeems us; we come under His feet.

When Boaz woke up in the middle of the night and asked who was there, she basically asked Boaz to redeem her family and to marry her. And this was not presumptuous - this was rooted in the law of God. It was perfectly lawful for her to propose in this way, and it was perfectly lawful for him to turn her down if he so chose.

But instead, we find that Boaz is blown away that she would think of him rather than going after younger and more handsome men. She is taking the path of Scriptural principle in marrying him rather than the path of human wisdom in allowing her beauty to capture a younger more handsome man. And in this she stands as a model to you singles. Don't let beauty or handsomeness be your first concern. Let it be godliness. And by the way, I wouldn't imitate her in getting that close to temptation. I think that was Naomi's idea, not the Bible's. And Boaz doesn't want that part of the plan known to anyone else in verse 14. But let's back up a bit.

In verses 10-11 he says,

“Blessed are you of Yehowah, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.

The expression “virtuous woman” is exactly the same expression for “virtuous wife” in Proverbs 31. A couple of generations before Proverbs 31 was written, he had found a woman who met that description rather well. And when he sees that she is available, he is eager to pursue her hand in marriage.

But he tells her that there might be a glitch. Since both of them are doing things according to the law of God, they have to follow the law to a t. There was another kinsman redeemer who was closer than Boaz, and Boaz was going to trust God by letting that man know that Ruth was available. It was a risk, but he knew that if God was in it, it would work out. As Rodney pointed out in his sermons on this book, both Boaz and Ruth are outstanding examples of trust and principle.

God will often put integrity checks into our lives to test that trust. I knew that Kathy was the right one for me before she really knew me that well. I was going to ask if I could court her, but my best friend beat me to the punch the very day I was going to ask, and he started to court her. Unknown to me, she broke it off very quickly, realizing that he wasn't the one for her. But my

best friend came to me for counsel on how to make his relationship with Kathy work out. It was an integrity check for me. Would I give him the best advice that I could, and just trust God on this? And I did. I gave him the absolutely best advice that I could, and trusted God with the results. God puts integrity checks into all of our lives to see if we will trust Him. Too many times Christians try to manipulate the results, but you can't manipulate God's Providence. All that does is to add stress.

Well, Boaz has a confidence in God that makes both Ruth and Naomi have confidence in God too. We can lead in developing a culture of confidence and faith.

So Ruth goes home, tells Naomi that he said "Yes, but there is a closer kinsman redeemer who has first rights." And Naomi is certain that whichever way it works out, God will be in this. She knows that Boaz won't rest until it is settled one way or the other. He is a very decisive man. He is a man of action. And young men, you need to learn to be so immersed in God's Word that you can take decisive steps that are in accord with God's Word even on huge issues like this. And once you know what you should do, to immediately set to work to accomplish the task.

In chapter 4 the tension rises as Boaz finds out that this other family member is willing to redeem the land. But when he finds out that he has to marry Ruth in order to do so, he realizes that it might spoil his own plans, whatever those were. Maybe he already had his eye on another woman. But the phrase "ruin my inheritance" in verse 6 seems to indicate that his decision was purely economic. There are inheritance rights connected with this. So he says "No." And Boaz and Ruth are no doubt breathing a sigh of relief.

Boaz knows Ruth's true character and he redeems Naomi's land from whomever it was sold to and marries Ruth. There was not a long romance. He saw everything that he needed to see from observing her work. Why drag out a courtship if you both already know the answer is "Yes." Get engaged and begin to work on the expressions of non-sexual love that will last you a lifetime.

Ruth's loyalty to God in chapter 1 is matched by Boaz's loyalty to God's law in chapter 4. Ruth's commitment to Naomi is matched by Boaz's commitment to Ruth.

This was a remarkably short betrothal, so let me quickly distinguish between the betrothal in chapter 3:11-15 and the marriage ceremony in chapter 4. They are quite different, and there are some betrothal models that fail to see

these distinctions and get themselves into legalism.

- First, the biggest difference is that betrothal is a promise to get married (sometimes in the form of a contract) and marriage is a covenant. Marriage is more than a contract; it is more than a promise; it is a covenant.
- Second, Boaz's promise to marry Ruth in Ruth 3:10-13 did not have an oath, though it did include a promise and a token (Ruth 3:15-18) - just like betrothals or engagements today have a promise or commitment and a ring or some other token of that commitment. In contrast, his marriage covenant in verses 8-13 goes way beyond a simple contract.
- Third, a contract does not need witnesses. So his betrothal was without witnesses in 3:8-18 whereas the marriage covenant necessarily involved witnesses, and he had ten witnesses in chapter 4:2 who also participated in the marriage ceremony in verses 9-12.
- Fourth, the betrothal was not done under authority in chapter 3, whereas elders are part of the ceremony in chapter 4. All covenants are administered under some authority.
- And last, his betrothal had a condition inserted into the contract in 3:13 whereas the marriage covenant was an unreserved commitment of Boaz' person and property to Ruth in 4:1-12.

When we read this story we can see God's marvelous providence that guided every detail of the story from beginning to end. Naomi on the other hand, had been so consumed by her troubles that she was blinded to God's good hand, and she had misinterpreted God's providences in chapter 1 and thought that God was against her. She was so bitter that she told her new neighbors that her new name was "Bitter." To name herself bitter means that bitterness was now her identity and her gladly embraced identity. Like most bitter people she thinks she has a right to be bitter. But God had not abandoned her. God was not against her. Even the difficult providences and disciplines that she and her family had experienced were part of a redemptive plan of restoration. So part of God's redemption was to move Naomi from bitterness to gladness. And part of God's redemption was to move Ruth from emptiness to fullness.

Boaz and Ruth have a baby, and they lived happily ever after. Of course, that's not the end of the story, is it? The real end of the story is not the birth of Obed, but the genealogy at the end of the book that shows that Obed was the grandfather of David, who in turn was the forefather of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we learn that every detail of this story was beautifully being woven together to be part of the grand story of redemption that Jesus would bring.

And I love the fact that the only women that are mentioned in Christ's genealogy in Matthew 1 are the women who might otherwise be shunned

because of either their sin or their foreign ancestry. In Matthew 1, Jesus identifies with sinners, the hurting, the outcast, the widow. He loves to identify with those who broken and crying and to take them up in His arms and apply redemption to them. And this book of Ruth puts emotional depth to that love and loyalty that Jesus has for us, and I hope the book of Ruth instills a deep desire to be as loyal and as passionately committed to the God of Israel as Ruth was. She is a marvelous model.

III. Key verses: Ruth 1:16-17; 3:9

I've already read the first key passage in your outline - Ruth 1:16-17. Let me quickly read the second one. Chapter 3:9 says,

And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative."

Or literally, "you are a kinsman redeemer." Can you imagine the courage it would take for Ruth to go through all of this? Many people would be too proud to humble themselves as she had done. And these same people do not have the humility to bow before their heavenly Kinsman Redeemer and say, "Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a kinsman redeemer." Was she a Jew? No. How could he be a kinsman redeemer to her? By adoption.

IV. Key word is goel or kinsman redeemer

Kinsman Redeemer (the Hebrew word goel) is the key word that knits this book together and makes it a prophetic statement of Jesus. Luke 24 says that Jesus went through every book of the Bible and "expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." There is not a single book of the Old Testament that does not in some way speak about Jesus. I would have loved to have heard the emotion in Jesus' voice when He spoke about his great-ancestor Obed, and Obed's mother, Ruth. What an astounding thing it would be to realize (as Jesus certainly did) that God was orchestrating everything in history to prepare for Jesus. But you know what? God is working all things together for the good of any who put their faith in Jesus. He is been orchestrating your providences even when you can't see His hand. He has been there for you.

God was there for Ruth even before she was converted by sending a famine to the land of Israel, and sending war, and motivating Elimilech and Naomi to leave. God was there for Ruth when Naomi was forced to stay in Moab longer than she had wished by having Elimelech die. God was there for Ruth when her first husband died. God was orchestrating all of this so that she

could be the ancestor of Jesus - the very Son of God who had already been upholding her from the time she was conceived.

V. The Christ of Ruth

A. Boaz as a kinsman redeemer (goel) he stands as a type of Jesus Christ.

Now, I have already given a fair bit of exposition on the section of your outline called the Christ of Ruth. Let me give a bit more background on each of those points.

A kinsman redeemer (Hebrew goel) had four functions:

I've already mentioned that Boaz as a kinsman redeemer stands as a type of Jesus Christ. That much is crystal clear. The Hebrew word for kinsman redeemer is goel, and it refers to a man who was a self-sufficient leader and who was able to do four things.

Avenging murder (Numb. 35:19-21)

First, when there was a murder of a relative, he was called upon to avenge that murder as a civil representative according to Numbers 35:19-21. In the same way, Jesus promises to judge all those who attack His bride. He is not simply a tender husband. He is also a warrior and avenger. In fact, the widow of Luke 18 who pleads for justice is said to be a model we should follow by asking God to avenge. In Luke 18:7-8 Jesus said,
7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

Redeeming slaves (Lev. 25:47-49)

The second function of a kinsman redeemer was to buy back relatives who had been sold into slavery, if possible. Leviticus 25 describes this aspect of his work in detail. And of course, Jesus is described over and over in the Bible as our redeemer (our kinsman redeemer) who purchased us out of slavery.

Buying back property on behalf of a poor relative (Lev. 25:25)

Third, the kinsman redeemer was supposed to buy back property that had been claimed by a debtor so that property would not be forever alienated from God's people. Satan robbed Adam and Eve of the world and claimed ownership. But Jesus paid the penalty and bought back planet earth so that

the meek could inherit the earth! Praise God! The land is important to God. So God's redemption is not just for our persons; it is for all that we have and are. And Romans 8 says that Jesus' redemption includes redeeming the very physical creation, which currently groans and labors under the burden of the curse.

Marrying the childless widow of a deceased relative (Deut. 25:5-10)

The fourth responsibility he had was to marry the childless widow of a brother or another close relative. And that is described in Deuteronomy 25. And Deuteronomy mandates the use of the elders in the gate, which is exactly what Boaz did. And that is one of the reasons why I am not a purist on whether civil officers or elders can be involved in a wedding. I think they can. They are not needed, but they can be involved. If the fathers are not alive, I see no reason why civil officers or church officers cannot administer the oaths or vows. O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as a bond in blood, sovereignly administered by some authority. And marriage is a covenant administered under authority.

But who does the widow symbolize? It is the bride of Christ. And who are those widow's children? They are the seed of Christ, the converts that come into the church.

There were three conditions to this redemption

Be willing to redeem (Deut 25:7-10) just as Jesus was willing to redeem (Matt. 20:28; John 10:15,18; Heb. 10:7). See Ruth 3:11.

Thankfully, there were some conditions to this duty of a kinsman redeemer. The first condition was that the kinsman had to be willing to redeem. He was not forced to do it. Though Deuteronomy 25 says that it was a shame to fail to do so, if he didn't want to redeem the widow or the property, he wasn't forced by the law to do so. And that part of the law of God enabled the closer kinsman in our story to say "No thank you" in Ruth chapter 4:6-7. And he did so by handing over his sandal. And that act enabled Boaz, who was quite willing, to both marry Ruth and redeem Naomi's land that Ruth would have inherited if it had not been indebted. So the whole family is swooped up into this redemption. It's a whole family redemption.

Jesus declares Himself to be totally willing to be our redeemer in Hebrews 10:7. Indeed, in Matthew 20:28 he says that this was the whole purpose of His coming to earth. And I give a couple of other references. And I never cease to be amazed that Jesus was willing to redeem me at such enormous

cost. He was not like the second kinsman redeemer, who said, “No thank you.” Jesus would have had the right to say, “No thank you.” But He was willing to redeem us despite the cost.

Be related by blood to those that he redeems (Deut. 25:5,7-10) just as Jesus had to be related (John 1:14; Rom 1:3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 2:14,15). See Ruth 2:1 and the closer relative in 3:12.

The second condition was that he had to be related by blood to those that he wants to redeem. The very word “kinsman redeemer” indicates that Boaz qualified, but in Ruth 2:1 he makes it clear that he was literally a relative to Naomi, using a different Hebrew term for relative.

So what does that prophetically show? Well, it highlights the fact that our redeemer had to be related to us in some way in order to represent us. I heard a pastor once say that Jesus was a fully formed baby put into the womb of Mary and that there were no genetic transfer from Mary to Jesus. He denied that God took an egg from Mary and added genetic material to it. He was trying to preserve Christ’s sinlessness, but his way of doing so was heresy. Jesus could not be our Redeemer if he was not related to us. Hebrews 2:14-15 says,

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

In fact, Jesus considers Himself to be so closely related to us that He calls those whom He has redeemed his brothers (Heb. 2:11). He includes all His elect in His corporate bride. He is indeed a kinsman.

Be able to pay the price for redemption (Lev. 25:25-26) just as Jesus was able to pay the price (1 Pet. 1:18-19; Jer. 50:34; etc). See Ruth 2:1.

The third qualification is that a kinsman redeemer had to be able to pay the price for redemption according to Leviticus 25:25-26. Leviticus is quite clear that if he did not have the money, the land or the persons could not be redeemed. Likewise, if the kinsman redeemer was enslaved himself, there would be nothing he could do.

Well, Boaz was able to redeem both in terms of power and in terms of wealth. His name, Boaz, means “In him is strength.” Corresponding to this, he is called a “mighty man” in 2:1, or as the New King James translates it, a man of great wealth. The Hebrew words used for this are gibôr hayil. gibôr is used by itself to refer to a mighty warrior and David’s choicest warriors were called gibôr. But when hayil is added to gibôr, it indicates an

intensification; a very mighty man, which would include wealth, but especially emphasized his power. Let me read you what the dictionary says on this and how Boaz was such an appropriate figure for Christ.

The individual designated seems to be the elite warrior similar to the hero of the Homeric epic and it may be that the gibbor hayil was a member of a social class.¹

And he goes on to speak of military prowess and wealth. So Boaz was a kinsman redeemer par excellence. And in the same way, Christ had to be strong. Jeremiah 50:34 says,

The Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is His name. He will thoroughly plead their case, that He may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon."

Whether the kinsman redeemer bought people back out of slavery, redeemed the land, redeemed a widow, or avenged the death of a relative, he had to be strong enough to not only provide for them, but also to protect them from the enemy and to destroy the enemy.

People sometimes question Christ's ability to redeem as many as He intends to redeem. When John 12:27 says that Christ's goal was to save the world, that seems too impossible, so people explain it away. No, that's His intention, and He is going to eventually save the world. 2 Corinthians 5:19 says that God is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. Scripture promises that it will eventually be a world in which righteousness dwells and in which the knowledge of the Lord will be as deep as the waters covering the ocean beds. He is able to do everything that He has promised.

B. Other prophetic aspects of Boaz

But the way this book is worded, it showcases many other aspects of the Person and work of Jesus. In one sermon we cannot possibly cover all the prophetic aspects of this book, but let me name a few.

He is presented as lord of all

Boaz is presented as the lord of his field in chapter 2. Verse 3 speaks of "the field belonging to Boaz." Verse 5 speaks of his steward. In verses 8 and 13 Boaz speaks of "my young women." And it wasn't just his arrogance to speak like this. The inspired text itself in verse 15 calls the reapers "his young men." In verse 21 he speaks of "my harvest." In verses 8-9 he tells Ruth not to leave and she calls herself "your maidservant" in verse 13. All of that language fits in with Christ being our Lord, our owner, and the one to whom we are indebted. All that we are is His, and gloriously, all that He has is ours. The moment Boaz married Ruth, Boaz' possessions became Ruth's

¹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), volume 1, p. 272.

possessions. And in the same way, Paul tells us, For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

It is so cool that in Christ we have all His resources. Praise God!

“Boaz came from Bethlehem” (2:4)

In chapter 2:4 Boaz came from Bethlehem just as Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Boaz and Ruth were married at the end of the barley harvest (3:15,17 “barley...barley”)

Chapter 3 makes it clear that the betrothal and marriage of Ruth took place at the end of the barley harvest rather than at the end of the wheat harvest. I won't get into all of the symbolism of that because I dealt with it in my sermons on Revelation 11.²

But I love the symbolism of Pentecost. Ruth was married at the time of Pentecost and the book of Ruth was read by the Jews on the day of Pentecost. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago on the Sabbath sermon, Pentecost was a mini-jubilee that freed the people from slavery. It was the fiftieth day after Unleavened Bread, symbolizing the freedom and liberty that our Kinsman Redeemer ushered in. Like the 50 year Jubilee, this 50 day Jubilee was tied up with the same Jubilee symbolism that you find in Leviticus 25. It was the time when God pledged to His people to provide everything that they need for life and godliness. What a wonderful book!

There are many other prophetic aspects to the book of Ruth that we won't have time to get into. I'll give you four more examples from chapter 1.

Verse 6 says, “the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread.” Luke 1 tells us that God has visited His people in His mercies by giving us Christ (Luke 1:78-79), who is the bread of life (John 6:32,33,48). It uses the same language. So that language not only ties in with the rescue of Deborah and Barak, but it ties in with the rescue of Jesus.

2 In chapter 2 she had planned to work through both the barley and the wheat harvests, but verse 15 indicates that didn't happen. It says that she was given six ephahs of barley from the threshing floor and verse 17 shows her bringing barley to Naomi. It was clearly the barley harvest. The wheat harvest happened a month later. And this is why the book of Ruth was read by Jews at the feast of Pentecost. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit is the symbolic betrothal of Jesus to His bride, and (as I pointed out in my sermon on Revelation 11:11-14), the marriage supper of the Lamb happened when the last of the barley harvest was gathered in in AD 70. After AD 70, the Festival of Tabernacles is the symbol, and all those saved from then to the end of the world will be part of the wheat harvest.

In Ruth 1:8-17 we find Naomi's treatment of Ruth and Orpah very similar to the treatment that the Jewish church gave to Gentiles in the New Testament. They stiff-armed them. Naomi discouraged entry of the Gentile widows into Israel, and only reluctantly agreed to Ruth coming when she insisted. But just as in God's program of "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" we find the Gentiles following Israel in Ruth 1:16a and insisting on being part of the same household in verse 16b and being part of the same people in verse 16c and having the same God in verse 16d. Ruth's statement of God being her God is our statement, and nothing but death can now part the Jew and Gentile being in one body.

I'll skip over some of the other cool prophetic images that are in chapter 1.³

VI. God's purposes in suffering

One last lesson that I want to give from this book is that God has His purposes in allowing us to suffer. I have previously given twenty one reasons that God allows suffering. This book gives three more that I didn't mention.

First, suffering purifies the elect and exposes the tares. Orpah and Ruth both had the same opportunity, both followed Naomi for a time, and both seemed sincere. But only Ruth had genuine faith in God. The difficulties made Orpah return to her gods. The difficulties made Ruth even more fiercely embrace the true God. All down through the centuries you can see examples of suffering purifying the church by exposing the tares.

A second purpose of suffering is to bring stubborn people to repentance. I don't know for a fact that Naomi was stubborn, but she certainly was not learning quickly. Her bitterness and misery and lack of industry stands in stark contrast to Ruth's submission to God, joy in the Lord, and willingness

3 Examples: The time of Boaz' betrothal and marriage was the time in the New Testament when the Spirit was poured out upon the church so that they spoke in tongues as a symbol of God's grace going out to the Gentiles. The incorporation of Jew and Gentile into one body happened at Pentecost. Interestingly, to this very day the book of Ruth is read on the feast of Pentecost; and it is a fitting symbol of Christ the Kinsman Redeemer bringing Jew and Gentile into one body. Yet we still find that the Jews do not recognize that. The New Testament tells us why. Hardness in part has come to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles is come in. Israel will be saved as a group of people only when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. It is therefore significant that there is no mention of Naomi being redeemed until fullness comes to Ruth and she gives birth to a child.

> Ruth 4:14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a kinsman redeemer; and may his name be famous in Israel! 15 And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." We see here not only that Naomi receives a kinsman redeemer on the day that Ruth gives birth, but also that great blessings come upon Naomi in verse 15 in the coming years as a result of the fullness on the Gentiles. In the words of Romans 11 the fullness of the Gentiles will bring ever greater blessings upon Israel. Up until that time Israel's provisions have been from the gleanings. But then, she will get in on the full harvest blessings as a restored member of the household.

to serve. Suffering did cause Naomi to gradually turn to the Lord, but it was much more slowly. In chapter 1:18-22 Naomi has a recognition that she has done wrong and that God has judged her. She is in a transition stage in those verses. She knows that she needs God, but she also has not been brought to the place of joyful submission to His providence. There can be no winners among those who do not submit to God. Their leaving Israel and disobeying God's purposes brought nothing but ruin and despair. But that despair was used by God to turn them back to Christ. So that's why I say that a second purpose of suffering is to bring stubborn people to repentance.

That by itself should help to inform us on how we should pray for loved ones who are in rebellion. Don't always be praying that the Lord would protect them if they are clearly outside of His will. That amounts to fighting God's discipline. I know that wanting their protection may be the first impulse of our hearts, but we should be more concerned about their eternal security than we are about their temporal safety.

My Dad told me about a young man who came to Christ only after God made him a quadriplegic. He grew up in the church but had backslidden so badly that everyone doubted that he could have even been a genuine believer to begin with. His mother faithfully prayed for him, but her prayers tended to focus on asking God to provide good jobs, sustain him, keep him from injury, and yes, to bring her son back to the Lord. So her pastor encouraged her one time to change her prayer life. In light of the fact that her son's eternal state was way more important than how comfortable he was on earth, he encouraged her to stop praying for his safety and to start praying that God would do anything necessary to bring him to repentance - anything. So she did. And shortly thereafter, he broke his neck in a logging accident and was paralyzed from the neck down. But as a result of that accident he came to the Lord and testified that he was grateful to God for his broken neck because without it he could see that he was headed toward hell. He recognized that his stubbornness and rebellion were leading him nowhere good, and that God had to use this kind of severity to bring a stubborn son back into the fold. Better a broken neck than entering into eternity without Christ.

And that brings me to the third purpose illustrated in this book - that the sufferings they experienced corrected a faulty view of God. Naomi was bitter because things weren't going her way, but by the end of the book she found joy in things going God's way.

God is not a cosmic policeman who is trying to blow the whistle on you and rob you of all joy. Nor is God an absentee landlord who only rarely shows

up in your life. Nor is God a cosmic bellboy whose main responsibility is to answer our every prayer, and come running to our aid whenever we call or have a particular need. Those three views of God are totally man-centered and totally different from the views of God as presented in this book.

The Biblical view of God is that He is sovereign and does His good pleasure in heaven and on earth. No one can resist His will and those who try to end up the worse for it. This book has a very God-centered view of God. And it is only when Ruth and Naomi gratefully bow before His sovereignty that they come to enjoy His sovereignty. It is only when we become God-centered and intent on pleasing God that we strangely find our own happiness in Him. And this is a book that shows happiness to be found in submission to Christ. When we lie at His feet and ask Him to be our Lord, we find His Lordship to be generous, kind, strong, and hope-filled.

Ruth's conversion was the beginning of a long chain of events that went through King David to Jesus and is still being worked out in the salvation of the world. This book presents a beautiful picture of a God who is a loving Father as well as a sovereign king. While Naomi did not initially acknowledge the truth of Elimelech's name, which means, "God is King," she did by the end of the book. This book showcases the love and care of God for each of those whom He has redeemed. May we respond to Him with the same love and loyalty that Ruth did. Amen.