

## YOU CAN'T FLEE FROM YOUR TROUBLES!

Ruth 1:1-5

*This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, April 8, 2007 Sunday evening*

Nothing, in such a brief way, describes the story of Redemption as well as the book of Ruth. Boaz, the male hero in the story pictures the Lord Jesus Christ—as the redeemer.

An underlining truth pervades this short story of the domestic life of Ruth and Naomi. You cannot deny, once you study the book, the pathway of providence. Christians are not always sure they are guided and protected by God. Yet, there is a single verse in the book of Ruth that assures us that God controls our lives and destiny. The King James Version expresses it so well, *“So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech,”* (Ruth 2:3). What seems to merely happen to Ruth was nothing but the providential direction of God. She happened upon the right field, at the right time when the right things were happening! It is said that large doors swing open on small hinges! Certainly that was truth here. What appeared to be a minor happening introduced Ruth to what would become life changing—life transforming. The concluding lines of the book of Ruth establish clearly the lineage of one of Israel’s great kings—King David. *“to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David,”* (Ruth 4:21-22). Ruth becomes the great grand mother of David. And it is not accidental either, that Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind will be known as “the Son of David.” He came from that family. Not only does the book tell about the family, but the location from which the Savior would come. We sing, “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” and should remember that the Christmas story began centuries ago with the incidents mentioned in the book of Ruth—about the place called “Bethlehem-Judah!”

There is more to the story than redemption. It tells the two major pillars upon which redemption rests. First, the book tells about finding grace. Ruth 2:2 (NASU) says, *“And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.”* The favor mentioned in this translation concerns grace. The King James Version speaks of *“him in whose sight I shall find grace.”*

If you would spend the time and trace the various times in which “finding favor” is mentioned in Scripture, you would find one of the most beneficial truths in the Bible. The first mention of such favor occurred when Noah was escaping the worldwide flood that would destroy the world. Genesis 6:5-8 reveals the contrast:

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. The LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*

A common expression about the various offerings to be given to God was that they were—*“An aroma pleasing to the Lord.”* No wonder that Jesus was always spoken of as being in favor with God and man, (Luke 2:52, Matthew 3:17, 17:5).

Having the favor of the Lord relates always to the grace of God. When the gifts of the Spirit are mentioned in I Corinthians 12, the better expression of them is that they are “gracelets.”

Grace is more than what the typical definition says. Grace is described as “the unmerited favor of God.” But grace is more! It is living continually with the unmerited favor of God in your life! So, the question of Ruth is profoundly significant. She asked, *“Why have I found grace in thine eyes?”* (Ruth 2:10). You enter the grace of God, as Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Coupled with grace is the theme of rest. Because Ruth found grace, she went on to find rest. That explains why Ruth 1:9 is significant: *“May the Lord grant that you may find rest . . .”* Or as Ruth 3:1 says, *“Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?”* Nothing is more touching and secure for Ruth than the words of Boaz, as her kinsman redeemer, *“Under whose wings thou art come to trust,”* (Ruth 2:12).

Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”* (Matthew 11:28-29)

Not all who experience salvation by the grace of God are able to enter the rest of redemption. Hebrews 4:1 SAYS, *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”* Then verses 9-10 say, *“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”*

The book of Ruth, then not only illustrates the power and provision of grace, but demonstrates the way of entering the rest of God.

## **IT STARTS SO DARK!**

The opening verses of Ruth (verses 1-5) give a most sweeping picture of the circumstances that Ruth and Naomi faced. Trouble was everywhere.

Warren Wiersbe called this chapter, “You can’t run away.” He opens by saying, “A family makes a bad decision and exchanges one famine for three funerals.”<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe reminds us the old saying that you cannot run from your troubles. Wherever you go, you will have to face them again.

In David’s Psalm on God’s knowledge and presence, he speaks of his undying confidence in God’s ability to keep him. He says:

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, History, (Colorado Springs, CO: 2003), p. 178.

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You. (Psalm 139:7-12)*

Sometimes, trouble is so overwhelming, it seems all hope is gone. That was what is must have felt like for Naomi and her husband Elimelech.

## **IT WAS DURING THE TIMES OF THE JUDGES**

No other time, in all of Israel's history that conditions were so dark. Immorality and idolatry continually swept the country. When the people repented, the Lord sent them deliverers. But soon, the people were back in the depth of degradation. The concluding verse of Judges characteristics the mood of the time: *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes,"* (Judges 21:25). It is then a bit remarkable to discover the meaning of Elimelech's name. It means "God is my king." Apparently, because of the actions of Elimelech to run out of the Promised Land to settle in Moab, He no longer saw God as his king.

## **THERE WAS FAMINE IN THE LAND**

This is all the more remarkable since the meaning of the name of Bethlehem means "house of bread." Judah means, "praise." So Bethlehem Judah was a wonderful place to raise our children. But all was not well. A famine invaded the land. Suddenly the land of milk and honey became desolate because of the sins of the people. God had warned them: *"If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit,"* (Leviticus 26:18-20, cf. Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24).

## **PHYSICAL FAMINE FOLLOWS SPIRITUAL FAMINE**

Deuteronomy 11:13-14 assure nations of God's blessing if they will simply obey Him—*"It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil."*

For Judah to have famine clearly indicated that Israel was disobedient to God. When a nation or person lives under an "open heaven," they are living in obedience to God, (see Matthew 3:17).

But the famine was far more than physical. Amos 8:11 says, *"Behold, days are coming,"* declares the Lord GOD, *"When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD."*

We are living in such a time. While the pulpits are full of preachers, there is widespread lack of “*Thus saith the Lord.*”

## **THEY SOJOURNED TO THE LAND OF MOAB**

Psalm 108:9 says, “*Moab is my washpot.*” That means that Moab had a lowly place with God. The image is that of a disgraced nation forced to wash the feet of victorious soldiers. Such words recall the Prodigal son who went into a far off country, squandered his estate with loose living. Luke 15:14-16 (NASU) says:

*Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.*

Elimelech’s family became a prodigal family—journeying to Moab.

Moab has a sorted history. The name originally came from the birth of Moab which was from the incestuous relationship Lot has with his elder daughter, (Genesis 19:30-37). During Israel pilgrim journey from Egypt to the land of Israel, they treated Israel harshly, (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). When Balak attempted to bring a curse upon Israel, he was able to use Moabite women to seduce Jewish men into immorality and idolatry, (Numbers 22-25).

So often, with the prophets, special judgment is often issued against Moab. Jeremiah 48:11 has several phrases that describe Moab:

*Moab hath been at ease from her youth.* That means that the national disposition of Moab was unconcern or indifference. She was spiritually lukewarm nation.

*He hath settled on his lees.* Lees are the dregs that go to the bottom of a vessel when wine is fermenting. The pictures a people who settle down without doing anything with God

*And hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel.* Instead of stirring themselves up with moral excitement, Moab remains spiritually inactive and stagnate.

*Neither hath he gone into captivity.* God’s judgment has not yet fallen upon Moab. She is on the brink of disaster—but not quite there yet.

*Therefore his taste remained in him.* That means, the old sinful appetites are still active and alive.

*And his scent is not changed.* Scent in the Bible often refers to discernment. It means they had “*noses . . . but they smell not,*” (Psalm 115:6). They are incapable of detecting what is right or wrong.

## **THEY WENT TO MOAB—ELIMELECH, HIS WIFE AND TWO SONS**

Apparently, the union between Elimelech and Naomi was not that good. Their spiritual decline is reflected by the names of their sons. Mahlon means “unhealthy,” while Chilion means “puny.” The boys must have been sickly.

But after lingering in Moab ten years, Naomi is so changed that she demands that her name to be changed to “Mara”—that is, “bitter.” The land of Moab has brought bitterness into her life.

## **THE TWO SONS TOOK MOABITE WOMEN AS WIVES**

For the sons to marry women of Moab was to break the Mosaic Law. Jews were never to marry Gentiles, (Deuteronomy 7:1-11, Nehemiah 13:1-3, Ezra 9:1-4). In fact, according to Deuteronomy 23:3, these were the very people that were forbidden by God from entering the congregation of Israel to ten generations. With grace, however, the blessings of God are secure for 1,000 generations.

Orpah means “deer” or “fawn.” It could also mean “a portion of the neck or back.” Here name either implies that she was an athletic type or she turned her back on spiritual matters. She refused to go to Bethlehem.

Ruth means “satisfied” or “beauty.” You might call her “Miss Personality.”

## **DEATH CAME TO ALL THE MEN**

What a tragic conclusion to the time in exile. It is like James 1:15—“*When sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*”

But, let us not linger too long here. You can never know how great redemption is until you realize how devastating sin is! Romans 5:20-21 explains:

*But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## THE POINT OF DECISION

Ruth 1:6-18

*This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, Sunday evening, April 15, 2007*

The darkest moments occur just before daybreak! Still, you can remain in the dark spiritually if you allow your attitude to remain gloomy. That is the story of Naomi and Ruth. They faced the most horrid problems imaginable. Then, as Warren Wiersbe says, they tried to “hide their mistakes.”<sup>1</sup>

### THE MOMENT OF DECISION, (Ruth 1:6-14)

The Scripture colorfully describes Naomi’s choice to return to the Land of Promise. She has heard how God was once again visiting her people with blessing. Verses 6-7 says that Naomi “*arose*” and “*departed from the place where she was. . .*” It is one thing to get up and another to go! To leave the old place is leave the old crowd, the old life style, for a new way of living. When the Prodigal said, “*I will arise,*” it was the first step in returning.

You must arise and leave! Anyone who wants to follow God, must come out from among them and be ye separate.

It is difficult to understand why Naomi appealed to her daughters-in-law to return to their people, back into the heathen life of Moab. Living in America today, it is impossible to comprehend what serious ordeal these three women faced. Widows were always without support. Theirs was a perpetual poverty and widowhood!

Naomi reasoned that if she should conceive a male that very night, would her two daughter-in-laws be willing to wait until the child was old enough to marry. To accompany Naomi meant that they would never marry. The women were not only outcasts with Naomi’s relatives, but also outcasts socially and religiously. The Jews had no dealing with the Moabites.

Then, according to verse 13, Naomi felt the wrathful hand of God against her, that “*the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.*” The hand of the Lord is a powerful expression in the days when Scriptures were being composed. Elijah is spoken of as, “*the hand of the Lord came upon Him,*” (II Kings 3:14-16). That denotes that God was with him, to bless and give him victory. After the death of Stephen and the scattering of saints, the Bible says, “*The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord,*” (Acts 11:21). Because the hand of the Lord was with them, they received the favor of God. But when Naomi said, “*The hand of the Lord is against me,*” she was expressing the displeasure of the Lord that was upon her.

What is genuine repentance? Orpah shed many tears, but they were not tears of repentance. The Greek term for repent in II Corinthians 7:10(NASU) is *metanoia* meaning, “to change your mind.” The verse says, “*For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.*” So true repentance leads to salvation!

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, History, (Colorado Springs, CO: 2003), p. 181.

To change your mind requires a whole new way of looking at life. In verse 15, when Orpah returned to her own people, Naomi concluded, “*Behold, (she) has gone back to her people and her gods . . .*” Here are the two most difficult places to change—with your relatives and your religion. Those are the most difficult things to give up. But if you are going to follow God, it must be a decisive and complete commitment. Jesus said, “*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life,*” (Matthew 19:29 NASU).

### **THE INVOLVEMENT IN THE DECISION, (Ruth 1:15-18)**

The great need these days is for people to make real decisions for God as Ruth made. She made a six-fold decision:

*Where you go, I will go.*

When a person follows Christ, he wants to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. The old way of walking is over. Things of the past are all forsaken. A person wants to go where God leads.

*Where you lodge, I will lodge.*

When a person finds Christ, he wants to live in a different place. To lodge refers to the every day place where you live—and speaks about the new home where you live. That is why the word “submission” is so typical of the “new house arrangements.” That is a key element in your relationship with Christ. You learn to submit yourself one to another.

*Your people shall be my people.*

Another change when you decide to following God is you change the company you are with. You no longer feel comfortable with your old associates. You are no longer of this world or its practices.

*Your God, my God.*

When God becomes your God, you change the realm of worship. I Thessalonians 1:9 speaks of “*how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.*”

Notice, Ruth made God her own God. She speaks of God as “*My God.*” How good to make God your God. David said, “*The Lord is my shepherd.*” Nothing is better than a personal relationship with God. “*He is my rock and my shield,*” “*He is my healer,*” “*He is my righteousness,*” “*He is my banner over me.*” “*He is my fortress.*” “*He is my “all in all!”*”

*Where you die, I will die.*

When Caesar brought his troops to England, he burned their ships behind them. Likely that is where we get the expression, “Burning your bridges behind you.” When you make such a decision, it is an all or nothing decision! Jesus said, “*No one, after*

*putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,”* (Luke 9:62).

*There I will be buried.*

At last, we come to the apex of commitment—“*and there I will be buried.*”

When Ruth said that she was making a commit beyond the graveyard. When Joseph, for example, died in Egypt, he insisted that he be buried in Canaan. Hebrews 11:22 says, “*By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones.*” The most basic fulfillment of that request was Joseph’s confidence that one day the children of Israel would return to the Land of Promise. Hundreds of years later, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him as he crossed the Red Sea and returned to the Promised Land. But there is a larger significant than that!

When Abraham entered the Promised Land, the first piece of land he purchased was the cave of Machpehah—so he could bury Sarah his wife when she died. From then on, a phrase goes on and on through the Hebrew Scriptures—that when a person dies, they are gathered unto their people. That was so with Isaac. When Jacob died in Egypt, he wanted to be buried back in Israel where his people were buried.

By Abraham’s action of buying “a tomb,” he expresses a faith that the land of Israel would remain perpetually for his people. As long as the remains of his loved one remained in the land—it would be theirs.

But there is more to it than that. When God asked him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, soon he was to discover something that would change his perspective forever. John 8:56 says, “*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*” When a substitute was provided instead of his son, Abraham could see “*the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.*” He also saw that God was able to raise his own son. He began to believe in the resurrection.

Notice Genesis 25:8-10. A remarkable commentary of these verses is mentioned in the Pulpit commentary:

**Then Abraham gave up the ghost** (literally, *breathed out*, sc. The breath of life), **and died in a good old age**, —literally, *in a good hoary age*, i.e. “with a crown of righteousness upon his hoary head” (Hughes)—**an old man, and full of years**. Literally, *and satiated*, i.e. satisfied not merely with life and all its blessings, but with living. The three clauses give an elevated conception of the patriarch’s life as that of one who has tastes all the sweets and realized all he ends of a mundane existence, and who accordingly was ripe and ready for transition to a higher sphere. **And was gathered to his people**. And expression similar to “going to his fathers” (ch. XV. 15, q.v.), and to “being gathered to one’s fathers” (Judges ii.10). “The phrase is constantly distinguished from departing this life and being buried, denotes the reunion in Sheol with friends who had gone before, and therefore presupposes faith in the personal continuance of a man after death” (Keil).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> H. D. M. Spence and Joseph Exell, *The Pulpit Commentary, Genesis*, (London and New York: Funk and Wagnallis Company), p. 313.

Hebrews 11:10, 13-19, in speaking of Abraham, says:

*For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God . . . Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.*

And it was these ideas about faith that Ruth was willing to accept and forsake all else. It was a complete commitment, totally relying upon the Lord!

## BEYOND HOPELESSNESS

Ruth 1:19-22

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The scripture references in this message is taken from the New American Standard  
Update.*

Companionship is good but even more so when you go through trouble.  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says:

*Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.*

As bad as Naomi's life had become, at least she had one consolation she wasn't alone. Loneliness can be an impossible foe. God said, *"It is not good for man to be alone!"*

We are told that the two disciples of the Lord walked together on the way to Emmaus, after the crucifixion of the Lord, (Luke 24:20). The Prophet Elijah has his companion—a prophet in the making named Elisha. (II Kings 2:9). Then, Enoch learned to walk with God—and one day, he was not found because God translated him so that he would not see death, (Hebrews 11:5). What a walk that must have been!

So, when you read, *"So they both went until they came to Bethlehem,"* You know as hard as the journey had been, it was not completely unbearable. They both went!

### **A GREAT SHOCK**

Naomi returned to Bethlehem without wearing time or the last ten years of sorrow well. As the town folk looked at her, she became the stir of the town.

When Naomi left for Moab ten years earlier, she was Mrs. Sunshine. She has such a radiant personality. You know you have met people like that—all light and glow.

"Is this Naomi?" the town women asked. She was so different. She carried the marks of the horror of Moab. She was almost unrecognizable. Could it be? She has a semblance of Naomi. Could this be her?

Then when the town concluded, *"This is Naomi and all the city was moved."* Their emotions attempted to grapple with all that has so dramatically changed Naomi's very face.

### **AN UNBEARABLE SORROW**

Naomi is insistent! Do not call me any longer "Naomi" which means "The pleasant one" but call me "Mara"—"the bitter one." She completely surrenders her name for it no longer conveyed the meaning of her life.

It is never what happens to us, but how we take what happens that determines what is made of our lives. Bitterness is the fearful beast of hell that robs the soul of hope and happiness. Hebrews 12:15 warns, “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.*”

She acknowledged that the hand of God has fallen against her. She was hopelessly afflicted. “*The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me,*” she says.

Naomi used the term for “The Almighty,” twice which is the Hebrew “El Shaddai,” –that is, “the All-powerful one.” What is it to deal with the supreme God. And in dealing with Him and having Him deal with you, it is easy to blame Him for all your trials.

The next phrase is even thornier: “*I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.*”

It is bad to go through bad things, but worse when you start the full and then become empty. The pain is doubly painful.

You can be full of the Holy Ghost—to know His power—the very power that formed the worlds and created all there is.

You can be full of faith—to be faithful and steadfast, as the Greek term *pistis* implies. Nothing can harm you when you are sheltered by the shield of faith.

To be full of glory means you are fully aware of the divine presence of God.

Ah, to be full of good works means that your life knows the full measure of meaning, that there is purpose to your life and you are fruitful in all your endeavors.

“Full of new wine” means you are full of joy. “*These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full,*” promised Jesus, (John 15:11).

John Wimber tells of a woman who approached one of the pastors after a most glorious meeting. She appeared to be worried. “The only thing that happened to me,” she said, “is that I have this incredible inner peace and joy.” The pastor was reassuring to her telling her that peace and joy were the fruit of the Spirit. That isn’t that bad!<sup>1</sup>

To be full of wisdom is another coveting fullness. The term wisdom is the Greek “Sophia” meaning “skill. When you are full of wisdom, you know what to do with what you know.

Oh the delight to be full of God. When Naomi left her home in Bethlehem, she went out full! Paul speaks of being filled with the fullness of God.

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<sup>1</sup> John Wimber, The Way In is the Way on, (Atlanta, GA: Ampelion Publishing, 2006), p. 245.

What a reverse, when you come back to where you left full, and now you return empty. The final phrase is the most disastrous—“*the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me.*”

How do you handle such bitterness? When King David was guilty of adultery, he at last came to the Lord and said, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me,*” (Psalm 51:10). There are things a man can manufacture, design, fashion and form. But he cannot create. Only God is the creator. So when David prayed, “Create in me, he came to the only source he could secure an answer. He asked God who alone could create to give him a clean heart. And that the source of your victory! It is in God alone!

## **A FLICKER OF SATISFACTION**

There is a glimmer of light. Verse 22 concludes the chapter, “*And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.*”

There were three harvests in the springtime—one was the barley which was the poor man’s food. It came first. Then came flax. Once the first grain harvest arrived, it was a guarantee that the wheat harvest was coming.

It may not be here yet, but it is coming!

You may not want to read it, but it is a literary gem—a painful one to read. C.S. Lewis writes, “*A Grief Observed,*” in which he tells of the death of his wife whom he was so deeply privileged to know in marriage life for a far too short time of four years. “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear,” he says in the opening words of the book. “The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning.”<sup>2</sup> Lewis comes quickly to his feelings about God. “But go to Him when you need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face. . . . The conclusion I dreaded is not ‘So there’s no God at all,’ but ‘So this is what God’s really like. Deceive yourself no longer.’”<sup>3</sup>

Other comments of Lewis include:

“Part of every misery is, so to speak, the misery’s shadow or reflection: the fact that you don’t merely suffer but have to keep on thinking about the fact that you suffer.”<sup>4</sup>

“Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers.”<sup>5</sup>  
“I look up at the night sky. Is anything more certain than that in all those vast times and spaces, if I were allowed to search them, I should nowhere find her face, her voice, her touch? She died. She is dead.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, (New York, NY: Bantam Books, Inc, 1976), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Op.Cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Op.Cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Op.Cit.*, p. 16.

On and on Lewis goes in what seems to be an endless cycle from one bitter scare to another. It is all maddening pain, so much that you feel like leave his book alone when a ray of light creeps into the book:

“Something quite unexpected has happened,” says Lewis. “It came this morning early. For various reasons, not in themselves at all mysterious, my heart was lighter than it had been for many weeks. For one thing, I suppose I am recovering physically from a good deal of mere exhaustion. And I’d had a very tiring but very healthy twelve hours the day before, and a sounder night’s sleep; and after ten days of low-hung skies and motionless warm dampness, the sun was shining and there was a light breeze. And suddenly at the very moment when, so far, I mourned (her) least, I remembered her best. Indeed it as something (almost) better than memory; an instantaneous, unanswerable impression. To say it was like a meeting would be going too far. Yet there was that in it which tempts one to use those words. It was as if the lifting of sorrow removed a barrier.”<sup>7</sup>

There is never a harvest without the death of the grain. Jesus said, “*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit,*” (John 12:24). To know the fullness and then become empty seems like you will never know fullness again. But there is a place that only is found in God where the once full becomes even fuller. “. . . *Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning,*” says Psalm 30:5. That is what makes the book of Ruth so personal and reassuring. It tells the path back from emptiness to being “*filled with the fullness of God.*”

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<sup>7</sup> Op.Cit., pp. 51-52

## FIRST STEPS IN FINDING THE FULL MEASURE OF GOD!

Ruth 2:1-14

*This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, Sunday evening, May 6, 2007  
The version for this sermon is the New American Standard Bible*

Ruth was utterly impoverished and it must have been completely embarrassing to be reduced to such destitution. Yet, she had come to Bethlehem, the house of bread. How was she to enter the provision and the fullness of God?

In the same token, how can a person come into the fullness of God's provision as mentioned in Ephesians 3:19—“*that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*” Where do you start? It has been properly stated that God changes circumstances when your heart is changed.

The Bethlehem story starts with verse 1—“*Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.*” This verse offers immediate insight into the possible provision God will have both for Naomi and Ruth. The provision centers on Boaz. The phrase “*a man of great wealth,*” can be interpreted in various ways—such as, a man of valour, a brave warrior, a mighty man, and a man of standing. Evidently, he was a man of the finest manly traits. His name means “in him is strength.”

The verses before us, are filled with exciting insight and spiritual instruction—the pathway of understanding.

### **SHE DID WHAT SHE COULD, (Ruth 2:2)**

Ruth recognized and stepped into what the Law said was available. As an impoverished person, Ruth has the legal right to glean in the corners of the harvest fields, (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22). What she could do, she did do. There is a Latin saying which goes, “Providence assists not the idle.” “It was God's way of taking care of the poor people of that day,” says J. Vernon McGee. “He didn't put them on relief; he didn't get them in a bread line: He didn't make them recipients of charity. He gave them something to do. They had to work for what they got.”<sup>1</sup>

That is the first step for anyone who wants to be enriched by God. Take Him at His Word.

### **SHE DETECTED WHAT SHE MUST DO, (Ruth 2:3).**

When Ruth secure Naomi's permission to “*go now*” to the field, the term “field” is not in the plural form. At the time there were no fences, family signs or natural barriers to distinguish one owner's property from another. Stones were used as markers that separated boundaries, (Proverbs 22:28). That she happened upon a given land that would later be her husband's, or that she would become a woman in the line of King David and ultimately, the Savior, is altogether astonishing. How did she know into which field she should go?

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Volume 2, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p.96

Dr. Harry Ironside, in reviewing his life, claims that about 80% of his decisions were made without knowing at the time they were God's will. Yet, there is a more definite plan!

As Ruth approached the field of Boaz, she knew that all the landowners would not welcome her, particularly a stranger from Moab. She desperately needed to find where she could find favor. So she watched to find where the favor of the Lord would be. That is a key element in guidance. To see where God is blessing! Though it might seem she just happened to get to the right place, she first put herself in the right position by taking God at His word and then looking for where the favor of the Lord was occurring.

How do you sense the favor of the Lord? There may be an inner prompting that this is the way, walk ye in it. Or there might be a "good impression of God," that where you are right. "*The favor of the Lord*" is often the guiding indicator in the lives of the godly. According to Hebrews 11:5, Enoch "*obtained the witness (that) he pleased the Lord.*" Noah, says Genesis 6:8, "*found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*" "*The Favor of the Lord*" was a key issue in for Ezra to find God's direction for his life, (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28).

It may seem like happenstance, but as Genesis 24:27 (kjv) says, "*I being in the way, the Lord led me.*"

#### **SHE SUBMITTED TO THE ENTIRE AFFAIR TRUSTING GOD FOR DIRECTION AND PROVISION, (Ruth 2:4-7)**

We are not told why Boaz was detained from going to his field early in the morning. Perhaps he had business to attend to in town. However, when he came to his field and saw the crew at work, he greets them. His greeting invokes a returned greeting from the working crew. It is a remarkable exchange—of mutual respect. It was a form of blessing—"*The Lord be with you,*" said Boaz. And the reapers' reply, "*The Lord bless you.*" The greeting on both sides was an acknowledgment of their complete dependence upon the Lord.

As Boaz approached his field, he immediately recognized a stranger. Her dress and appearance were different. When Boaz asks the crew leaders about her, he seems almost rude.

Ruth had three recommendations—she had come with Naomi, she had asked permission to pick grain with the other reapers, and she was ever so persistent as she steadily worked.

Even when she carries a brief time in the house—likely a temporary hut for rest and recovery, Ruth spends only a short time as a break from her work.

Why should she be so favored? Of course, her reputation had gone before her. Boaz has already heard of Ruth and her exceptional qualities. Likely, Bethlehem was like any small town where gossip has spread about the "little foreign girl from Moab." Here was a woman who was loyal to her mother-in-law, who would never desert her. Ruth, it must have been reported, was a charming woman as her name means—"of a beautiful or glamour personality." She was an attractive woman!

We dare not miss the spiritual significance of the “unnamed servant” who was “*in charge of the reapers*,” (verse 6). Genesis 24:2 speaks of the eldest servant that Abraham sent out to find a wife for his son Isaac. Then, Joseph’s “*ruler of his house*” was the servant who prepared a meal for Joseph’s brothers when they are reunited, (Genesis 43:16-17). The nameless figures are always a reminder of the Holy Spirit who does not draw attention to himself, but exalts the Lord. He provides for Christ a bride, brings them into unity with gifts and graces as in the story of Ruth suggests and finally, brings them into the Marriage supper of the lamb as represented by Joseph. Much a due may be spoken about the manifestations of the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit never mentions Himself. He always and only magnifies the Lord, (John 16:13-14).

### **SHE EMBRACED THE FULL CAPACITY OF HER PROVISION AS SHE UNDERSTOOD IT, (Ruth 2:8-13)**

There is a subtle shift in the story, which is a remarkable change. Till that moment, Ruth is spoken of as “damsel” or “woman.” Then, Boaz calls her “daughter,”—“my daughter.” The welcome is friendly and personal.

Boaz gives Ruth good advice—not to seek to glean in another field, but to abide here. She is to continue on with the godly people that she has come to know. He says to her, “*Let thine eyes be on the field.*” She is not to dream or think of anywhere else to go. That is a commitment to stay where God has started you growing.

He offers her protection and provision. Boaz tells how he has warned his young men not to touch, reproach her but to be kind to her. That is a taletell sign of the day in which they lived. Wickedness was everywhere and she needed to stay where she could be safe and secure.

He tells her to “*go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.*”

Ruth is overwhelmed and “*she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground,*” (verse 10). She does not understand the wonderful grace bestowed to her. Boaz explains his part—that “*it hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done,*” (verse 11). In the word “answered” in verse 11, it means literally, “raised his voice.” He wants her to know clearly and deliberately how valuable her commitment had been!

Boaz then expresses a key to Ruth’s entire redemptive story. He said, “*May the Lord repay you.*” He was suggesting that because of her commitment to God she might be richly and fully rewarded. Boaz uses a figure of speech common in Israel—that of God’s protection as a bird that spreads its wings over her chicks, (Psalm 17:8, 36:7, Matthew 23:37).

The heart of the story is found in verse 13—“*I find favor in thy sight.*” She looked for someone who would show her grace. Verse 2 and 10 tell how Ruth sought a field where she might “*find favor.*”

The word “favor” is from the Hebrew word “*chen*” which is the same Hebrew term for grace. A little search will uncover why Boaz is so full of grace for Ruth. He knew what it was like to be an alien—to be an outcast. Boaz was the son of Rahab who received spies in Joshua’s day during the destruction of Jericho, (Joshua 2:5). Rahab then became part of the lineage of Jesus Christ and part of the commonwealth of Israel.

Two lingering images remain. In verse 14, it says, “*She sat beside the reapers.*” The word “sit” implies that the work is finished. Recall, when Jesus drove out the legions of demons from the demoniac, Luke 8:35 says that he was calmly “*sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.*” The book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus “*After he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God,*” (Hebrews 10:12). That means that Ruth entered a realm of rest with God, that the work of her redemptive recovery was already accomplished.

That may explain the second image conveyed in verse 14. Boaz served her roasted grain “*and she sat and was satisfied.*” She had found the place where her soul was satisfied.

## THE UNFOLDING OF GOD'S PLAN!

Ruth 2:14-23

*This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, June 3, 2007 Sunday evening  
The version for this sermon is the New American Standard Bible*

The last message ended with the last word in Ruth 2:14—"Left." After having a meal with the other reapers supplied by Boaz, Ruth ate until she was satisfied. There was still some roasted grain left. This sense of abundance was a remarkable display of all that was to follow.

Such an experience recalls the words of the Apostle Paul who speaks of the believer's inheritance. All that was experienced of God's grace is only an earnest, or a down payment of that which is to come. Originally, this word likely came from Phoenicia, referred to "earnest-money." It was a deposit by a purchaser and if the purchase was not completed, the earnest was forfeited. In time, an earnest denoted a pledge. In the New Testament, it is used only as assurance by God that the giving of the Holy Spirit is a pledge of future blessedness, (Ephesians 1:14, II Corinthians 1:22, 5:5).

Once Ruth had landed on the field of Boaz and had been properly introduced to Boaz, you would think that the intention of God would be fully realized—that she would step into the full purpose of her life, into her full inheritance. But that was not intended to be. Why do we imagine that when God begins to work with us, we expect to arrive immediately at the destiny of God's purpose? Instead, there are many winds and turns, twists and troubles, but little by little you enter more and more into your spiritual inheritance.

The New Testament term "entrance" (*eisodos*) speaks of the believers access into God's presence, (Hebrews 10:19) and into the full supply of God's provision. II Peter 1:11 says, "*For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*"

The plan of God for your life unfolds a step at a time. It has been said that the great doors of God's guidance swing on small hinges. It was the happenstance of Ruth landing on Boaz's and becoming acquainted with him, that started the process that would ultimately bring her in the fullness of God's plan.

The unfolding of God's plan for your life, not only begins when you begin to move in the direction of God's purpose, but as you realize that moving into the goal comes a step at a time. That is why I Peter 4:10 is so practical. It says, "*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" What is the "manifold grace of God?" The word "manifold" could be translated "variegated." That is, they are various folds in God's grace and they become unfolded to us a single fold at a time. All that God provides for the believer is far more than what can be grasped or understood in this life. That explains why the Apostle Paul says, "*that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus,*" (Ephesians 2:7). It will take eternity to unveil the magnificent grace He provides for Christians!

## THE UNFOLDING OF RUTH'S PATH

Where did it all start with Ruth? The guidance of God began when she made a commitment to follow God, (Ruth 1:16). That commitment was multifaceted—a commitment to a new people, a new life style, a new country, a new place to die—a complete make over!

The next step was to obey that Laws of God as she understood them. That is what caused her to one day, get up early and go and glean in a field during harvest time. It was a provision afforded to her by the law.

The third step was that she just accidentally landed on the property belonging to Boaz. What appeared to be accidental was actually providential. It reminds us that if you keep your heart right before God, He will certainly guide you along the way—even though each step may not seem to be His direct intervention.

### THE NEXT STEPS, (Ruth 2:14-16)

Once Ruth became acquainted with Boaz, she continued to move into the place of God's design and purpose. Trace the next few steps:

1. A place of fellowship, (Ruth 2:14). Boaz's invitation to join him for dinner, suggests not only a means of provision for providing for Ruth's physical needs, but a way of becoming better acquainted with Boaz. Boaz invited her to take a place of honor.
2. A place of provision, (Ruth 2:15). When Ruth returned to the field, Boaz gave specific instructions to the young field servants. "Boaz commanded his young men," which recalls how the older men of God are for counsel while the young are for work. He told them, "*Let her glean even among the sheaves. . .*" The poor were very likely to get up to where the grain was excellent. You understand then why the owners of the field would insist that the poor gleaners would always kept behind his reapers. But in Ruth's case, Boaz told his labor force to allow Ruth to push into the good grain.
3. A place of abundance, (Ruth 2:16). The handfuls on purpose were an additional supply given to Ruth without her knowledge of it. The deliberate scattered of more grain was designed to enrich Ruth more.

For the believer, God gives "handfuls of revelation on purpose." The term knowledge in the Hebrew (*nakar*), is used both in verses 10 and 19. It means "to discern or make a distinction." As the events of Ruth's life unfold, there is a detection of what God is doing.

When Ruth returned to her mother-in-law, she returned with an ephah (originally an Egyptian measurement) of grain. When God gave manna, a day's supply per person was "an omer," (Exodus 16:16). An omer was a measurement—of a sheaf (5.1 pints)—that is, an ephah was ten omers which was enough food for two women for nearly a week, (five days). Ruth also gave Naomi some food that had been left over from lunch, (verse 18).

## **FAITHFUL COMMITMENT, (Ruth 2:17-23)**

Many make commitments, but do not remain faithful to her commitment. Ruth was faithful three ways:

1. She worked thoroughly till evening and performed all her work, (verse 17-18). Not only did she spend the day gleaning, she ended her day threshing the grain with a stick to separate the grain from the chaff. No one knows how humble the work of gleaning is. It requires that you are on your knees. And is this not the posture where you find the richest of grace stooped in prayer and waiting before an open Bible? Then, the task of threshing is even more humbling. It must be a dirty job and tiring. But if you are going to get into the depths of God's storehouse, it demands a commitment to diligent work. Ruth was a woman who has a commitment each day to do all the duties her commitment required.
2. Taking notice of your blessings, (verses 19-20). Not only must the believer feel blessed when he is blessed, but at moments of blessing ought to be times when special recognition made to God for what He gives.
3. She stayed faithful for the entire season, (verses 21-23). The term used to describe Ruth's staying close to the servant girls is the same verb used in verses 8 and 21 (to stay with) is the identical term used for the marriage bond, (Genesis 2:24). A commitment started well continued on well. She stayed throughout the harvest season—about a six week period. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "*It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy, (or as the KJV says, 'faithful.')*" Nothing prepares you for greater depths in God than being faithful with what God gives you to do!

The reward of Ruth's commitment will concern a kinsman-redeemer. This topic, which is the heart of the book of Ruth, will be for a future message.

## THE CRISIS!

Ruth 3:1-18

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The version for this sermon is the New American Standard Bible*

As long as the harvest was going on, Ruth and Naomi had a certain amount of security. But when the harvest concluded all forms of income were gone. Weeks of harvesting were over and now threshing was in progress. They faced what Jeremiah described as “*Harvest is past, summer is ended, And we are not saved,*” (Jeremiah 8:20). How were they to handle their predicament?

### **OBEYING,** (Ruth 3:1-5)

What Naomi had in mind for Ruth is marriage. That is what the phrase, “*shall I not seek security for you,*” implies. Evidently, Boaz had not made any move toward a marriage proposal. Yet, because Ruth was not familiar with the customs of Israel, Naomi told Ruth what to do. In Israel, during Old Testament times, marriages were arranged by parents. So, the steps that Naomi told Ruth to follow were the way to make the “marriage arrangements.”

Ruth’s actions recall how one must come to Christ—that beyond the gifts and provisions He gives, you long for Him alone. Here are the steps of her preparation:

*Washing*—Ruth was to prepare herself so she could present herself in the best way for this most eventful evening. “Washing” as a spiritual meaning—that of being born again. John Wesley was once asked why he always preached, “Ye must be born again,” (which was his favorite text.) “I’ll tell, you,” he replied. “The reason that I preach on ‘ye must be born again’ is because ye must be born again.

*Anointing*—Ruth needed not only to look good, but smell good. The term “anointing” is from the Hebrew word *suk*—meaning “to pour out.” Anointing refers to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit that is poured into a person’s life.

*Changing clothes*—this reminds us that you cannot live the Christian life in your own power that you cannot rely upon your own righteousness which is nothing but filthy rags, (Isaiah 64:6). II Corinthians 5:21 says, “*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*”

*Going to the Threshing Floor*—this is the place of separation and judgment. Until the Christian judges himself and deals with his life, he will not be living a victorious Christian life.

*Lying at the feet of Boaz*—for Ruth, this was a declaration of faith claiming Boaz as her Kinsman-Redeemer.

You can get the impression that Ruth’s action of lying at Boaz’s feet is a bit provocative, if not an immoral act. However, if you recall that the area was a public place crowded with the harvesters and their families, you will conclude that such action was not inappropriate. What Ruth was doing was simply following a custom prescribed by Naomi who was taking the initiative in proposing marriage.

## **SUBMITTING, (Ruth 3:6-9)**

The threshing floor was a significant part of Ruth's story. After harvest, the grain would have to be separated from the chaff. Usually, on top of a mountain is a raised circular platform surrounded by rock where clay soil was packed into a firm, level surface where the grain could be threshed. Normally, in the late afternoon, the breezes would come and after either the oxen had already trampled the grain or the grain beaten with stalks (Deuteronomy 25:4), the grain needed to be tossed in the air so the chaff to be blown away.

As long as the breezes blew, work continues. Sometimes it would continue until sundown and other times as late as midnight. Afterward, the work crew and family members would hold a great religious feast. Then, after eating, the crew would take up positions for the night to guard the grain from thieves. Since the threshing floor was circular, workmen would put their heads toward the grain with their feet sticking out like spokes of a wheel.

The threshing floor already had a spiritual significance to it. It was the place of spiritual judgment.

When David decided to number Israel, he acted contrary to the laws of God. Even his general Joab was reluctant to carry out the census. But David insisted, (II Samuel 24). Soon, a plague hit the nations with 70,000 dying. The plague finally ended at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite when David offered a sacrifice there. This was the same location where God tested Abraham—where he offered his son upon the altar, (Genesis 22). It was the same location where Jesus died on the cross—the place where the temple was built, (II Chronicles 3:1). Why did David insist upon paying for the land when Araunah was willing to give it to him without charge? It appears he was willing to pay for the land because of his previous failure. God has told the leaders of Israel that when they held a census, they were to pay a temple tax known as redemption money, (Exodus 30:11-16, Numbers 3:40-51). That is what David neglected to collect—to collect the atonement money. That is why the plague stopped at the threshing-floor, a place of judgment for sin, when David offered the right sacrifices.

## **LISTENING, (Ruth 3:10-14)**

When Ruth said to Boaz, "*So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative,*" she was putting claim upon him as a kinsman redeemer—a practice known among Arabs as a token of marriage. Taking up the position at the feet of Boaz was a sign of submission. The term "covering or skirt" (*kanaph* in Hebrew) has an even greater significance. This is the same term used in Ruth 2:12 for "wing." This was an expression for providing protection, warmth and fellowship—the elements of a good marriage. It was the spreading of one's mantle by which a person claimed that person for marriage.

Boaz commends Ruth for not seeking one of the young men in town. Evidently, she was not out looking for a husband. A tradition claims that Boaz was 80 years old at the time.

The switch from calling Ruth a maiden to "my daughter" reveals how he was willing to have her as his wife. There was an obstacle in the way. There was another man

who was a near kinsman who could claim that right. Boaz was only a nephew to Elimelech, while a brother was still living.

As a side note, the word “know” in verse 14 is not the term for sexual intercourse as in other portions of Scripture, but means to discern.

### **RECEIVING, (Ruth 3:15-17)**

Before Ruth departs, Boaz gives her two bushels of grain—which previously he had given her a half a bushel. Here was a supply for more than two weeks. This was a gift to show that Boaz was satisfied with Ruth’s proposal. It also gave Naomi a place. She had returned from Moab to Bethlehem “empty.” Now Boaz tells Ruth, “Go not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”

The question in verse 16 that Naomi asked Ruth has been confusing to Bible translators. The question is, “How did it go, my daughter?” The Authorized Version says, “*Who are you, my daughter?*” Or, to put it in other words, “Are you still Ruth the Moabite, or are you the potential wife of Boaz?”

### **RESTING, (Ruth 3:18)**

There is a final word at this point in the story. Ruth would have to “wait” for the outcome.

“Waiting” is always hard but so necessary in a good spiritual advance with God. Moses told the people to “stand still,” (Exodus 14:13). With the Egyptian army coming after them, it was easy to panic. Reliance upon God as the moment was the need of their lives.

Obedying the command, “*Be still, and know that I am God,*” (Psalm 46:10) will calm your restless spirit. So the words to Ruth, “*to sit still,*” are how she needed to possess her nervous nature.

The interesting feature in this story is that the time of threshing occurred during the Feast of Pentecost. The amount of grain Boaz gave to Ruth was an earnest or down payment of what was to come, just as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of God’s provision for those filled with the Holy Spirit.

The word “tarry” (*kathizo*) means to “sit or set down.” That was the posture of the believers on the day of Pentecost. It mean that the work was accomplished and God would carry it out!

Why is Ruth spoken as a handmaiden? Is it possible that the reference to handmaidens in Acts 2:18 tells how the Holy Spirit works with a person?

## ENTERING THE FULLNESS OF GOD!

Ruth 4:1-22

*This message delivered at Lincoln Christian Life Center, Sunday evening, June 17, 2007.  
The version for this sermon is the New American Standard Bible*

Nothing compares to this chapter on the power of redemption other than the story of the Prodigal Son, (Luke 15:11-32). The fourth chapter of Ruth is a commanding display about entering the fullness of God, as mentioned in Ephesians 3:19—“*that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*”

To understand the nature of these divine privileges, you must unravel the cultural customs of that day—there are many in the chapter.

### **THE MARRIAGE ARRANGEMENT, (Ruth 4:1-8)**

The final part in this romantic story begins when Boaz goes to the city gate. This was like going to city hall—the local law court. It compares to a community where a courthouse was located at the town square. In that ancient day, the common communal center of the city was the city gate, (Deuteronomy 21:18-21; II Samuel 15:2; Job 29:7). During any day, most of the population would pass through it.

So, it was not unusual for the relative of Naomi to pass through the gates—and then for Boaz call at once a city council meeting. He selected 10 men, capable of discerning wisely, who were handy at the moment to serve as elders and representatives of the community in the proceedings. This was the quorum required for conducting a synagogue meeting. That was what was required for conferring a marriage blessing. The number probably originated when God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of her wickedness. Abraham asked God if it were fair for Him to destroy the righteous with the wicked. At last, God agreed that if there were 10 righteous people, He would not destroy the communities.

It is remarkable that when Jesus spoke about the required number to hold a Christian worship service that He promised that if two or three was gathered in His name, He would be with them, (Matthew 18:20).

The immediate difficulty facing Naomi was the possible lose of her property. Perhaps, her land had already been “mortgaged” off when her family had left for Moab ten years earlier when they faced famine. Or, with the end of the harvest, Naomi and Ruth had no other means of support. So Naomi decided that she had to “*sell the piece of land.*” But there was a far better plan. She could appeal to a relative who would keep the land in the family.

At this juncture, we have come to the heart of the story. It revolves around a rather unconventional practice for us these days, but was normal in that day. It was the kinsman redeemer, (“*goel*” in Hebrew). Elimelech, her deceased husband had the right to an heir. The kinsman redeemer could perform three works:

- Redeem a person from bondage, (Leviticus 25:47-55). A person might sell himself, his wife and children into slavery because of a lack of income.

- Redeem the loss of poverty, (Leviticus 25:25-28). In case of an emergency, a family might mortgage their land to someone who would retain the property rights until the year of Jubilee.
- Redeem from the dead, (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). In the event that a couple never had children, and the husband dies, the wife could ask for her husband's brother to marry her—*“to raise up the name of the dead.”* It was a reproach in Israel to be childless because a man's name would be blotted out. Barrenness was regarded as a special mark of God's displeasure. But mostly, having a child was the hope of every Jewish family because they knew that through *“the woman's seed,”* the Messiah would come.

In Naomi's case, redemption involved more than poverty. It dealt with people—carrying on the family name. That is why suddenly in verse 9, her husband's name with her sons' names are mentioned again. When Elimelech died, the family's rights were passed on to Mahlon, Ruth's husband. With his death and having no children, the family name would become extinct.

The Biblical term “redemption” means “to buy back with a price,” or “to deliver from harm by pay a price.” It meant a rich relative could pay off the agreement. When you consider the seriousness of the problem, you will realize the value of a redeemer. The problem is with the length of such an agreement. It was a fifty-year mortgage. What that could mean that a poor fellow would be a slave until the year of Jubilee. It could mean the loss of property rights for a lifetime. The law of the year of Jubilee meant that at the end of fifty years, all things would revert back to its original condition. All this a redeemer could do—without gaining any personal advantage. He would have, for example, no right to the regained property.

When you consider the very name “mortgage,” you see just how disastrous it could be. “Mortgage” comes from two French words “mort” for death—and “gage” meaning pledge. It was a “death pledge.”

The term kinsman is translated in Ruth 3:13 as ransom, as well as in Isaiah 51:10. In Job, it is “redeemer.” When Job said, *“I know that my redeemer (goel) liveth,”* he was thinking of someone to rescue him from all his life long torments.

The episode of Ruth reveals far more than the redemption of a family—and its name. It pictures the Lord's compassion for the deplorable fallen state into which mankind has fallen. In Adam and Eve's sin, the universe came under mortgage forfeiting humanity's life and destiny.

For a person to become a kinsman redeemer, he must be “nigh a kin,” (Leviticus 25:25, 49). (The word kinsman means a relative.) That is one reason Jesus came man, to be of the seed of Abraham, *“to be made like unto his brethren,”* (Hebrews 2:16-17). *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us!”*

A kinsman redeemer must be willing and able to be a redeemer. As the Son of God and the Son of man, Jesus was able to serve as our redeemer, but He was also willing. Some think that His life was taken from Him when He was crucified.

Vernon McGee distinguishes between a person who commits “suicide” and someone who gives his life:

“Many years ago down in Houston, Texas, when a boarding house caught on fire, a woman broke through the lines and went into that house. It collapsed, and she was burned to death. The headlines read; ‘Poor Wretch Dies: Suicide.’ Later, the newspaper corrected it and printed an apology. Do you know why? It was because when workmen were digging around in the rubble, they found in a back room, a little iron bed, and in that little iron bed was baby, *her* baby. She entered that burning building to save her baby. She wasn’t a suicide. She loved that baby and wanted to save her. The Lord Jesus was a willing Redeemer . . . very willing, and it was because He loved us.”<sup>1</sup>

If He is willing, is He able? I Peter 1:18-19 tells how He not only was sympathetic about man’s sins, but able to do something about it: He was able because He was willing to pay the price of redemption with His own precious blood, “*Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them,*” says Hebrews 7:25.

Jesus is foremost our redeemer. When He opened His ministry, He affirmed His redemptive purpose by reading the prophecy in Isaiah and claiming that was why He had come to earth. He read, “*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord,*” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus gave His life as a ransom for sinners, (Mark 10:45; Revelation 5:9-10).

The removing of one’s sandals was a symbolic act of transfer. By it, a person renounced any legal rights and gave the other person the right to tread or go upon the land (to take possession, Genesis 13:17, Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 1:3) According to Deuteronomy 25:7-10, the law required a person to surrender his shoes from off his feet—and was to be spit in his face—showing what a reproach it was not to fulfill this sacred obligation. In Boaz’s case, the near kinsman—was never spit upon.

#### **THE IMMEDIATE BLESSING, (Ruth 4:9-12)**

The immediate area around Bethlehem is known as Ephrathah as pointed out at this time in the narrative. The Hebrew means “fruitful.” That was certain to be true for Ruth and Naomi.

The witnesses believed that the union between Ruth and Boaz would be like the house of Rachel and Leah. Those were the women, plus their handmaids, who gave birth to the twelve men—the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The House of Perez (Pharez) of Tamar is mentioned also not only because he came from the largest tribe of all the twelve tribe, but because it concerned a similar marriage arrangement. The incident was a shameful event in the life of Judah. Pharez was the offspring of a Canaanite woman by the name of Tamar, (Genesis 38:1, 29). Tamar

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vernon McGee, Thru the Bible, Volume 2, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p.119.

took the law of the kinsman redeemer into her own hands after the death of two of her husbands. She had the right to have a relative marry her because no children were left in her marriages to carry on the family name. She took the initiative, as did Naomi, in the ‘levirate marriage rights,’ (*levir* is from the Latin for brother-in-law). This right has been willfully ignored by Judah so she disguised herself as a harlot and enticed Judah into an illicit relationship with her. This union produced twin boys—Pharez and Zarah.

### **THE LONG TERM BLESSING, (Ruth 4:13-22)**

The story of Ruth opened with Naomi as the central figure and she returns at the end, again as the central figure. She had returned “empty handed” and “bitter” from Moab. Now, with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz with the birth of their son, she returns to the full blessing of the Lord. The same women of the community who had questioned, “*Is this Naomi?*” now exclaim, “*Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel,*” (Ruth 1:19, 4:14)

When Naomi took the child and nursed him that is to be interpreted as an act of adoption.

Obed became her salvation. His name, (short for Obadiah) implies “worshiper” or “servant of the Lord.” Certainly he reveals how God kept His promises and achieved His purposes.

The book of Genesis has a tenfold division. After the phrase, “*The generations of the heavens and of the earth,*” ten times the book mentions “the generations of,” (Genesis 2:4). It traces the ten generations—through Adam, Noah, Isaac, Esau and Jacob—tracing the line through which Jesus, the Messiah would come. Only three other times in the Old Testament is “the generations of” mentioned—that of the Sons of Levi (Exodus 6:16-19), that of Aaron and Moses (Numbers 3:1) and finally, the generations of Pharez (Ruth 4:18).

The book of Ruth concludes with a startling, yet subtle sign of redemption. The book ends with the list of ten generations.

1. Perez
2. Hezron
3. Ram
4. Amminadab
5. Nahshon
6. Salmon—Married Rahab, (Matthew 1:5)
7. Boaz
8. Obed
9. Jesse
10. David

Why is that significant? It is the measure of redemption. According to Deuteronomy 23:3, a woman like Ruth could not expect too much. Deuteronomy said that a Moabite was not allowed to enter the congregation “*even to the tenth generation.*” For Ruth, the tenth generation climaxes with King David.

David wanted to build a house for God, but God told him that He was building out of his family a house—that House of Judah—from whence came the Lion of the tribe of Judah! And through David would come the Messiah—the Son of David!