

Book of Ruth: New European Christadelphian Commentary

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Ruth

Ruth Chapter 1

Ruth 1:1 In the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the land. A man of Bethlehem Judah went with his wife and two sons to live in the country of Moab-

The famine was because of Israel's disobedience. The idea of famine was to bring the people back to God, but Elimelech [like many people today] responded poorly to it, and went away from God's people by moving to Moab. In Moab he would be unable to come to the sanctuary, and his children ran the risk of marrying unbelievers; and seeing marriage required the father's approval, their marriage out of the faith reflects poorly on Elimelech as well as on his sons. So we see how sin results in Divine intervention [famine, in this case]; that intervention is punishment, but it is aimed at reformation. But it can be taken the wrong way, and people who respond poorly to it are then driven even further from God. This is the way the downward spiral works; but the *holy* Spirit likewise is the dynamic of the upward spiral. See on :13.

Ruth 1:2 The name of the man was Elimelech-

'God is king', reflecting the belief at the time of the judges (:1) that Israel had no human king because Yahweh was their king. But he went to live in the land of Moloch, a form of the Hebrew *melech*; Moloch who was presented as the real king rather than Yahweh, and this family were happy to go along with that on a surface level.

His wife's, Naomi; his two sons', Mahlon and Chilion-

The names of the sons mean "sickly" and "wasting away". So we are given the impression of a "pleasant" woman [Naomi] with two sickly sons and a materialistic husband, ever seeking a better deal in life, which never worked out. To have just two sons was a very small family for those days; for we get the impression they had no other children. We can imagine the child deaths, miscarriages etc. which led her to feel that God was not completely with her. And yet it was through all this that she came to Him so strongly.

They were Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah. They came into the country of Moab, and stayed there-

As he now shifted to Moab for a better life, perhaps he had already made such a shift before; because he was a man of Ephraim who had moved to Bethlehem in Judah. We are presented with a family who always wanted a better life, but it never quite worked out. We have surely met this type in our lives. We note that many of the histories of apostasy in the book of Judges feature people from Ephraim, and it seems we are intended to read Elimelech's move to Moab as a continuation of that sad theme. The whole point of the story is that out of such weakness, at least one person [Naomi] holds on, and through her, indirectly [through Ruth] a wonderful movement of God's Spirit is seen. And this too is a story we have all seen time and again.

Ruth 1:3 Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons-

See on :5. "Left" is usually translated "remained". The implication could be that she ought to have returned to Judah at this point, but she didn't. She is really the classic case of someone out of weakness being made strong; Esther is another example. She came to realize and experience that indeed Yahweh is a protector of orphans and widows (Ps 68:5). It may be significant that Naomi is Elimelech's wife in 1:1 but by 1:3 he is now called Naomi's husband; she has had to adopt the prominent role because of his illness and weakness.

Ruth 1:4 The sons took wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other was Ruth. They lived there about ten years-

The very phrase "the women of Moab" recalls Israel's apostasy with the women of Moab in 1 Kings 11:1; indeed the Midianite women who led Israel astray in Num. 25:18 were connected with Moab (Num. 22:4). Moabites were not to come into the congregation of Yahweh (Dt. 23:3; Neh. 13:1). The fact the Moabite Ruth was accepted into that congregation in such a major way was therefore an example of God's great value of the human person as an individual, and He is willing as it were to break His own law to demonstrate the degree of that value He placed upon Ruth. With Elimelech dead, we can assume that Naomi was responsible for allowing these marriages to happen, because she refused to return to the land of Israel at that time (see on :3). In their culture, the mother had quite some role to play in the arrangement of marriages (see Song 8:2).

Ruth 1:5 Mahlon and Chilion both died, and the woman was bereaved of her two children and of her husband-

"Bereaved" is the word translated "left" in :3. We are given the impression of a woman who has the scaffolding around her life removed, bit by bit; for to lose all the men in her life was a major blow. And it brought her to

passionate personal relationship with Yahweh. It seems she found Yahweh in Moab and not in Israel. And her commitment was so strong that it exuded from her, to the extent that Ruth was persuaded of Yahweh by her example. And this is the path so many must pass through; isolation and the removal of all human scaffolding leads us to personal relationship with our God.

Ruth 1:6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, to return from the country of Moab; for she had heard in the country of Moab how that Yahweh had visited His people-

"Visited His people" is an idiom for God's action and intervention. It's clearly not to be taken literally, and likewise the connected idiom of 'coming down' should not be read literally either. When God 'came down' in Christ, we are not to understand a literal descent of a pre-existent Christ to earth; but rather, the manifestation of God in His Son who was born on earth.

In giving them bread- The implication could be that there was a famine in Moab. Naomi's motives were not paramountly spiritual. Again, as noted on :2, she is moving around in search of a better life. We marvel at how God worked to get Ruth into Israel- the death of three men, the famine in Israel initially, the spiritual weakness of Elimelech, the punishment of the family (:21), the enduring faith of Naomi... all in order to bring Ruth into Israel. In the bringing of each person to Himself, there is likewise complex working with far-reaching effects upon unbelievers, for whom events have no personal meaning, and yet the events were for the sake of others. Thus large numbers of people suffered during the seven years famine in Egypt, with no personal meaning for themselves, because that famine was required to reunite the family of God.

Ruth 1:7 She left the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They began the journey to the land of Judah-

It seems the idea had been to accompany Ruth from where she was living in Moab, at least to the border of Judah. "Left the place where she was" uses the same words about Lot and his daughters leaving the place where they were in Sodom (Gen. 19:12,14) to go to spiritual safety. And of course Moab was the fruit of Lot sleeping with his daughter when they did so. The allusion is therefore purposeful. The theme is as ever of spiritual weakness, and yet of people becoming strong for God out of that weakness.

The Hebrew is literally "To return to the land of Judah". I suggest the book of Ruth was written up or edited under inspiration in Babylon, as guidance and encouragement for those in captivity in Babylon to return to Judah. Despite having sinned and having endured judgment for that, and despite having lost many of their men folk, Judah were to follow Naomi's example and return, taking any faithful Gentiles with them, and would like Naomi find unexpected blessing in the land, and a part in the family of Messiah.

Ruth 1:8 Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to your mother's house, Yahweh deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me-

God blesses those who bless the seed of Abraham, even if the members of the seed are spiritually weak (see on 1:1). Naomi shows her awareness of the Abrahamic promises by wishing this blessing upon her daughters in law, whom she considered had been 'kind' to her sons and husband and to herself too. Presumably this was said at the border of Moab and Israel. The women had accompanied Naomi there and the idea was that they should not return. Women travelling alone was unusual. We get the distinct impression of Naomi as being totally without male support in her life. This all drove her towards Yahweh as her Father, protector, provider and redeemer.

Ruth 1:9 Yahweh grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice, and wept-

"Find rest in the house of her husband" is an idiom for having a stable family life with children; note how Ruth 3:1 uses the same idiom: "Shall I not seek rest for you?" effectively means 'I will try to set you up with marriage and a family'. The implication would therefore be that the women had not had children by Naomi's sons, and the sons had both died suddenly. Naomi interpreted this as God's judgment upon her (:20,21). Her bitterness with God was because she felt that her daughters in law had unjustly suffered [childlessness was seen as the greatest tragedy] only because of her and her family. Naomi is effectively telling these women that she considers that the God of Israel is responsible for their barrenness, and if they returned to their gods, and married one of their own people, they would likely have children and 'find rest' in family life. Ruth's strong commitment to Naomi personally and to the God of

Israel was therefore all the more remarkable; she accepted she may never have children, that Yahweh's judgments upon His people sometimes affected Gentiles who happened to be involved... but she still so loved Him and wanted to devote herself to Him, despite His harder side. If there is really only one true God, then it is our duty to accept Him, even if we cannot attach meaning to events at the moment we experience them.

We note how Naomi openly and freely uses the word "Yahweh" (also in :8). Clearly she felt strong covenant relationship with Him.

Ruth 1:10 They said to her, No, but we will return with you to your people-

It was Naomi and not those Moabite girls who was returning. But they speak of "we will return" because they had come to so identify with Naomi. Or there may be the idea that they wanted to 'turn to' [another legitimate translation of *shub*, rendered here "return"] Naomi's people. Lot was the father of Moab, and the same words are used of how he was returned to his people by Abraham (Gen. 14:16). The hint may be that they wanted to have this same grace shown to them due to the Abrahamic covenant. See on :15.

Ruth 1:11 Naomi said, Go back, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?-

"Go back" is the word for "return" in :10. Naomi is encouraging them to return or turn to their own people, and not hers. And Orpah accepts her encouragement (:15). Naomi apparently had only produced two sickly sons who survived to adulthood, and they had both prematurely died; and she felt herself to be barren. There was no legal requirement for a widow to marry the younger brother of a deceased husband, but it could be argued that any future children of Naomi had a duty to marry their late brother's wife and have children by her in his name. But that would be a very strict reading of the Mosaic legislation in this case, if not simply a wrong interpretation of the Levirate law. For the simple intention of the Levirate law was that if a man died, his brother was to marry his widow and have children by her. And it only applied to "brothers dwelling together". But Naomi has clearly thought it through; for all her apparent weakness and even apostasy as noted so far, she was aware of God's laws. Despite having nobody to teach her there in Moab and no written scripture with her [she was surely illiterate anyway], she remembered the Mosaic law and thought through its implications. However her very strict interpretation of them in this case may suggest she is seeking every reason to discourage the young women to follow her back to Israel. And this makes Ruth's decision the more commendable.

Ruth 1:12 Go back, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say, 'I have hope', if I should even have a husband tonight, and should also bear sons-

See on :11. She considered herself barren (:11), but even if she should be able to have children, and they were males, and they lived... it would mean the young women would have to wait to many years that they would likely then be infertile. So Naomi considers herself a woman without hope, in human terms. And it is for those who perceive their hopelessness that the hope of Israel means the most. She also considers the laws of levirate marriage as unable to provide a way out of her hopeless situation. This is perhaps why she doesn't even suggest that Ruth approach Boaz when they first arrive in Bethlehem. It was really a case of being surprised by grace when she finds that in the end, the levirate laws will in fact be used as the vehicle to effect for her such a great salvation for both her and Ruth.

Ruth 1:13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from having husbands? No, my daughters, for it grieves me much for your sakes, for the hand of Yahweh has gone out against me-

See on :11,12. "Grieves" is a form of the Hebrew word *Mara*. It would seem from :20 that Naomi, for all her awareness of God's word and faith in Him, was consumed by bitterness; and she publically acknowledged this. She was bitter because she felt God had unfairly punished her daughters in law for her sin and the apostasy of her family. This is so often a reason for bitterness with God- a sense that His judgments are unjust, and that the innocent wrongly suffer. The book of Ruth concludes with a happy Naomi raising her grandson who is presented as being in the direct line of Messiah. But this was a woman consumed with bitterness earlier. One lesson is that God still works with and through bitter people, even those who are angry and cross at Him. Another lesson is that in the final end, God's utter grace and love is revealed through all His workings, even if at some points during the process, His actions seem totally unjust to us. But in the final, bigger picture, we realize that this was in fact the way of Divine love and grace, so far above any human plan.

She was grieved because she felt that the judgments upon her for her sin (see on :1) were of such a nature that they

had seriously affected these two Gentile women, in that they had been left young widows without children. The fact the two sons and husband died apparently at the same time would lead to the impression that this was an act from God, which Naomi understood as judgment for sin. The fact she retains her love of God and wants to return to Israel is therefore commendable; she responded the right way to God's intervention and judgment, rather than going further away from Him as she had done previously when He intervened (see on :1).

Ruth 1:14 They lifted up their voices, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell, but Ruth stayed with her-

AV "Clave unto her", the same Hebrew word used of the 'cleaving' in marriage of Gen. 2:24. And marriage has been the context of the discussion. Ruth is saying that she accepts childlessness and singleness, and in place of those things she wished to 'cleave' to Naomi, whom she saw as representative of Israel's God. She was rewarded for this in an appropriate way- she wanted to dwell under the wings of Israel's God (2:12), and He came to be manifested in Boaz, under the wings of whose garment she came (3:4,7,9).

Ruth 1:15 She said, Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people-

The word for "gone back" is that translated "return" in :10. The girls had originally intended to 'return' or 'turn to' Naomi's people, but now Orpah had decided to return to *her* people and not Naomi's people.

And to her god. Follow your sister-in-law-

Cp. AV "her gods". The contrast is between Orpah returning to *her* god [Chemosh?] and Ruth stating in the next verse that she wants to accept Naomi's God [Yahweh]. "Follow" would imply 'follow her back to follow her god'. And putting it like that, Ruth felt she had no choice but to cross the border of Moab / Israel, and totally commit to Yahweh.

Ruth 1:16 Ruth said, Don't entreat me to leave you, and to return from following after you-

She has a choice of following her sister in law to follow her gods, or to follow the apparently hopeless case Naomi, and follow her God Yahweh. It seems to me that it was Naomi's faith in her God despite her own personal weaknesses and Yahweh apparently failing to 'come through' for her in a short term sense... which actually attracted Ruth to Yahweh, through Naomi's example. The harder side of God is attractive in this sense. Because He is so evidently real and for real in human life. It is simply untrue that a God who appears to give immediate blessings is going to be the most attractive. The spiritually minded person will believe otherwise. See on Ruth 2:23.

For where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God-

Ruth's rejection of her national gods and her people was a huge thing to do. We note that the name "Ruth" means "to water"; which was exactly what Moab had refused to do for Israel in Num. 25:1-3. The hope of the restoration prophets was that a repentant Judah would return from the lands of the Gentiles, bringing with them Gentile converts. And I suggest the book of Ruth was rewritten in exile to support this, by demonstrating that it had happened before, historically. Not all Moabites were like Moab had been historically; a xenophobic Judah were to thereby remember that their own beloved king David was from Moabite stock, and any Gentile could come into the people of Israel. Evidence that the book has been rewritten is found in the impression that it was originally all in poetic form in very ancient Hebrew, but that appears to have been rewritten in a way which removes much of the poetic structure whilst adding later Hebrew words and Aramaisms (notably in Ruth 1:13; 4:7). Hence the need in Ruth 4:7 for the book to explain how things were done in "former times" in Israel.

The LXX of Ruth 1:16 is almost quoted by the Lord Jesus in an unusual way, at first blush. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day. He is the same yesterday [as He was in His ministry], today [in His mediation for us] and for ever, as He shall be at His return. Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brothers" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God (Jn. 20:18). He alludes here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

Ruth 1:17 where you die, will I die, and there will I be buried. Yahweh do so to me, and more also-
Ruth had learnt the Yahweh Name and already accepted Him as her God. Only a person who was in covenant with Yahweh could swear by Him, for in those days you took an oath by your gods (1 Sam. 17:43). The location of death and burial was significant to those who believed that their gods were geographically limited; you wanted to be buried in the land of your god so he could look after you. It's quite possible that Ruth and Naomi still had a somewhat limited view of Yahweh, as did Jonah and many others, thinking that He was the God of the land of Israel, and therefore must be served there. Their return to the land was a return to Yahweh. But of course the wonder of their stories, as they looked back at them, was that they had both effectively found Yahweh outside the land of Israel, and in a situation of great moral weakness and disobedience to Him. This was exactly the intention for the exiles in Babylon, for whom this book was likely rewritten and republished.

If anything but death part you and me-

The idea is that not even death would not part them, because Naomi says they will be united in their death and burial.

Ruth 1:18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she stopped speaking to her-

It was Israel who were to be "strong" (s.w. "steadfastly minded") in order to leave Moab and enter the land of Israel in faith that Yahweh would go with them, and give them an inheritance in that land (Dt. 31:6,7; Josh. 10:25). Again we see the relevance for the exiles in Babylon, who were urged to likewise be "strong" (s.w.) and leave Gentile lands and come back to Judah (Is. 35:3; 41:10).

Ruth 1:19 So those two travelled to Bethlehem-

AV "went until they came". This is the phrase repeatedly used of the travels of the patriarchs, who also left a Gentile land and came to inherit the land of Israel and enter relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 11:31; 13:3; 26:13; 28:15). Ruth is clearly presented as one who wished to act in faith as a true member of the seed of Abraham, and thereby to attain the "hope of Israel". We notice the intended contrast with Rachel, who died before she came to Bethlehem; the women likely passed by the spot where she died (Gen. 35:16,19). The idea is that this wayward Israelitess and Gentile Ruth had more faith than Rachel, one of the founding mothers of Israel.

When they had come to Bethlehem, it happened that all the city was agitated about them, and they asked, Is this Naomi?-

They counted Ruth as part of Naomi; so the grammar demands. They were "agitated about them", asking "Is this [not "are these"] Naomi?". Her identity with Naomi was somehow apparent.

Ruth 1:20 She said to them, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me-

She uses the term "Almighty" rather than Yahweh, although she knows the Name Yahweh (:21), because *shaddai* means 'fruitful', from *shad*, the breast. But she had lost the fruit of her womb and apparently didn't even have any grandsons. She believed in Yahweh passionately, so much so that Ruth came to believe in Him because of her; but she has her deep struggles with His justice, and was bitter ["Mara"] because her character reflected how she felt He had dealt bitterly with her. We see how struggles with God's "justice" do not completely preclude relationship with and faith in Him. There are many Biblical examples of that (like Job, David and Jeremiah). And our character and personality likewise is a reflection of our perceived experience of God. The convinced atheist will have an "empty" aspect to their personality because God is missing. Those who have experienced His grace will likewise have grace and patience as part of their characters.

Ruth 1:21 I went out full, and Yahweh has brought me home again empty-

To be "full" was one of the blessings for obedience to the covenant, and the potential gift of God to Israel when they first entered Canaan (Dt. 6:11; Neh. 9:25 s.w.). But she had left Israel assuming that those blessings were not fulfilled. See on :2. Now she realized that she had seen the cup half empty instead of half full. To be empty was to be without blessing (Gen. 31:42; Ex. 3:21; Dt. 15:13). Boaz later tries to indirectly persuade her that this was not the case ultimately (s.w. Ruth 3:17). She returned to Israel and to Yahweh of her own initiative, and yet she says that Yahweh "brought me home", s.w. "returned" (:22 etc.). He worked, and still works, in confirming the desire of every person who seeks to turn or return to Him and the Hope of Israel. She felt that although she had not experienced blessing from Him, indeed she had lost the potential blessings and was without His blessings, yet still she wanted to

return to Him. Contrary to Pentecostal reasoning, the experience of "blessing" was not what attracted her to Him. Rather she wanted to simply be in relationship with Him, like the prodigal son returning from Gentile lands not looking for any material blessing.

Why do you call me Naomi, since Yahweh has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?-

Judgment is now, in a sense. She felt that God had judged and as it were legally testified against her for her various weaknesses discussed earlier in this chapter; her seeking for a good life rather than putting God first, not returning to Israel when her husband died, allowing her sons to marry Gentiles etc. But what she was yet to realize was that the apparent affliction was but a prelude to her greater deliverance. Likewise God afflicted Israel in Egypt to the point that even Moses felt it was too much (Ex. 5:22,23), but only that He might bring them out to inherit the land of Israel (Gen. 15:13). The God who forbade the affliction of the fatherless and widow like Naomi and her sons (Ex. 22:22) would not ultimately willingly afflict His people, but only with their restoration in view (1 Kings 11:39; Job 37:23; Lam. 3:33).

But at this point, Naomi appears to not grasp this. And yet for all that, her faith in Yahweh was such that she persuaded Ruth to forsake all and follow Him; for all this mystery of His ways with men and apparent affliction of people with no game plan toward salvation yet in view. Indeed the word she uses for "afflicted" is that translated "to do evil" or 'be wicked' with a moral dimension (s.w. Gen. 19:7; 38:10; Lev. 5:4; Ps. 64:2; 92:11; Is. 31:2 and often). She comes close to accusing God of being wicked in His treatment of her. This is how bitter she was. And yet this didn't preclude her desire to come to Him, and that desire and commitment to Him, the God whose ways she didn't understand, was so powerful that it converted Ruth to Him as well. We simply learn from this that solving all the problems of Divine justice is not actually required for a person to have relationship with Him. Indeed the very existence of those problems actually leads humble people to believe in Him. That is the paradox which is totally missed by those who seem to think that endless apologetics will pave the way for folks to therefore and thereby believe in God.

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned out of the country of Moab-

We notice the double stress upon how they "returned". As noted on :21, it was God who 'returned' them. She says that Yahweh "brought me home", s.w. "returned" (:22 etc.). He worked, and still works, in confirming the desire of every person who seeks to turn or return to Him and the Hope of Israel. There is another similarity here with Abraham, who felt God had made him leave his father's house and come to Canaan, even though this is what he had been commanded to do on his own initiative (see on Gen. 20:13). Ruth returned or turned to Israel "out of" Moab, suggesting she came out from her own people in order to come to Yahweh; just as Abraham.

And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest-

A reminder that there was indeed now bread in Israel. It would have been March or April, the time of Passover (Ex. 9:31), heightening the connection between these women and Israel. For Israel left Egypt after being "afflicted" there (see on :21), to enter the land of promise.

Ruth Chapter 2

Ruth 2:1 Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz-

"Kinsman" is literally 'one who knows'. Boaz ["strength", as in 1 Kings 7:21] is presented as a manifestation of Yahweh. He knew the situation exactly (:11), he was a *gibbor* ["mighty man"], with the wealth required to resolve the situation. And yet Naomi seems to have forgotten about him, or at least assumed her apostasy was such that he would be unable to assist. Again we see a similarity with the prodigal son, who returns to his father's relative wealth but with the assumption he might just be able to get a job as a day labourer with him. Indeed the parable of the prodigal has so many similarities with the story of Ruth. The connections suggest that Naomi had indeed sinned and wasted her inheritance in Moab. Boaz was a descendant of the prostitute Rahab and Salmon, a prince of Judah (Mt. 1:5; Lk. 3:32); and a case can be made that he was one of the spies who first spent the night at her brothel. So he had Gentile blood within him, and was aware that Gentile women, even questionable ones, could be accepted into the community of God's people.

The *goel* or redeemer role played by Boaz was representative of that played by Yahweh; the word is often used about His desire to be that redeemer figure for His people once they returned to the land. I suggested on Ruth 1:16 that the book was rewritten, under Divine inspiration, and applied to the exiles as an encouragement for them to return to the land, bringing Gentile converts with them.

Ruth 2:2 Ruth the Moabitess-

This is emphasized six times (Ruth 1:22; 2:2,6,21; 4:5,10). The exiles who returned became very xenophobic against Gentiles, and one intention of the book of Ruth being reissued amongst them (see on :1) was to remind them that God deals with individuals, and there were faithful Gentiles as well as unfaithful Israelites.

Said to Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find grace-

If Naomi had Boaz in mind as a saviour, she surely would have suggested Ruth went and gleaned in his field. But she apparently doesn't suggest this, and is pleasantly surprised when she finds out Ruth happened to encounter Boaz. The encounter with grace is always a surprise to the recipient, for this is the nature of grace, and Naomi responds exactly as we would expect if she had indeed assumed Boaz would not help her. Ruth casts herself completely upon grace. To glean for dropped grain was for the poorest of the poor (Dt. 24:19); and this is what they were.

We could however take the reference to Boaz in :1 as meaning that Ruth at least was aware of Boaz, and is describing him as the one in whose eyes she should find grace. It was Israel who were to find grace in Yahweh's sight (s.w. Ex. 33:16); so perhaps the spiritually minded Ruth was looking for a person who would reflect Yahweh's grace to her. And indeed Boaz has been set up in :1 as a manifestation of Yahweh's strength and power to save. Ruth was proactive in seeking for grace, however, as we will see when she takes the initiative in proposing to Boaz that he marry her. We could also note that Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. This would account for the hint in :22 that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. Likewise he extrapolates from the law of Levirate marriage to marry Ruth; but as noted on Ruth 3:13, this showing far more grace than the law actually required, seeing that the Levirate law only affected "brothers dwelling together".

It could be argued from Dt. 24:1; 1 Kings 11:19; Esther 5:8; Jer. 31:2 cp. Ruth 1:9 that to find grace in the eyes of a man meant that he would marry her. Ruth perhaps entertained the hope or fantasy that she would find a wealthy landowner who would marry her. For this, humanly speaking, was the only way out of their desperate situation. It's rather like Joseph suggesting to Pharaoh that a man be appointed over Egypt's future harvests, and having the spiritual ambition to have himself in view for the appointment. Or Abigail asking David to "remember your handmaid" (1 Sam. 25:31), another possible idiom for marriage. And as with Ruth, that spiritual ambition paid off. What seemed impossible, that a Moabite Gentile beggar could marry a wealthy Israelite landowner and be welcomed into the community of Israel, actually came about. And I suggest Ruth had this spiritual ambition. Although when it began to come true, she was awed by the grace being shown to her.

She said to her, Go, my daughter-

Naomi was effectively a surrogate mother to Ruth. The idea of Ruth marrying Boaz had not initially even occurred to Naomi. She wishes her well in finding someone who would let her glean in their field, and that is all. It is only

when Naomi tells her that a man called Boaz was kind to her, that the possibility appears to form in Naomi's mind. For levirate law didn't really envisage someone of such a distance from Ruth as Boaz marrying her to raise up seed. See on Ruth 3:9.

Ruth 2:3 She went, and came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers-

The barley was reaped by women, who tied the reaped grain into bundles, which were then gathered together into shocks for transport by the men to the threshing floor. See on :7.

And she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech-

They practiced strip farming, the strips being defined by landmarks. This situation arose because of the land being constantly split up in inheritances, and was one reason why the anonymous kinsman didn't want to mar his inheritance which he would leave by buying land which would revert to the son he was to have by Ruth, and would not remain in his name but in the name of that son. There was of course no "chance" to this ["she happened to.."]. One simple message of the book is that there is no chance. All was clearly meant to be, as God worked to respond to Ruth and Naomi's desire to come to Him. "She happened to come" is AV "Her hap was to light on...". The same phrase is used by Solomon in lamenting how such time and chance happens to all (Ecc. 2:14,15; 9:2,3). He failed to learn the lesson from his great ancestor; that in fact there is no such thing as chance happening in the lives of those who love God.

Ruth 2:4 Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, Yahweh be with you! They answered him, Yahweh bless you!-

We have here an insight into the spiritual mind of Boaz, openly using the Yahweh Name in the workplace. It is this kind of day by day spirituality which is the essence of the believing life. Yahweh's 'blessing' and 'being with' His people is however directly associated with generosity to those like Naomi and Boaz: "The foreigner living among you and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates, shall come and shall eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (Dt. 14:29). Perhaps the blessing called out upon Boaz by the people in his field was because they recognized that he was indeed blessing the foreigner, fatherless and widow. So his interest in helping Ruth and Naomi was genuinely spiritually motivated; the fact that Ruth was an eligible and perhaps attractive younger woman wasn't the primary motivation for his grace.

Ruth 2:5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was set over the reapers, Whose young woman is this?-

Boaz asking [in the Hebrew] *whose* is she, rather than *who* is she, might suggest it was love at first sight and he was immediately holding in mind the possibility of marrying her. It could be Ruth had the same feelings (see on Ruth 2:13; 3:2,10). The question 'Who is this?' as asked by Boaz of Ruth is to be understood as a statement of intended action and not read on face value. For he knew exactly who she was (:11). The same kind of question is asked by David about Bathsheba, even though he knew who she was because she lived next door to him and was the wife of his close friend (2 Sam. 11:3). Likewise when Saul enquires about who David is after his victory over Goliath (1 Sam. 17:56), it is not because he doesn't know him. For David had been already at the court of Saul. The question 'Who is this?' means that the questioner wants to do something for the person being enquired after.

Ruth 2:6 The servant who was set over the reapers answered, It is the Moabite woman who came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab-

This implies that she was already well known in the small town. Her Moabite nature is twice stressed.

Ruth 2:7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves'. So she came, and has continued even from the morning until now, although she stayed a little in the house-

"The house" refers to a temporary booth where workers could take rest in the brutal heath. The law about gleaning didn't at all require that people should be allowed to glean right behind the reapers, "among the sheaves". It simply stated that if a sheaf was forgotten, the farmer should not return to collect it, but leave it in the field for the poor. That Ruth's utter poverty lead her to beg to be allowed to pick up the grain "among the sheaves" was far beyond this. That Boaz and his servant allowed it indicates how he saw beyond the letter of the law to the spirit, and this is what will be seen again in the very generous and far reaching extension he makes to the law of levirate marriage. The whole story is in fact about moving beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of it, which is grace. Ruth could be interpreted as being forward, but it seems to me that really she was driven to such going beyond the letter of the law

because of her desperate need.

Ruth 2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, Listen, my daughter: Don't go to glean in another field, and don't go away from here, but stay here close to my maidens-

The girls in view are the reapers, for the reapers were usually women, and it was the men who gathered the sheaves into shocks and transported them to the threshing floor. We note how the Lord likens His Angels to reapers, when this was a typically female work.

Ruth 2:9 Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, and go after them-

"Go after" the other women is to be connected with how Boaz later commends Ruth for not 'going after' men in the hope of marriage (Ruth 3:10). So we can conclude that he is directing her attention to the field before her; for already there was forming in his mind a plan to get a field for her of her very own. And by directing her eyes to the field he was surely hoping that the same possibilities would form in her mind too.

Haven't I commanded the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the vessels, and drink from that which the young men have drawn-

Boaz perhaps feared Ruth would go after the young men who were his harvesters. Although he and they greeted each other in spiritual terms, clearly that may have been a mere formality as they were likely to abuse a vulnerable single woman. He commends her later for not having gone after young men (Ruth 3:10). It would seem that Boaz fell in love at first sight, but the basis of his attraction was her spirituality and devotion to Israel's God (2:12,13).

Ruth 2:10 Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found grace in your sight, that you should take knowledge of me, since I am a foreigner?-

Falling on the face, bowing and saying these very words is all what Moses did before Yahweh in the context of entering the covenant and entering the land (Ex. 33:12,13). Abraham and Joshua did likewise (Gen. 17:3,17; 18:3; Josh. 5:14). All the way through, Ruth sees Boaz as representing Yahweh, and his acceptance of her and redemption of her represented that of Yahweh. For she had come to Israel primarily because of her commitment to Yahweh and the covenant.

But to 'find grace in the sight' of a man also means to be accepted by him as a wife (Dt. 24:1). The words of both Ruth and Boaz always seem to have hints in them towards marriage; their feelings and hopes were clearly mutual, and this is the beauty of the story as romance. See on :13. Ruth is awed that he should give her grace in his eyes although she was a Gentile. She was aware of the prohibition upon Moabites entering Yahweh's congregation. But one of the themes of the book is that the spirit and not the letter of the law is to be followed. God cares for individuals and ultimately has relationship with persons rather than nations *en masse*. Ruth obviously lived in the hope that she could indeed enter the congregation of Yahweh and the letter of the law need not apply to her. She used the Yahweh Name and had specifically chosen to follow Naomi to Israel because of her commitment to Naomi's God, whom she had declared to be her God- whether or not God's people accepted her. She was therefore thrilled to see hints that Boaz likewise was thinking outside the box, beyond the constrictions of mere legalism. And in Boaz she sees the representation of Yahweh towards her.

Ruth 2:11 Boaz answered her, I have come to know 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-

The reason for Boaz's kindness was not therefore that he simply was showing grace to some random stranger. He was aware of Ruth's story. From whom would he have known all Ruth had done for Naomi, unless he had spoken with Naomi? For they were relatives. This paves the way for my suggestion on Ruth 4:3,5 that Naomi, the seller of the land, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. It could be that Naomi and Boaz had He respects how she left her parents- implying they were still alive.

Again there is a *double entendre* in Boaz's words. For in Gen. 2:24, marriage is defined as leaving father and mother and being joined to our partner. He says that she has indeed left father and mother- to come to Israel. But his words are pregnant with the implication that now she had left father and mother, she was to marry. And his grace toward her in entering the marital covenant was to reflect Yahweh's covenant being extended to her. These ideas are developed in Ruth 3. planned the whole legal situation we encounter in Ruth 4.

And have come to a people that you didn't know before-

She had of course "known" Israelites before. So Boaz is using the idea of 'knowing' in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with. She realized that relationship with Yahweh means a relationship also with His people. John's letters likewise point out how the vertical relationship with God must have a horizontal dimension also. Boaz realizes this and wants therefore to manifest Yahweh's acceptance of Naomi.

Ruth 2:12 May Yahweh repay your work, and a full reward be given you-

These are the very words of the new covenant offered to Judah in Gentile lands (Jer. 31:16). Again, as noted on Ruth 1:16, the book of Ruth was clearly rewritten with phrases and wordings designed to encourage the exiles to make the journey of Ruth and Naomi, and to accept Gentile converts and not oppress women, nor anyone, but to perceive the value of persons as Boaz had done. The fact Boaz says these words to her again shows him to be Yahweh manifest to her. He was to recompense her "labour" with practical care and the marriage covenant, and thereby was manifesting to her God's covenant acceptance of her.

John writes that it is our 'labour', in the sense of hard mental effort, to know Him and believe in Him, which will have a 'full reward' (2 Jn. 8). John here is alluding to the LXX of Ruth 2:12, where a 'full reward' is given to Ruth for working hard all day gleaning in the fields. It may be that this allusion was because "the elect lady" addressed by John was in fact a proselyte widow, like Ruth. John's allusion indicates that he understands Boaz as using "labour" to refer to her mental labour of coming to faith in Yahweh. But the point is, we have to *labour*, as much as one might work hard walking around a lake or gleaning in the field, in order to know the Lord Jesus Christ. For He told those who walked around the lake that they should not do that labour for food, but for relationship with Him.

From Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge-

Again, he sees himself as manifesting that refuge which Yahweh was extending over Ruth. This was why he was preserving her life and her personal safety as she worked in his fields. See on Ruth 3:10. After "Yahweh, the God of Israel", the LXX adds "to whom you have come", implying that Ruth's motivation for coming to Israel was in order to come to the God of Israel and take her place under His wings.

Ruth 2:13 Then she said, Let me find grace in your sight, my lord-

As noted on :10, to 'find grace in the sight' of a man also means to be accepted by him as a wife (Dt. 24:1). The words of both Ruth and Boaz always seem to have hints in them towards marriage; their feelings and hopes were clearly mutual, and this is the beauty of the story as romance. She was here summoning the courage to indirectly suggest to Boaz that he could accept her as his wife. In the same way as she had the courage to throw herself upon Yahweh and claim covenant relationship with him, despite being a Moabitess.

Because you have comforted me, and because you have spoken to the heart of your handmaid-

This is very much the language of the restoration prophets in their message of encouragement to Judah in Gentile lands to return to the land (Is. 40:1; 66:13; Ez. 3:10). As explained on Ruth 1:16, the book of Ruth was rewritten under inspiration as encouragement to the exiles.

Although I am not as one of your handmaids-

This is one of a series of connections with the parable of the prodigal. As the son wanted to return to the Father as a servant although somewhat different from them, as he was a relative also, so Ruth felt. There's an ambiguity in the last part of Ruth's words here. It could be translated as "I don't wish to merely be as one of your maidservants" (see NEB), with the implication, however vague, that she was thinking of marriage. This was then extended into the effective proposal she later makes to Boaz (see on Ruth 3:2,10).

Ruth 2:14 At meal time Boaz said to her, Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the wine-

Bread and grape juice was indeed appropriate fare for workers in the oppressive heat of harvest. But the invitation from Boaz to Ruth to partake of "bread and wine" is framed as having religious overtones. For nearly all Biblical references to "bread and wine" together have a spiritual, covenantal dimension or context. He was again seeking to encourage her that she had indeed entered covenant with himself and with Yahweh whom he represented to her.

She sat beside the reapers, and they reached her parched grain, and she ate, and was satisfied, and left some of it-

The legal requirement was that a poor person could pick grain and rub it in their hands to give a little food (Dt. 23:25). But this was taking that law way beyond what it said, in a spirit of grace. She was given no passing snack; she ate so much that she left some of what she was given. And we will see that this is what Boaz does with the levirate marriage law too. But the parched grain was extended to her by the reapers. They too had absorbed the spirit

of grace shown by their master. And indeed, ways of grace are contagious. The superabundance of grace is shown by her having more than enough to eat, and taking back for Naomi what she had left over from the meal (:18).

Ruth 2:15 When she had risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and don't reproach her-

The women reaped, tying the reaped grain into bundles, which were then gathered together into shocks for transport by the men to the threshing floor. It was unsurprising that there should be some protest at this gleaner picking up as much grain as they themselves were going to take home. "Reproach" is the word used in the restoration prophecies of how a repentant, regathered Judah would not be reproached (Is. 45:17; 50:7; 54:4). Her boldness in asking to glean even among the sheaves was not forwardness; she was driven to it by hunger and poverty. And it was that same desperate but proactive seeking for grace which led her to as it were propose to Boaz. Ruth was childless and a widow, both of which were a reproach to a woman (Gen. 30:23; Is. 4:1; Lk. 1:25). Boaz again is hinting that he wished to take away her reproach amongst men- by marrying her. And it was Israel in exile who were a reproach (Ps. 44:13), which could be removed from them by God's plan of redemption. "Fear not the reproach of men" (Is. 51:4) was God's word of restoration to the exiles, but it was based upon Boaz's words to Ruth. They would forget the reproach of their widowhood and never be ashamed again (Is. 54:4; Jer. 31:19), after the pattern of Ruth.

Ruth 2:16 Also pull out some for her from the bundles, and leave it; let her glean-

Again, we see Boaz hugely expanding upon the letter of the law about gleaning. And it was this spirit which was to climax in his development of the levirate law of marriage to allow him to marry Ruth. But we note that he began with the law and extrapolated its spirit further; he didn't simply ignore it and act as he felt would be gracious according to his own native sense of justice and kindness. And there is a major lesson here. For so much that is claimed to be humanitarian aid is doing just that, and is not the same as the grace we see being developed, understood and practiced here. The law was a springboard toward grace, guiding the path and trajectory toward it; as Paul puts it, the law was a schoolmaster to lead men unto Christ.

And don't rebuke her-

I noted on :16 that the restoration prophecy of Is. 54:4 comforted the exiles that they would not be reproached again; and the same word for "rebuke" here is used in Is. 54:9, assuring them that their restoration would mean that they would not again be rebuked. Those prophecies were clearly allusive to the story of Ruth; she and Naomi are being held up as parade examples to the exiles, to return to their land and to their God. They were not to fear that their situation had put them on the wrong side of the letter of the Mosaic law, but to accept grace and reflect it to others, especially in how they treated women and Gentiles.

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

The beating out and winnowing was done in the evening when there was generally a stronger wind. There were ten omers in one ephah, and one ephah of manna could feed a man for a day (Ex. 16:16,36). So this was a huge amount of barley, enough to feed a man for ten days. The abundance of provision by Boaz is clear, but we note also the abundance of the harvest, when neighbouring Moab was perishing from famine. There is here confirmation that Yahweh was blessing Israel at this time.

Ruth 2:18 She carried it, and went into the city where her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she brought out and gave to her that which she had left after she herself had enough to eat-

I calculated on :17 that this was a huge amount of barley, enough to feed a man for ten days. She also took home for Naomi what was left over from the meal of :14. The impression is that Boaz has done what the Lord Jesus also did for the hungry [including Gentiles] who loved the God of Israel, providing them with superabundance of food so that there was much left over for people who were perishing with hunger. This was all consciously orchestrated by Boaz. He had gone way beyond the letter of the law and just wanted to articulate the lavishness of God's grace. And it is for us in our encounters with people to likewise lavish a reflection of the grace we have received.

Ruth 2:19 Her mother-in-law said to her, Where have you gleaned today? Where have you worked? Blessed be he who took notice of you!-

"Took notice" is s.w. "acknowledged" (Gen. 38:26; Dt. 21:17; 33:9). Boaz had acknowledged her as a Gentile who

was in covenant with Yahweh, had acknowledged her desire to be in His family. Just as Yahweh had done. The exiles (see on Ruth 1:16) were likewise encouraged that they would be acknowledged and blessed (s.w. Is. 61:9).

She showed her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz-

We may note that she speaks not of working for a man, nor of just being given gifts; but of working together "with" Boaz ["with" is stressed twice]. She answers the question as to "where" she worked by explaining *with whom* she had worked. We are increasingly getting the impression that Ruth and Boaz are unconsciously working together towards the same end conclusion, as lovers do. But as those who truly love God also do.

Ruth 2:20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of Yahweh, Who has not left off His grace to the living and to the dead-

Clearly Naomi recognizes that Yahweh's grace was being articulated through that of Boaz. The Bible is clear that death is unconsciousness. But Naomi perceives that through being gracious to her and Ruth, Yahweh was also being gracious to their dead husbands. Both of them had not been spiritually strong, as discussed on Ruth 1. But His grace is very deeply perceived by Naomi; she sees His grace to her and Ruth as also in a way being grace shown to their husbands, despite their bad decisions during their lifetimes. And when analyzed, Divine grace does indeed appear to have ever increasing facets and aspects the more we consider it; His grace is therefore "manifold" or multi-coloured, as a crystal refracting light (see on 1 Pet. 4:10). She may already have in mind now that if Boaz married Ruth and they had a child, this would be a grace to the dead Mahlon, as a seed would be raised up.

Naomi said to her, The man is a close relative to us, one of our near kinsmen-

The idea of the returned exile being saved by a *goel*, a redeemer, connects with the frequent descriptions of God as Judah's redeemer at the time of the restoration; the word occurs multiple times in this context in the latter chapters of Isaiah. The possibility of a *goel* marrying Ruth had apparently not occurred to Naomi in Ruth 1:11-13, where she understands the *goel* to only possibly marry herself, and then her resulting sons might then marry Ruth and Orpah. That the *goel* could marry Ruth had not previously occurred to her. Perhaps because this wasn't what the Levirate law legally required, or perhaps because she considered that no true Israelite ought to marry a Moabitess like Ruth. Or because she considered Boaz too old and possibly impotent. But now she sees beyond the letter of the law to the possibilities of grace. And this is indeed what affliction and providence lead us to.

Ruth 2:21 Ruth the Moabitess said, Yes, he said to me, 'You shall stay close to my young men, until they have ended all my harvest'-

The end of all the harvest meant both the barley and wheat harvest which followed it (:23). It is emphasized that Ruth "Stay close" to the young women (s.w. :8,23). Yet she reports this to Naomi here as saying that she had been told to "stay close" to the young *men*. Exactly why is unclear to me. It is the same word used of how Ruth "clave" to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). It is also the word of cleaving to a partner in marriage (Gen. 2:24), and cleaving to Yahweh in covenant relationship (Dt. 30:20; Josh. 22:5; 23:8). Boaz's servants were effectively him. The language is again to demonstrate that Ruth's cleaving to Boaz was an acted parable of her cleaving to Yahweh; and his usage of the word was surely to suggest that she might cleave to him in marriage. It was God's wish that His exiled people should cleave to Him (Jer. 13:11).

Ruth 2:22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, and that they not meet you in any other field-

This could mean that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. See on :2.

"Meet" is s.w. "entreat" in Ruth 1:16. Naomi could see that others might be impressed by Ruth and want her association with them, perhaps with a view to marriage. But although Boaz was old, she was sure that he had to be the right candidate for Ruth because he was the relative who could raise up seed for Mahlon. She thereby put spiritual principle first. The levirate law didn't strictly apply to Ruth and she was free to marry whom she wished.

Ruth 2:23 So she stayed close to the maidens of Boaz, to glean to the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest-
For "stayed close", see on :21.

And she lived with her mother-in-law-

This may be a reminder that despite their feelings for each other, Boaz and Ruth didn't live together before their marriage. It was the fulfilment of Ruth's promise in Ruth 1:16: "where you lodge, I will lodge". But it may also be an allusion to Gen 2:24, as there was in :11. Ruth lived with her mother, but she was to leave her and cleave to a husband. She had emigrated to Israel solely for the sake of relationship with Yahweh; she had begged Naomi not to entreat her to "leave" her (Ruth 1:16). She was resigned to a single life for the sake of her devotion to Him. But she was to be surprised by grace; she was in fact going to do just that [in terms of Gen. 2:24] when she married Boaz.

Ruth Chapter 3

Ruth 3:1 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?-

"Seek rest" is an idiom for finding a marriage partner. See on Ruth 1:9. Ruth had given up any hope of this in order to follow Yahweh, and Naomi had stressed that returning to Israel with her would mean not finding rest in this sense. But now the possibilities of grace beyond the law occur to Naomi. The lights go on, as they have in the minds of all who start to perceive grace. It was a man who sought a wife, yet the record here stresses the initiative taken by Naomi and Ruth. Jer. 31:22, in a restoration context, speaks of how "a woman shall compass a man" (AV), i.e. a woman would take the initiative. And this surely alludes to the story of Ruth and Naomi. God's people were to take the initiative with their redeemer, believing He would respond.

Ruth 3:2 Now isn't Boaz our kinsman, with whose maidens you were? Behold, he winnows barley tonight in the threshing floor-

Threshing floor at harvest time was an immoral place, associated with prostitutes and cheap women: "the harlots hire on every threshing floor of corn" (Hos. 9.1). A case could be made (but see on :3) that the plan was that Ruth would come to Boaz at night whilst he was drunk, dressed up appealingly, and sexually compromise him into marrying her. This would've been so difficult for a woman like Ruth, who appears by all accounts an upright woman- more upright, if this were the case, than her Jewish mother-in-law who hatched the plan. The suggestion in :4 that Ruth lay down with him is indeed vague but could arguably suggest sexual contact; and "feet" there could be a euphemism as in Ez. 16:25, a passage which as we shall show was in Naomi's mind. Uncovering the skirt is also capable of sexual interpretation; see on :9. The whole story, of deceiving a man into marriage, coming to him by night, when he's likely slightly drunk... all recalls the situation of Jacob being tricked into marrying Leah [for surely Jacob couldn't have been quite sober if he really didn't know that the woman he was sleeping with wasn't in fact his beloved Rachel]. The motif of deception appears common to both histories. The connection is heightened by the villagers wishing Ruth fertility like Rachel and Leah (Ruth 4:11). They also wish her the fertility of Tamar (Ruth 4:12)- who also deceived a man using sexual compromise. See on Ruth 2:13. But Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity (:11), who wasn't chasing men (:10). This strongly weighs against the idea that she was practicing sexual manipulation.

But perhaps the simple reality was that "winnowing was generally done at night, in order to take advantage of the breeze". This meant that the grain remained there overnight, and Boaz perhaps Boaz slept by his corn because he feared it being stolen at night. Israel after all was emerging from a time of famine and the corn would have been valuable.

Ruth 3:3 Therefore wash yourself, anoint yourself, get dressed up, and go down to the threshing floor, but don't make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking-

There is a lot more to this than Springsteen's "Put your makeup on, fix your hair up pretty / And meet me tonight in Atlantic City". Likewise the advice to wait until he has finished eating and drinking is not simply secular wisdom, waiting until his heart was merry. She does these things and then asks for Boaz to spread his skirt over her (:9), which although not recorded here, was also what Naomi told her to do. What is "more" to all this is that Ezekiel describes Israel's coming into covenant with God in the wilderness as involving bathing, washing, anointing and the spreading of the skirt of the covenant, which the historical record states was accompanied by Israel's representatives eating and drinking before Yahweh (Ez. 16:8-12). And see on :5. Whilst Naomi's advice may all have been fair enough on the secular level, her language choice clearly indicates that she has the covenant at Sinai in mind. And Boaz is clearly represented as manifesting Yahweh to Ruth (see on Ruth 2:1). Naomi and Ruth were not simply sexual manipulators, there was without doubt a deeply spiritual element in all this. Whether that was the sole aspect of the carefully planned encounter is open to debate, but that spiritual dimension cannot be denied.

Ruth 3:4 It shall be, when he lies down, that you shall note the place where he shall lie, and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lay down; then he will tell you what you shall do-

Laying with a man and uncovering his feet could imply sexual contact; see on :2. "Feet" there could be a euphemism for the sexual organs as in Ex. 4:25 and Ez. 16:25, a passage which as noted on :3 was in Naomi's mind. But she was apparently to note the place where he was laying, and only return to it later that night. And it was quite likely that the threshing floor had other men sleeping on it as well, protecting their piles of corn (see on :2).

Ruth 3:5 She said to her, All that you say I will do-

I noted on :3 that both women have consciously in mind the covenant at Sinai, and this is word for word the agreement made between Israel and Yahweh in Ex. 19:8.

Ruth 3:6 She went down to the threshing floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law told her-

Her complete obedience to the idea of entering covenant is emphasized. See on :5.

Ruth 3:7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry-

The mention of this is an inconvenient truth for those who wish to portray Boaz and Ruth as parade examples of peerlessly spiritual believers who fell in love with each other. I have discussed on :2,4 whether Naomi and Ruth were being sexually manipulative in their plan. I overall decide against it. But it is simply so that human motivation is rarely pure, and faith is rarely total. The completed harvest was typically a time of sexual immorality and over eating and drinking. That Ruth should come to him precisely at this time, at night, and that he is described as having a merry heart from drinking... is all unfortunate for any argument for the peerless spirituality of Boaz and Ruth. The situation simply reminds us of their humanity. Ruth's, in that she apparently did capitalize upon Boaz's weakness, instead of inviting him to have a sober meeting with her to discuss things. Boaz's, in that every mention of a heart merry from drinking is in a very negative spiritual and moral context (1 Sam. 25:36; Jud. 19:6,22 cp. 18:20; 1 Kings 21:7). And yet it is through their weakness and humanity that their reality and spiritual greatness shines through. They, who were so weak and human, had such faith and spiritual insight.

He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. She came softly, uncovered his feet, and laid herself down-

Ruth seems to me to be a wonderful example of a spiritually ambitious person. It was unheard of in those times for a woman to propose to a man; yet by coming to him, uncovering his feet and laying under his mantle, she was stating that she wished to see him as a manifestation of God to her (Ruth 3:7,9 = Ruth 2:12). She went after him, following him (Ruth 3:10); the poor, landless Gentile aspired to be a part of a wealthy Jewish family, in order to fulfil the spirit of the Law. And she attained this. As noted on :1, this was to be the inspiration for the exiles, when a woman was to compass a man.

Ruth 3:8 It happened at midnight, that the man was startled and turned himself; and noticed a woman lay at his feet-

"Startled" is too mild a translation. The Hebrew is "trembled", and is used about trembling at the prospect of Divine judgment (Is. 32:11; Ez. 32:10 s.w.). Why would he tremble in this way if he awoke, sensing someone else near him, and find it to be the young woman whom he had his eye upon, and she was effectively proposing to him. Surely a different word would have been used, rather than one which expresses such fear and trembling in anticipation of judgment. He had got drunk (:7), and now he awakes, sober. He sees a woman near him, and he trembles at the thought that whilst drunk, he may have slept with one of the prostitutes who frequented harvest floors (Hos. 9:1). He had done wrong in getting drunk. But because he realized this and trembled because of his failure, what might have been the night of his shame became the most wonderful night of his life, humanly speaking. The young woman of his dreams proposes to him. And so again we see Divine grace; that in the very midst of human failure, and recognition of that failure... God acts to pour out His grace. We have likely all experienced this in our lives, and we see it so wonderfully at this point in Boaz's life.

Ruth 3:9 He said, Who are you? She answered, I am Ruth your handmaid. Therefore spread your skirt over your handmaid-

But she had taken the initiative and spread his skirt over herself (:4,7). She was asking him to confirm the initiative which she had taken, and to manifest the God of Israel to her, under whose wings she had come from Moab to come under (Ruth 2:12 LXX). The same Hebrew words for 'spread... skirt' are those used to describe how the cherubim "spread their wings" (Ex. 25:20; 37:9 etc.). She saw God manifest in that man, her *goel* / redeemer. To uncover the skirt of a person can mean to have sex with them (Dt. 22:30; 27:20). But clearly she wants marriage, redemption and family life rather than just sex. But this could play along with the possibility of sexual manipulation discussed on :2. For you didn't sleep sharing the same blanket unless you were married. But she asks him to do this because he is "a near kinsman", and not for passing pleasure or money. LXX, following the targum: "Let thy name be called upon thine handmaid to take me for a wife". Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity (:11), who wasn't chasing

men (:10). This strongly weighs against the idea that she was simply practicing sexual manipulation; although see on :7

For you are a near kinsman-

But legally, in terms of levirate law, Boaz wasn't the *goel*. And he wasn't even the closest relative. The levirate law operated when "brothers dwell together". And that wasn't the case. Under Mosaic law, a Moabite woman was not to be married. At best it could be argued that a relative of Elimelech's could marry Naomi and raise up seed to him. But she was barren. It was a stretch of levirate law for Boaz to marry Ruth, let alone that she should take the initiative and proposition him to that effect. The idea of Ruth marrying Boaz had not initially even occurred to Naomi, so we can deduce from Ruth 2:2. I suggest that Ruth was not simply being a forward, manipulative woman. She and Naomi had thought through the levirate law, and were seeking to extend its implications according to the spirit of grace rather than law. See on :12.

Ruth 3:10 He said, Blessed are you by Yahweh, my daughter. You have shown more grace in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as you didn't go after young men, whether poor or rich-
Heb. "You have made this last kindness greater than the first". His idea may be that she had not gone chasing men in Moab, because she wanted to follow Yahweh and not the gods of those men. That was her first grace. And now she had shown another grace or kindness, in that she wanted to marry Boaz because she perceived him to be a spiritual man and manifestation of Yahweh; and because she chose him specifically because of her respect in the principles, although not the letter, of the levirate laws of the covenant. He rightly perceives that his wealth was not an item of attraction. His usage of the word grace / kindness is slightly out of context, but we can understand it if he saw that out of it all, it was a kindness to him for a young, attractive widow to offer to marry him as an old man. Jewish tradition claims that he died soon after their marriage; perhaps his old age was one reason why the idea of Boaz marrying Ruth didn't initially occur to her. It can also be understood that her first kindness was to her late husband and his family. She wanted to raise a Godly seed for him, even though he was apparently weak in faith; and so her first kindness was that she had refused her Moabite suitors after his death. And now the second kindness was in being willing to marry an old Israelite man in order to continue her kindness to her first husband, by raising a Godly Israelite seed for him.

Boaz here recognizes that Ruth is 'going after' him. He feels she is showing him grace- reciprocating the grace he had shown her in the harvest fields. Just as he had invited her to see God's skirt spread over her (Ruth 2:12), so she is asking him to spread his skirt over her. Her ambition in effectively proposing to Boaz, a Gentile nobody proposing herself to a man of the Jewish establishment, is indeed inspirational. See on 2:13. The GNB probably catches the idea: "You are showing even greater family loyalty in what you are doing now than in what you did for your mother-in-law". This is looking very positively on Ruth- she was desperately poor, childless despite a previous marriage, and to throw herself on a rich distant relative in the hope of marriage and long term support was all absolutely human and natural. But Boaz, with the imputation of goodness which comes from being in love, saw her boldness and desperation in a very positive light. He liked to think of it as her showing grace to him, the old guy.

Ruth 3:11 Now, my daughter, don't be afraid; I will do to you all that you say-

Again, as noted on :5, this is the language of the covenant at Sinai. Ruth does all Naomi says, and Boaz does all Ruth says. The power of faithful, spiritually minded women is being emphasized, in a male dominated society. We note that both Boaz and Naomi call her "daughter".

For all my people in this city know that you are a worthy woman-

That Ruth was already known as a woman of integrity rather precludes the possibilities discussed on :2 that there was an element of sexual manipulation going on. Although human behaviour and motivation is rarely pure, and we cannot totally rule it out, as discussed on :7. "Worthy" is the same word translated "wealthy" in Ruth 2:1. Boaz was a worthy / wealthy *man*, and Ruth was a worthy *woman*, who was to be also wealthy when she married Boaz. They were perfectly suited for each other in moral and spiritual terms, and "all my people in this city", all the family [including the nearer kinsman], knew this. If this reading is correct, the idea of them getting married would not have come as a shock to the elders of the city in Ruth 4. It also confirms my suggestion later that Boaz and Naomi had agreed that the condition of buying her field was that the purchaser marry Ruth. They had had the two months or so of barley and wheat harvest (Ruth 2:23) to work things out and have some kind of courtship.

Ruth 3:12 Now it is true that I am a near kinsman; however there is a kinsman nearer than I-

But I explained on :9 that the levirate law didn't really define Boaz as any kind of *goel*. He was only that through a seeking to extend its implications according to the spirit of grace rather than law. But he goes along with the idea. She appeals to grace, and he already understands that grace goes beyond the letter of the law. Dt. 24:19 doesn't make allowing gleaning a binding law upon landowners. The text simply states that "When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless and for the widow". By allowing gleaners to come and pick up dropped grain, Boaz's grace was going far beyond the letter of the law. This would account for the hint in Ruth 2:22 that not every landowner allowed gleaning in their fields. And he was a descendant of the Canaanite prostitute Rahab, who had been allowed to marry into the princely line of Judah (Mt. 1:5).

Ruth 3:13 Stay this night-

This presumably was because it was dangerous for a woman to walk at night, or because he didn't want Ruth to be thought of as a threshing floor prostitute (Hos. 9:1) by being spotted walking near the threshing floor alone late at night. I suggested on :2 that Boaz slept by his corn to protect it from wandering thieves. But by saying this, he sets himself up already as her protector.

And it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform for you the part of a kinsman, so be it; let him do the kinsman's part-

Although as explained on :12 the whole idea of Boaz being the *goel* was a long stretch of the law, he was willing to take the spirit of the law and extend it by grace. But this didn't mean that he therefore disregarded the original principle behind the grace he was willing to show. And he therefore is careful not to simply flout Divine law and principle in the expression of grace. And this is an important principle to grasp for all time. Seeing he was clearly in love with Ruth, this was no painless formality for him.

But if he will not do the part of a kinsman for you, then will I do the part of a kinsman for you, as Yahweh lives. Lie down until the morning-

The levirate laws stated only that the brother of the dead was to perform the duty of levirate marriage. And the duty only concerned "brothers dwelling together". Seeing Elimelech had left Israel, this hardly applied in this case. We get the sense throughout that Boaz wants to marry Ruth; and that he was showing far more grace than the law actually required. Just as he allowed gleaners in his fields, extrapolating from the letter of the law towards a far more gracious position; see on Ruth 2:2.

Ruth 3:14 She lay at his feet until the morning. She rose up in the dark; for he said, Let it not be known that a woman came to the threshing floor-

This could be what he said to himself, explaining his reasoning for sending her away before others had woken up. I suggested on :13 that he asked her to stay the night because it was dangerous or unseemly for a woman to walk alone at night. He was concerned that people didn't think he had slept with her. Perhaps the thinking of the Mishnah (Yeb. 2:8) was already current, whereby "a man suspected of having sexual relations with a gentile woman is excluded from performing the levirate with her".

Ruth 3:15 He said, Bring the mantle that is on you, and hold it. She held it; and he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her; and he went into the city-

By removing her "veil" [AV] in order to hold the barley, she was effectively removing the sign of her widowed status. Surely there were other means of transporting it, but Boaz is acting in faith that indeed he will marry her.

Ruth 3:16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did it go, my daughter? She told her all that the man had done to her-

"Had done" rather than "had said" is perhaps significant. We could read her as meaning that he had promised to marry her. But again we cannot escape the thought that what he had "done" to her was to sleep with her or at least be sexually intimate with her, as discussed on :2. The huge amount of barley given her in :17 would then be some form of payment or at best concession that he had not acted completely correctly by her. Perhaps this whole question is indeed raised by the text, but left tantalizingly unanswered. It would be part of the story line which intrigues and holds attention, and leaves us with the caveat that for all their faith and spirituality, Ruth and Boaz were not sinless but still human.

Ruth 3:17 She said, He gave me these six measures of barley; for he said, 'Don't go empty to your mother-in-law' - "Empty" here is s.w. Ruth 1:21, where Naomi laments that she is "empty": "I went out full, and Yahweh has brought me home again empty". To be "full" was one of the blessings for obedience to the covenant, and the potential gift of God to Israel when they first entered Canaan (Dt. 6:11; Neh. 9:25 s.w.). But she had left Israel assuming that those blessings were not fulfilled. See on Ruth 1:2. Now she realized that she had seen the cup half empty instead of half full. To be empty was to be without blessing (Gen. 31:42; Ex. 3:21; Dt. 15:13). And so here Boaz tries to indirectly persuade her that this was not the case ultimately; she was going to receive blessing such as she could never have imagined, even in this life. She felt that although she had not experienced blessing from Him, indeed she had lost the potential blessings and was without His blessings, yet still she wanted to return to Him. Contrary to Pentecostal reasoning, the experience of "blessing" was not what attracted her to Him. Rather she wanted to simply be in relationship with Him, like the prodigal son returning from Gentile lands not looking for any material blessing- and yet all the same finding it.

Ruth 3:18 Then she said, Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will end; for the man will not rest- "The matter will end" uses the word usually translated "fail". The idea could be "Wait and see whether our plan has failed". "The matter" is the Hebrew translated elsewhere as "word" or "thing". Not one word failed of God's plan to bring Israel from Moab into the land and give them an inheritance there (s.w. Josh. 21:45; 23:14). And neither would this word for Ruth's redemption fail either.

Until he has finished the thing this day-

Literally, "fulfilled the word". And Boaz did do so, manifesting God to the exile Naomi and the Gentile Ruth. The very same phrase is used of God fulfilling His prophetic word of restoration through the decree of Cyrus to restore Judah from Gentile lands to Israel (Ezra 1:1). See on Ruth 1:16 for the relevance of Ruth to the restoration.

Ruth Chapter 4

Ruth 4:1 Now Boaz went up to the gate-

This fits exactly with Bethlehem being built on a ridge. The accuracy of fine details like this throughout the Biblical record confirm that indeed the Bible is not a fictional work of men but the inspired words of God.

And sat down there. When the near kinsman of whom Boaz spoke came by he said to him, Come over here, friend, and sit down! He turned aside, and sat down-

The near kinsman sits down, and in :2 the elders sit down. This all leads on from the information in Ruth 3:18 that Ruth too is sitting down, but at home, nervously and eagerly awaiting the result of the sitting down of the men. This is all part of the inspired story line and suspense. For we all want to know whether Ruth ends up having to marry a man who doesn't love her when she has already a lover. The narrative of loveless marriages, girls loving men whom they can't marry and marrying men they don't love and who don't love them... this has for ever been the stuff of Middle Eastern stories. And there is that intrigue inserted into this story, a kind of carrot to get human attention- in order to introduce us to some of the profoundest issues of Divine and human grace.

Ruth 4:2 He took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit down here. They sat down-

Note the emphasis upon sitting down; see on :1. It's as if the cameraman of Divine inspiration is zoomed in close on the men in the scene; truly we can play Bible television with these verses.

Ruth 4:3 He said to the near kinsman: Naomi, who has come back out of the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's-

Just as Boaz had no legal necessity to allow gleaning in his fields, nor was he legally obligated to be the goel to Ruth (see previous discussions in Ruth 2,3), so he here appears to be somewhat stretching legal truths. For this is the first we hear of Naomi owning land. Mosaic law didn't allow inheritance by a widow (Num. 27:8-11); the property was to pass to the husband's family, not to his widow. Elimelech had long since left Israel and forsaken his inheritance, and we would assume that his parcel of land had passed already to someone else. And there appears no legal requirement for the kinsman to consider the land as jointly owned now by Ruth and Naomi, and to make purchase of the land contingent upon marrying Ruth and having children by her. The issue of property seems unrelated to the levirate law which Boaz was seeking to apply to himself. Surely he could have offered Ruth in marriage to the near kinsman, and married her if he refused.

We naturally enquire why he raises this issue of property. There are various options. It could simply be that there were Jewish laws in place at the time which we don't have access to, and Boaz is alluding to them. For in practice, the Mosaic laws would have required other practical laws added to them in order to enable to functioning of society in practice. Or perhaps the parcel of land in view had been inherited by Naomi from her father, in a situation akin to that of Zelophehad's daughters in Num. 27; or maybe Naomi was related to her husband Elimelech, which might explain their lack of children and poor health of the two who survived to adulthood. Or perhaps it belonged to Naomi in the sense that it should have passed to Mahlon and Chilion, but as they were dead, she was their legal representative and had the right to dispose of it as they were childless (:9). Or "The property was perhaps promised to Naomi as a marriage-gift or bequeathed to her at marriage to provide for her husband's predeceasing her without leaving a child".

It was absolutely possible for women to inherit property from their father (as in Job 42:13-15), and for a woman who had been a period in Gentile lands to return to Israel and have her inheritance restored (2 Kings 8:1-6). Because of her poverty, Naomi was selling the land which somehow she had legally inherited. But the need to marry Ruth if the land was purchased is not in accordance with any Mosaic legislation or even logic. Therefore it has been suggested that :5 should be translated "On the day you acquire the field from Naomi's hand, I am acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased, to raise up the name of the deceased over his inheritance". And on reflection, the near kinsman pulls out of the property acquisition because he can see legal problems developing in the next generation if Ruth has children who would also claim it.

Maybe Boaz raises this whole issue of the property simply because he indeed did want to keep the land in the power of Ruth, and he wanted to make his advertising of his marriage to Ruth somehow incidental. He would then be using the property issue as a kind of blind, a distraction, to take attention away from his declaration of intent to marry Ruth. But we wonder why the night before he had told Ruth that he would like to be her *goel*, but there was a nearer kinsman who legally could do this.

My preferred answer is that Naomi, the seller, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. Any children Ruth had would then inherit the land. And therefore Boaz had been unable to agree immediately to marry Ruth because he needed to get the near kinsmen with the first right of purchase to actually not purchase it.

I conclude, therefore, that between them, Boaz and Naomi are seeking to expand the spirit of the levirate law of Deuteronomy. The spirit of that law was that the widows should be protected and be given children. By various mechanisms and schemes, they were expanding and keeping the spirit of the law but not the letter. Yet they didn't disregard the letter of the law, but sought to give the near kinsman the opportunity to buy the field and formally turn down the chance of marrying Ruth. This is in harmony with the way that Boaz had expanded the spirit of the law about not fetching home a forgotten sheaf to mean that he allowed women to glean in his field. And this is exactly the spirit of Yahweh's redemption of His people.

Ruth 4:4 I thought to disclose it to you saying, 'Buy it in the presence of those who sit here, and of the elders of my people'. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then let me know. You have first right to redeem it; and I am next in line. He said, I will redeem it-

See on :3 for the various options of interpretation. John the Baptist's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself (Jn. 1:15) contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4. Boaz told him that "I am after thee" (AV, NEV "next in line"), but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

Ruth 4:5 Then Boaz said, On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must buy it also from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance-

I concluded on :3 that Naomi, the seller, had made a condition of buying the land that the purchaser also married Ruth. The record doesn't state contact between Boaz and Naomi; although see on Ruth 2:11 for the suggestion that they worked out this plan together in the months of barley and wheat harvest. Naomi had told Ruth to just sit tight and wait and see what Boaz would arrange over the next 24 hours. We note too that Boaz didn't give the anonymous kinsman the full picture- he firstly mentioned the land for sale / redemption, and only then mentions that this would involve marrying Ruth and raising children by her in the name of Elimelech. The Levirate law only required brothers to raise up children to their dead brother. Elimelech had not died childless, so there was no legal requirement to raise up children in his name. Ruth's former husband had no living brothers. Therefore Boaz was operating according to the spirit of the law and not the letter of it; there was no legal requirement for the kinsman to marry Ruth and have children by her. But Boaz seems to be playing legal and psychological games to make the anonymous man turn down the offer of marrying Ruth- so that Boaz could then marry her on the basis that this was his legal necessity. The truth seems to be that he fell in love with her at first sight, and was going through all this appearance of legal necessity in order to somehow legitimize that fact. We likewise noted how he spoke of Ruth and Naomi's manipulation and desperate appeal to him for help to in fact be a display of Divine grace (see on Ruth 3:10).

If in some way the levirate law was being strictly followed, and I discussed possibilities for this line of thought on :3, then we reflect that the principle would have often required men to become polygamous. A man "must redeem" the property of a dead relative in some cases by marrying his wife; but this would have resulted in polygamy. Boaz himself may have been already married. There are times when the standards of God contradict each other, on a surface level.

Ruth 4:6 The near kinsman said, I can't redeem it for myself, otherwise I will spoil my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption for yourself; for I can't redeem it-

Land at that time was organized according to strips of land within a field, rather than owning a field. Even wealthy Boaz only owned part of the field (2:3). Strip farming was very inefficient; upon death, land was split up between the children, and then when they died, the land was split up even further. The anonymous man didn't want to have any more children because it would mean that what he was leaving as an inheritance would be even more reduced and divided. But because of that, he remains anonymous. He was concerned about what would happen over the next generation or so. By contrast, Boaz wasn't worried about splitting up yet further the inheritance which he was

leaving- and because of that, he left an inheritance which was recorded and stretched right down to the Lord Jesus.

It seems to me that the nameless relative in Ruth 4 was like so many people today. He was interested in getting a bit more land to add to his stack; but he didn't really care for the redemption of his brother, and pulled out of the whole thing once he learnt he would have to marry another wife and have more children. He said he couldn't do this because he would spoil [AV] or endanger [NIV] his inheritance. We know that at this time, strip farming was being practiced- whereby a field was split up into parts, each of which belonged to a different person (Ruth 2:3). By having more children, the man would have to split up his land into yet more parts so that each son had his strips. And the son he had by Ruth would be counted as Mahlon's son, in the spirit of the levirate marriage laws. And so his bit of land would then be separate from the land strips the man was intending to give to his existing children. Ultimately this could lead to the man's total inheritance becoming almost worthless if it was just split into tiny strips because he had too many children.

I like how the NIV has the man speaking of 'endangering' his inheritance. He was like so many people- he had say a 20 year horizon, genuinely concerned about what was best for his children in the short term, rather than thinking about his responsibility to his brother. He saw 'danger' in doing that. It could be argued that the 50 year Jubilee law meant that the land boundaries returned to how they originally were after 50 years... so perhaps [although it's hard to work out how the Jubilee law worked in practice] he was worrying about something which only had meaning for the next few decades [if that]. He wasn't a bad man; just one who was fearful and wouldn't look beyond the next 20 years or so. And I suggest the genealogy at the end of Ruth 4 comments upon this- that man is anonymous, his name never went down in history, whereas Boaz who loved his brother and didn't focus solely on his own immediate family went on to be the ancestor of both David and the Lord Jesus Himself.

Another possibility is that the man thought that marriage to Ruth was bound to spoil or destroy *his* inheritance or family, as she had that of Elimelech. He considered her a *femme fatale*. He may have seen this as just judgment for marrying a Moabitess. And he wasn't going to do the same. In this case we see how utterly wrong he was. He would be representative of the legalistic Jewish xenophobes of the postexilic period- who missed out on so much because of their attitudes.

Ruth 4:7 Now this was the custom in former time in Israel-

It can be noted that there are Aramaic terms in this verse. This confirms my suggestion on Ruth 1:16 that the book of Ruth was rewritten in exile, presenting Naomi and Ruth as examples to the exiles who were likewise intended to return to their land their God. This would explain why at this point, the author or editor sees the need to explain what the customs were "in former time in Israel", because the readership would not know this.

Concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, to confirm all things: a man took off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour; and this was the way of affirmation in Israel-

This custom indicates that the law of Dt. 25:9 had been somewhat reduced in severity and altered. For there is no mention of spitting. We could read this as an indication of Israel's apostasy from God's law; or we could consider that even in Old Testament times, the essence of the Law was what was important rather than keeping the letter of it. However I have suggested on :3-5 that the levirate law did not at all require anyone to marry Ruth. Perhaps that is why the spitting was not done, only the removal of the shoe as a sign that they had indeed made the agreement.

Ruth 4:8 So the near kinsman said to Boaz, Buy it for yourself. He took off his shoe-

We notice that this was done "in the presence of the elders" (:2), just as was required by the law of Dt. 25:7-9 if the levirate law was not followed. But there was no spitting in the face, because actually the law did not require the kinsman to marry Ruth. That was an extension of the law being added by Boaz and Naomi. However :7 may imply that this whole thing was nothing to do with levirate law in itself, and taking off the shoe was simply a token of confirmation of an agreement.

Ruth 4:9 Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, You are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi-

Presumably by this point, Naomi has appeared on the scene. Clearly there has been more collusion between her and Boaz than is recorded. The order Elimelech - Chilion - Mahlon may reflect the order in which they had died.

Ruth 4:10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I have purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of

the dead on his inheritance, that the name of the dead not be cut off from among his brothers, and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day-

They were standing in the gate of his place, in the gate of Bethlehem (:1). Although Mahlon had been but a child when he left Bethlehem, he was still counted as being from there and somehow was rooted to the land of his inheritance. "To raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance" seems another attempt to connect the property issue to the marriage of Ruth (see on :3). This was not a connection strictly made by the levirate law. The seed did not have to be raised upon the geographical land inheritance of the deceased person. But that would indeed have been according to the spirit of the law; but it was not the letter. Naomi's selling of the land conditional upon the purchaser marrying Ruth was (see on :5) was therefore a reflection of how she [and Boaz] had worked out the spirit of the law. And indeed there is the nail-biting moment when the nearer kinsman has the opportunity to marry Ruth. When she's in love with Boaz and he with her. This arose because of their genuine desire to be obedient to the law. So in terms of the narrative, this statement of Boaz that he is going to marry Ruth leaves us all with the same sense of relief and triumph which we imagine in his voice.

Ruth 4:11 All the people who were in the gate and the elders said, We are witnesses-

Passers by had crowded around the seated elders to witness what was happening. Marriage was to be publically testified. There was not necessarily any documentary evidence, but marriage was publically acknowledged by the surrounding society in whatever form was then current. This can help us in defining marriage today.

May Yahweh make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and like Leah, who built the house of Israel; and treat you worthily in Ephrathah, and bring you fame in Bethlehem-

See on Ruth 3:2; 4:12. We recall that Elimelech was from Ephrath (Ruth 1:2), and perhaps Boaz was too, as he was a relative of Elimelech. The people perceived that Boaz wanted to build up the family of Elimelech, which had been wiped out by the death of his sons childless and his apparent failure to have any other children. This was grace indeed, to be so concerned about building up your brother's family, when Boaz surely had his own family. But it was as a result of this concern that his name is remembered; because we know nothing of his children, but we do know that his child by Ruth led to the Lord Jesus. "Worthily" is the word for "virtuous", used of Ruth in Ruth 3:11. They were seen as a match for each other, as they were both virtuous people.

Ruth 4:12 Let your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, of the seed which Yahweh shall give you of this young woman-

Tamar's fertility was legendary because despite being in middle age, one act of intercourse resulted in her having two children [twins]. The comparison with Rachel and Leah also seems forced, because they both had fertility problems; we have an example here of people using traditional terms of blessing, rather like singing hymns, without putting any meaning into the words. What unites all these three women is the fact that they were sexually manipulative, and this would support the impression we could possibly take from the record of Ruth's approach to Boaz that night at the threshing floor.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in to her, and Yahweh gave her conception, and she bore a son-

The rubric for procreation usually found in the Bible is that a man goes in to a woman, she conceives and bares a child. But here there is added that "Yahweh gave her conception". We wonder if she had been barren before. Perhaps that is why she more easily resigned herself to coming to Israel to serve Yahweh and being Naomi's carer, resigning the hope of remarriage. She imagined that if she did remarry, it would be a sad marriage [for those times] as she would be barren. However, her enthusiasm for Boaz, himself an old man, and the whole plan about him marrying her to raise up seed for Mahlon, was therefore all done even more in faith.

Ruth 4:14 The women said to Naomi, Blessed be Yahweh, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman; and let his name be famous in Israel-

The 'being a kinsman' to Naomi was felt to have only been achieved when a son was born. But grammatically, the near kinsman who would be famous and a restorer of life (:14) appears to refer to the baby boy. And this would then look forward to how this child's descendant would ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the ultimate restorer of life.

Ruth 4:15 He shall be to you a restorer of life, and sustain you in your old age, for your daughter-in-law, who loves

you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him-

Is. 56:3-8 seems to allude to Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. The "dry tree" who was a eunuch [Boaz? Naomi?] and the Gentile [Ruth] who had taken hold of the covenant would be given a destiny "better than of sons and daughters", a quotation from Ruth 4:15. Naomi has said she is barren (see on Ruth 1:11), and we can deduce from Ruth 4:13 that Ruth was also. And at his age perhaps Boaz was impotent. Perhaps this was why the idea of Ruth marrying him didn't initially occur to Naomi. Out of every human inadequacy and impossibility, God raised up a seed, through using two women and a man who had faith that "God is able". And that seed was to continue to the conception of the Lord Jesus by the faithful virgin Mary, also from Bethlehem.

Hezekiah apparently chose to be a eunuch for the Kingdom's sake. There is the implication in Is. 56:3-8 that his example inspired others in Israel to make the same commitment. They are comforted by Isaiah: "Neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold (the same Hebrew word is used *five times* about Hezekiah, 2 Chron. 29:3,34; 31:4; 32:5,7) of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house, and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off". Hezekiah had lamented that he would die without a seed (Is. 38:12 Heb.; Is. 53), and so did those who had also become (in their minds?) eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. There was that human desire for a seed, a "house" to perpetuate their name. But they are promised a name in God's house (family) in the Kingdom, better than of sons and daughters in this life. This alludes to Ruth 4:15, where Ruth is described as being better than sons to Naomi. In other words, Ruth's having a child was a living exemplification of the Kingdom now. How God acted with her is how He will with all His people, who put Him first and take hold of covenant with Him.

Ruth 4:16 Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse to it-

The barren Naomi (see on Ruth 1:11) is portrayed as becoming able to nurse the baby. That would have been a miracle, reflective of the new life God was giving to all involved. Or it could be that she symbolically held the child to her breast, rather like Bilhah giving birth upon Rachel's knees so that Rachel could claim the child as hers (Gen. 30:3).

Ruth 4:17 The neighbouring women gave him a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi! And they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David-

The naming of a child by women rather than the father is unusual (Lk. 1:62). Perhaps it was because Boaz died soon after the marriage, as Jewish tradition claims. But it fits in with the theme in the book of the meaning and power of women, in a male based society. "Obed" means 'servant' and this was not a great name for a child in those times, especially for the son of a wealthy man like Boaz. But the spirit of the family was such that they perceived the spirit of servant leadership.

Ruth 4:18 Now this is the history of the generations of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron-

The genealogy now given jumps many generations and so those who are mentioned must all have purpose. Beginning with Perez, son of Tamar who played the prostitute to Judah, we surely have Tamar [who was likely also a Gentile] being paralleled with Ruth. This could confirm the theme of sexual manipulation discussed on Ruth 3:2. But I think the similarity is more in that they had both worked out the spirit of the law, and then went out and in their own ways tried to practice it with the appropriate men in their lives.

Ruth 4:19 and Hezron became the father of Ram, and Ram became the father of Amminadab-

Comparing with 1 Chron. 2, some generations are skipped. But the point is that it included Amminadab, meaning "my kinsman, or paternal uncle (*ammi*) is generous". The idea is being presented that generosity and being a true kinsman redeemer *ran in the family*. Not only Boaz had been like this, but his ancestor too. The idea is that this would characterize the line of David, and would come to full term in the Messianic Son of David.

Ruth 4:20 and Amminadab became the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon became the father of Salmon-

Amminadab, the generous kinsman like Boaz (see on :19), had a descendant called Nahshon, meaning 'snake'. The abrupt juxtaposition is so that we understand that spirituality is not at all inherited genetically. It is a case of consciously choosing to follow good examples.

Ruth 4:21 and Salmon became the father of Boaz, and Boaz became the father of Obed-

Mt. 1:5 says that Salmon had Boaz by Rahab. Yet Rahab lived some time earlier. I therefore suggest that Salmon was the ancestor of Boaz [not the literal father], through the child he had from Rahab. This is mentioned to highlight the fact that Boaz was descended from Rahab, and therefore was generous to the strangers and saw nothing wrong with a Moabitess marrying into the congregation of Yahweh.

Ruth 4:22 and Obed became the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David-

The function of the narrative is to set up David as the intended outcome to a line which had arisen out of barren, Gentile women, domestic tragedy, servant leadership (see on :17), faith and perception of grace. And this is the line which the New Testament genealogies show continued to the Lord Jesus.