

THE BOOK OF RUTH



‘The Book of Ruth’

Introduction

The **Book of Ruth** is one of the most beautiful books we find within the Bible, it’s a story about love and loyalty. Although it has only four chapters, we see God working in people’s lives in wonderful ways. The author is unknown, some scholars credit the writing to Samuel the prophet, Samuel died before David’s kingship, which is alluded to at the end of the book.

It was probably written sometime after **1010 B.C.** since that was when David took the throne of Israel. It also refers to a **‘former time’** in Israel, indicating it was written years after the actual events occurred and it was written to Israel. The book opens in Moab, which was a pagan country east of Judah and the Dead Sea. Naomi and her husband Elimelek fled there during a famine. After Elimelek and Naomi's two sons died, she decided to return to Israel. The rest of the book takes place in Bethlehem, the future birthplace of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness is one of the main themes of this book. We see Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi, Boaz’s faithfulness to Ruth, and everyone’s faithfulness to God. God, in return, rewards them with great blessings. All their faithfulness led to kindness toward each other. Kindness is an outpouring of love and we see that everyone in this book showed the type of selfless love toward others that God expects from his followers. We also see Ruth was a hardworking, morally pure woman, Boaz treated her with respect while fulfilling his lawful responsibility.

We also see obedience to God and His laws within the book. Ruth took care of Naomi, Naomi took care of Ruth, then Boaz took care of both women. Finally, God took care of all of them, blessing Ruth and Boaz with a child they named Obed, who became the grandfather of David. From David's line came Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour of the world. And finally, redemption is an underlying theme in the book of Ruth. As Boaz, the ‘kinsman redeemer,’ saves Ruth and Naomi from a hopeless situation, he illustrates how Jesus Christ redeems our lives.

The Text

Ruth 1

‘In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.’ Ruth 1:1+2

The setting for this book is **‘in the days when the judges ruled.’** This is the story of a woman who wasn’t a Jew but a Moabite woman who would play a significant part in the ancestry of King David and Jesus. We’re reminded that another Gentile, Rahab the harlot, also played a part in the lineage of David and Jesus. When we think of the period of the Judges we think of a turbulent period in which there was apostasy, oppression from other nations, intertribal jealousy and civil war. By contrast it would seem this was a period of time in which there was peace throughout the land. This story focuses on the providence of God as He deals with a family that has faced tragedy. It can also be called a love story.

Because of ‘a famine in the land’ a man by the name of Elimelek and his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Kilion left their home in Bethlehem and moved to the land of Moab. Rainfall in Palestine was never plentiful and frequently it was insufficient to provide adequately for the crops. A number of famines are mentioned in the Bible. Famines took place during the lifetimes of Abraham, David, Elijah and during the early years of the church in Jerusalem. As a result of the famine Elimelek moved his family to the neighbouring country of Moab.

It got its name from Moab a son of Lot, the evil fruit of the incestuous relation of Lot with one of his daughters. **Genesis 19:36+37 ‘So both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today.’**

We remember the story how the king of Moab, Balak, hired Balaam to curse Israel, during their pilgrimage to Canaan after wandering in the desert for forty years. **Numbers 22:1-8 ‘Then the Israelites travelled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, ‘This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the**

grass of the field.’ So Balak son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to summon Balaam son of Beor, who was at Pethor, near the Euphrates River, in his native land. Balak said: ‘A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed.’ The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said. ‘Spend the night here,’ Balaam said to them, ‘and I will report back to you with the answer the LORD gives me.’ So, the Moabite officials stayed with him.’

By contrast David when fleeing from Saul found a friend in the king of Moab, 1 Samuel 22:3+4 ‘From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, ‘Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?’ So, he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.’ It would seem that the two nations were on friendly relations

‘Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.’ Ruth 1:3-5

Seemingly not long after their arrival in Moab Elimelek died, the two sons married Moabite women. There is no specific condemnation of these marriages, although they would surely have been frowned upon by the orthodox in Israel. According to the Law of Moses this would have been forbidden, for an Israelite was not to marry outside his or her tribe which in this case would be the tribe of Judah, and certainly not to a Gentile as the Moabites were. In time both sons die.

Some Jewish writers venture to say that death was punishment sent upon this family for moving to Moab and marrying Moabite women. However, it’s interesting to note that another Gentile woman, Rahab preceded Ruth in the lineage of David and Jesus and no punishment resulted that we know of.

‘When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.’ Ruth 1:6+7

Hearing that the famine no longer existed in Bethlehem and that God was blessing His people and their crops were now yielding them food (bread) Naomi having family ties there, prepares to return to her home. Her two daughters-in-law accompany her at the beginning of her journey. This indicates they were very much attached to Naomi even to the point they were willing to leave their own country and go to Bethlehem. This speaks much about the character of Naomi.

‘Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband. Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud.’ Ruth 1:8+9

Naomi evidently thought it wouldn’t be wise for the girls to leave Moab, their native land. So, she commended them for their loyalty to their dead husbands and to herself but urged them to return to their families. She knew these young women would want to remarry so she kisses them and prayed that God would grant them days of prosperity and blessing in their second marriage. The very thought of their being separated from Naomi brought forth weeping.

‘And said to her, ‘We will go back with you to your people.’ But Naomi said, ‘Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!’ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.’ Ruth 1:10-14

While the daughters-in-law were intent on leaving their own land to go with her to Bethlehem, Naomi objects. ‘Why will you go with me?’

According to levirate marriage, the next brother or kinsman was expected to marry the childless widow of a deceased brother. The first child of the second marriage carried on the family name and inherited the property of the deceased first husband. **Deuteronomy 25:5+6** 'If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.'

Naomi is simply saying that she couldn't hope to be the mother of sons who could later marry the two Moabite widows. Even if she could have children, **would they be willing to wait until they were old enough to marry them?** After more weeping Orpha kisses her mother-in-law and turns back to Moab. However, Ruth wouldn't be dissuaded, she is determined to remain with Naomi regardless of the consequences of not finding a husband since she was a Moabite.

'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.' But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.' When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.' Ruth 1:15-18

With the departure of Orpha, Naomi admonishes Ruth to return also, Ruth's response was please do not deny me from following after you. This next section of the book is esteemed one of the most touching passages in all of literature. Ruth renounces all that she could be expected to hold dear in Moab and voluntarily chooses to go to Judah and begin an entirely new life with her mother-in-law among a different race of people. She says, **'Wherever you go, I will go.'**

There are cultural overtones in her words, **'and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people.'** Her choice has strong religious implications as we see from her words, **'Your God (shall be) my God.'** **Had Ruth already been convicted and converted to the one God of Israel by the faith of her mother-in-law and husband?** In Moab Ruth would have worshiped Chemosh, **Numbers 21:29** 'Woe to you, Moab! You are destroyed, people of Chemosh! He has given up his sons as fugitives and his daughters as captives to Sihon king of the Amorites'.

In going to Judah, she would now worship the one God of Israel. We think it is a testimony to both of her deceased husband and her mother-in-law that she was willing to entrust herself to the God whom they worshiped. She is also willing to die and be buried in Judah.

Her words, **'May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me'** is a solemn vow that can be paraphrased, **'May a severe judgment fall on me if I am not true to my vow.'** Ruth's words expressed a love and loyalty that is rare and one that the Naomi could not reject so she no longer gave up in urging her to return to Moab.

'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.' Ruth 1:20+21

The two now finish the journey to Bethlehem and their arrival in the city caused quite a stir as the people seem surprised. They ask, **'Is this Naomi?'** Years earlier Naomi and Elimelek had left with their happy family, now Naomi returns without her husband and sons. No doubt her looks have changed, certainly she would look older now. Perhaps her very appearance bore testimony to the hardships and sorrow she had experienced while away in Moab.

She tells them, **'Don't call me Naomi. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.'** The name Naomi means (pleasant), whereas Mara means (bitter). Naomi is saying in effect, that the experiences in Moab had brought great grief into her life and she could no longer wear a name which meant pleasant. Rather they should call her by a name that meant bitterness. She says, **'The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'** The KJV says, **'The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.'** It would seem Naomi recognized that the tragedies of her life weren't all accidental but that the hand of God had been involved in the life of her family. God is the Almighty. We may not understand why he allows tragedy to come into our lives at times.

He is the sovereign God who can make all things work together for the good of his children, **Romans 8:28** ‘And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose’. While her life in Moab had ended in bitterness yet the end of her story in Bethlehem will be good and would eventually results in great things.

‘So, Naomi returned, accompanied by her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, who came back with her from the region of Moab. (Now they arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.)’ **Ruth 1:22**

The famine was over and the land was producing again and Ruth and Naomi arrive at the beginning of the barley harvest which was a good time to return to Bethlehem. The Moabite experience had proven tragic, but the fields of Bethlehem were now full and this will demonstrate to us how the providence of God can work to bring about good out of a bad situation.

Ruth 2

‘Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side of the family named Boaz. He was a wealthy, prominent man from the clan of Elimelech. One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the fields so I can gather grain behind whoever permits me to do so.’ Naomi replied, ‘You may go, my daughter.’ **Ruth 2:1+2**

We’re informed that Naomi had a kinsman related to her husband by the name of Boaz. He is described as a man of great wealth, although this can also mean a ‘**man of valour.**’ It seems Ruth is anxious to find work in the fields since it was harvest time and no doubt they needed food. Notice her request to Naomi. ‘**Let me go to the fields so I can gather grain.**’ Again, we see the dedication and respect of Ruth to her mother-in-law seeking her permission first.

According to Mosaic law the poor were entitled to gather grain that fell from the hands of the reapers and also the corners of the fields were left so that the poor might glean the grain. This was the time for the barley harvest not corn as the AV implies.

Leviticus 19:9+10 ‘When you gather in the harvest of your land, you must not completely harvest the corner of your field, and you must not gather up the gleanings of your harvest. You must not pick your vineyard bare, and you must not gather up the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You must leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.’

Leviticus 23:22 ‘When you gather in the harvest of your land, you must not completely harvest the corner of your field, and you must not gather up the gleanings of your harvest. You must leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.’

Deuteronomy 24:19 ‘Whenever you reap your harvest in your field and leave some unraked grain there, you must not return to get it; it should go to the resident foreigner, orphan, and widow so that the LORD your God may bless all the work you do.’

‘So, Ruth went and gathered grain in the fields behind the harvesters. Now she just happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Now at that very moment, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, ‘**May the LORD be with you!**’ They replied, ‘**May the LORD bless you!**’ **Ruth 2:3+4**

Ruth wasn’t determined to go to any particular field it just so happened she went to the field of Boaz but what appears to be an accident can be seen as the providence of God. Boaz comes to inspect the work that is being done and noted the presence of a stranger in his field. The greetings between Boaz and the gleaners is interesting and unusual and isn’t the typical kind of greetings between us as Christians today. ‘**May the LORD be with you!**’ And they answered him, ‘**May the LORD bless you!**’ Suppose we greeted each other today as they did, **what would happen?**

‘Boaz asked his servant in charge of the harvesters, ‘To whom does this young woman belong?’ The servant in charge of the harvesters replied, ‘She’s the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the region of Moab. She

asked, 'May I follow the harvesters and gather grain among the bundles?' Since she arrived she has been working hard from this morning until now – except for sitting in the resting hut a short time.' Ruth 2:5-7

Boaz immediately notices Ruth. Ruth's appearance and dress was no doubt different from that of the girls he usually saw gleaning behind his reapers. Perhaps being a Moabite her dress may have been different from that of the Jewish women. The reply was almost derogatory and at the same time complimentary. 'It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.' She had asked permission to gather in the field of Boaz. When the overseer gave her permission, she worked diligently throughout the day except for a short period of rest which would be expected of any of the workers.

'So, Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen carefully, my dear! Do not leave to gather grain in another field. You need not go beyond the limits of this field. You may go along beside my female workers. Take note of the field where the men are harvesting and follow behind with the female workers. I will tell the men to leave you alone. When you are thirsty, you may go to the water jars and drink some of the water the servants draw.' Ruth 2:8+9

Hearing and then observing the diligence of Ruth as she gleaned in his field and no doubt her physical appearance, she is asked by Boaz not to go to another field to glean but to remain in his own field where she could join the women who were directly behind the reapers. The poor were allowed to gather.

It seems that other women would follow the reapers and bind the sheaves left by the reapers as they cut the barley. In saying this there is a suggestion that he would provide for her needs. In fact, Boaz had already given instructions to his workers to keep Ruth from harm. Furthermore, she is instructed to drink of the water provided for the workers in Boaz' field.

'Ruth knelt before him with her forehead to the ground and said to him, 'Why are you so kind and so attentive to me, even though I am a foreigner?' Ruth 2:10

Ruth was so moved by his words of kindness that in an act of humility she bowed down before him and asked, 'Why are you so kind and so attentive to me, even though I am a foreigner?' Under ordinary circumstances being a foreigner she wouldn't have been given such a privilege as Boaz offered her. Her very question showed a spirit of humility and modesty.

'Boaz replied to her, 'I have been given a full report of all that you have done for your mother-in-law following the death of your husband – how you left your father and your mother, as well as your homeland, and came to live among people you did not know previously. May the LORD reward your efforts! May your acts of kindness be repaid fully by the LORD God of Israel, from whom you have sought protection!' Ruth 2:11+12

Boaz by inquiring about Ruth no doubt learned of her faithfulness to her mother-in-law. Leaving the land of one's nativity was considered a real sacrifice. Her willingness to take on a different culture (Jewish ways) indicated a complete rejection of the ways of the people of Moab and their worship of idols. Boaz said, 'I have been given a full report of all that you have done for your mother-in-law following the death of your husband – how you left your father and your mother, as well as your homeland, and came to live among people you did not know previously.'

This had to be impressive not only to Boaz but to all those who lived in Bethlehem. Also, Boaz knew he alone could not adequately repay Ruth for her faithfulness, he prayed that Ruth might be abundantly rewarded by the Lord 'from whom you have sought protection.' Ruth has found a place of refuge under the God of Israel, as a hen gathers her young under wings to protect them from harm, so God protects those who come to him for safety. Matthew 23:37 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have none of it!'

'She said, 'You really are being kind to me, sir, for you have reassured and encouraged me, your servant, even though I am not one of your servants!' Ruth 2:13

Her words, 'For you have reassured me' indicates she had been deeply stirred by the remarks of Boaz.

She felt herself unworthy of his great kindness even though she was not a Jewish woman. No doubt probably because of her poverty, her Gentile nationality, and her heathen background she felt unworthy of his kindness. His kindness to Jewish women is understandable, but his kindness to her was nothing but pure grace.

‘At mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.’ When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.’ Ruth 2:14

Boaz’s generosity extended even further by inviting her to eat with his workers at mealtime, he made it a point to see that she had plenty to eat. So, she sat beside the reapers at mealtime. He had parched grain passed to her but she kept back some of it obviously so she could take it home to her mother-in-law.

‘As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, ‘Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.’ Ruth 2:15+16

As she is ready to resume her work in the field Boaz gives instructions to the young men, (reapers), **‘Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her.’** Usually the gleaners took only the grain that had not been found in the sheaves. However, Boaz made special provision for Ruth, they were to let some of the grain from the bundles to fall so that she might glean. One translation renders this **‘Pull out some for her.’**

They were providing for her in a special way that would not have been done for the other reapers yet without her knowing it was being purposefully done for her, they weren’t to rebuke her for gleaning. Under Moses’ Law she had a right to take all that was accidentally left behind. The point seems to be that the reapers saw to it that an abundance of grain was left for her.

‘So, Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.’ Ruth 2:17+18

The grain being small it was beaten out by means of a stick to separate the grain from the chaff. That evening when she had finished beating out the grain it amounted to **‘about an ephah of barley.’** This amounted to approximately three pecks, dry measure. it was enough to support Ruth and Naomi for about five days. When Ruth arrived back home in Bethlehem, Naomi no doubt was very surprised to see the amount of barley Ruth had brought home. Ruth also gave Naomi the parched grain she had left over after eating with Boaz’s servants. Again, we see the deep dedication she had for her mother-in-law.

‘Her mother-in-law asked her, ‘Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!’ Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. ‘The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,’ she said.’ Ruth 2:19

Naomi seeing the large amount of grain that Ruth had brought home immediately asked, **“Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”** Ruth informs her that it was in the field of Boaz. Boaz was both a wealthy landowner and a close relative of Naomi. As such he could be expected to buy for the family its rightful land and also look after the helpless members of the family as was the case with Ruth and Naomi. **Leviticus 25:25 ‘If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold.’**

‘The LORD bless him!’ Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. ‘He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.’ She added, ‘That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.’ Ruth 2:20

Naomi breaks forth on a statement of praise. By caring for the widow of Mahlon, Boaz was providing for the dead as well as showing kindness to the living. Moses’ Law saw to it that the surviving widows should be provided for by their near kin. Even though Ruth wasn’t of the tribe of Judah nor a Jew yet the act of Boaz was fulfilling the requirement of the law to provide for a widow.

Deuteronomy 25:5-7 'If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfil the duty of a brother-in-law to me.'

'Then Ruth the Moabite said, 'He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.' Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else's field you might be harmed.' So, Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.' Ruth 2:21-23

Naomi sees this as a good omen, it's obvious that Boaz has shown unusual kindness to Ruth. Therefore, Naomi's advice to Ruth is to continue to work in his field and with his maidens. She isn't to be hesitant to accept his generosity, she encourages her to continue not only until the end of the harvest but also the wheat harvest.

Ruth 3

'One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, 'My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.' Ruth 3:1

The KJV uses the word 'rest' while the NKJV uses the word 'security' in this verse. These words are equivalent to marriage. In effect Naomi was saying, "Shall I not get you a good husband, that it may be well with you'. Here we see Naomi's care for her daughter-in-law's present and future wellbeing and comfort. She didn't want Ruth to remain a poor gleaner in the fields at harvest times, this was very commendable on Naomi's part. She understood what it meant to be old and live a life of melancholy. She didn't want to see her daughter-in-law who was still a young woman confined for the rest of her life to widowhood.

Naomi will now proceed with a plan to arrange a marriage between Ruth and Boaz. To put it mildly she is full of contrivance how to get Ruth well married to Boaz. Due to Ruth living among strangers with different customs along with her modesty and humility she would never have thrust herself forward to be married to Boaz who no doubt she was very impressed with.

'Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.' Ruth 3:2

Naomi basically asks, 'Isn't Boaz of our kindred?' She is mindful of the levirate marriage customs which called upon the nearest unmarried kinsman to take the responsibility of marrying the widow of a deceased husband who was of near kin. It was a custom of the Jews although never stated precisely in the Law of Moses that if an Israelite who had been married died without children, it became the duty of his brother to marry his widow that he might establish his brother's name in Israel by begetting a son through his sister-in-law.

The child then would take the name of the deceased in order that the deceased's name might not become extinct in Israel. This person was looked upon as a 'redeemer.' Deuteronomy 25:6 'The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.' Due to the near kinship of Boaz, he stood in line to be the redeemer.

Naomi recognised this when she said, 'Boaz is a relative of ours?' Naomi probably had noticed with great interest that Boaz seemed partial to Ruth and that Ruth had a great admiration for Boaz. She now steps forward to further this relationship.

At this point of the barley harvest he would be winnowing that night at the threshing floor. Winnowing often occurred at night when the breeze would come up with enabled the grain to separate from the chaff when it was tossed into the air. It seems likely also that Boaz would spend the night there to guard the grain from any thieves who might try and take the grain to gain money.

‘Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.’ Ruth 3:3

The facts are clear that both Naomi and Ruth have the purest of motives in their plan. Although Ruth had been kindly treated by Boaz, he hadn’t made any suggestion concerning marriage. Naomi now plans a way by which Ruth might be able to meet Boaz alone. First, she must wash herself and then anoint herself then put on her best garment that would make her attractive and appealing in appearance. Such customs haven’t changed over all the years since Ruth time.

She is to go down to the threshing floor but not to make herself known (**an appearance**) to Boaz until he had finished eating and drinking. This in many ways is a risky and daring act on the part of Naomi and Ruth.

‘When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.’ ‘I will do whatever you say,’ Ruth answered. So, she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!’ Ruth 3:4-8

She is to wait until he lies down to sleep and then go and uncover his feet and lie down at his feet. Under usual circumstances this would have been interpreted as an immoral act. Certainly, Ruth is taking a risk in doing this, the integrity of both Ruth and Boaz, however, was such that Naomi felt free to suggest it.

Ruth seems quite willing to follow Naomi’s instructions and so, she waits until he had eaten and drank and **‘in good spirits’** due to the good harvest. He finally lies down beside the heap of grain that had been winnowed. We are told she came **‘quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.’** At the moment, the man isn’t aroused from sleep but around midnight he discovers that a woman lying at his feet which no doubt startled him.

‘Who are you?’ he asked. ‘I am your servant Ruth,’ she said. ‘Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.’ Ruth 1:9

Boaz naturally was startled to discover a woman lying at his feet. **‘Who are you?’** he asked and the response was, **“I am your servant Ruth,”** she said. **‘Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.’** The KJV renders this **‘spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid.’** The custom of a man’s placing a corner of his garment over a maiden as a token of marriage is still known among the Arabs today.

‘The LORD bless you, my daughter,’ he replied. ‘This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.’ Ruth 3:10+11

His answer and reaction to Ruth indicates to some that he was much older man in age than Ruth and she is commended that she didn’t seek after a young man who would have been more attractive to her, some have estimated that he was 80 years old at the time. The difference in age wasn’t as much a factor as it is in our culture. He states a fact that the whole city of Bethlehem knew of her and that she was a virtuous woman but he doesn’t consider her actions as immoral.

‘Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.’ Ruth 3:12+13

It’s said that Boaz was only a nephew of Elimelek, whereas it seems a brother of Ruth’s deceased husband was still living. Even though he was obviously desirous of marrying her, he recognises that the closest relative must decide whether or not he wished to marry her. The closer relative should have first opportunity.

‘So, she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.’ Ruth 3:14

She remains lying at his feet until early morning early enough that no one would recognize her. Boaz realising the danger of the situation requests that she not let it be known that she has spent the night at his feet. Such a story repeated by other would grow into a story that would be greatly exaggerated of what had actually taken place and would have harmed the reputation of Ruth and Boaz.

‘He also said, ‘Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.’ When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.’ Ruth 3:15

Before departing he asks for her shawl and measures out six ephahs of barley which she takes with her into the city under the dim light of early dawn.

‘When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, ‘How did it go, my daughter?’ Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, ‘He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’ Ruth 3:16+17

The fact that it was very early in the morning is brought out by the fact that Naomi wasn’t sure who she was at first as she asks, ‘Is that you, my daughter?’ KJV. No doubt with much excitement Ruth rehearses what had happened between her and Boaz. Furthermore, he didn’t want her to return to her mother-in-law without some barley grain.

‘Then Naomi said, ‘Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.’ Ruth 3:18

Naomi gives some encouraging advice, he definitely was interested in marrying Ruth and being an honourable man he wouldn’t rest until he followed the proper procedures to determine if he would be eligible to marry Ruth.

Ruth 4

‘Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, ‘Come over here, my friend, and sit down.’ So, he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, ‘Sit here,’ and they did so. Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, ‘Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.’ ‘I will redeem it,’ he said. Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.’ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, ‘Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.’ Ruth 4:1-6

Decisions, judgments and administration in Israel took place at the gates of the cities. This is where people went to consult with the elders. Boaz was somewhat crafty in his approach to gain the right to marry Ruth. He first informed the near kinsman that there was a field of land that he had a right to buy. After hearing of the land, the near kinsman agreed to buy the land but then, Boaz said that there were obligations that came with claiming the land.

When informed that Ruth came with the land, the near kinsman decided that he wouldn’t buy the land, just in case he endangered his own inheritance. The land would eventually go to the sons of Ruth, and not to the heirs of the near kinsman. His investment would be lost once the possible sons of Ruth assumed the rights of inheritance, the near kinsman would then have to relinquish his right to both the land and Ruth.

‘(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) So, the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, ‘Buy it yourself.’ And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!’ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, ‘We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel

and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' Ruth 4:7-12

Because the readers of this book had to be informed concerning this custom indicates that the events that transpired here took place many years before the writing of the book. When the shoe, or sandal, was given to Boaz by the near kinsman in the presence of witnesses, the land transaction was sealed. Boaz not only had a right to redeem the land, but also the right to take Ruth as a wife.

Since Boaz and Ruth were the forefathers of David, and in the lineage of the Messiah, what is stated here certainly came to pass. In reference to the Messiah, His birthplace in Bethlehem brought fame to this insignificant village of Palestine, as well as to the family of Boaz and Ruth. Micah 5:2 'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'

Judah was the family through which came the existence of the village of Bethlehem. Genesis 38:29 'But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, 'So this is how you have broken out!' And he was named Perez.'

'So, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.' Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son!' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.' Ruth 4:13-22

The birth of Obed was the guarantee that the family of Naomi would continue. The children took care of the aged parents. Perez was the son of Judah by Tamar, David came from the lineage of Perez. This brief genealogy reveals the purpose for the writing of the book. Though the ones who first received the book didn't know the reason for this brief genealogy, we today understand because of the mention of David, through whom God promised that the Messiah was to be born into the world.

Matthew 1:5 'Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse.'

Matthew 1:16 'And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.'

Luke 3:23 'Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli'

Luke 3:32 'The son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon'.

In the genealogy that is here in Ruth given we must assume the customary recording of Jewish genealogies wherein only the main personalities of the genealogies were included while some generations were left out. It's stated here that 'Nahshon was the father Salmon', and Salmon, Boaz, covering a period of more than 250 years, the time between the death of Moses and the time of Gideon. This is too great a time for only two generations.

In the genealogy of the Messiah, the wife of Salmon was Rahab, the former harlot.

Matthew 1:6 'Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse.'

Luke 3:32 'The son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon'.

James 2:25 'In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?'

But as the genealogy is here stated, Boaz wasn't the immediate son of Salmon and Rahab, though they were in the genealogy of Boaz.

Conclusion

What a wonderful love story, this book has revealed to us, faithfulness, godliness, selflessness and a desire to do what is right to everyone around but foremost to do what is right for God's sake. We can only be encouraged by the story to do likewise in our own lives, lets trust God to take care of our tomorrows, even when tomorrow seems uncertain to us at times.