

# OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

## Lesson 22

### The Kindness of Ruth

About eight years ago, a few days before Christmas, my nephew came downstairs to find his mother, Vickie, turning purple on the couch. He ran upstairs to get my brother who immediately started CPR. Then, he ran to the house next door, where Vickie's parents lived. Vickie's dad is a surgeon. He came and worked on her before the ambulance arrived, but when she got to the hospital, her brain had been deprived of oxygen for too long. She was in a coma for a long time. We found out later that she had suffered a heart attack. While we never thought she would, Vickie emerged from her coma after 4 months. Today she has a serious brain injury. It is strange how the brain works. When she first awoke, she could not remember the names of her children but she could sing every word to "American Pie" by Don McLean.

Today, she has the simple mind of a child. My brother has to do everything for her; wash and comb her hair, fix her meals, make sure she takes her medicine and take her to numerous follow up doctor visits.

I'm proud of my brother! He loves his wife and is showing compassionate loyalty, dedication, kindness, steadfast love to her, when others might make a reasonable decision to leave her care to an institution. If he did do that, certainly no one would blame him. But he took his vows seriously, loves her and knows that as hard as it is, the best circumstance for Vickie is that he is the best one to care for her.

For all of her problems, Vickie is a joy to be around! She says very funny things. Another characteristic of a serious brain injury is that her brain seems to catch hold of certain phrases she hears and then she repeats them over and over. At our last visit, she kept repeating two phrases. "Blub, blub, blub" which was what Goldie Hawn was blubbing in the movie "Overboard." She also kept saying "hellooooo" in the same voice Robin Williams used in the movie "Mrs. Doubtfire." My brother explained that they had watched both movies the previous week and she was stuck on those phrases.

This is one of my families' examples of *hesed*; kindness, compassionate loyalty, steadfast love, which is a central theme to the book of Ruth.

Our study today is a delightful little book, only 4 chapters long. Because it is so short, we'll look at the basic story first, then we'll look at three themes in a little more detail. As usual, we are limited in what we can present. A bibliography is listed at the end for more study.

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## OVERVIEW

There was a famine in Israel during the time of Judges. Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, move to Moab, which is about 50 miles away. Elimelech dies, and the sons marry two Moabite women: Mahlon marries Ruth and Chilion marries Orpah.

The two sons of Naomi then also die. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, because she heard that the famine had ended. She tells her daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers and remarry. Orpah reluctantly leaves; however, Ruth stays with Naomi. It is a dramatic moment when Ruth utters the most famous line from the book, parts of which are repeated at weddings to this day, "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." (1:16,17)

The two women return to Bethlehem. They were both in a desperate situation! Naomi told people to call her "Mara" which means "bitter" because calamity was upon them. It is the time of the barley harvest, and in order to support her mother-in-law and herself, Ruth goes to the fields to glean. Glean means to gather grain.<sup>1</sup> The field belongs to a man named Boaz, who is kind to her because he has heard of her loyalty to her mother-in-law. Ruth tells her mother-in-law of Boaz's kindness, and she gleans in his field through the remainder of the harvest season, with some extra privileges, above those that are the Israelite law.

Boaz is a relative of Naomi's husband's family. There is an obligation in the Levirate law to marry Mahlon's widow, Ruth, in order to carry on his family line. Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor at night and tells her to "uncover the feet" of the sleeping Boaz. Ruth does so, Boaz awakes, and Ruth reminds him that he is "the one with the right to redeem." Boaz states he is willing to "redeem" Ruth via marriage, but informs Ruth that there is another male relative who has the first right of redemption.

The next morning, Boaz discusses the issue with the other male relative in front of the town elders. The other male relative, at first said yes, because he wanted the property, but he was unwilling to jeopardize the inheritance of his own estate by marrying Ruth. We speculate that he may not have been able to afford the extra

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<sup>1</sup> It was the custom in that day to allow the poor to go behind the workers and gather up leftover crops, which were not economically wise to spend the time harvesting. *See* Leviticus 23:22, Deut. 24:19 – 22.

responsibility, and so he relinquished his right of redemption which allowed Boaz to marry Ruth. They transfer the property and redeem it by a forgotten custom, the nearer kinsman taking off his sandal and handing it over to Boaz.

Boaz and Ruth get married and have a son named Obed (who by Levirate custom is also considered a son or heir to Elimelech, and thus Naomi and Elimelech's legal son). In the genealogy which concludes the story, it is noted that Obed is the descendant of Perez, the son of Judah, and the grandfather of King David. Of course, that also means that Ruth, Boaz and Obed show up in the genealogy of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew.

## **BACKGROUND**

The earliest Jewish and Christian lists (canon) of what became the Bible unanimously include Ruth.<sup>2</sup> Ruth is one of five books that are called the Megilloth and are five scrolls of the Hebrew Bible that are read in conjunction with five Jewish festivals. They are:

1. Ecclesiastes, read at the Feast of Tabernacles
2. Esther, read at Purim
3. Lamentations, read at the 9th of Ab (commemoration of the destruction of the Temple)
4. Ruth, read at the Festival of Weeks (late May, early June)
5. Song of Solomon, read at Passover

The Book of Ruth shows up in the most ancient list of scripture (Hebrew Bible) that has been found to date. This is important because other ancient writings sometimes took a much longer time to be recognized as God's Holy Word. The actions of God are understated in Ruth, for sure, but as we will see, God is the central character and His providence is one of the central themes.

It is an ordinary story, about an ordinary family. There are no miracles. Maybe that is why it listed in the canon right after Judges. Such a contrast! Judges with its violence, civil strife, international concerns, as compared to Ruth, which reminds us that the "God of the nations is also concerned with the ordinariness of a 'certain' man."<sup>3</sup> An ordinary story, but it is a literary masterpiece with great theological insight. It is easy to see how people of faith, even back to ancient days, have long treasured this wonderful story as sacred scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> Although, going back to ancient lists, these books are not always listed in the exact same order as today.

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson, pg. 41 (see bibliography for all footnotes).

## WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

### *The earthly author*

The Talmud says Samuel authored the book, but that is doubtful according to some commentaries. Samuel lived during the period of the Judges and the very first verse of Ruth says, “In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land...” Some of the commentaries I read agree, but make excuses for the fact that the genealogy of David is at the end and Samuel anointed David as King, but did not live to see him become a great king. He certainly did not know the genealogy at the end. Commentaries explain it could be added later, but as we’ll see, the whole book of Ruth seems to be organized to lead up to the genealogy at the end. The whole book has 85 verses, of which 59 are dialogue. It is remarkable how rich of a story can be told with such a minimum of words.<sup>4</sup>

### *The date it was written*

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of scholars thought that Ruth was written after 538 BC. The language forms suggest a time after the exile. The fact that the shoe custom has to be explained, suggests that this is written many years after the period of the Judges. The rules of Levirate marriage are different in Ruth, when compared to the law, written in Deuteronomy 25. They also seem to think that the nice, peaceful tone of the book, suggests that time also.

The more recent trend in scholarship favors a date earlier than 538 BC. There are a wide range of differing opinions among scholars. The legal customs explained, the literary feature, Ruth’s impartial, matter-of-fact style could suggest an earlier time. Another logical point is that it might have been written after written documentation took the place of customs like the shoe being passed to signify the transfer of property. This transition could have been in the early monarchy years. Maybe it was written during the time of David, to further his claim on the monarchy and to people outside of Israel or during Solomon’s time. These dates reference the genealogy at the end and suppose that the writer had access to court records. There are suggestions that the book was written earlier and then revised later. For example, chapter 2 and chapter 3 have numerous parallels. Perhaps it was originally a poem, transferred down through the ages orally, then changed to prose, when it was finally written. These are no more than educated guesses. Ruth is a very difficult book to date.

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<sup>4</sup> This paper is more than double the size of Ruth.

### *The ancient customs*

Commentaries spend a lot of time explaining the law of Levirate marriage. Deuteronomy 25:5, 6 states, “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”<sup>5</sup>

Most of the commentators try to explain the differences between the custom mentioned in Ruth and the Deuteronomy passage. The book of Ruth is the only place in the Bible where three areas of Israelite legal customs (inheritance, redemption, and remarriage of a childless widow) are interrelated into one story. Only in Ruth are two of them combined into one (property and marriage for an heir). This makes it hard to find a similar passage in another place in the OT, for comparison and study. Boaz is a distant relative, but there are no brothers of Elimelech mentioned. Levir (from Levirate) means a husband’s brother. The obligation seems to be to Ruth, a foreigner, not to Naomi. Since she is “too old” for childbearing, there must be some sort of “stand in” custom going on that we don’t know all about. The redemption of Naomi’s property is understandable under Jewish law, but what did the additional obligation of marriage to Ruth have to do with this? Some commentaries suggest that Boaz tricked the unnamed relative, by making marrying Ruth one of the conditions of redeeming the property. Whatever the custom of the day, marrying Ruth was part of the obligation and fortunately, the unnamed relative was not willing to take on the added responsibility and expense. It is always a good idea to keep in mind the author’s and God’s objective. The objective in Ruth is to tell us a great, encouraging story, not to explain the Israelite legal system.

### **WHY WAS RUTH WRITTEN?**

One obvious theme of Ruth is God’s rescue of Elimelech’s family from extinction by providing an heir. This heir turned out to be the grandfather of King David. Not too shabby!

The closing genealogy mentions the famous ancestors between Perez and David.<sup>6</sup> Robert Hubbard’s book on Ruth makes the excellent observation, “In addition, the

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<sup>5</sup> It is also mentioned in Genesis 38, the story of Judah and Tamar. Perhaps this is a contrasting story showing how Ruth and Boaz conducted themselves to a higher moral standard. The Pharisees tried to “trick” Jesus with a question about this subject in Matthew 22:24 – 30.

<sup>6</sup> There are 10 listed, but some names are probably skipped.

book is replete with motifs which recall episodes in the patriarchal stories in Genesis.”<sup>7</sup> There are a number of similarities:

1. Migration because of famine which advances God’s plan (Gen 12:26)
2. A family’s survival endangered by a mother’s childlessness (Gen 16, 17:25:21, 29:31; 30)
3. A foreigner’s voluntary, permanent immigration to a new land (Gen12:1-5)
4. Protection of the women elected to bear the son of destiny (Sarah, Gen 12, Rebekah, Gen 26, Dinah, Gen 34)
5. The betrothal-type scene of the chosen wife (compare Ruth 2:20 with story of Rebekah in Gen 24)
6. Female initiative overcoming male inaction (story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38)
7. The integration of foreign immigrants into their new homeland. (Gen 14, 20, 21, 23, 26, 34)
8. The purchase of property as a result of death (Ruth 4:3 to Gen 23 and 33)
9. Marriage to a foreigner, which leads to a ruling family. (Perez, Gen 38, Ephraim and Manasseh, Gen 41, 50)
10. The divine gift of conception providing the son (s) of destiny (Sarah Gen 21, Rebekah Gen 25, Leah Gen 29, Rachel, Gen 30, Hannah 1 Sam, Samson’s mother in Judges 13)
11. The conquest of obstacles impeding the emergence of an important family

“By interweaving these motifs into the fabric of the Ruth story, the writer wanted the audience to associate that story’s events with those of Israel’s ancestors. This further implies authorial desire to establish historical and theological continuity among the patriarchs, David’s ancestors, and (by implication) David himself. The point seems to be that the same divine guidance which led to Israel’s famous ancestors has brought David on the scene. His kingdom is their successor in God’s divine plan.”<sup>8</sup>

That sounds scholarly and plausible. Ruth is compared to Rachel and Leah in 4:11. Ruth, a foreigner, is a founding mother of the nation of Israel. Her connection to King David and the many comparisons to the patriarchal stories is certainly a central theme of the book. However, my view is much simpler.

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<sup>7</sup> Hubbard pg 40

<sup>8</sup> Ibid pg, 41

The story reflects faith in the providence of God. Providence is God's present activity in the world.

Providence was defined in an early church document as: God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, (1) direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, (2) from the greatest even to the least, (3) by His most wise and holy providence, (4) according to His infallible foreknowledge, (5) and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.(7)<sup>9</sup>

(1) Hebrews 1:3

(2) Daniel 4:34, 35; Psalm 135:6; Acts 17:25, 26, 28; Job 38,39,40

(3) Matthew 10:29, 30, 31

(4) Prov 15:3; Psalm 104:24; Psalm 145:17

(5) Acts 15:8; Ps 94:8, 9, 10, 11

(6) Eph 1:11; Psalm 33:10, 11

(7) Isaiah 63:14; Eph 3:10; Romans 9:17; Genesis 45:7, Psalm 145:7

God's providence can be hard to understand. Some think that God set the world up like a machine, pre-programmed it, and now watches it run, without intervening in it ("Deism"); others don't think about it at all. Their goal is simply to eat, drink, and be merry. Still others think that man has no control; it is all in the hands of fate.

The Christian view is that a loving, holy, personal God sustains and rules our world and loves us and has a plan for us. We are dependent on him. Acts 17:25b reads "...since He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

"Providence" says that God is there, God cares, God rules, and God provides. Faith in such a God undergirds every chapter in Ruth."<sup>10</sup>

First Naomi, then Ruth, then Boaz, take turns being the central character driving the plot of the story. We could say that not even Ruth, the title character, is the central one. God is the center, the driver, to the story of Ruth. God is first mentioned in chapter 1 in Naomi's prayer for her daughters-in-law; "May the Lord deal kindly (*hesed*) with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" (1:8 9)

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<sup>9</sup> "early church document" is an understatement. This is from the Westminster Confession of Faith (V:i) the source document of the Presbyterian church. It was written during a time of civil war in England. For the whole story, read lesson 65 of church history at [www.biblical-literacy.com](http://www.biblical-literacy.com).

<sup>10</sup> Atkinson, pg. 14.

The best way to get in line with “God’s present activity in the world” is through prayer. There are four prayers in Ruth. Robert L. Hubbard says that “every prayer in the book is answered during the course of the plot.”<sup>11</sup>

Vs. 2:12 “The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

Vs. 2:19, 20 “...blessed be the man who took notice of you....May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!”

Vs. 3:10 “and he (Boaz) said, ‘May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.’”

Vs. 4:11, 12 “...May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.” 4:14 “ Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!’”

God’s work in this story, on a first reading, does seem to be understated. There are no miracles. No explicit divine guidance. At one point it seems to make the point that the critical decision to go glean in Boaz’s field, just happened by chance. “so she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was the clan of Elimalech.” (2:3)

I think that is the theme of Ruth. How God works in ordinary lives and through human agents. I’ve never met anyone who has had a “burning bush” experience. This has to be a main reason for the enduring popularity of this wonderful book. This story shows us how God intervenes on our behalf, in response to prayers, in ordinary circumstances.

## HESED

A good friend of our class, the songwriter, Michael Card, is writing a book on *hesed*. I found this on his website: “*Hesed*” is a Hebrew word that describes the indescribable, that defines the un-definable. Put simply, *hesed* is the defining characteristic of God in the Old Testament. It is a key to opening the mysterious door to understanding who God really is.”

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<sup>11</sup> That was certainly true for Ruth! However, we don’t know what became of Orpah.

Although the word is translated “kindness” in our text, no one English word conveys it accurately. Covenant loyalty, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, mercy, agape love and compassion are all part of the definition.

Here’s the familiar Psalm 136:1, the way I first learned it. “Oh give thanks unto the Lord; For He is good; For his *mercy* endures forever.” We’ve been using the English Standard Version in this class, notice the difference? “Give thanks to the Lord; for he is good, for his *steadfast love* endures forever.” The word translated “mercy” in the King James Version and “steadfast love” in the ESV are the same word; *hesed*. The reason it was first translated “mercy” is because translators used the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible and the word *hesed* was translated as “eleos,” which is the Greek word for mercy.

- A lifestyle of *hesed* has to have extraordinary commitment. In our story, Ruth and Orpah, both have a devotion to their mother-in-law, Naomi. Orpah reluctantly follows Naomi’s advice and heads home. It is Ruth’s commitment and her wonderful quote, “your people shall be my people, your God, my God...” which exhibits the commitment that a life of *hesed* requires.
- The life of *hesed* also requires taking risks. Ruth showed courage, going out to glean in the field. Even though it was the law at the time, the story implies that she risked physical abuse by gleaning there. She put herself in a vulnerable position by asking for extra gleaning privileges in 2:7. The real gutsy part was her visit to the threshing room floor. She was risking her good reputation, and had no idea how Boaz would react to such a bold statement, “spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” (vs.3:9) It mirrors Boaz’s own statement to her previously where he says, “The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”
- *Hesed* comes from a covenant relationship. It is showing the loyalty and commitment that comes from that relationship. So, my brother’s example is *hesed*, since his marriage vows established a “covenant” relationship. To the contrary, the Good Samaritan story is an example of how we are to treat our neighbor, not really the meaning of *hesed* because the Good Samaritan did not know the injured man on the side of the road to Jericho. *Hesed* is not just doing something nice for someone.
- *Hesed* is always a more powerful person (or God) doing something for a much weaker person.

Over two-thirds of the time that *hesed* is mentioned in the Old Testament, it is God’s *hesed* for us. It is the ideal characteristic for the nation of Israel.

Micah 6:8 “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness (*hesed*), and to walk humbly with your God?”

Michael Card adds this, “*Hesed* teaches us that a supremely untranslatable word can only be understood when it becomes “enfleshed,” translated into a living person. Through the Incarnation of Jesus, *hesed* was at last perfectly defined. But the call of God for you and me is to continue that incarnating in our own lives.

I immediately thought of 1 John, chapter 4, which says, in part, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Unlike any OT character (that I can think of!), nothing negative is written about Boaz. He is called a “worthy man” in scripture. It would seem that the story is showing that Boaz is a ‘stand in’ for God. I think of this another way, a foreshadowing, where we can begin to understand Christ’s love for us. Boaz is their “kinsman redeemer.” Christ is our redeemer!

### ***gō ’ēl* = KINSMAN REDEEMER**

In 3:9, Ruth boldly proposes marriage to Boaz. “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”

This verse mirrors what Boaz said to her earlier in 2:12. “The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”<sup>12</sup>

It seems to me that Boaz is answering his own, earlier, prayer to the Lord. The *gō ’ēl* was the nearest adult male blood relative who served as the advocate for another “clan” member who was in unfortunate circumstances. We don’t have a similar law today and again, there is no one English word which even gets close to translating *gō ’ēl*.

Here is what we do know from scripture about the duties of a *gō ’ēl*, kinsman-redeemer: There are at least five functions:

- He acquires the property of a kinsman (Lev. 25:25)
- He purchases property in danger of being lost to a stranger (Jer. 32:6-15)
- He redeems relatives who have been in slavery (Lev. 25:47-55)

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<sup>12</sup> The expressions are not identical in Hebrew, however. Atkinson pg. 102.

- He avenges relatives' wrongful deaths (Num. 35:17-34)
- He is obligated to support a relative's widow (Ruth 4:4-10)<sup>13</sup>

The actions of Boaz, as Ruth's *gō 'ēl'*, do foreshadow the saving work of Jesus and help us understand. After all, Boaz is in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew. There are no coincidences in scripture. Boaz had the right of redemption, but was not under any obligation to help on Ruth's behalf. There are too many similarities to list them all here.

Christ is closely associated with us. He was born "in the likeness of sinful flesh." (Rom. 8:3) Ruth and Boaz were closely associated. Jesus willingly paid the price to redeem us! We were certainly in a desperate (sinful) situation, as were Ruth and Naomi. Ruth and Boaz created a new family, a royal family as it turns out! When we accept Christ's redemption, we become part of God's family. Rom. 8:15 "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father." Verse 16 says we are children of God, and verse 17 says we are joint heirs with Christ.

## CONCLUSION

There are four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew:

Tamar 1:3

Rahab and Ruth 1:5

Bathsheba 1:6 (wife of Uriah)

Tamar and Rahab played the role of prostitutes. Bathsheba had an illicit affair with David. **Ruth had a great reputation!** This in spite of the fact that Gentiles were not well respected in Israel. All four were PROBABLY Gentiles, pointing ahead to when Jesus would be offered "of all nations". The incredible providence of God is seen in the lives of all four of these women's stories. Today we can see how these stories fit into God's messianic plans.

The Lord knew that Joseph and his bride, Mary, would enter the gates of Bethlehem, same as Ruth and Naomi did, near the gate where Boaz would receive the right to marry Ruth. Close by the gate is where Jesus would be born and laid in a manger. It has to be close to where Jesus' great, great, great, great...ok that's enough...grandmother, Ruth, had gleaned and near the threshing floor where she boldly proposed marriage to Boaz. The shepherds that came to see Jesus tended

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<sup>13</sup> Morse, pg. 344.

their flocks in the same fields where Ruth's great grandson, David, had protected his families' sheep (1 Sam. 16:11 17: 34 – 35).<sup>14</sup>

Ruth was one of the five books of the Megillith, read annually at the Feast of Weeks. In the Bible, Shavuot is called the *Festival of Weeks* (Hebrew: חג תועובשה, *Hag ha-Shavuot*, Exodus 34:22 , Deuteronomy 16:10 ).

Shavuot is also connected to the season of the grain harvest in Israel. In ancient times, the grain harvest lasted seven weeks and was a season of gladness (Jer. 5:24 , Deut. 16:9-11 , Isa. 9:2 ). It began with the harvesting of the barley during Passover and ended with the harvesting of the wheat at Shavuot. Shavuot was thus the concluding festival of the grain harvest.

Since Shavuot occurs 50 days after Passover, Hellenistic Jews gave it the name Pentecost (πεντηκοστή, "fiftieth day").<sup>15</sup>

That means that the story of Ruth, who was a Jewish hero, originally from the Gentile world, was read close to this time of year when the Holy Spirit arrived; “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a might rushing wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.....there were added that day about three thousand souls.”(Acts 2:1, 2, 41b)

God's providence and perfect plan!

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. “A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.”(4:17)

The happiest ending Ruth and Naomi could ever have imagined occurred. There was nothing unfavorable at all mentioned in Ruth about Boaz, which is unusual for the Old Testament which typically shows great Bible characters with all their faults. Boaz says to Ruth, “All my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.” Ruth was indeed, a Proverbs 31 woman! “Strength and dignity are her clothing, she opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue, she

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<sup>14</sup> Luter, Davis pg. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Martin Nowlin for tracking this down for me.

looks well to the ways of her household.” A life well lived, can have great consequences for our children and grandchildren.

2. *“May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” (1:8)*

The line from a song that many of us sang at church camp many years ago, “they’ll know we are Christians by our love” comes to mind. *Hesed* is so much more than kindness; it also takes commitment and loyalty. I recently experienced the “kindness” and prayers of my friends in this class, because of the death of my father. There are always going to be people within your circle, who also need you to “deal kindly” with them, during rough times. Don’t let any inconveniences get in your way of reflecting God’s *hesed* for us to others (even foreigners).

3. *“...and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (2:12)*

Meditate on this verse all week. It may be what wakes you up at night, or keeps you from sleeping. It may be a family member or close friend. It may be the challenge of a circumstance of life or a health problem that seems insurmountable. One thing is for sure. The same God of Ruth wants us to take refuge under HIS wings. We can rest in our Lord and know that he protects us. He has not given up on us, nor has He created the world, and then just left us alone to get along as best we can. John Piper is a pastor, who has written a lot of books that I like. He puts it like this; “God is not an employer looking for employees; He is an eagle looking for people who will take refuge under His wings.”

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