

## ***PROMISED LAND 1: Lesson Six, Naomi's Story***

### ***Ruth 1 - 4***

**Subject:** Ruth and Boaz demonstrated the same kindness to Naomi that God showed Israel.

**Main Idea:** God is always at work behind the scenes.

**Principles:**

1. *Viewing our circumstances with spiritual eyes renews our perspective.*
2. *When we demonstrate "hesed" to hurting people, they are sometimes awakened to God's providential involvement in their lives.*
3. *God's plan for each believer's life extends far beyond the impact to him or her alone.*

### **Introduction**

This past summer, I was asked to take part in the recording of a three or four-minute video for entertainment in the weekly, music concerts at CAMP-of-the-WOODS in upstate New York. On several occasions, I was able to sit through the concerts in which it was included. Invariably, someone would approach me afterward with a big grin on his or her face and a comment. On one occasion, someone said, "Ah! Were you surprised by the video?" I knew the person really meant to ask if I was pleased to have been involved, but it was an awkward question to answer since, obviously, I could not possibly have been surprised when I had participated in it behind the scenes.

Reading the Book of Ruth is almost like watching an entertaining play, in which the most important character is the One behind the scenes orchestrating the action. Nothing that happens takes Him by surprise. We might be confused at times by life's circumstances, and even tempted to become hurt or angry, but God sees the big picture and is turning every circumstance for our ultimate good and His ultimate glory.

As you will recall, the book of Judges ends with two stories (appendices) that illustrate the apostasy, chaos, and sin that defined Israel for several centuries. It was a time in which the Israelites did "as they saw fit" (Judges 17:6, 21:25). The first verse of the Book of Ruth not only identifies it as having occurred during the period of the Judges but it also links the book with those two closing illustrations in Judges by mentioning Bethlehem in Judah. According to Judges 17:9, the Levite (who is later identified as the grandson of Moses; 18:30) was from Bethlehem in Judah. In the second and concluding illustration, the concubine who was raped and killed was from Bethlehem in Judah (Judges 19:1).

The historical connection between the two books makes the story of Ruth all the more surprising. Humanly speaking, the promise-plan of God to bring a Messiah through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was put at risk by the Israelites' moral decay. God's plan was to bless the world by sending the Messiah through them, but if they lost their unique identity as His people, how would God fulfill His promise? In one sense, the governing Judges were a provision. God raised them up to deliver His people from their enemies. However, the Book of Ruth shows us that God was also preserving His plan in a way in which people at that time were unaware, a quieter and less expected way.

The main characters of the Book of Ruth were not Judges, or for that matter, people who were widely known for any reason. They were just average people dealing with the common struggles of life. Yet it was through a handful of such common folks as Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth that faith survived the several hundred bleak years of the Judges. Even they had no idea, in their lifetime, of the way in which God had worked through them to protect His redemptive plan.

The theme of the book is summarized in the single but important Hebrew word *hesed*, which appears three times in the book (1:8, 2:20, 3:10). It is a term that describes absolute, unfailing loyal love, kindness, and devotion shown by acts of mercy and grace. Ruth and Boaz demonstrated *hesed* to Naomi. However, this story teaches us much more about *God* than about anyone else. At a time when the Israelites were largely unfaithful, faith survived in Israel and the fulfillment of God's promises was preserved because, motivated by His *hesed*, God worked behind the scenes.

## I. Naomi's Problems – Ruth 1

### A. Naomi's Losses – 1:1-5

#### i. The Move to Moab

1. The author of Ruth is not identified, but based on the opening words, "In the days when the Judges ruled," and another statement later in the book (4:7), it must have been penned sometime after the period of the Judges. Since the genealogy at the end assumes the audience's familiarity with King David, it also must have been written during or after his time. According to Jewish tradition, Samuel wrote it.
2. Elimelek was an Ephrathite (probably a founding or prominent family) from Bethlehem. *Elimelek* means, "My God is king," a reflection of either his own faith or the faith of his parents.
3. As the result of a famine, he took his two sons and his wife and "went to sojourn" approximately 50 miles east of Bethlehem on the other side of the Dead Sea in Moab. Some have suggested this was an act of unbelief on his part. The Israelites were to inherit Canaan. Also, the first two usages of the term "sojourn" in the Bible are in the context of poor decisions (Genesis 12:10, 19:9) and, up to this point, Moab has been consistently portrayed in a negative light (Genesis 19:30-38, Numbers 22-24 and 25:1-9, Deuteronomy 23:3-6, and Judges 3:15-30).

ii. Three Deaths

1. While in Moab, Elimelek died. Afterward, his sons Mahlon and Kilion married local, Moabite girls. Mahlon married a young woman named Ruth (4:10) and Kilion married Orpah, but then both of the sons also died. Furthermore, they died without fathering any children.
2. A summarizing statement of disastrous import follows: “Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband” (1:5).
  - a. This put Naomi in the most extreme situation possible for a woman living in ancient Israel. Wives generally did not inherit their husband’s estates. Furthermore, having sons was considered critical to one’s future since they provided for their parents in their old age. Without a husband or any sons, and beyond childbearing years herself, Naomi seemingly had no future.
  - b. Some view Naomi as a female version of the Biblical Job, a God-fearing person who suffered devastating loss. Author Carolyn Curtis James suggests that Naomi actually “out-Jobed Job”: “Both tragically lose their families and the life they worked to build. But Job is not alone. He still has his wife and a community to surround him (such as they are).” Furthermore, “Job is not an immigrant and he is not a woman.”<sup>1</sup>

iii. Naomi’s Story Considering this introduction, and also the conclusion of the book, we find that the Book of Ruth is actually Naomi’s story.

**B. Three Decisions – 1:6-18**

i. Naomi’s Decision

1. When Naomi heard the famine in Bethlehem was over, she left Moab for Bethlehem with her daughters-in-law. Somewhere along the way, a moment of clarity and common sense thinking prevailed. Orpah and Ruth were bound to her by custom, but given the circumstances of their infertility (childlessness) and foreign origin, their future in Bethlehem seemed as desperate a situation as Naomi’s. So she made a second decision and emancipated her daughters-in-law.
2. Naomi thanked them for their loyal love and kindness to her (first use of the word *hesed* 1:8) and to their dead husbands, and asked Yahweh to show them that same *hesed*-kindness to them in return by granting them the security (“rest”) they could find in the home of another husband in their homeland.

ii. Orpah's Decision

1. Considering that Naomi did not free her daughters-in-law until after they were en route to Bethlehem, her decision was almost certainly unexpected by Ruth and Orpah and forced them into making a sudden, life-altering, and irreversible decision.
2. After an initial protest, Orpah decided to return to “her people and her gods” (1:15). Remaining in Moab was a logical choice since, even if she never remarried, she would still be in a culture with which she was familiar and among her own friends and family. However, the statement of her return to *her gods* is noteworthy, especially when contrasted with Ruth's response.

iii. Ruth's Decision Unlike her sister-in-law, Ruth chose to align herself (whatever the consequences) with Naomi's people and God. What motivated her to make such a costly decision?

1. Some have suggested that a sincere love and friendship between the two had developed over the previous ten years, and that may have been the case.
2. However, Ruth's strong declaration and oath yield clues that indicate her decision came in a moment of *spiritual* clarity and was based on more than just loyal love for Naomi.
  - a. Ruth said, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people *and your God my God* [my emphasis].” In the moment at which Ruth was forced to decide between a potential for enjoyment of life and aligning herself with Naomi's people and God, Ruth made the decision to value the *spiritual*.
  - b. Ruth fixed her decision with a solemn oath: “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” These words remind us of Peter who, when asked if he would truly follow Jesus at any cost, in essence replied, “Where else would I go?” (Matthew 19:27).

**C. Naomi's Public Statement – 1:19-22**

- i. Unrecognizable: When they arrived in Bethlehem, Naomi's former neighbors hardly recognized her. Ten years had passed but surely the grief and strain had also taken a toll.
- ii. Naomi's Bitterness
  1. *Naomi* means “pleasant,” but Naomi told her old friends to call her *Mara* instead, which means “bitter.” Formerly, with her husband and two sons, her life had been full, but now it was empty. She stated that her troubles were from God. The Bible teaches that there are several root causes for suffering:

- a. Some of it is directly from the Lord in order to discipline us. We can be thankful that His discipline is always remedial and redemptive in nature.
  - b. Our enemy Satan initiates some suffering. Even then, God allows it in the life of His children to test and refine our faith.
  - c. Some suffering is simply the result of living in a fallen world.
  - d. Finally, we sometimes suffer the consequences of someone else's sin.
2. Naomi's statement about bitterness leaves us wondering about her attitude toward her suffering.
- a. One possibility is that, like the average Israelite in her day, she had no real allegiance to Yahweh and blamed Him for her trouble.
  - b. Another possibility is that, although Naomi's life *had* been made bitter, she was not *personally* embittered. Perhaps she was a woman of noble character, a true servant of Yahweh. After all, if Naomi had never portrayed the Lord positively to Ruth, would Ruth have chosen to follow Naomi's God? It seems likely that Naomi was just so discouraged by her circumstances that she lost perspective. Any believer who has suffered deeply knows the soul-searching and questioning that takes place at such times. The words of 19<sup>th</sup>-century, American poet Lucy Larcom may describe how Naomi felt:

“Toward Thy voice I grope,  
 Brother, Friend, Lord! Although with many a fall,  
 And sore bewilderment, and baffled hope.”<sup>ii</sup>

If nothing more, we must certainly conclude that Naomi was baffled by what had happened to her.

**Summary Statement:** Naomi's trouble made her nearsighted and she didn't consider that there might be a bigger picture.

In the moments when we can't think beyond the present, it often seems like nothing will ever improve. Suffering, loss, and regrets can threaten to swallow us and we lose perspective. We wonder whether God has disappeared or entirely forgotten us.

Few of us could compare our difficulties with those of Naomi, Job, or the apostle Paul yet, amazingly, Paul was able to maintain perspective. He wrote, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

**Principle:** *Viewing our circumstances with spiritual eyes renews our perspective.*

**Application:** What issue might be keeping you nearsighted?

If your present circumstances threaten to engulf you, use your spiritual vision to renew your perspective and do this *one day at a time*. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scotsman, author Robert Louis Stevenson, reputedly said: “Anyone can carry his burden, however heavy, until nightfall. Anyone can do his work, however hard, for one day.”

In His grace, God has brought you to the Book of Ruth *at this very time* to remind you that there is a bigger picture. He has guaranteed that His children will not live in their present circumstances forever (John 3:15-16). 1 Peter 5:10 says, “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” He knows the limit of how much we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13) and will always restore us in His right time, even when it is through death.

While we wait for restoration, we can be encouraged that, in every circumstance, God is always working toward the good of making His children Christ-like (Romans 8:28-29). Being like Him is the best thing that can possibly happen to us!

**Transition:** God *appeared* to be absent in Naomi’s life in chapter 1, but in chapter 2 we find evidence to the contrary.

## II. A Providential Encounter – Ruth 2

### A. Ruth Encounters Boaz – 2:1-18

#### i. Ruth Goes to Work

1. 1:22 informs us that Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning. The Law of God provided for aliens and widows by requiring the Israelites to allow the poor and vulnerable to pick up any leftovers after the harvesters reaped their crops (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:21). Apparently, Ruth knew of this law and sought Naomi’s permission to go out in the fields.

2. Ruth was not familiar with the area but found a field, requested permission from the foreman, and started gleaning. “As it turned out” (2:3), she was working in the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s deceased husband.
3. The phrase “Just then” in 2:4 seem to indicate that Boaz *just happened* to go out and check on the progress in his fields shortly after Ruth arrived. We receive the impression that he was impressed by her industriousness. In addition, he had already heard about her reputation for sacrificial faithfulness to her mother-in-law.

ii. Boaz’s Goodness to Ruth

1. According to 2:1, Boaz was a man of standing, implying that he had a good reputation in the community and probably was wealthy also. We cannot help but be impressed by the fact that he warmly greeted those working in his fields (and did so in the name of the Lord). Furthermore, he was familiar enough with his workers that he instantly recognized Ruth as a newcomer. From his first introduction, we already receive a very favorable picture of Boaz.
2. *Boaz’s Generosity to Ruth*
  - a. He approached Ruth and told her to remain in his fields throughout the harvest, where he would ensure her safety and provide water for her.
    - i. Normally, gleaners like Ruth would work all day in the hot sun, often without access to a water supply.
    - ii. In addition to the difficulty of the work, women gleaners were also at risk of being assaulted in the fields. Recall the story of the gang rape of the Levite’s concubine that occurred not too many miles from Bethlehem, according to Judges 19. In the context of such an immoral climate, an Israelite as generous and law-abiding as Boaz was indeed quite unusual!
  - b. Then, he blessed her for coming under the shelter of Yahweh’s wings (a picture of peace and security). As the story progresses, we realize just how true Boaz’s words were, for the Lord was surely protecting and providing for Ruth!
  - c. At mealtime, he invited her to eat from what was provided for the other paid workers.

- d. Finally, he told his workers to ensure plenty of grain was “accidentally” left behind for Ruth to collect. Although the Law allowed the poor to follow behind paid workers and pick up leftovers, most landowners would not have been happy if their workers left much grain behind (intentionally or not). Typically, gleaners could work a full day and ended with little to show for their effort.
- e. Boaz was clearly a man of unusual grace and kindness, a man who acted out of *hesed*.

### iii. Ruth’s Bounty

- 1. As a result of Boaz’s generosity and Ruth’s industry, at the end of the day, when Ruth had threshed all she gleaned, it amounted to an ephah, a huge sum (conservatively, 30 pounds or 13 kilograms). The value of it was about half a month’s wages! <sup>iii</sup>
- 2. Ruth brought the barley to her mother-in-law, along with the remnants of the meal she had been given by Boaz earlier in the day.

## B. Ruth Talks with Naomi – 2:19-23

### i. Naomi’s Surprise

- 1. When Naomi saw the surprising amount Ruth gleaned, she inquired about the identity of the generous field owner. Ruth knew Boaz’s name but had no idea he was related to Naomi. Naomi informed her that he was not only a relative but a *kinsman-redeemer*.
- 2. *The Kinsman-Redeemer Role*
  - a. “The words ‘redeem/redemption/redeemer’ occur twenty-three times in the eighty-five verses of Ruth. The essence of redemption is reversal—the reversal of a bad situation, at the expense of a redeemer.”<sup>iv</sup>
  - b. The Hebrew term translated “kinsman-redeemer” is *go’el*. According to scholar David Howard, Jr., “The *gō’ēl* seems to have been one who had certain obligations to fulfill, whether they were recovering people or property that had been lost through indenture, or they were paying a fee (usually by a relative or an owner), or they were meting out punishment for killing someone.”<sup>v</sup>
  - c. The Mosaic Law indicates that God was the actual owner of all the land He gave Israel as an inheritance. The Israelites merely had the use of it. Furthermore, the existing possessor of each parcel could not part with or sell the family portion. When a person (like Naomi) fell on hard times and was forced to “sell” their property, the person who bought it was actually leasing it until the Year of Jubilee.

In the Year of Jubilee, all land returned to its original owner (or his heir). However, a close relative, or *kinsman-redeemer*, could always act as a benefactor and “redeem” the land at an earlier date (Leviticus 25). The *kinsman-redeemer* role is a type of Christ who redeemed us from our impoverished state at His own personal expense.

- d. In the time of the Judges, when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, it was quite unlikely that anyone would be willing to make such a personal, financial sacrifice. The rarity of Boaz’s actions is evidenced by the fact that, prior to Ruth’s encounter with him, Naomi never even considered that anyone would possibly rescue her in this way. She had considered her situation hopeless (“empty,” 1:21). Additionally, at the end of the story, the kind of blessing the residents of Bethlehem bestowed on Boaz for taking the role (4:11-12) indicates utter amazement.

### 3. *The Custom of Levirate Marriage*

- a. The second factor that came into play involved an old customary right, known as the law of Levirate marriage. The existence of the practice is evident in Ugaritic, Hittite, and Middle Assyrian sources,<sup>vi</sup> as well as the Bible. God’s law sanctioned it but did not require it (Deuteronomy 25).
- b. According to the custom, in order that the name of a man who died without sons might not become extinct, the deceased’s brother took the widow as his own wife. Children born to her were given the name and inheritance of the man who died. Now, Boaz was under no obligation to do this, especially since he was not Ruth’s brother-in-law, but as a close relative, he was, apparently, qualified.
- c. The institutions of Levirate marriage and redemption by a *kinsman-redeemer* were not connected in the Mosaic Law; “nevertheless it was a very natural thing to place the Levirate duty in connection with the right of redemption”<sup>vii</sup> and, as we discover in Ruth 4, such had become the custom.

### ii. Naomi’s Hope

1. When Naomi heard how Ruth had happened to glean in Boaz’s field and that he had treated her with such unusual kindness, her hope was renewed. Recognizing the Lord’s providence at work, she declared that He had “not stopped showing His *hesed* to the living and the dead” (meaning, to her and also to her dead husband and sons, 2:20). There might be a way out of the desperate situation after all. What a difference a single day can make!

2. She instructed Ruth to continue gleaning in Boaz's fields, which Ruth did, right through the barley harvest and through the wheat harvest after that.

**Summary Statement:** The terms, “Just then” and “As it turned out” in 2:3-4 are indicators that God was providentially at work behind the scenes. Theologians define providence as, “The way God sustains, cares for, and governs the world so that it moves toward the destiny He defined at creation.”<sup>viii</sup> Boaz's kindness toward Ruth and Naomi was one of the catalysts that opened Naomi's eyes to recognize God's involvement in her life. She recognized Boaz's kindness as representing God's covenant loyalty and mercy toward her, His *hesed*.

**Illustration:** A little girl called out from the bedroom one stormy night, “Mommy, I'm scared!” The mother assured her little one, “I'm in the next room. Don't be afraid,” but the child countered, “I'm still scared.” The mother told her, “Close your eyes and pray. Remember that Jesus is always with you.” After the next loud clap of thunder the girl fled from her room into the arms of her mother and said, “Mommy, I know that Jesus is always with me, but right now I need Jesus with skin on.”

Naomi needed to see “God with skin on,” and she saw Him in Boaz.

**Principle:** *When we demonstrate “hesed” to hurting people, they are sometimes awakened to God's involvement in their lives.*

It sometimes takes time for a hurting person to see believers who serve them as “Jesus with skin on.” Naomi had not recognized Ruth's faithfulness to her as a reflection of God's involvement in her life. She didn't see His providential involvement until after He orchestrated Ruth's encounter with Boaz. Then, it was as if someone switched on a light in the darkened room of her life and she suddenly realized that God had not abandoned her. Our job is to act as the hands and feet of Jesus, demonstrating His *hesed* through acts of love, kindness, grace and mercy. We just keep representing the Lord faithfully and trust Him with the job of awakening the person to His involvement.

**Application:** What motivates your acts of service? Is it *personal recognition* or is to help *others recognize God* and His involvement in their lives?

To which undeserving and hurting person can you reflect God's *hesed* this week? What practical steps will you take? Your kindness may be one more link in a chain of events that ultimately causes someone to recognize God's faithfulness.

**Transition:** Once they had hope, Naomi and Ruth were emboldened to take some risks.

### III. Several Bold Initiatives – Ruth 3 – 4

#### A. Naomi's Initiative – 3:1-6

- i. A Risk for Naomi: The harvest season normally lasted seven weeks (Deuteronomy 16:9-12). As the season ended and the threshing began, Naomi decided not to wait to see what Boaz might be thinking but to take the initiative. Naomi instructed Ruth to approach Boaz with the equivalent of a marriage proposal. Asking Boaz to act as kinsman-redeemer was asking him to make a personal and financial sacrifice. If he rejected Ruth, any opportunity for a future for both the women might be lost.
- ii. Naomi's Instructions: Although Boaz would not be alone, Naomi instructed Ruth to watch where he lay, implying that she should wait until all present were asleep. Doing so would minimize Ruth's embarrassment if the request was denied. Presumably, uncovering Boaz's feet would cause the cool night air to awaken him. (Although some have suggested that the uncovering of Boaz's "lower limbs" has sexual connotations, to understand Ruth as having sexual intent completely negates the book's portrayal of her as a person of *hesed*.)

#### B. Ruth's Initiative – 3:7-18

- i. Risks to Ruth: Naomi was not the only person put at risk by the bold plan. Ruth must have wondered what would happen if Boaz misunderstood her brazen act as an attempt to seduce him. Even if she had the chance to explain herself, he might still reject her. These were not the only risks. Her reputation could be ruined by anyone who was accidentally awakened and discovered her, since women were not allowed at the threshing floor (3:14). She also faced the danger of being molested while waiting outside and alone in the dark.
- ii. Ruth's Marriage Proposal
  1. Despite all the risks, Ruth proved true to the lovely, humble, and courageous woman she had already shown herself to be. She submitted to Naomi's plan, and boldly initiated a marriage proposal to Boaz.
  2. When marriages were solemnized among the Israelites, the man threw the skirt of his *talith* or robe over his wife and covered her head with it.<sup>ix</sup> By asking Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her, Ruth was requesting his protection and (based on the tradition) Boaz would have understood it as a marriage proposal.

### iii. Boaz's Response

#### 1. *Boaz's Words of Reassurance:*

- a. Boaz answered Ruth's request with reassurance. He told her that this act of loving-kindness (*hesed*, 3:10) was greater than her first (he must have been comparing the risk she had taken, on Naomi's behalf, by proposing marriage to him to Ruth's earlier sacrifice in leaving Moab, on Naomi's behalf).
- b. He also acknowledged that she could have gone after younger men or married out of love (a poor man). This tells us something we have not known previously, something that reveals the true extent to which Ruth had been acting in *hesed* toward Naomi. Boaz indicated that, once Ruth arrived in Canaan, she potentially could have acted as a "free agent" and pursued any man she wanted.<sup>x</sup> It is unlikely, based on what we know about him, that Ruth would have found Boaz a completely undesirable husband. Yet apparently, he believed that Ruth was willing to marry him, at least in part, *because Naomi would benefit*.
- c. Boaz also revealed other information of which we have been unaware: that there was a closer relative than he who could act as *kinsman-redeemer*. Apparently, this was news to Ruth. She knew Boaz's character and the thought that she might end up married to a lesser man probably made her heart sink.
- d. Boaz assured Ruth that he would initiate the proposal to this unnamed relative first thing the following day and, if the man was unwilling, he would take up the duties of the *kinsman-redeemer* himself.

#### 2. *Boaz's Willingness to Sacrifice*

- a. As discussed, acting as a kinsman-redeemer required personal sacrifice on Boaz's part. If Ruth bore him a child, the proceeds from the land he was buying would belong to the child and not to Boaz. In other words, he was making a financial investment he could easily lose. In addition to the cost of redeeming the land and providing for Ruth and any children she bore, he would also bear the cost of supporting Naomi.

- b. The text does not indicate whether Boaz had other wives. Polygamy was not condoned by the Law but was, nevertheless, commonly practiced. Assuming Boaz did not have other wives with children, his levirate marriage to Ruth could potentially mean that all his personal assets would be transferred to the family of Elimelech and his own name could disappear.
- c. Nevertheless, Boaz acted in *hesed*. He instructed Ruth to wait until morning to leave (for the sake of safety). She rose at the first light of day, before her presence could be discovered by anyone else and her reputation tarnished. Boaz loaded her up with a great deal of grain, intended to assure Ruth and Naomi of his good intentions.

### C. Boaz's Initiative – 4:1-12

- i. His Offer to the Nearer Kinsman
  - 1. The city gate was the place where business was transacted in ancient times. It was a natural meeting place since people came in and out of the gates all day long. Once again we find providence at work, for just as Boaz sat down to wait for the nearer kinsman at the gate, the man happened to come along.
  - 2. Boaz gathered a quorum of ten elders from Bethlehem as witnesses and proposed that the kinsman buy Naomi's land.
- ii. The Nearer Kinsman's Response
  - 1. Initially, the nearer kinsman agreed, but when informed that marrying Ruth the Moabitess was part of the deal, he realized that he might not profit from the bargain and declined.
  - 2. 4:7 is a parenthetical statement about the custom of removing one's sandal to indicate the transference of property. The sandal may have indicated one's right to walk on the land they owned. The nearer kinsman thus removed his sandal, signifying that he was relinquishing his right to redeem the property. The phrase, "in earlier times in Israel," is another indication that the writer of the Book of Ruth lived at a later time.
- iii. Boaz's Legally Recognized Agreement
  - 1. In the presence of the elders, Boaz entered a legal agreement to purchase of Naomi's property and take Ruth as his wife, in order to maintain the line of Elimelech.
  - 2. His generosity was recognized by all present. They asked the Lord to grant Ruth fertility and to bless the couple so richly that they would be elevated to the status of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel (a prayer, as the end of the chapter indicates, that the Lord answered).

## D. God's Bold Initiative – 4:13-22

### i. Ruth and Boaz Marry and Have a Son

1. The Lord enabled Ruth to conceive (a reminder that she had borne Mahlon no children, 4:13) and she gave birth to Obed. Naomi delighted to be the baby's caregiver. She had gone from being empty to having a bright future.
2. The women of Bethlehem rejoiced with Naomi and praised God for renewing her through Ruth. Ruth had shown her the same *hesed*, loyal-love that God had shown Israel through the period of the Judges.

### ii. Genealogy

1. God had a plan in mind in allowing all of Naomi's misfortune, one that she could never have fully understood in her lifetime. Through Ruth's marriage to a *kinsman-redeemer*, He placed her (and indirectly, Naomi) in the royal line of ancestry. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of King David! Ruth's great-grandson, King David, was Israel's greatest king. What a gift he was to the Israelites who so badly needed godly leadership!
2. But even that is not the end of the story. More than a millennium after Naomi and Ruth's time, another humble, young woman gave birth in Bethlehem. Her baby was a descendant of Ruth, Obed, and David, but more importantly, was born in fulfillment of God's promise to redeem mankind: Jesus Christ, the Messiah!

**Summary Statement:** Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz all took courageous initiatives, but none so great as the initiative God took to protect His people and His promises.

The genealogy at end of the Book of Ruth reveals something important about God's initiative in Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi's life *and* in each of our lives:

**Principle:** *God's plan for each believer's life extends far beyond the impact to him or her alone.*

### Conclusion

God's plan in allowing Naomi's suffering included teaching her to trust Him, but it was far more than that. Through her suffering, He orchestrated a plan that would eternally bless her physical and spiritual descendants. He provided a kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth, foreshadowing His plan to send the sinful and desperately needy Israelites a kinsman in Jesus, Son of David, son of Obed, to redeem them. His plan for our lives is always redemptive. To that plan and on our behalf, He is ever faithful and always working behind the scenes.

I am convinced that, if any of us knew the full meaning and implications of God's involvement and work in our personal lives, we would be absolutely amazed! One day, we will know the full story, but now, we see only a reflection, as in a mirror. Now, we know in part; then, we will know fully, even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12). Until that day, we can trust that God is always behind the scenes working every detail toward an outcome that is more thrilling than we can possibly imagine.

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- <sup>i</sup> James, Carolyn Custis (2008). *The Gospel of Ruth* (p. 44). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- <sup>ii</sup> Larcom, Lucy. As quoted in *Daily Steps Upward* (October 24 reading). London: James Nisbet & Co, 1884.
- <sup>iii</sup> Prime, J. (2007). *Opening up Ruth* (p. 54). Leominster: Day One Publications.
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