

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL
 the PROMISED *land*
 GOD THE JUDGE
A Glimpse of God's Love

When I was a little girl, I loved to hear my mother tell the love story of how she met my father. I loved to hear it again and again. The Word of God is like that – repeating God's love story for those who love to hear it again and again. Amidst the dark time of the Israelites straying so far away from God by choosing to do what was right in their own eyes, we find a beautiful glimpse of God's love.

Nestled between the book of Judges and the books of Samuel is a short four chapter story possibly written by Samuel, the last judge of Israel. It was written on a separate scroll and read at Pentecost, the harvest festival. It is the Story of Ruth. Ruth lived about 1,000 years after God called Abraham to found a nation for the purpose of one day bringing a Savior into the world. Ruth, the Moabitess, will play a significant part in God's plan of redemption. And from Ruth's story, we discover that God's love is unyielding.

Read Ruth 1:1-5 (ESV) ¹ *In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.* ² *The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.* ³ *But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.* ⁴ *These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,* ⁵ *and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.*

In the Old Testament, the LORD sometimes used a famine to judge his people or to get their attention for the purpose of bringing them to repentance. Apparently this famine was localized because Moab which had food was just about 55 miles from the land of Judah which was experiencing a famine. Moab was a narrow strip of fertile land directly east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were descendents of Abraham's nephew, Lot, born from Lot's incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter. **Genesis 19:37 (ESV)** ³⁷ *The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day.*

The Moabites had mistreated the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land and had even ruled over the Israelites for 18 years. The psalmist writes in **Psalms 108:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *Moab is my washbasin...* The scripture does not say that the LORD told Elimelech to relocate. Most conclude that Elimelech's move to Moab was similar to Abraham taking his fate into his own hand when he moved to Egypt. He left Bethlehem, the house of bread, in search of food in a washpot! Wiersbe refers to it as a time in which a family makes a bad decision and exchanges one famine for three funerals.

Elimelech's name means 'My God is King' - but he didn't live his life with the Lordship of Jehovah in mind and it destroyed him and his sons. His wife, Naomi lived to face the consequences. As she begins her desperate return to the House of Bread, ten years later, we can picture her as the 'prodigal daughter' paralleling Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son in the New Testament.

Read Ruth 1:6-9 (ESV) ⁶ *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.* ⁷ *So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.* ⁸ *But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."* ⁹ *The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.*

In Naomi's actions we see a picture of repentance – turning and going in the opposite direction. The prodigal Naomi made the decision to return home to the land of Bethlehem-Judah. Other parts of the story tell us that she was bitter when she went back. Undoubtedly, she felt as though God left her. But, from the story we know she was the one who had moved – not God and God had not forgotten His prodigal daughter.

At first it seems that both Orpah and Ruth would return with their mother-in-law. Maybe they had agreed to go just so far, maybe their families' homes were on the way to Bethlehem, or maybe they both had planned to go the entire way. In the decision of these two sisters-in-law, I am reminded of a picture of choices we still see today. Two children walking down a church aisle together to profess Christ as Savior but as time passes only one genuinely continues in the walk of faith. We see from Ruth's testimony that she chose to walk the pathway of faith for her entire lifetime. And that choice would bless both her and Naomi.

Read Ruth 1:16-18 (ESV) ¹⁶ *But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. 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."* ¹⁷ *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."* ¹⁸ *And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

These verses used in many wedding ceremonies were first spoken by a daughter-in-law to a mother-in-law after the person that had bound them together by law was dead. Ruth was blessed with a mother-in-law who knew the LORD and her choice to follow Naomi also included the choice to follow Naomi's God – *your God my God*. Notice Ruth also said: *Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried*. Ruth had no desire to turn back. Our heart should express the same desires as the heart of Ruth when we choose to follow Jesus – no turning back. Ruth was about to discover God's love is welcoming.

Read Ruth 2:1-3 (ESV) ¹ *Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.* ² *And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor."* *And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."* ³ *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 of the clan of Elimelech.

There is no indication that Naomi had Boaz on her mind when she returned to Bethlehem. And, there is no indication that Ruth went to Boaz's field 'on purpose. Here is a scripture that for me explains what happened. **Psalm 37:23 (ESV)** ²³ *The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way.* Ruth was walking by faith in the LORD's way, and it was the LORD who directed her steps.

About a mile east of Bethlehem is a field called the "Field of Boaz" where tradition says that Ruth gleaned. Gleaning is the process of gathering grain or other produce left in the fields by the reapers. The Old Testament law required that property owners leave the gleanings of the produce in their fields so that they might be gathered by the poor and the stranger. Today, we would call it a 'welfare program.'

Recall the harlot Rahab who helped the Israelites escape from Jericho and was later saved when the Israelites attacked Jericho. She was brought to live among the Israelites. Boaz was the son of Rahab. How do we know this? They are listed together in a New Testament genealogy. **Matthew 1:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab...* That same genealogy in **Matthew 1** traces Boaz back to Judah, the son of Jacob and great-grandson of Abraham. After our first parents fell, the LORD promised to send a Redeemer into the world. This Redeemer was promised to be the seed of the woman (**Genesis 3:15**), the seed of Abraham (**Genesis 12:1-3**) and the lion of the tribe of Judah (**Genesis 49:8-12**).

By the way, adjoining this field is "Shepherd's Field" in Bethlehem where tradition says the angels announced the birth of Jesus. Later the prophet Micah would prophesy in **Micah 5:2 (ESV)** *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

The ancestor to our promised Redeemer was about to become the kinsmen-redeemer of Ruth and Naomi.

Ruth 2:8-12 (ESV) ⁸ *Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 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!"*

Boaz, was a near male relative of Naomi's deceased husband. Certain obligations were placed on the near relatives (most often a brother) of a deceased man. Boaz was about to volunteer to become what the Israelites

called a kinsman-redeemer to Ruth and Naomi. A kinsman-redeemer was a relative who would take responsibility for an extended family. The nearest relative to the deceased husband could become a kinsman-redeemer by marrying the widow. If he chose not to marry the widow, the next nearest relative could take his place. If no one did, the widow would probably live in poverty the rest of her life because in the Israelite culture the inheritance was passed to the son or nearest male relative, not to the wife.

Boaz not only invites her to stay in the field, but he also puts his ‘cloak of protection’ around her. In Ruth’s response, we see her humble gratefulness. She appreciates Boaz’ protection. When Ruth went to glean, she never dreamed that anyone would ever take any notice of her. In fact, she expected that they would all turn their backs upon her, because the Jews at this time did not have dealings with the Moabites. Possibly Naomi had explained to her that the Mosaic Law shut a Moabite out from the congregation of the LORD. In God’s love story, racial barriers were broken down, and we realize that God loves even those who are considered ‘shameful’ by others. God’s love is redeeming.

Read Ruth 4:13-17 (ESV) ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife... and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. 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! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life... ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

In ancient Israel the passing down of land through the male heir was of utmost importance in the survival of the family. The first son of the widow and her new husband was to be considered the deceased husband’s heir inheriting his name and property. The first husband’s name would not be forgotten.

Boaz became Ruth’s kinsmen-redeemer redeeming her, covering her with his protection and making her his bride. Their son, Obed, became the grandfather of David who would become king of Israel. The LORD of Hosts made a promise to David and that promise will not be broken. **Psalm 89:34-36 (ESV)** ³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips. ³⁵ ... I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me. The genealogy of David is traced to Jesus by both Matthew and Luke in the New Testament. The genealogies cover different family lines – **Matthew 1** traces to Joseph, the adopted father of Jesus. **Luke 3** traces to Mary the mother of Jesus. There is a day coming when King Jesus, the Son of David, will literally reign on David’s throne.

In Boaz’s action of kinsmen-redeemer to Ruth, we see a picture of our Kinsmen-Redeemer – Jesus. The name of Elimelech continued through the offspring of Ruth and Boaz because Boaz, the kinsmen-redeemer, made it possible. Because of what our Kinsmen-Redeemer Jesus did for us, our name will never be blotted out from the book of life! We will receive our heavenly inheritance – everlasting life! **Revelation 3:5 (ESV)** ⁵ The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. Thank you, Jesus, for being our Kinsmen-Redeemer!