

**GRACE TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH OF LAWNSIDE**  
**Wednesday Night Bible Study**

**RUTH 1:1–22**  
**RETURNING TO BETHLEHEM**

**SUMMARY**

Ruth begins with a brief introduction and a dramatic first scene that set the stage for the whole narrative. In the midst of a desolate context both historically and personally, Naomi decides to return from Moab to Bethlehem. That return precipitates the actions of the rest of the story, beginning immediately with Ruth's response. This first chapter shows Naomi's emptiness in Moab which, by the book's end, will turn into the fullness of God's provision in Bethlehem. It shows the context of Naomi's desolation (the time of the judges, famine, alienation from home, death, bitterness) and yet the seeds of hope in a return to a food-filled Bethlehem along with a faith-filled daughter-in-law, Ruth.

Elimelech evidently didn't intend to leave permanently the land of promise or his own particular clan, city, and tribe within it (1:2). He meant only to "sojourn" (1:1), or to stay a while in Moab, to escape the famine in Israel. Moab's inhabitants were the descendants of an incestuous union between Lot and one of his daughters (Genesis 19:30–38). The Moabites worshiped other gods and were not friends of God's people.

The book opens with Naomi in crisis, her sons and husband have died (1:5). In that place and time, a woman without a man was without means of support, helpless and vulnerable. And a wife without children to continue the family line was regarded as a failure. Jewish law provided for "levirate marriage" (after the Latin *levir*, meaning "brother-in-law"), in which a brother was obliged to marry a childless widow of his deceased brother and to raise children in the brother's name. Naomi refers to this law as she addresses her two daughters-in-law. Orpah took the sensible route and went home, but Ruth "clung" to her mother-in-law (v. 14). The same Hebrew word *dabaq* in Genesis 2:24 describes a man leaving his father and mother and "holding fast" to his wife.

We meet Ruth here only through words and actions, not through any narrative interpretation. But what we see strongly suggests a regenerative work of God in Ruth, so that she gives her heart and her life not only to her mother-in-law but to her mother-in-law's God. She has been drawn into a family that is part of God's people, where she clearly has heard enough about to call him "Lord" and to begin to grasp the connection between God and His called-out people. Her words might even echo God's covenantal language to Abraham and his descendants, promising that He will be their God and they will be His people.

Such a story, like that of Rahab's before her (Joshua 2), makes us ask how and why God plucked this one person from out of an ungodly nation. Why not Orpah? The text does not answer those questions but leaves us increasingly in awe of God's inexplicable grace that calls out sinners from every nation.

This chapter keeps reminding us that we are reading about a return. The Gospel is all about God's providing a way for lost people to return to God—ever since Adam and Eve were separated from God by their sin but received His promise to provide a way for that sin to be defeated, through the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). The shape of a return story resonates with the shape of redemption. The prophets called out again and again, "Return!" But they didn't simply call for a return. They pointed ahead to the means for that return: the promised seed, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the One born in Bethlehem, the very city to which Naomi is returning, in the land of God's promise. Scripture resounds with the call to return. Both Naomi and Ruth follow this call and find the provision of God's grace.

God's promises to Abraham stand out as context for this story. The details of Elimelech's background (1:2) establish that we're dealing with the sons of Jacob descended from Abraham who were divided into tribes—now numerous, as God promised, and settled in the land God promised. Accordingly, we feel the jarring of one of these descendants leaving the land; this jarring adds to the import of the return. We also feel the huge significance of a foreigner like Ruth so boldly purposing to become part of the people God has covenanted to bless. Only as the story develops do we, with fuller understanding, celebrate the way Ruth's enfolding into Israel is actually a beautiful part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that, in him, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed".

Ruth 1:8 brings the first of several appearances in this book of a profoundly beautiful Old Testament Hebrew word, *hesed*, often translated "steadfast love," "loving kindness," or simply "kindness." *Hesed* can refer both to human kindness and, in many instances, to the loving kindness of God toward His people. When God in His glory passes by Moses hidden in the cleft of the rock, there in Exodus 34:6 shines God's "steadfast love," surrounded by His mercy and faithfulness, and poured out on generations of His people. When we come upon it in Ruth 1:8, this word shines out, especially as it connects with the Lord's own kindness—offered in blessing by one of Abraham's descendants (Naomi) but referring to kindness passed on by those not in Abraham's line (Naomi's daughters-in-law).

When commissioned by God to lead His people out of Egypt, Moses asked God how to answer concerning the name of the one who had sent him. "God said to Moses, 'I Am Who I Am.' And He said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). God here reveals His name "Yahweh", which expresses both God's eternal being and unfailing love for the people to whom God reveals Himself. It is not surprising that Naomi, an Israelite, repeatedly uses this Name, indicated in the English text by "Lord." However, Ruth's use of this Name stands out. In her speech, Ruth first refers to Naomi's "God," with the more universally understood Name (1:16). But in her climactic statement she implies a relationship between this God and herself, referring to Him as "Lord," or "Yahweh" (v. 17).

God's providence hovers over this chapter. The initial mention of famine brings to mind God's control over nature and use of it for His purposes. Naomi does not hear just that the famine is over in Israel but that "the Lord had visited His people and given them food" (1:6). "Food" here means literally "bread"—as in "Bethlehem," which means, "house of bread." God is clearly at

work, providing, and visiting His people in substantial ways. We recall Joseph, who in God's providence provided grain for his family and for all of famine-struck Egypt (Genesis 45:4–11), and who as he was dying prophesied God's visitation on his people that would come in the Exodus (50:24–25). One might think of Zechariah's prophecy concerning the baby to be born in Bethlehem: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed his people . . ." (Luke 1:68). When Ruth 1 ends with the mention of barley harvest in Bethlehem, we sense God's providential hand at work and look forward to seeing His provision on many levels.

God is in charge of this story, and Naomi knows it. She does not envision herself at the mercy of a random or chaotic universe. Even though she misunderstands God's kind purposes, she does understand that a sovereign "Almighty" has brought about everything that has happened to her (1:20, 21). Naomi knows the Lord God Almighty rules, and she will learn to acknowledge God's kindness even along the painful path on which He leads her.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. During what period did the story of Ruth occur? (1)
2. Who went to Moab and who was the first to die there? (2)
3. Who did Naomi's sons marry? (4)
4. What happened to these sons? (5)
5. Why did Naomi decide to return from the country of Moab? (6)
6. Why did Naomi encourage her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab? (11-13)
7. Who went back to her people? (14)
8. How did Ruth reply? (16-17)
9. Why did Naomi want to be called Mara? (20)
10. At what season did Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem? (22)

## **RUTH 2:1–23**

### **A MEETING IN THE BARLEY FIELD**

#### **SUMMARY**

After Naomi’s “empty” return to Bethlehem along with Ruth, we are ready to see how God will fill her. Scene two begins to unfold God’s full provision for these women, as Ruth goes out to glean and encounters Boaz. The scene overflows with God’s kind, abundant provision through Boaz, and it sets up the expectation to see how this encounter of Ruth and Boaz might develop. God’s kindness is demonstrated and recognized as Ruth leaves Naomi to glean and finds herself welcomed and abundantly provided for in Boaz’s field, and then returns to tell Naomi all about the gracious provision.

Parenthetically, Jewish law made provision for the poor, sojourners, widows, and orphans to gather (“glean”) grain that was standing in corners or borders of fields or that was dropped by reapers as they cut and tied the grain in sheaves. Boaz’s words in verses 11–12 capture the essence of this conversation and of this chapter. As Boaz blesses Ruth with his words, he builds up to the most important thing she has done.

Boaz prays that God will “repay” Ruth with a “full reward,” as she has come to take refuge under his wings (Ruth 2:12). Naomi forms this chapter’s bookends, as Ruth leaves her and then returns to her, carrying about an ephah of barley (over 5 gallons, or 24 liters), along with the leftovers from lunch (vv. 14, 18)! It’s a rich and overflowing scene—first with the food and grain, and finally with the amazing news of the source of all this abundance.

Next, in verse 20, Naomi informs Ruth that Boaz is one of her family’s “redeemers,” sometimes called “kinsman-redeemers.” Jewish law made provision for a near kinsman to redeem (buy back) land sold by a poverty-stricken relative, and even to redeem the relatives themselves who were sometimes sold into slavery if they had no way to pay their debts. The purpose was to keep the family and the God-given inheritance together (Leviticus 25:25–55). At this point in the narrative, the fact that Boaz is a potential redeemer leads to no immediate conclusions. We know nothing so far of Elimelech’s land and what has happened to it. And yet, these women have found Boaz, who has shown kindness.

The Lord’s kindness never fails. Naomi thought it had. This story’s theme of redemption is a concrete one, but in Scripture’s larger context we cannot help but follow this thread toward Jesus, who is our Redeemer. The spiritually charged meaning of redemption grows in Ruth, especially as we watch the narrative point toward the line of David, and as we think wonderingly of the Son of David who accomplished for us “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Ephesians 1:7).

The Bible is full of needy people who receive favor from those who have power to help them. Every such story echoes the big story of needy human beings who receive unmerited favor from God through his Son. Ruth 2 highlights the word favor (vv. 2, 10, 13), as this poor foreigner humbly acknowledges her need and her wonder at that need being met with such favor.

The book of Ruth is rich with reference to laws God established to nurture and protect the poor and needy among His people. Both the laws concerning gleaning in the fields and those concerning redemption of land evidence the Lord's compassion for the needy and God's call for His people to extend that same compassion. This story's Gospel ramifications help us hold together a concern for both physical human need and the ultimately important spiritual need of every human being for a refuge in the Lord God.

Not only in the Old Testament do we find pictures of God's wings as our refuge. Jesus looked over Jerusalem and His own people who rejected him, saying, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). Back in the time of the judges, Ruth points us to the fullness of God's love that, finally rejected by His own people, reaches out to create a people from all the nations of the world.

By the time Ruth leaves the field of Boaz, she has received more help than the law required (plenteous bread and water and wine, extra grain pulled out and left for her), more lunch than she can eat, and perhaps almost more barley than she can carry home! God's provision is pictured in Scripture not as measured out to be just enough, but rather as overflowing, poured down from the windows of heaven (Malachi 3:10), "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38), not just life but "abundant" life (John 10:10). The harvest God ultimately promises is abundant and eternal (Ps. 126:6; John 4:31–38).

Boaz prays that God will "repay" and "reward" Ruth for her selfless care of her mother-in-law (2:12). A quick reading might lead to the conclusion that Ruth's good works deserve God's good reward—that we somehow earn God's favor. The climactic point of verse 12, however, is that what Ruth has done is to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. From that place of faith, her good deeds have overflowed. Boaz prays she will be blessed not because she has earned any favor but because she has by grace found the place of blessing, in following the true God. Ruth's response of humble servanthood confirms this understanding of her as one who is responding to the grace and favor, she receives.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. To whom was Boaz related? (1)
2. What did Ruth do in the field of Boaz? (2-3)
3. What did Boaz ask Ruth to do? (8-9)
4. What had Boaz heard about Ruth? (11)
5. What did Boaz tell his young men to do? (15-16)
6. How long was Ruth allowed to glean in the field of Boaz? (23)

## **RUTH 3:1–18**

### **A PROPOSAL ON THE THRESHING FLOOR**

#### **SUMMARY**

Ruth 1 started at a low point, with Naomi alone, bitter, and empty. The return to Bethlehem immediately precipitated a flow of rising action and hope. Ruth 2 added overflowing kindness and more hope, as we were left pondering possible further good from the central encounter of Ruth and Boaz. Naomi clearly has been doing some hopeful pondering! In chapter 3 the hope rises to a climactic moment, which will culminate in the resolution of chapter 4.

The proposal scene directed by Naomi and gracefully executed by Ruth, on the “threshing floor” at night, brings joyful resolution—and further hope, related to the desired act of redemption. It was an open-air setting where the harvested sheaves were delivered, the grain was loosened from the straw (often by cattle treading on it), and then the grain was “winnowed,” or tossed up with winnowing forks so the wind could blow away the straw and chaff. The men often remained there after a long day of work, eating and drinking—and staying the night to guard the grain. Naomi’s plan for Ruth to visit Boaz secretly in the night is presented matter-of-factly and accepted by Ruth with no commentary.

By so asking for his protection as a “redeemer,” Ruth is asking Boaz to redeem her along with Elimelech’s land—in sort of a “custom” combination of the laws concerning levirate marriage and kinsman redemption! Boaz would have understood that Ruth, with this request, was asking him to marry her.

The theme of redemption grows. This story is full of Ruth’s blessedness and wonder at finding such a kind redeemer who is willing not only to pay a price for her but to marry her in love. The pictures this book uses to show such a human redeemer are pictures the Bible uses to show our redeeming God: the one who saves and protects us under his wings (Ruth 2:12; 3:9; Ps. 91:4; Mal. 4:2), the husband who loves and covenants with his wife (as in Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:16–23), and the Son willing to ransom us at His own cost (Matt. 20:28). Boaz’s words in Ruth 3:13 ring out: “I will redeem you.” As the book progresses and these various pictures merge, the story of Boaz the redeemer resonates increasingly with the Bible’s big story of redemption.

Ruth portrays the beauty of being redeemed, though not, in this story, by showing any sinfulness of her own from which she is rescued. Of course, Ruth was not sinless, and we know that God drew her from a pagan society of idol-worshippers. Ruth is a foreigner to Israel, not part of God’s people, who becomes part of God’s people. This is what Christ’s redemption accomplishes: by grace, through faith, we are reconciled to God and become part of his family forever.

It is tempting to focus on the worthiness of this virtuous man and woman that we forget the kind providence of God directing and enabling every moment of their story. The Proverbs 31 “worthy woman” is worthy only because she embodies the wisdom given by God to His people in His kingdom: God’s “kindness” (hesed; Proverbs 31:26) is on her tongue and in her heart. So,



with Ruth and Boaz: they are in the place God has mercifully visited (Ruth 1:6), supplying their needs and making them part of his people. Ruth and Boaz are two humbly virtuous characters, both of whom receive more than what they know they deserve—Ruth as a foreigner (2:10) and Boaz as an older man whom young Ruth chooses to love rather than “going after young men” (3:10). Both Boaz and Ruth have taken refuge under God’s kind wings, and they know it. From that place, they acknowledge and pass on the kindness of the Lord himself. That is their worthiness.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. Where did Ruth lie down after Boaz fell asleep? (4-7)
  
2. What did Ruth bring to Naomi? (15-17)

## **RUTH 4:1–22**

### **REDEMPTION AT THE GATE**

#### **SUMMARY**

The book's final chapter not only joyfully resolves the question of whether Boaz will have the first right to redeem Ruth and give her rest. It also resolves the whole story's movement: from Naomi's initial bitter emptiness to her final lapful of blessing and joy. The concluding section reaches out to an even greater resolution of redemption accomplished by the Son of David. Layers of blessing unfold as the story resolves: the nearer kinsman bows out and leaves Ruth to Boaz, their marriage produces a son, the reversal of Naomi's emptiness is complete, and we glimpse the line of this child reaching all the way to King David.

We have seen the theme of redemption develop throughout Ruth, but in the final scene, we watch it enacted, as Boaz buys from Naomi all that belonged to her sons—including Ruth. This cost of redemption, paid in full, points to another, greater Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who ransomed us "from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (I Peter 1:18–19).

The closing scenes offer marvelous pictures of God's people together rejoicing in His steadfast love and saving kindness. The women's "Blessed be the Lord . . ." joins a chorus of generations of praise and worship to a redeeming God. Truly, as Mary sang, "his mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50). In the words of Zechariah, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David . . ." (Luke 1:68–69).

One cannot help but notice, even in a cursory review of Israel's history referenced in Ruth 4:11–12, that the story of God's people is full of sin and brokenness. How remarkable to celebrate Ruth's joyful marriage and childbearing in light of the marriage/childbirth stories of Rachel, Leah, and Tamar. And yet God's grace wove eternal blessing out of all these imperfect relationships, according to his kind, unfailing promises. Each of these families needed, benefited from, and helped lead the way toward the perfect grace to be found in Jesus our Redeemer.

Ruth 4:13 makes it clear that God gave conception to Ruth, who had been barren for 10 years. The Bible shows a long line of barren women whose wombs God opens, in His perfect timing: Sarah (Genesis 21:1–2); Rachel and Leah (Genesis 29:31–30:24); Hannah (I Samuel 1); Elizabeth (Luke 1:5–25). In these stories we see a God who "gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Psalm 113:9). Such mercy, however, is meant to point us to a God who is working His redemptive purposes.

Ruth 4:18–22 is one link in a whole biblical network of genealogies, beginning early in Genesis (4:17–22). Biblical history traces Noah's descendants to Abraham, Abraham's descendants through his 12 sons and eventually through the tribe of Judah to David, and finally David's line to the promised Christ. God's people understood that His promises were to be delivered

through promised offspring—and so they traced and traced that offspring. Matthew’s opening genealogy (1:1–17) summarizes the tracing, culminating in Jesus Christ.

As Ruth the Moabite is enfolded among God’s people and into the messianic line, this story leaves us celebrating God’s promise to bless “all the families of the earth” through Abraham’s seed (Gen. 12:3). That promise bursts into fulfillment in the New Testament, especially as in Acts we see the gospel going out “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). But the fulfillment was happening all along, as we see in stories like those of Rahab (Joshua 2) and Ruth. Jonah didn’t like the idea. Isaiah makes it clear (Isaiah 2:2–3). The Gospels make it abundantly clear (John 1:12–13). And Revelation shows the glorious end result (Revelation 5:9–10).

Boaz in the redemption scene is careful to observe and articulate in what seems almost painstaking detail the Mosaic laws concerning redemption of land and relatives. In his redeemer role, Boaz shows the fulfillment of God’s law—just as Christ our Redeemer perfectly fulfilled God’s law during His earthly life, in order to be able perfectly to secure our redemption. Boaz consistently does even more than the law requires: he gives Ruth not only the proper gleanings but all sorts of extra attention and provision as well, and of course he finally pursues marriage to her, though he is not technically required to do so. So, in Christ, our Redeemer, God’s perfect law and his unending love meet.

The book of Ruth, and especially this final chapter, highlights the importance of preserving one’s family inheritance (Ruth 4:5, 6, 10). The inheritance of every Israelite was one given by God, originally administered through Joshua to the 12 tribes as they settled in the Promised Land. That rich inheritance offers a picture of every believer’s ultimate inheritance through Christ’s redemption of us (I Peter 1:3–5): this is the “beautiful inheritance” David glimpsed and celebrated in Psalm 16:5–6.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. What was the method of confirming a transfer of property? (7-8)
2. What did Boaz buy and acquire? (9-10)
3. Who was Ruth's great-grandson? (21-22)