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Ruth 2-4



Ruth - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides a insightful analysis of Ruth chapters 2 to 4, shedding light on the cultural context and significance of the story. He explores the idea of gleanings and how Ruth's vulnerable position as a poor widow could have put her at risk in the fields. Gregg emphasizes the importance of Boaz's kindness and his role as a near kinsman, highlighting the legal obligations in redeeming someone's condition. He also delves into the customs and laws of ancient Israel, drawing connections between Leviticus and the events in Ruth. Through his compelling analysis, Gregg offers a deeper understanding of the story and its themes of kindness, redemption, and cultural dynamics.

Transcript

So we pick up the story of Ruth at the beginning of the second chapter. And all that has happened is that Ruth and Naomi have become widows and have returned to Bethlehem, Naomi's hometown, but Ruth is a newcomer there because she's really from Moab. And so she's become inserted into a foreign culture for her, but she has become a proselyte, a believer in Yahweh.

So she's technically a Jew by faith, and therefore with the privileges of a Jew, but not many privileges because she's a widow and in poverty, and therefore she has to make a living somehow. And Naomi is too old to work, so Ruth is going to work for both of them. She is sort of the quintessential virtuous woman of Proverbs 31.

You know, she labors hard and she's virtuous and she's set forth as one of those rare women that Proverbs 31 describes, as a hard worker who is really selfless in all of her activities. Now we read at the end of chapter 1 that they arrived in Bethlehem from Moab after 10 years absence, just at the time of the barley harvest. There had been a famine when Naomi had left 10 years earlier, but it was ended, and now the harvest was good and there were provisions in the Law of Moses that the poor could glean in the fields.

In fact, the Law of Moses forbade those who owned grain fields to go back and collect the gleanings. Now we're not from an agrarian culture, you might not even know what

gleanings are. After the harvesters would go through and grab as much as possible the heads of grain to collect for the harvest, there would always be some that would be missed, there would be some still attached to the stalks after the harvesters went through, or some that fell on the ground.

Those would be the gleanings. The gleanings were sort of the remnants left behind after the harvesters had gone through wholesale and grabbed as much as they could. And the gleanings were not to be picked up by the owner of the field.

He was not supposed to send his workers through to pick those up. He was supposed to leave that for the poor. This was one of the ways that the Law made provision for poor people to be fed.

They actually had the right legally to the gleanings. And in all likelihood, there were a number of poor people gleaning in any field that had a lot of crops there. There was this one man whose fields were apparently abundantly producing and Ruth found a place in his field to do gleanings so that she and her mother-in-law would be able to eat.

So chapter 2 says, Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. The name Boaz means in him is strength. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, Please let me go to the field and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.

That is, anyone who will allow me is what she means. Anyone who will treat me right. Apparently sometimes gleaners because they were the lowest rung of the social ladder, they were the poor, they might be sometimes treated rudely by harvesters.

Although the Law required that the gleaners be allowed to come in, it may be that in some cases they were resented by the owners of the fields and she said, I want to go find someone who will show me favor. That is, will be kind to me if I'm gleaning in his field. So Naomi said to her, Go my daughter.

Then she left 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 family of Elimelech. Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, Yahweh be with you.

And they answered him, Yahweh bless you. Then Boaz said to his servants who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this? Now probably he wasn't just standing over saying this in all likelihood, you know, seeing the reapers and seeing Ruth as a newcomer and not recognizing her, she's new in town. And you know, whose woman is that over there? That is almost certainly what he's asking.

Is this someone I don't recognize? So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among

the sheaves. So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.

This line, though she rested a little in the house, some authorities say this is not a good translation, but it means that she did not take any rest in the house. Apparently there were places where perhaps in the middle of the day the workers could go under shelter of shade to rest. Nowadays, almost all civilized countries have built in coffee breaks and lunch breaks and rest times every few hours for workers.

These workers probably didn't have those built in, but probably when they were starting to feel exhausted, they'd go recover in the shade for a little bit and then go out and work some more. But she, as I understand it in this passage, is saying she didn't do that. She didn't rest.

She just worked diligently all day long. Then Boaz said to Ruth, You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another's field, nor go from here, but stay close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them.

Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn. Basically the poor who were gleaning didn't have the privileges of hired workers, and therefore if his servants would draw water, that was for his household and for his workers and so forth. The poor just had to fend for themselves.

That's what they were there for, fending for themselves, gathering what was left behind. And essentially he is saying to her, although she is one of the poor and not one of his employees, feel free to drink any of the water my men gather. Feel free to hang close to the female reapers.

You don't have to hang back away from them. Apparently sometimes if the poor were maybe competing with other poor people, they'd tend to press up closer to the front to get things before other people got them. And if they got too close to the hired servants, they might be resented and told to get back and so forth.

Because they were poor, they were probably looked on with some measure of disrespect by others. We wouldn't see why a poor person should be treated that way, but that's how it was in almost all societies. You're poor, it was even considered in many cases, you're poor because God is upset with you about something, you've done something wrong.

And so there was always the danger of a person who is poor and vulnerable and a female to be abused by the workers, to be resented by them. What Boaz is saying is, I've told my young men to leave you alone. You go right in among the women if you want to who are gathering the grain.

You can be the first to pick up what they drop. Feel free to help yourself to the water and refresh yourself. That is, he's giving her privileges that the poor would not normally have unless they were offered to them, and he's showing her special kindness.

Then she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground and said to him, Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me since I'm a foreigner? And Boaz answered and said to her, It has been fully reported to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband and how you have left your father and your mother and your land of your birth and have come to a people whom you did not know before. Yahweh repay your work and a full reward be given to you by Yahweh, God of Israel under whose wings you have come for refuge. Then she said, Let me find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and have spoken kindly to your maid servant, though I am not like one of your maid servants.

I'm not sure what that means. Maybe she means just I'm not of the same race or whatever. I'm not sure what she means, but very possibly her race is what she's alluding to.

Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, Come here and eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar. So she sat beside the reapers. She was a gleaner, but she got to sit with the household servants who were the reapers.

And he passed parts grain to her and she ate and was satisfied and kept some back. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not reproach her. Also let some grain from the bundles fall purposely for her.

Leave it that she may glean and do not rebuke her. He secretly had his reapers drop some in front of her so that she could have more. And so she ended up collecting a lot more than most people would normally glean, which surprised her mother-in-law when she came home with so much.

But he didn't outright just give her a gift. He didn't treat her like a beggar. He let her work for it.

In a sense preserved her dignity rather than just treating her like a poor beggar and handing her a handout. He made it easier for her. Made sure that her work was prosperous rather than gathering very sparsely from a similar amount of work.

So she gleaned in the field until evening and beat out what she had gleaned. And it was about an ephah of barley, which was a lot for a gleaner. Someone has said that the weights and measures tables in their Bibles don't always give the same figures.

But I think an ephah is supposed to be something like a bushel. Forty liters, I don't know my liters. It's a goodly amount.

Certainly more than one would need for a day to eat. If the gleaners, if the poor could just glean enough to make bread for that night and make it through to the next day to glean the same amount and just come up with enough to eat day by day, that would be in most cases all they'd care for. Twenty-two liter bottles.

That's a large amount of grain. That'd be like twenty good-sized loaves of bread. More than a person would eat probably in a week.

So this is how much she was prospering. So she took it up and went into the city and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied.

That is to say, not only did she glean the bare grain that could later be ground into flour, but when he had fed her at the lunch table with the rest of the employees, he had given her parched grain, which was not baked into bread, but probably you could eat it. It would be kind of crunchy grains that had been seared on fire. And she had kept back some besides what she ate herself.

This was immediately edible. The grain she gleaned would be for future use as bread and flour, but this was like fast food. And she could bring home to Naomi a meal ready prepared from what she had set aside when she was offered that.

And her mother-in-law said to her, where have you gleaned today and where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, the man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz. Apparently Ruth all this time didn't know that Boaz was a relative and this is where she finds that out.

But that's why she was so surprised that Boaz was showing special favor toward her. She didn't realize he was doing it because he had appreciated what she was doing for Naomi who was actually in some ways related to him through marriage. Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, blessed be Yahweh who has not forsaken his kindness to the living and the dead.

And Naomi said to her, the man is a relative of ours, one of our near kinsmen, that is a go-out which had great significance in terms of their future, having a rich kinsman redeemer potentially. Then Ruth the Moabite said he also said to me you shall stay close to my young men until they have finished all my harvest. And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, it is good my daughter that you go out with his young women and that people do not meet you in any other field.

So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz to glean until the end of the barley harvest and wheat harvest. And she dwelt with her mother-in-law. Now the barley was harvested earlier in the season and then the wheat ripened later.

And there would be at least two months of work here for her. And obviously if the pickings were good, it is obvious that grain could be stored all year. So if you really had a good two months harvest you could eat all year on it because grain will obviously store for a very long time until it is ground into flour.

So she got to work the whole harvest and we have every reason to believe that Boaz was continuing to tell his workers to leave extra on the ground for her. If she was bringing home an ephah a day, then certainly by the end of a couple months of work she would have the whole year's supply of food. So it was a good take, it was a good year for them.

And she dwelt with her mother-in-law. Now, you know, we are so conditioned by the stories that we read, the romances. This is a romance, this story is a romance obviously.

We always picture in romances the women are good looking, the guys are good looking. You know, I mean, that's how movies, you'd never have a movie made of the story of Ruth and have Ruth be plain or anything other than attractive because that's how in America we've come to see our heroines and our heroes in romances. We don't know if she was a good looking woman or not.

She may have been. But what Boaz appreciated about her was her virtue. I mean, he may also have found her attractive, but we shouldn't assume that that's the case.

She might not have been physically that attractive. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 nothing is really said about her looks. And Proverbs tells us very plainly that charm is deceitful and beauty is vain.

But a woman who fears the Lord shall be praised. And that even a beautiful woman without discretion is a little bit like a jewel of gold in a pig's nose. And so forth.

So Proverbs divine wisdom suggests that beauty is not at a premium as much as our culture would suggest. At the same time, of course, the Bible often makes note that certain women are beautiful. I mean, the Bible acknowledges that there is such a thing as physical attractiveness of women.

We're told that Sarah was a very beautiful woman. We're told that Rebecca was a beautiful woman. We're told that Rachel was a beautiful woman.

And there are others that we're told were beautiful women. Tamar, the daughter of Absalom, was said to be a beautiful woman. But while the Bible acknowledges there is such a thing as physical beauty, it also puts it in its proper place that it is of relatively no value to be beautiful if you're not virtuous.

And that beauty is vain. But fearing the Lord is something that is a true warrant for being praised. And when Boaz talks about her, we don't find him praising her for her beauty.

She might have been attractive, for all we know, but that's not an issue in the story. We picture this love story between this beautiful young girl and this probably not too bad looking rich man. It's very charming.

But the way we picture things in our culture are not always as they were. Also, you know, in our culture we have a basic picture of the perfect shape of a woman. Whereas in many other cultures, what was attractive in a woman's shape was very different than what is in ours.

There have been societies, obviously from the sculpture and from the paintings of certain eras in the medieval times, apparently women with a lot of belly fat were considered to be attractive. And obviously in a culture like Israel's, a woman who was good for bearing babies would be attractive. And often that is not necessarily your beach body.

It's funny how when we read a romance, we're so western, so modern, we have this picture and we would depict in a drama or a movie, we'd cast somebody who's your typical movie star type actress in the role. But it's very possible that Ruth was not what we would call beautiful by our standards. And it wouldn't matter if she was or not.

She was the right kind of woman and Boaz, every time he speaks about her, appraises her just like Solomon said he would. A woman who fears the Lord shall be praised. She's always praised for her virtue, for her selflessness, and for her choices that she's making.

And Boaz obviously falls in love with her. Naomi is going to recognize that that's happening before Ruth does. Ruth is more naive about this, but Naomi just hearing how Boaz is favoring her, the wheels are going in Naomi's head, she knows that this guy's on the hook.

It says, Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, chapter 3, said to her, My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our kinsman? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself and put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Then it shall be when he lies down that you shall notice the place where he lies and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down and he will tell you what you should do.

And she said to her, All that you say to me I will do. Now, when it says he will tell you what you should do, Naomi already knows that Boaz is going to want to marry her. And she can put two and two together.

Ruth has been working for him for two months and he keeps doing more and more favors for her, just showing favor to her. And whatever else might have made a woman

attractive to a man in those days, Naomi could tell that Ruth had what it takes. It might not have been what we would find attractive in a woman in our culture, but it would be, I mean Naomi had no doubt that Boaz would want this lady.

And she even expresses more confidence about it further on in the story. He is winnowing grain tonight. Winnowing is what happens after the harvest.

You get all this raw, rough heads of grain together and it's got kernels that are useful for food, but it's got all this chaff, this little hair-like stuff that grows between the grains and you can't eat that, you don't want that. So you have to separate the two and winnowing is the process of separating the wheat from the chaff. Generally it was done using the wind.

That was the easiest thing to do. Usually the wind was not strong enough to carry grains horizontally through the air, but the chaff was so light it could blow away like dust. So the idea was to break up the heads so that the grain is separate from the chaff, though they are all mixed together.

Then you take a shovel-like thing and you throw the whole thing in the air. As it goes in the air, the wind blows the chaff away and the grain just falls down. You keep repeating it until the chaff is all gone and the grain is there.

That's winnowing. They would do much of this in the evening time or at night because the wind would come up at the evening time more and they could make better use of the wind rather than in the midday. They'd work nights.

When the harvest was done and it was time to winnow, they'd spend the night at the threshing floor. So this night Naomi knew that Boaz would be there. That is, he's not going to be in his rich house.

It would be impossible for Ruth to sneak into his house and into his bedroom and do the kind of thing that's being described here, but since he's camping out with the workers because it's a nice summer night and they're going to be threshing that night, so he's going to be outdoors, pay attention to where he lies down and then go and lay at his feet. Now she says, wash yourself, anoint yourself, put on your best dress. Now this is not in order to seduce him, but apparently her widow's garments or her laboring garments, for one thing her working garments might not have smelled very good, but she was to get cleaned up, put on her best clothes and go and lay down at his feet.

There's no suggestion here of any kind of immorality, but rather she's laying at his feet, more or less offering herself as a servant role, who would sleep at the feet of their master, therefore putting him in the position to decide what he wants to do in terms of her status. Does he want to marry her? Naomi feels confident that he'll want to. And so she says, he'll tell you what to do.

So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. And she came softly, uncovered his feet and lay down.

And apparently just went to sleep there under the bottom edge of his blanket near his bare feet. Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled and turned himself and there a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, who are you? So she answered, I am Ruth, your maid servant.

Take your maid servant under your wing, for you are near kinsmen. Now this statement, take your maid servant under your wing, is really a paraphrase. It's kind of unusual for the New King James to simply paraphrase like this, because they assume we don't understand the Jewish custom, and I'm sure we don't.

But what it literally says is spread the corner of your garment over your maid servant. The New King James says take me under your wing, because we have sort of that idiom in our modern English. You take someone under your wing, that means you take them under your protection.

We would say that when Lot's father died, Abraham took him under his wing. That means he brought him into his family and took charge of his care. And so our idiom does agree with what she was saying, but they had a different idiom there.

And that was to throw the edge of your garment over me. And this is something that in Israel was apparently a custom. If a man wished to marry somebody, he could put his garment over them and indicate that she's going to, you know, she has a place in his garment along with him.

He wants to be one flesh with her. He wants to become married to her. In Ezekiel chapter 16, God gives sort of a parable about how he had found Israel and married her.

And it also talks about how he had put his garment over her. Ezekiel 16, 8, there's a parable here about a castaway young baby girl who was found by a man and he saved her life, nurtured her, brought her to maturity, and then married her. And this is supposed to be Israel and God.

And as he's telling this story, he says in verse 8, When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love. That is, this baby he had adopted had grown into a marriageable woman. And he says, And I spread my wing over you.

Again, literally in Hebrew, the corner of my garment. I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness, just as I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you that you became mine. So the idea of whether literally or figuratively putting your garment over a woman was the way that you entered into a covenant of

marriage.

You invited her into your life, even into your garment, as it were. And in Ezekiel 16, 8, it was connected with taking an oath and becoming married and so forth. And that's no doubt fully implied in her words here.

Basically, she says, Take me under your wing, as it says here, or marry me because you're near kinsmen. Now, this is not just the case of a brazen woman saying, I'm in love with you, marry me. I mean, like a woman being really forward, taking initiative in a relationship.

This is more her informing him that there is a legal obligation of a near kinsman to redeem somebody like herself in her condition. So she's informing him that he is in the position to play the role of a kinsman redeemer. It's not likely that she would be so brazen.

Women were not. And she, especially as a virtuous woman, would not just walk up to a man that she had eyes for and say, Hey, I want to marry you. But this is more a situation of moving forward on a legal obligation that really fell to him.

She thought. Now, it turns out it really fell to somebody else. There was another man closer in relationship that really had the first right of redemption and duty of redemption.

But apparently she didn't know that. And she figured that Boaz was the one who was in that legal position. Then he said, Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter, for you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich.

And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of the town know that you are a virtuous woman. Now, again, he didn't say, I'm in love with you.

I want your body. I think you're beautiful. He said, I will marry you because everyone knows, and I know, you're a virtuous woman.

Lots of men would like to have a beautiful woman, but every man would like to have a virtuous woman, beautiful or not. And so, that's what he's saying. I'll do it.

Now, what's interesting about this is, he felt like she was showing him a kindness. He acted like she was doing him a favor. Well, blessed are you of the Lord, because you chose me instead of a younger man.

Apparently he was not a young man. He might have been very old and unattractive. And he knew that she really would have options other than him.

Everyone knew she was a virtuous woman, so even the young men would be interested

in marrying her. Anyone would want to marry a woman like that, he's saying. And he says, you had your pick of all the men, young and old, and you picked me.

And yet, she was of an entirely different class in society than he was, and a different race. She's a foreigner, although a convert, and she's a widow in poverty. And he's a rich man.

If there had been a caste system, as there is in India, in Israel, she would have been an untouchable compared to him. And yet, he doesn't seem to make any distinction in the class difference here. He just sees her as a good woman, and one that he's lucky to have available.

One would have thought that whether he was a kinsman, redeemer, or not, that he as a rich man could have approached any gleaner woman and invited her to marry him, and she would have thought it was a privilege to come out of her poverty and to marry a rich man. So it's interesting that he was as humble about this as he was. He didn't see himself as a great catch, even though he was a rich man.

The Bible says he had great wealth, which would make a man usually not have any trouble finding just about any kind of woman he wants, even if he's not otherwise attractive. But he's looking for a good woman, a virtuous woman, and he considers that even though this woman's poor and a widow, that she's showing him a kindness. It shows that he really values her and considers her quite a catch, and for the very reason that he gives, that she is known to be a virtuous woman.

Who can find a virtuous woman? Now it is true that I am your kinsman. However, there is a kinsman nearer than I. Now whether he knew this off the top of his head or whether he had done some research, we don't know. He had known her for several months in his fields.

He might have been looking into this himself. I found a legal technicality. There is someone who really is ahead of me in this position.

But he had also figured out how to resolve that. Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you, good, let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you.

As the Lord lives, lie down until morning. So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Well, it was still dark.

Then he said, Do not let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor. They knew nothing inappropriate had gone on, but how would anyone else know that? If they see a woman leaving his bed in the morning, they wouldn't know. So he says, Keep that a secret.

Also he said, Bring the shawl that is on you, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six ephahs of barley and laid it on her. Now that's six times as much as she collected the first day, which was way more than was needed even then.

So he's really laying on the wealth, as it were. I mean, grain is wealth in a society like that. And she went to the city.

So when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, Is that you, my daughter? Then she told her all that the man had done for her. And she said, These six ephahs of barley he gave me, for he said to me, Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law. That's hardly... I mean, that's not... Even one ephah was not empty-handed.

Don't you go home empty-handed. Here, take this truckload with you. Then she said, Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out.

For the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day. So Naomi was pretty sure that the guy was interested, just from the kindness he'd been showing. And so when she sent Ruth to sort of make this proposal at the threshing floor, Naomi was pretty sure how things would turn out.

But when she saw that Ruth came back with six ephahs, she said, Okay, my suspicions were correct, definitely. Now he's definitely interested. You just sit back and watch him do what he's going to do.

Because he's not going to give himself rest until this is a settled thing. Now, he indicated that his interest was more in her welfare than in his own. Because he said, There's another man who really has the right, and if he wants to do it, let him.

You have the right to be married. You have the right to be removed from your state of poverty. There's another man who can do this.

I'd like to be the man, but he actually has the right, and if he wants to, then that's fine. At least you're better off. I'm still a single guy without a wife, but at least you're better off.

I mean, the idea is, whether it's me or him, you have the right to be removed from this state of widowhood and poverty, and I can live with that. He was more concerned about her well-being than about his own. Although he said, If he won't do it, I'll be glad to do it.

So, in chapter 4, he has to approach this other man who has the prior claim. Though the other man was apparently unaware of it. We don't know what the exact relationship was of either of these men to Elimelech.

They were relatives, cousins of some sort, apparently. Elimelech apparently didn't have any brothers, but he had relatives of some sort. Cousins, first cousins, second cousins,

but the one that was closest to him in relationship was Elimelech, but apparently not close enough in relationship.

I mean, in blood relationship, yes, but in social relationship, apparently not very close, because the man had apparently not given it any thought. It wasn't like he thought, Well, I'm Elimelech's cousin. I'm in the first position of right of redemption.

I should do something about this. It seems like Boaz had to bring this to the man's attention. And Boaz must have done a bit of research to find this out himself, because if this man who was closer related than Boaz didn't know, then Boaz would be even less likely to know, unless he had taken a special interest in finding these things out.

Now Boaz went up to the gate, which is where business and legal transactions would be conducted at the city, and sat down there. And behold, the near kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, Come aside, friend.

Sit down here. So he came and sat down. Now this was not just a private talk on a bench outside the city.

This was the city gates. This is where the magistrates were. There were witnesses.

It's like Boaz came and sat in one chair, waiting for the other chair to be filled, where a transaction would be made between him and someone else to be made legal at the gate of the city. So the guy happens to come along, and he says, Here, sit over here. Now I'm going to transact some legal business with you.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, Sit down here. So they sat down to be witnesses. Then he said to the near kinsman, who is never named for us, he's not memorialized because he didn't do his duty.

He was in a sense doing something shameful by turning this down. There's even this shoe transaction that takes place, which is as we shall see, something of a modification of an earlier thing prescribed in the law, which was a matter of shame to a man who would not do the duty of a leverite, of a brother-in-law marrying his brother's widow. This man is one of the few characters whose name is not given to us, and that may be a subtle way of showing contempt for him because of his refusal to care about Naomi and Ruth and so forth, who were in hard luck circumstances, and he was in a position to help and didn't do so.

It's like if you were the President of the United States and you had a brother living in a hut in Africa and you didn't do anything for him. It's sort of the same kind of thing. And he said to the near kinsman, Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.

Our brother just means our relative. Brother is used broadly. And I thought to inform

Usain, buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants of the elders of my people.

If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not redeem it, then tell me that I may know, for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you. And he said, I will redeem it.

Now there's a bit of history here that had not been mentioned previously in the story, but Naomi like any widow in Israel would have had some whatever land was her husband's inheritance from the time of Joshua. The families each had tribal and family inheritances. So when Elimelech died, there was some piece of property in Israel that had belonged to him, which was Naomi's.

Now Naomi as a widow in a hard luck case had to sell it. And this is just the kind of situation envisaged in Leviticus 25, 25, where someone is poor and they have to sell their land. That's just the situation where a person who is a kinsman or a redeemer could step in and buy it back.

So apparently Naomi prior to this had sold whatever land she had inherited from her husband. And that's what it says in verse 3. He says, Naomi who has come back from the country of Moab sold a piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. So this happened unrecorded in the story earlier.

But the kinsman now is offered the right to redeem that land. And the guy says, okay, I will. And Boaz puts all his cards on the table.

He's not being deceptive. He says, I'm the next in line. But you are in the first position, so if you want to redeem it, you can do that.

If you don't, let me know because I'm in the next position to do it. And I'll do it. And the guy says, okay, I'll do it.

I don't mind picking up another piece of property. And Boaz said, oh, there's another part to this. On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance.

In other words, you also have to marry Ruth. Now, this was not necessarily stated in the law. This is the way that the law had come to be interpreted or modified in the practice of the Israelites now, of course, several generations, maybe centuries after the time Moses gave the law.

There were two different laws that applied to different situations. One was the redeeming of land, and that could be done by the nearest kinsman. And this was truly what this man was in the position to do.

When it came to marrying the widow, that was in Deuteronomy 25, and that was only the obligation of the brother. If the man had a brother, that man was supposed to marry the widow. It was not necessarily the obligation of whoever was the nearest of kin, though not a brother, a cousin or uncle or someone.

He didn't have to do that. But that was not how the law had come to be interpreted, since similar situations were in both cases. It was assumed now that the man who would redeem the property would also redeem the widow and marry her and raise up seed to the deceased man.

And when this unnamed man was informed of that, it changed his disposition toward the transaction. And the nearest kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.

Now, it's not entirely clear what he meant that if he did so, he would ruin his own inheritance. And there have been many theories. The commentators don't all agree about what he was thinking either.

There was obviously something that he had in mind that was a fact, that if he married Ruth, it would damage something about his inheritance. It might be that his present wife would kill him. Hard to say.

After all, in the Old Testament, polygamy was not forbidden, but wives didn't like it very much. I don't think there's ever been a society where wives really liked it. And the law of Levite marriage was that if a man died, his brother was to marry his widow.

And that would not necessarily be that his brother must be previously a single man. It would be that that widow would be added to his family. And so, if he already had a wife and children, that would make marrying another woman and raising up children for your dead brother a slightly different thing.

It's not entirely clear what all the legal ramifications were, but it's possible that he thought that if he had a child by Ruth, and that child was not his child, but Ruth's deceased husband's child, that this somehow would legally compromise the inheritance his own sons were going to get. I'm not really sure how it would. Might need a Jewish lawyer to figure all that out.

But he could tell right away that redeeming a piece of property is uncomplicated. Marrying another woman with all the obligations came with that, that was going to complicate things in a way that he could foresee problems. He says, oh, okay, well in that case I'm going to not do it, so you go ahead and you do it, Boaz, for I cannot redeem it.

Now, verse 7, this was the custom in former times in Israel, which means that at the time this was written, this custom apparently had ceased to be practiced, but at the time so

some time and some cultural changes had elapsed between the time of Ruth and the time that this was written down. But in former times concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything, one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other and this was an attestation in Israel. Therefore the near kinsman said to Boaz buy it for yourself, so he took off his sandal.

And Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, you are witnesses this day that I have brought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Malon's from the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Malon, I have acquired as my wife to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses this day.

Now, this matter of the shoe, it seems obvious that it has its roots in what was prescribed in Deuteronomy chapter 25 although it has obviously been modified. In Deuteronomy 25 which is where the obligation of a man to marry his brother's widow is talked about in verses 5-9 it says in verse 7, Deuteronomy 25 7, But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife then let his brother's wife go up to the gate of the elders and say, My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name for his brother in Israel. He will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.

Then the elders of the city shall call him and speak to him, and if he stands firm and says, I do not want to take her then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel the house of him who had his sandal removed. So apparently you couldn't make someone marry someone they didn't want to marry.

If the man said, I don't like my sister-in-law, I'm glad my brother married her but I don't want her. Now I'm obligated to marry her? It's not even good for a woman to have to marry somebody that doesn't want her. In that case the law said then the elders of the city should take him and try to persuade him to change his mind.

But if he is resolute and he refuses, then he will have this ceremony of shame where the woman who he should have taken shames him publicly before the elders of the city by taking off his sandal and spitting in his face. Now why take off the sandal? The shoe in ancient Israel could designate possession as in every place that the sole of your foot shall step shall be your possession. In the case of the unnamed kinsman taking off his shoe and handing it to Boaz it meant he's transferring his right of possession to Boaz.

And that's what it says in Ruth 4.7. Now this was the custom in former times concerning redeeming and exchanging. In this case the man was not going to redeem, he was going to exchange. He's going to pass along his right of redemption to someone else.

So taking off of the shoe there was no more spitting in the face at this time. This woman didn't come and do this. This was obviously a morphed custom that had been done differently under the law but had over time its practice had been modified.

But this man, this unnamed man is the man who had his sandal taken off. That's his reputation. You don't want that hanging over your head.

But that's the guy. Now Boaz then said before the ten witnesses at the gate okay, I'm now redeeming everything in that family including marrying Ruth and you're the witnesses this day. A marriage took place and the bride wasn't even present.

And all the people who were at the gate and the elders said we are witnesses. Yahweh make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah the two who built the house of Israel and may you prosper in Ephrathah, that's Bethlehem, and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah because of the offspring which Yahweh will give you from this young woman.

So may she be like Rachel and Leah who together were of course the mothers of the whole nation of Israel. Zilpah and Bilhah their slave girls had a role in that too. But what their slave girls did, they did in their name and in their person.

So Rachel and Leah were more or less having more children through their slave girls. But they were the owners of the slave girls and therefore the owners of the children too. So basically all the children, all the twelve sons were counted to be in one sense the sons of Rachel and Leah.

So the whole nation came as they're suggesting from these two women. And then they mention Tamar. Tamar actually does bear an interesting parallel with Ruth in that Tamar was not Jewish.

She was a Canaanite and yet she came into the family line of the house of Judah. And these were people of Judah. This was Bethlehem Judah this was in.

So these people were Judahites. And so they all were descendants of Tamar who had come into the family from a foreign land presumably converted to belief in Yahweh and became part of the family of Judah. In fact the ancestors of them.

And so the idea here's another case of a Gentile coming in like Tamar did and hopefully God will bless her offspring as he blessed Tamar's offspring. The whole tribe of Judah really came from Tamar. Okay so Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife and when he went into her the Lord gave her conception and she bore a son.

Then the women said to Naomi blessed be Yahweh who has not left you this day without a near kinsman and may his name be famous in Israel and may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age for your daughter in law who loves you who is

better to you than seven sons has born him. Now of course Naomi wasn't even a blood relation to this child but this child was technically legally the son of her own son the son of Naomi was technically the legal father of this child so Naomi was legally the step grandmother and therefore it was her grandson by the legal fiction. Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom and became a nurse to him.

So probably not a wet nurse she was too old to have children so she was also too old to nurse the baby at her breast and many times especially in rich families the mother didn't always nurse her own child they'd have a wet nurse some slave girl who would nurse the baby at her breast but that's not the kind of nurse that Naomi became in all likelihood. Also the neighbor women gave him a name saying there is a son born to Naomi and they called his name Obed. I don't know why the neighbor women had a role in giving the child a name apparently they suggested it and it stuck.

Boaz apparently had no objection to it. He is the father of Jesse the father of David and this mention makes it very clear that whoever wrote this was contemporary with David and he expects his readers to know who David is. David had become prominent at this point.

No mention is made of Solomon so it's probably not after David's time and he says now this is the genealogy of Perez. Now Perez of course was the son of Judah. Why Judah is not mentioned I don't know but it's a given that Judah's line here came through his son Perez Perez begot Hezron.

Hezron begot Ram Ram begot Amminadab. Amminadab begot Nashon Nashon begot Salmon and we read by the way that Salmon married Rahab Rahab the harlot. We read that in Matthew chapter 1 when it's given the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1.4. It says Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab and Boaz begot Obed and Obed begot Jesse and Jesse begot David and so we come to the end of the story.

It certainly has a happy ending not only an ending in the lifetime of Ruth and Naomi who were in a sense their fortunes were turned around from being in the worst condition possible, poverty stricken widows without really natural prospects for change and that turning around to being a wealthy couple because Boaz was very wealthy and it's clear that Naomi was brought into their home not only as a grandmother to the child but also as a nurse so they all lived happily ever after but more importantly is that even ever after indeed what happened here did cause a happiness of living ever after. It's from them that David came and from David Jesus and from Jesus living happily ever after. So the story has a true fairy tale ending though it is a true story and a number of the things it exhibits would be of course the sovereignty of God in orchestrating things to bring about a good result for his people.

And so we come to the end of that story.