

Ruth-by Tommy Lee

### Chapter 1

The opening words put us in the days of the Judges—a time when *"there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21.25). But if you peek ahead you'll see that the final word in this book is *"David."* This beautiful little book gives us the family history and backstory of David, who will one day fulfill Israel's longing for a godly king. Of course, David will also be a sinful king; but he establishes the kingdom that will ultimately be fulfilled in the eternal and blessed reign of this world's forever and final King, Jesus—the Son of David and the Son of God. The story opens with a series of tragedies: famine, a family migration out of the land of promise and into Moab, the death of a husband, and the deaths of two sons (who were also husbands). No wonder Naomi changes her name from "Pleasant" to "Bitter" (Mara). See vss.13,20,21. But... Ruth the Moabitess shows steadfast love and selfless loyalty, putting Naomi's interests above her own, even in the face of protest. And she does so in the name of Yahweh ("LORD," v.17), declaring him to be her God (v.16). Hints of hope breaking through the darkness of tragedy.

### Chapter 2

Did you catch Naomi's great confidence, in the first chapter, in God's sovereign rule over all human affairs and events? Circumstances do not dictate her theology; rather, her theology is fully dictated by God's Word. And that's a beautiful thing, in every circumstance. But God is not just sovereign; he's also good and kind. His law stipulated that Israelite farmers were not to harvest the corners of their fields (see Leviticus 19.9; 23.22). They were to leave that grain standing there untouched, that the poor might come and glean from it, and that the farmer might be blessed in all the work of his hands (Deuteronomy 24.19). Ruth, in her poverty and vulnerability, sets out to do so. And she just so *"happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz"* (v.3). But there are no forces of lucky happenstance here. God is sovereignly ruling over every event. At the beginning of the day, Ruth had hoped *"find favor"* (v.2) in someone's eyes. Did she? Just try to count up all the kindnesses poured out on her by Boaz, one of their family *"redeemers"* (v.20). It's a costly grace that foreshadows the Greater Redeemer, who would one day descend from Boaz and Ruth.

### Chapter 3

The people of God have long loved to liken God's protective care to a mother bird spreading its wings over its young. See Psalm 17.8; 36.7, Matthew 23.37, etc., and see earlier in this book: Ruth 2.12! And now, in 3.9, we see Ruth—a recent convert to the faith—picking up on the lingo: *"I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."* She rightly sees God's protecting, redeeming care pictured in the selfless love of Boaz; she reminds Boaz of his own words from 2.12, and requests that he become God's answer to his own prayer by taking up the role of redeemer. But what does it mean that Boaz is a *"redeemer"* (2.20; 3.9,12)? In Israel each member of the family had a moral responsibility to

defend and provide for other members of the family who may become destitute or victims of injustice. Buying back land or freedom, sold in time of need (Leviticus 25.25,47-55), avenging murder (Numbers 35.19; Deuteronomy 19.6), providing an heir for a male relative who died childless (Deuteronomy 25.5-10), etc. But... this duty could be refused; it was not enforced by law; only by love.

#### **Chapter 4**

Boaz agreed, without hesitation, to the request of (Naomi and) Ruth... however, there is a closer relative who has the rights of kinsman-redeemer, if he would like. Why has Naomi not mentioned him before? Perhaps she thought it unlikely that the nearer relative would take on the sacrificial responsibility. Boaz will put the matter to the test, introducing some dramatic suspense at the end of this delightfully-told story. The nearer relative agrees to the purchase of property, but balks when the matter of marriage to Ruth is introduced. The idea is that, should the kinsman-redeemer and Ruth produce a male heir, the land would revert to Elimelech's (see 1.2) family name, *"to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance"* (v.5). The kinsman-redeemer would then effectively lose what he purchased; being a redeemer means costly, sacrificial love for the sake of another. The godly character of Boaz is becoming more and more apparent to the reader. The child born to Boaz and Ruth will *"redeem"* (vs.14,15) Naomi's lost family, and his name, *Obed*, means "servant." Of his line will come David... and later, Jesus, the Greater *"Obed"* and Redeemer of all the people of God.

#### **-Reflecting on Ruth-**

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Ruth. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Ruth before we move forward?

*"Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him."* Proverbs 30.5