The Book of Ruth

Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

1. An Introduction
2. Naomi: the prodigal daughter of the Old Testament – chapter 1
3. The Kinsman-Redeemer: a day in the field of Boaz – chapter 2
4. Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor – chapter 3
5. Redeemed and Claimed – chapter 4
6. Appendices

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

1 An Introduction

1.1 The art of story-telling

1.2 Presenting the Gospel in such a way that it meets the felt needs of Muslim peoples

1.3 The meaning of redemption in an honour-shame culture

1.4 The setting of Ruth in Biblical history

1.5 Some vital Old Testament passages

1.6 Four periods in the Book of Ruth

1.1 The art of story telling

Explaining the Gospel to Muslims is largely the art of story-telling. Jesus demonstrated genius in this art form and we all need to learn this art form. We not only need to learn it, but we need to teach new MBBs so they too can learn to share the Gospel within their own story-telling culture.

Why is oral Bible Storying relevant?

- Over 4 billion people receive the majority of their information through oral communication and over half of these can **only** receive information this way.
- In the Muslim world over 95% of all women can **only** be reached through oral communication.
- 75% of the Bible's content is stories.
- We only usually reach the 10% who are functionally literate.

People in most cultures remember stories. They know how to interpret stories and learn principles from them. It is not offensive and has been shown many times to be more effective than a propositional linear presentation of the Gospel as is so typical in western culture. [See 'The Four Spiritual Laws' for an example.]

The Book of Ruth is a short story told with consummate skill. It is the most beautiful in the entire Old Testament and it constitutes a model in the art of story-telling. Not only is it a model, but we can re-tell the story of Ruth today. It is a great story for all Muslims, but especially for Muslim women. It is the story of a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This is the most difficult relationship within nearly all Muslim cultures. [See Appendix 3 for the reasons.]

There are **three really important things** in most cultures in the Muslim World: food, marriage and children. These three things are really important to women. The Book of Ruth involves these three things.

1.2 Presenting the Gospel in such a way that it meets the felt needs of Muslim peoples

It is clear that where Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus Christ in numbers, it is because the Gospel is being presented to them:

- In a form they appreciate – story-telling
- In such a way that it meets their felt needs

Jesus said, ***"If I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself."*** (Jn. 12:32) Jesus was speaking primarily about the cross. We are to preach ***"Jesus Christ and Him crucified"*** and risen from the dead, for this is the heart of the Gospel.

In the New Testament there are several explanations (pictures/stories) given to different peoples and cultures about the significance of the cross.

- **The Book of Hebrews uses sacerdotal pictures**: the language of animal sacrifice, atonement, a High Priest offering up blood, the tabernacle, the altar etc.
- **The Book of Romans uses legal/forensic pictures:** the language of Roman law – guilt, penalty, justification, condemnation and no condemnation.
- **The Book of Ephesians uses the language of reconciliation** between man and God and between man and man.
- **The Book of Colossians demonstrates that when Jesus died, He disarmed the principalities and powers.** (Col. 2:15)

Now if we try to use sacerdotal pictures with Muslims to explain the cross, they don't understand at all. In Islam there are no priests, nothing like the tabernacle with its symbolism and there is no animal sacrifice for the atonement of sin. Before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Jews were very familiar with "the picture" and it made sense to present the Gospel to Jewish people in this way. It made sense and it met their felt needs. It is effectively useless to use this "picture" with Muslims as it is unintelligible.

If we try and use the forensic/legal language of Romans with Muslims, again it touches no felt needs in their hearts. Yet this is largely how we **have** presented the Gospel: *"Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of my sin and guilt."* Shari'ah is based not as Roman law on actions or as English common law on writs, but on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The basic principles of Shari'ah law are:

- The larger interest of society takes precedence over the interests of the individual.
- Although relieving hardship and promoting benefit are both among the prime objectives of the Shari'ah, the former takes precedence over the latter.
- A bigger loss cannot be inflicted to relieve a smaller loss or a bigger benefit cannot be sacrificed for a smaller one. Conversely, a smaller harm can be inflicted to avoid a bigger harm or a smaller benefit can be sacrificed for a larger benefit.

These principles are deeply ingrained in our Muslim friends and so the language of the Book of Romans is incomprehensible. For example: **The Four Spiritual Laws** is typical of a western approach.

Many Muslims live under the fear of evil spirits, jinnun, qarina, zar and impersonal forces such as the evil eye. This is the area of Folk Islam. To hear that ***"Christ disarmed the principalities and powers"*** is **good news**. And this aspect of the cross needs to be preached with great clarity.

The New Testament doesn't major on the **concept of redemption**. Nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus called a "Redeemer" ('lytrotes'). Probably the concept of redemption had become a political/nationalistic/eschatological term of rabbinic expectation of political freedom.

The term 'redemption' in the New Testament is based largely on the context of releasing slaves – i.e. deliverance from bondage by means of a ransom price being paid. [See Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6] So the death of Jesus is pictured as the payment price for the deliverance of those held captive by Satan. Until recently slavery was part of some Muslim cultures, but this New Testament terminology for redemption does not seem to meet a current felt need.

In the Old Testament, and in Semitic cultures in general, redemption has a far richer meaning. It is this meaning that is developed in the book of Ruth.

I hope to demonstrate that in an honour/shame culture (which most Muslim cultures are) redemption meets a very definite felt need.

1.3 The meaning of redemption in an honour-shame culture

There are two books in the Bible that bear a woman's name:

Esther has to do with **the preservation of the people of God**. Jewish people read it during the Passover. It tells how the redeemed one is seated on the throne and has power against all the power of the enemy and so defeats Satan and all his devices.

Ruth has to do with the **restoration** and **preservation of the inheritance** of the people of God. Jewish people read it at Pentecost.

There is great Pentecostal truth in this book of Ruth for it speaks about **redemption** (the word is used in its various forms 23 times).

The two key verses are:

2:20 - ***"Naomi said ..... 'that man is our close relative. He is one of our kinsman-redeemers*** ('go'el')*'"* or 'one that has the right to redeem'.

3:9 - ***"I am Ruth ..... spread the corner of your garment over me, for you are my Redeemer*** ('go'el')."

So Ruth teaches us about our Redeemer and how far-reaching is His redemption. All the other passages in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah, need to be defined in the light of Ruth's understanding of redemption. In the book of Ruth redemption does not mean merely deliverance from evil and hardship. It includes restoration of lost blessing and ultimate union with the Redeemer - being brought into oneness with Him.

Redemption is supremely an activity of grace. God does two things:

- He creates
- He redeems

Sadly, creation has been marred and spoilt, but God does not despair! He ***"made it again into another vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it"*** (Jer. 18:4). The Potter redeems the spoilt clay. So God is a Redeemer. He is willing to redeem even though it is extremely costly on His part. We have no right to be redeemed. It is sheer grace on His part. Ephesians 1:7 says, ***"We have redemption through His blood - the forgiveness of sins"***. But redemption is more than the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is related to restoration and the overruling of all loss caused by sin. **Folly, sin and pride cause us very great loss**. We lose the experience of "being blessed". We lose our happiness and rest. Mistakes and wrong choices can lead to terrible consequences. But failure is never final, for Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. Yes, He forgives the sin we confess to Him and then He begins to overrule in our situation for our good. When He does that **He does it with style**! He gives back more than we lost.

Redemption is related to a number of other key works. **Re** on the beginning of a word comes from the Latin prefix meaning 'again'.

Revival - Restoring - Renewing - Regeneration

God is doing something **again** after man has spoiled it. That is redemption. We experience God's redeeming power when:

- the Redeemer takes charge of us
- we live under the loving care of the Redeemer
- we enter into the rest (peace of heart) that our Redeemer is taking care of things
- we enter union (oneness) with our Redeemer

Isaiah 43:1, ***"But now this is what the Lord says. He who created you, O Jacob***
He who formed you, O Israel, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you.
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'"

Redemption leads to belonging to our Redeemer. We are His and we are forever with Him.

Isaiah 43:3, ***"For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I gave Egypt for your ransom …… since you are precious and honoured in My sight and because I love you …… Do not be afraid, for I am with you."***

Redemption means we are His and His for ever and He is ever with us.

Paul writing to the Corinthian believers expresses the heart of an evangelist and pastor in using the language of redemption, ***"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him"*** (2 Cor. 11:2).

Paul has "engaged" these new believers in Corinth to the Husband-Redeemer - the Lord Jesus. So Paul is very concerned about them that they remain pure until their "wedding day". The Corinthian believers were wandering in their affections, but they were engaged to Jesus. So Paul longs that they may **lay hold of a full redemption** and be made worthy of their Bridegroom-Redeemer.

Tit. 2:13-14, ***"While we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify <u>for Himself</u> a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good."***

So being redeemed makes us:

1. Pure - cleansed from all iniquity
2. A people for His own possession
3. Eager for good works

So the New Testament indicates for us that our redemption is not yet complete, but that it will be made complete when Jesus returns again. But we are presently in the process of being redeemed – purified from wickedness, eager for that which is good, being made ready to ***"be His very own"***.

We are 'lost in wonder, love and praise' for the great and the marvellous redemption of God. Does this understanding of redemption relate to Muslim cultures? Does it meet their felt needs? The answer is, 'Yes'.

In many Muslim cultures the **gaining and maintaining of honour** is more valued than anything else – even life itself. Avoiding shame is the corollary. This is done by shifting the blame to others when one's honour is threatened. Living with shame is a living death and it cannot be endured. Honour is only restored by shame being avenged or payment being made.

Honour and shame societies are usually based on **Islamic Semitic** values. They are common in the Bible.

Gen. 30:20, ***"Then Leah said, 'God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honour because I have born him six sons' ".***

Lk. 1:25, ***" 'The Lord has done this for me', she said, 'in these days He has shown His favour and has taken away my disgrace among the people' ".***

Not only did childlessness bring dishonour, shame and disgrace to women, but building up family honour is the greatest contribution an individual can make to his family.

Gen. 43:13, ***"Tell my father about <u>all the honour accorded</u> me in Egypt and about everything you have seen."***

The root of this very strong honour/shame culture is the preservation of the tribe in a harsh environment. It helps to maintain strong group solidarity and cohesion.

[See more about honour and shame in Appendix 1.]

Essentially, the problem is not so much how to build up honour or 'face', for honour cannot be acquired. It can only be given to you by one who is highly respected. The problem is how to deal with shame. **Shame must be shifted**! The life of a member is always expendable if the honour of the group is at stake. It is the **group** that is responsible for honour. If an individual has been shamed or has shamed him or herself, it is the responsibility of the

Khamsa - the Five - in Arab culture. "The Five" are the person's kin group. This is composed of all male relatives who are removed from him/her by no more than **five male links**. But in fact it is a 'go'el' (a Kinsman-Redeemer) the near relative, who is mainly responsible to act to defend and restore honour – often the eldest brother.

A Kinsman-Redeemer is responsible for **my** honour. He is:

- **a Kinsman** – Heb. 2:14
- **an Avenger** - see an example in Josh. 20:3 where a man avenges his brother's murderer.
- **a Deliverer** from shame
- **a Giver of honour** - he restores honour to me and my family.

Everyone needs a mighty, honourable, influential Kinsman-Redeemer (a relative with a great deal of 'wasta').

Ruth was **a person of no honour**, a foreigner, an unbeliever, a widow with no children, no land and no money. Naomi had **lost** any honour she had and was 'empty of honour' and full of shame. Neither of them could do anything about restoring their honour. Yet as the story of Ruth unfolds, the meaning of redemption becomes the restoration of honour! And honour is how this worthless, honourless person is brought into union with the Kinsman-Redeemer she didn't know about and whose role she didn't understand and how she found **rest** under the shadow of His wings.

[See the connection between honour and rest **and** shame and work in Appendix 1.]

So a 'go'el' is a champion and guardian of our honour and the one who is responsible to restore our honour when we have brought ourselves into shame!

1.4 The setting of Ruth in Biblical History

Ruth 1:1 ***"In the days when the judges ruled……"***

"In the days" is a common formula used to introduce **historical** narrative. So **Ruth is a historical story**, not an allegory. The judges ruled from about 1200 BC to 1050 BC. Ruth probably lived during the early part of Judges. Boaz was the son of Salmon and Rahab (Mt. 1:5) In the story he is middle-aged (in his 40s). This puts the story early. Ruth was probably written in David's reign - about 1000 BC - when the shoe ceremony had been forgotten (see Ruth 4). It is also obvious that the law of levirate marriages was falling into disuse even when the story occurred.

Perhaps Elimelech was born during the time of Othniel - the first of the judges, for his father gave him a great name - The Lord is King. There was a period when Eglon (who was exceedingly fat) king of Moab, ruled southern Palestine (Benjamin and Judah) from Jericho. Ehud, a young man from Benjamin, killed Eglon and the Moabites withdrew to Moab. It was during the following years of peace that the story of Ruth probably occurred [See Judges 3:11,30].

According to Jewish tradition (the Midrash) Ruth was the daughter of King Eglon. Moab (meaning a field) was the fertile area on the east side of the escarpment both north and south of the river Arnon that flows into the Dead Sea. You can see Bethlehem looking over the Dead Sea from the tops of the hills of Moab. The Moabites were the descendants of Lot. They worshipped an idol called Chemosh - a bronze idol whose arms enclosed a sacrificial fire. Moabites were called "the people of Chemosh" (Num. 21:18 and 2 Kings 11:33). Chemosh was a fire god and also a symbol of bad luck. So Chemosh had to be placated by sacrifice otherwise he would punish you with 'bad luck'. There was a large temple to Chemosh at Dibon - not far away from the present city of Kerak in Jordan.

The period of the Judges was largely one of apostasy, moral degradation and oppression. Much of the later chapters are a registry of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind. In Judges 21:25 (the last verse in the book) it says as a summary of this period, ***"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit"***.

The Holy Spirit emphasises this lawlessness and its consequences again in Judges 18:1 and 19:1. Again and again no application of the law of God resulted in a sorrowful story. It started soon after Joshua's death. Judges 2:10, ***"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord, nor what He had done for Israel"***. So (Judges 2:12) ***"They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt"***. This backsliding - following their own devices – led to deep moral corruption and great communal strife. The tribe of Benjamin was very nearly wiped out by the others. But again and again God rescued them, by the hand of judges, from the terrible consequences of backsliding.

The story of Ruth shows that even during this period, not all the people had abandoned God. God was still at work and people (like Boaz) believed that God would be faithful to His covenant.

So this story of redemption is given to us in the context of war and conflict - in the context of in hardship and disease. So redemption is out of conflict, out of awful suffering, out of war and out of sin and corruption. Even in these bad situations, God is still the God of redemption. And in similar situations God is still the God of redemption working to fulfil His promises. We shall see the glory of the Lord filling the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. We shall see Satan cast down. We shall see a new heaven and a new earth. We shall see sin cleansed away. We shall see the Lord reigning and honour and worship being given to Him throughout all of creation, for He is worthy of this.

Sometimes we may feel we are living in the Book of Judges. May this little book of Ruth help you to rejoice and be glad at your redemption out of a depressing situation as you find real union with Christ and find rest at His feet.

1.5 Some vital Old Testament passages

There are some major passages of Old Testament Law relating to redemption in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

- Lev. 25:23-25: **The Law relating to the Redemption of Land**

  In the event of a man having to sell his family's land because of poverty, the next of kin had the duty to redeem the land and restore it to him.

  So if you bought a piece of land, there was always the proviso that it may be redeemed at any time by the next of kin. The redeemer had the right to redeem and the purchaser of the land could not say no and refuse to sell the land.

  In the 50th year, the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-17), all land was restored to its original owners. So no land was permanently owned except by God and He gave it out originally to families according to the size of the family. The Year of Jubilee was a great festive year - a year that brought equality.

- Lev. 25:47-55: **The Law relating to the Redemption of People**

  In the event that a man had to sell himself into bonded labour in order to pay his debts and get out of poverty, the next of kin had the duty to redeem him – i.e. pay his debts and purchase his freedom.

- Deut. 25:5-10: Levirate Marriage

  If a man died without having any children, his brother had the duty to take his brother's widow as his wife. The children of this marriage then inherit all the property of the dead man. As a result of this law, no family could become extinct. So in the Year of Jubilee all property would go back to the original families.

  These laws of redemption belong to the realm of family law. Each member of a family had strong obligations to protect the others. None should be lonely or destitute.

  The metaphor of redemption includes the idea of **loosing** from a bond, setting free, buying back something that has been lost or sold. There are three key words in Hebrew:

- **'Pada'** (a verb)

  This is a legal term concerned with **the substitution required in terms of money for a person or animal**. It is mainly used in laws relating to the first-born. Every first-born male - human or animal - belonged to God and should be offered to God. The first-born of ritually clean animals were sacrificed on the altar. Unclean animals were 'pada' (redeemed) – See Ex. 13:13, 34:20; Num. 18:15-16. Humans were also 'pada' on payment of a fixed sum – Num. 18:16.

  The Levites are also said to be a 'pada' (a ransom) for the first-born of the people of God (Num. 3:44-45).

  Blood money was also paid over to a family to deliver a person from death. 'Pada' is also used in this context. [See Ex. 21:20; Num. 3:46-51, 18:16 also Ps. 49:7-9.]

- **'Karpar'**

  The meaning of this word is "to cover" - to cover sin, to atone, to make expiation. The related noun is 'koper' (a ransom) i.e. the price paid for a life that has become forfeit (see Ex. 21:30 and Ex. 30:11-16).

- **'Ga'al'**

  This means **to be free** – especially from shame. This is the word used in Ruth and Isaiah and other places. You can be 'made free' in two ways:

  - by being avenged
  - by repaying – the idea that freedom is secured by the payment of a price

So 'ga'al' is the legal term for setting free and restoring honour to some person or property or right to which he/she previously had a claim.

'Go'el' – the participle pf 'ga'al' – is the person who performs the duties of a "redeemer". 'Go'el' is used 13 times in Isaiah. It is the duty of a 'go'el' to buy back the freedom and restore the honour of a family member who has lost it. He had to buy back family property. He also had to avenge the murder of a family member and the person who had caused the shame (Num. 25 and Deut. 19:6). Finally he had to raise up children for a brother who had died leaving no son. In essence, a 'go'el' was **the protector and the guardian of family honour**.

Ruth had no brothers-in-law, so a more distant 'go'el' was expected to marry her and to give her honour. God is our 'Go'el' because of His covenant promise to be our God and we His people. 'Go'el's alone possess **the right** to redeem, but it seems they are under no obligation to do so.

So the greater sense of redemption is that God is the 'Go'el' (Redeemer) of His people (see Is. 41:14; 43:1; 44:6; 47:40). But God also redeems individuals in distress (see Gen. 48:16; 2 Sam. 4:9; Job 19:25; Ps. 26:11; 49:15; 69:18; 103:4). There is one specific reference to redemption from sin – Ps. 130:8, ***"He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins"***.

1.6 Four Periods in the Book of Ruth

- **Ruth as an outcast**

  Ruth probably means **friendship**, but she was a Moabitess. In Deut 23:3 we read, ***"No …… Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation."***

  Why? They were under God's judgment for hiring the prophet Balaam to curse Israel as they passed through Moab on their way to the Promised Land. So they themselves were a cursed people. Ruth was also under that judgment.

  And so are we! ***"We were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"*** (Eph. 2:12). Our situation was the same as Ruth's!

- **Ruth as an 'Israelite' in Moab**

  Ruth married Mahlon - an Israelite – so she was treated as an Israelite under the covenant of God. So legally she was an Israelite, but she was still living in the land of Moab - without any honour.

  Lots of us are like that. We have been called. We have been saved. We know the mercy and the grace of God. We too are New Covenant people, but we are still living in Moab away from honour and all the privileges of that relationship. We are living in shame.

- **Ruth growing to know her Redeemer**

  Ruth left Moab and went to the Land of Promise. She began to know and understand that she had a 'go'el' – a redeemer – who would restore her honour.

- **Ruth Redeemed**

  Ruth is united to her kinsman-redeemer – belonging to him. This brought with it blessing, hope, a home, children and great honour.

All of us are living in one of these four periods. We should be living as much as possible in period four - living in full redemption now and waiting for a fuller redemption to come!

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

Chapter One

2. Naomi: The prodigal daughter of the Old Testament

2.1 Naomi emptied (1-5)

- A God-dishonouring choice (1-2)
- A miserable experience (3-5)

2.2 Naomi returns from the Far Country (6-22)

- Good news from home (6)
- A testing time (7-13) for:
  - ✧ Naomi: the backslider coming home
  - ✧ Orpah: who began well but turned back
  - ✧ Ruth: the outsider who came in
- The final decision (14-18) – Ruth's declaration

2.3 Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem (19-22)

- A hearty welcome (19)

2. Naomi: The prodigal daughter of the Old Testament

2.1 Naomi emptied

"I went out full and the Lord has brought me home again empty."

- A God-dishonouring choice (1-2)

  Before the implications of the message of redemption, we have the story of trouble and loss - a situation where there is a need of redemption. There was a famine in the land and Elimelech leaves Bethlehem (the house of food) and Judah (the heritage of praise). Taking Naomi with him, he goes over Jordan and 'sojourns' in Moab. The Hebrew word implies a temporary stay.

  Adversity will drive you either nearer to God or nearer to the world. If faith does not cause you to cling to God, the flesh will drag you away from Him. Why did Elimelech leave? Perhaps it was a measure of his despair over the chaotic state of the land. But he forgot his God. He probably thought of himself as a realist. Canaan as a land of milk and honey was a myth in his experience!

  So many backslide, not because the world is so very attractive, but because Bethlehem has become so dry. Jesus does not seem so real any more. And so we go and 'visit' Moab for a short while! We allow our love for Jesus to grow cold. We harden our hearts against the Word of God. We forget 1 Jn. 2:15, ***"Love not the world"***. We do what we think is best and we end up in Moab.

  Often, early in our Christian life there is much joy and peace. Jesus our King is ruling over us. We are living in the House of Food (Bethlehem) and we are really satisfied with life. It is said of wisdom, ***"All her ways are pleasantness and all her paths are peace"*** (Prov. 3:7). Often it starts this way in our Christian life. Perhaps this is why Naomi was called in the way she was. Naomi means 'my pleasant one'. It is the feminine form of Naaman. But the Lord disciplines those He loves. When we try and escape the discipline, we end up in Moab!

  Now there was famine in the land because God was dealing with His people's hardness of heart. Amos 8:11 speaks of a famine not of bread nor a thirst for water, but a famine of our hearing the Word of the Lord. In order to heal their backsliding God had sent famine.

  Note the progression, they went to Moab as "tourists" but they settled down there. It was family connections that kept them there. Elimelech married his two sons Mahlon and Chilion to two local Moabitess girls. Why? We are not told. With the death of King Eglon many men died. Perhaps with the shortage of marriage partners the Moabite families didn't feel too dishonoured to marry off their daughters to strangers. Ruth (whose Moabite name means 'friendship') married Mahlon (a Canaanite name meaning 'weakling' or 'sick and wasting'). Orpah (whose Moabite name means 'a fawn' 'a little deer' implying youthfulness – immaturity) married Chilion (again a Canaanite name). Orpah and Ruth are Moabite names and are not found in Hebrew form.

- A miserable experience (3-5)

  The bitterness of backsliding was terrible and the fruit of disobedience is always sour. Moving to Moab was a disastrous move and grief followed grief for this little family. First Elimelech dies. Then the two sons die - perhaps as a result of malaria that was endemic in the area.

  We don't know whether Naomi's heart was in the move to Moab. But she followed her adventurous and restless husband. God's love for us is such that as soon as we are away from Him, He works to bring us back to Himself again. So he disciplines us. The work 'discipline' has no thought of punishment in it. It means being 'taught'. Sometimes the

Lord's discipline causes us to suffer loss. This is not punishment. Restoration is the purpose. However terrible the loss is, it never matches our sin and rebellion for only infinite punishment is sufficient for that. The only adequate punishment for sin is that which Jesus bore for us on the cross.

Loss as a result of discipline is not punishment. It is in order to bring us back to God so that He can bless us. A guilty conscience always misinterprets God's dealings with us and makes us feel that God is against us. This is never so! He ***"Never imputes to us our trespasses"*** (2 Cor. 5:19). But Naomi felt bitter!

In a Middle East culture Elimelech brought great dishonour and shame upon himself and on his family. He left his land and his family. He married his sons to heathen wives. In the cultural setting of the Middle East he got what he deserved! Sorrow is expressed for Naomi who was very greatly shamed and in a very hopeless situation. Dishonourable choices had led to great shame.

So Naomi, whose life had been full with a husband and two sons, was emptied of joy and happiness. Emptiness implies no insight into God's Word, no power over sin and no fellowship with God.

It probably involved financial poverty. The cost of three funerals had probably bankrupted the three widows! Elimelech had **sowed to the flesh** and he died. [See Rom. 8 & Gal. 6] Moses, **relying on the flesh**, struck a rock. And Moses died in Moab (Deut. 34:5-6). Sodom's immorality was Moab's beginning (Gen. 19:30-38) and Sodom's end was Moab's fate (Zeph. 2:9). According to Jer. 48:11, the source of Moab's attraction was lust and the cause of Moabite behaviour was laziness. Was it this that attracted Elimelech - Moab as a land of ease and indolence? Perhaps it was no coincidence that King Eglon was very fat.

None of us realises how much discipline we need, for we have no appreciation of how much was lost in the Fall or the extent to which the divine image was defaced in us. We have no idea how extensive is the reign of self in our lives. But God knows! And He is engaged in an unrelenting operation to redeem **all** that was lost. So He is always working to restore us in those areas where we are 'still in Moab' - where self has shown little or no surrender. We must surrender!

There is a Bill Gaither song that goes like this:

If there ever were dreams that were lofty and noble,
Those were my dreams at the start.
And the hopes for life's best were the hopes that I harboured
Deep down in my heart.
But my dreams turned to ashes, my castles all crumbled,
My fortune turned to loss.
So I wrapped it all in the rags of my life
And laid it at the cross.

So in 1:20 Naomi says to friends on her return to Bethlehem, ***"Don't call me Naomi*** (my pleasant one). ***Call me 'Mara' because the Almighty has made my life very bitter."*** (Mara means bitterness) And in 1:21 she says, ***"I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty".***

In Exodus 15 the bitter waters of Mara were sweetened by ***"a tree appointed by the Lord"***. The name Mary is derived from the word Mara and Mary was the first word spoken by the risen Lord Jesus, turning her sorrow and bitterness into joy and pleasantness. By the application of the death of Jesus who died on the tree, bitter things become sweet!

It is in the loss of all that we have that God becomes to us all we need. Naomi thinks (v. 13) that ***"the Lord's hand has gone out against"*** her and (v. 20) ***"The Lord has afflicted me. The Lord has brought misfortune upon me."*** But she is mistaken! God is stretching out His hands of love to her. He is drawing her home. He is bringing her back to the Land of Promise.

Redemption is not just restoration. It is making it better than it ever was before! The prodigal son's relationship with his father was better after his return than before he left for the far country. So God loved Naomi and wanted to draw her back and bless her. But Moab screws up your thinking and so she says that God was dealing with her bitterly.

God delights to turn 'Maras' into 'Naomis'. As Is. 61:3 puts it, ***"To provide for those who grieve ..... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair"***. Read the great promises of restoration in Jeremiah 33:6-18.

2.2 Naomi returns from the far country

- Hearing the news from home

  After ten years in Moab, Naomi hears that the famine is over in Bethlehem and that there is bread again in the Land of Promise. So, like the prodigal son who said, ***"I will arise and go to my father"***, Naomi decides to go back to her land and her people. It is hard to return home empty for it reveals our shame to all. Jer. 2:19 says,

  "Your wickedness will punish you,
  Your backsliding will rebuke you.
  Consider then and realise
  How bitter and evil it is for you
  When you forsake the Lord your God,
  And have no awe of me,
  Declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty."

  But back in Judah people had been repenting and God had been gracious and had healed their land. God's promise was: ***"Trust in the Lord and do good. So shall you dwell in the land and truly you will be fed."***

  Famine drove Elimelech out of Bethlehem and it was starvation that appears to have compelled Naomi to return to Bethlehem. Naomi **heard**, she **believed** what she heard and belief led to **action**. Sadly many backsliders hear the Good News but remain in Moab.

  There are three widows in this story - Naomi, Orpah and Ruth. All three of them decide to move to Bethlehem. There are three sorts of people who want to come home to the Father's blessing. They were tested by the choices they made.

- A testing time (7-13)

  Naomi represents a backslider coming home.

  Orpah represents an outsider who starts well but turns back.

  Ruth represents an outsider who came in to a new home.

  - **Naomi** – the backslider coming home

    Naomi came back to her husband's land, now very neglected and overgrown after ten years - back to the old village house, now probably broken down and in need of major repair. And it is like that with us. When we come back to God we come back with nothing. We are so empty that there is nothing we can do to regain our lost inheritance. But ***"better a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith"*** (Prov. 15:16).

    There can be **no returning without separation**. If you want to feast at the Father's table, you have to abandon the pigs' food. You can't commute between Moab and Bethlehem. All that was of Moab had to be left behind. But in fact it was not worth anything. All Naomi left behind were three graves and a lot of rubbish.

Jesus said in Mt. 16:26, ***"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** In other words, if you have lost your soul, what can you do to undo the transaction? The answer is, 'absolutely nothing'! For Naomi there was nothing she could do to redeem that which had been lost. We have limitless power to commit sin, but no power to redeem.

In spite of her poverty and her humiliation and shame, she returned home. Perhaps she realised that God, in His grace, can give honour to those who have been hopelessly shamed. Titus 3:3-4 possibly describes backsliders, ***"Foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving different lusts and pleasures ..... but ..... the kindness and love of God the Saviour appeared."***

- **Orpah** - the outsider who turned back

  Orpah starts out with Ruth and Naomi (v.7) to return to Bethlehem. But when Naomi tells her and Ruth to go back to their Moabite families, she decides to go back to her home in Moab (v. 14). So she says farewell to Naomi her mother-in-law and Ruth her sister-in-law and goes back to her people and her gods (v. 15).

  She started well, but then Orpah was overwhelmed by the natural - the need for a husband and a family to look after her. She sought security among her own people. 'Blood is thicker than water.' She was a Moabitess and so she went back. Like Demas, she loved Moab and all that it represented too much! The protection of marriage is very important in the Middle East and barrenness is a great cause of shame.

  Many make a gesture of intent but never go. The child said, "I go sir", but never went. Seeds of intent like this take no root. They wilt when tested. Why? The old Adamic bedrock is not broken. The Moabitish root is not axed. The motives of every follower of Jesus will be tested. Naomi offered nothing and could offer nothing. Only undying love would do and Orpah didn't have it. Emotion is not to be confused with devotion.

  Heb. 10:22 says, ***"Let us draw near with a <u>sincere heart</u>, in full assurance of faith"***. Perhaps that was Orpah's heart. She had no sincere heart. She really didn't want to go to the country of the Lord of Hosts. Bethlehem was in her eye, but Moab was still in her heart.

  "Remember Lot's wife ....." She too started well, but looked back. There are many who have turned like this 'grandmother of Moab' into pillars of salt. So let us be warned! Let us draw near with a sincere heart - with an honest heart - covering up nothing.

- **Ruth** - the outsider who came in

  So Orpah leaves, but Ruth cleaves. Orpah leaves the pages of history, but not so Ruth! Ruth had **a steadfast heart**. Three times she was tested and urged to go back, but she steadfastly went on. The Hebrew word for being steadfastly-minded is 'amats'. God uses this word 'amats' to Joshua, but it is translated ***"be of good courage"***. What God was urging Joshua to do was to steel himself against any dissuasion. In Psalm 27:14 we are advised to, ***"Wait on the Lord, be of good courage*** (a different word) ***and He will strengthen your heart"*** (amats).

  So Ruth had 'amats' - a strengthened, steadfast purpose. She was like Paul who said, ***"One thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind. I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling ....."***. This is an 'amat'- ish thing to say. Paul also said, ***"Let no man take your crown"***. We need steadfast hearts like Ruth's. For her, Jordan was the frontier of destiny and the end of despair.

  Why was Ruth so determined to stay with Naomi? Maybe she remembered Balaam's words to her people of Moab (Num. 24:17):

"There shall come a Star out of Jacob,
And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel
And shall smite the corners of Moab
Out of Jacob shall come He
That shall have the Dominion."

Perhaps, dimly at first, she understood the great Messianic promises and had faith. Little did Ruth realise her significant role in the fulfilment of these prophecies.

Perhaps it was the sight of Naomi turning back, in some measure, to God and sensing that here there was a God of restoration and forgiveness - a God who is merciful to sinners, ***"The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin"*** (Ex. 34:6-7). How very, very different from Chemosh, the God of Moab!

So often we try and present ourselves as good people. We imagine a life of holiness will have a great effect on people and to some extent this is true. But often the result is that our God is only the God of good people. Ruth saw Naomi repenting and returning and maybe it was this that won her heart. Maybe she said in her heart, *'This God will be my God, for I am as great a sinner as Naomi and if Naomi's God accepts and forgive sinners, then I qualify. If He only accepts Jews, then I don't'.*

It is when **they** see the 'brokenness' of our lives, our accepting that we can do nothing to restore our honour; when they see our repentance followed by our joy in forgiveness, that people say to themselves, *'This is a God for someone like me'* !

In other words, the world sees Jesus in us much more effectively, not when they see holy people - this doesn't draw them to Jesus, but rather it discourages them as being not good enough to qualify - but when they see our confession of sin, our repentance and our returning to God.

- The final decision (14-18) - Ruth's declaration

  "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God."

  This is one of the great classic passages in all world literature! We are thrilled with Ruth's words. Ruth's choices were really three:

  - ✧ She chose to follow Naomi, prompted by love and loyalty.
  - ✧ She chose Naomi's people to her people and chose to live among them.
  - ✧ She chose Naomi's God to be her God

  This is often how people come to faith.

Step One
The 'would-be' disciple comes upon people he knows and trusts. He observes that they have a peace and a radiance that he has not yet found. He spends time with them. Discipleship always starts with a search to know Jesus. In John's Gospel chapter one Jesus saw two disciples following Him so He asked them, ***"What are you looking for?"*** They replied, ***"Master, where are you living .....?"*** They understood that the starting point in a life of discipleship was to be with Him where He was. The challenge to us is to give time to be available to people who want to be with us.

Step Two
When it appears obvious to others that we derive our joy and our liberty from a lifestyle of repentance and that it is not true that God is good to us because we are good people, they are interested in 'Our God'. They see that the secret of receiving the grace of God is to be a repentant sinner. Then these disciples decide to join in and begin to repent of their sin.

Step Three
When the disciples begin to repent, then they begin to know personally for themselves the God of grace.

So with Ruth there was the renunciation of her family and her tribe in order to be with the one that she loves - Naomi. She counts her past as loss and she chooses the path to life. ***"I will go where you go"*** - turning her back on her old ways. She chose companionship with the people of God – ***"Let your people be my people"***. She chose to come under the wing of God - the covenant-keeping God.

Ruth fully fulfils Psalm 45:10-11.
"Listen, O daughter. Consider and give ear. Forget your people and your father's house. The King is enthralled with your beauty. Honour Him for He is your Lord."

The same choice was given to Ruth and to Orpah - a choice of faith based on love. Orpah turned back - just as many disciples of Jesus turned back (Jn. 6:66). But Ruth did not. She followed and she found:

- a new **path for her feet**
- a new **place for her home**
- a new **people for her friends**
- a new **power for her life**
- a new **prospect for her future**

So a **new direction** led to a **new home**. A new home led to a **new relationship** and this led to a **new adoration**.

Notice that Ruth invokes the name of the Lord to maintain her new allegiance. She says, ***"The Lord do so to me and more also ……. "***. This is the first place this phrase is used in Scripture. But it was remembered well. Eli used the phrase in order to get Samuel to tell the truth (1 Sam. 3:17). Jonathan used it in his pledge to David (1 Sam. 20:13) and Ruth's great-grandson, David, used it as well (1 Sam. 25:22)!

2.3 Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem

So Naomi came home with Ruth to Bethlehem after ten years in Moab. When they get to Bethlehem Naomi says, ***"The Lord has brought me home"***. Ruth could have said, *"The Lord has brought this outsider in"!*

They arrived at the great time - as the barley harvest was starting - early April. So they came back at harvest time. The barley harvest was just after Passover. After the Passover festival the first fruits of the barley harvest were brought to the tabernacle (Lev. 23:4-11). And Passover time was when God's people remembered God's great salvation when God became their **Deliverer**. The first fruits sacrifice was a reminder of when God became their **Provider**. What a great day for Naomi to arrive home!. How surprised and excited Ruth must have been. She must have discovered:

- ✧ that she could have peace with God
- ✧ that she had been delivered out of the power of Satan
- ✧ that she was under the care of protection of God
- ✧ that she could enjoy the riches of His grace

- Naomi is received with a hearty welcome (v. 19)

"All the town was <u>moved</u> by Naomi's return….." Clearly there was a recognition of her and an acceptance of her.

So we have seen how Elimelech **went out**. We have seen how Naomi **came back**. Now we will see how Ruth finds a **way in** to the very heart and fold of God.

William Wordsworth wrote a poem about Naomi, picturing her at the end of her life as:

"A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller twixt life and death.
The reason firm, the temperate will
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill;
A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort and command.
And yet a spirit still and bright
With something of an angelic light."

And all this was because she repented and returned to the Land of Promise and to her God.

Questions

Chapter 1

1. What main things do you learn about Elimelech's family?
2. Why did Elimelech and his family leave Bethlehem?
3. After Naomi's husband and sons died, what would it have been like for Naomi?
4. What did Naomi say to Ruth and Orpah?
5. Often, when the Israelites lived with other people, they worshipped their idols. Did this happen in Elimelech's family? What does this tell us about them?
6. Why did Naomi want Orpah and Ruth to go back to Moab?
7. Why didn't Ruth go back like Orpah did? Discuss v. 16-18.
8. When Naomi went back to Bethlehem, what did she find? What did she do? In the Hebrew language Naomi means 'pleasant' and a Mara means 'bitter'. Was what Naomi did good or not?

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

Chapter Two

3. The Kinsman-Redeemer : A Day in the Field of Boaz

3.1 Ruth begins to work (1-7)

- Boaz as a relative (v.1)
- Ruth's great humility (v.1)
- Ruth's good fortune (v.3)
- Boaz' first impressions of Ruth

3.2 Boaz shows kindness to Ruth (8-16)

- The first interview with Boaz
- Living under the shadow of God's wings
- The second interview with Boaz

3.3 Ruth returns to Naomi (17-23)

- An understanding of a Kinsman-Redeemer

3. The Kinsman-Redeemer

3.1 Ruth begins to work (v.1-7)

- Boaz as a relative (v.1)

  There are four words used in chapter two for "relative". This demonstrates a growing recognition of Boaz' stature and grace.

  - v. 1: ***"Now Naomi had a relative*** ('moda')***."*** Moda would indicate a general relative of unspecified closeness.
  - v. 3: Boaz is of ***"the clan"*** of Elimelech ('mispachah'). The Hebrew word signifies the larger extended family.
  - v. 20: ***"That man is our close relative*** ('qarob')" 'Qarob' is a relative you are closely related to = in Arab culture to one of 'the five'.
  - v. 20: ***"A Kinsman-Redeemer*** ('go'el')

  So in the chapter Naomi and Ruth have a growing appreciation of the value of Boaz as a Redeemer. So it is with us of the Lord Jesus.

  The name Boaz means 'in him there is strength' and he is described as 'a man of standing'. Behind the Hebrew word is a man gifted in every way - a man of honour. Boaz was mighty in:

  - pedigree - back to Judah through Perez
  - power/'wasta'
  - authority – see v. 5
  - graciousness – see v.10
  - provisions – see v. 14-16
  - his ability to redeem

  He was a "type" of Christ, but he falls far short of Jesus as a Redeemer for in lifting Ruth from poverty and anonymity and dishonour, he sustained no impoverishment himself. But Jesus suffered.

  But Naomi, perhaps the poorest widow in the land, had as a relative the wealthiest man in the land! Ruth knew nothing of this man. That is typical of us. So many believers have very little idea how wonderful are all the gifts of grace that God has in store for us. We rejoice in the forgiveness of sins. We are thankful for the gift of eternal life, but we have little idea of what full salvation is.

  Victor Hugo wrote a beautiful poem in French about Boaz. Hugo pictures this wealthy, middle-aged, unmarried man going out of his way in simple kindness to help a weary girl gleaning in his field. Boaz did that, but it is a parable of a much greater truth. Let us see how the story unfurls.

- Ruth's great humility (v.1)

  To grow in an experience of grace you need to start with humility of spirit. Where were Naomi and Ruth **staying**? Possibly in Elimelech's old derelict family home. They were far too poor to renovate it. But it was spring. The cold winter rainy season was over. At least the house gave them some seclusion. Their **second problem** was food or income to buy food. It was barley harvest time - early April – and so Ruth volunteered to glean. There was a lot of difference between a gleaner and a reaper. A reaper is a recognised worker who receives wages. As a gleaner Ruth has no status. By her clothes she is obviously a poverty-stricken alien widow. Perhaps she still felt sad. Certainly she was fearful. In his "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats wrote:

  "The sad heart of Ruth when sick for home,
  she stood in tears amid the alien corn."

As a young Moabite widow, she knew that she courted rejection by the Hebrews who hated Moab (for Moab had just ruled over them for 18 years and they had been treated very badly by the occupying force). Every instinct in Ruth must have suggested flight and the avoidance of confrontation. But the young widow mastered herself and went out to glean. She probably wasn't welcomed. Only her marriage to a son of Bethlehem and the shield of Naomi's goodness protected her from verbal and physical abuse and worse.

- Ruth's good fortune (v. 3)

  By 'happenstance' Ruth chose to glean in the field of Boaz. It was fairly probable that this was near the neglected field of Elimelech as Boaz and Elimelech were related. But Scripture says, ***"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord"*** and Ruth's choice of field is an example of this principle. ***"In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."***

  Harvesting of the barley took several steps:

  1. Cutting the ripened standing grain with hand-held sickles. The men usually did this work. Bronze Age/Iron Age.
  2. Binding the fallen grain stalks into bundles (sheaves). The women usually did this work.
  3. Uncut grain on the borders and corners of the field was left for the gleaners. Also a gleaner could pick up any cut stalks that accidentally were not bound into a sheaf.
  4. The sheaves were taken to a threshing floor - a hard flat surface on the top of a hill.
  5. The stalks were threshed. Small amounts were threshed by beating the stalks and ears with a flail. This was labourers' work.
  6. The winnowing process took place next - usually in the late afternoon/early evening when an onshore breeze blew off the Mediterranean. The threshed material was thrown in the air and the wind blew away the chaff.
  7. The grain was then sifted to remove all non-grainy bits.
  8. Finally the pure grain was bagged ready for grinding into flour.

  As a gleaner, Ruth would have had to do all these steps before she went home in the evening. That first day she gleaned about an ephah (about 2.2 litres or 4 gallons) - about 23 kg of grain. She was amazingly successful! She must have worked very, very hard.

- Boaz first impressions of Ruth : Her character searched out

  Boaz was a man of authority. Now we see the sphere of his authority. Notice the contrasts in this story between the man who had everything and the woman who had nothing.

  Ruth was gleaning and Boaz arrived by chance - her first sight of him! Do you remember your first sight of Jesus? Andrew never forgot his first sight of Jesus when John the Baptist pointed him out as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:36). Peter's first sight of Jesus is recorded in Jn. 1:42 and Nathaniel's in Jn. 1:49. Do you remember the day when you first saw the Lord? Perhaps you were gleaning for truth, hoping to find a handful of help for this life. Suddenly the Lord was there. Interest was awakened, but you still had pitifully low expectations.

  Boaz came from Bethlehem (as Jesus did!). What were Ruth's first impressions of Boaz? Perhaps she noted the gracious way he greeted his workers, ***"The Lord be with you"***. Boaz, an ancestor of Jesus, unwittingly speaks the truth about Immanuel. Jesus did

come and fulfil that greeting, ***"God with us"***!

Boaz is a model of servant-leadership. So often 'lording it' and leisure go together. Not so in Boaz's life. He is found in the fields with his workers and in the field he is the master. The Lord Jesus must be pre-eminent wherever He is. He is to be central to every scene. The field is His. The harvest is His. The reapers are His. The food is His and the rewards are His.

There was nothing like this in Moab in terms of master-servant relationships. Here there was a spirit of love, honour and grace. Ruth doesn't yet know that she has a claim on Boaz as the champion of her honour. Nor does she know that he is ready to answer that claim. Ruth's first impressions of Boaz are: here is the master - the Lord of the harvest. He is rich, honourable and given great respect by all. She was glad to be in his field for he looked kind and gracious.

Our expectations of what Jesus our Kinsman-Redeemer can do for us are usually so low and we have no sense of a **claim** upon our Redeemer.

There is a nameless servant set over the reapers (v. 5). This person introduces Ruth to Boaz. The first question Boaz asks his overseer of the reapers is, ***"Whose young woman is that?"*** Everyone belongs to someone in a tribal society. This is such a typical Middle Eastern question! Not, "Who is that?" but "whose?" In fact we are all either of the devil or God is our "Father" - our owner.

The answer: the overseer says four things about Ruth:

- ✧ She is the Moabitess who came back with Naomi from Moab (v. 6). This is who Ruth was according to the flesh. She was from Moab. But this also indicates who Ruth is **by faith** – for she left Moab. There is a realm into which we are born and another realm where we are born again. The 'far country' is what forms us by nature. The fields of Boaz are where we are by faith.
- ✧ She had correctly asked the overseer if she could glean (v. 7). She took nothing for granted. As a foreigner she had no right to glean.
- ✧ She acknowledged her humble role. She was not a reaper, but only a gleaner. She was not working for Boaz, but for herself and Naomi. She was claiming mercy.
- ✧ She worked with diligence and continuance. Except for a brief rest under an awning, she had worked hard - lots of work and little rest.

  So there is a progression. Ruth starts work hoping to enjoy getting some food by the end of the day. Gleaners hope to gain. Reapers give of their labour.

3.2 Boaz shows kindness to Ruth (v. 8-16)

- The first interview with Boaz (v. 8-13)

Ruth recognised Boaz as the master and probably cowered in the background. But Boaz comes up to speak to her. She had seen his face, but now he speaks to her. Note that Boaz approached Ruth, ***"We love Him because He first loved us"***.

Boaz's instructions to Ruth

- ✧ ***"Don't go to another field"***.

  Don't look for food anywhere else. Wasn't that His first instruction to you? We tend to have a spiritual wanderlust and have no conscience about it. We flit from field to field. Some sort of nomadic spirit grips believers. They should go from strength to strength, but they merely go from church to church or from spiritual fad to spiritual fad. So many 'other fields' are presented to us - rules to keep, experiences we must have, steps to take if we are to become victorious, The

result? We are stressed. We struggle in our own strength and we never make the grade! See Gal. 3:3, ***"If we have begun in the Spirit, don't let us seek to be made perfect through the flesh"***.

✧ ***"Follow after my other servants"***. (v. 9)

Ruth was told to join the crowd of other servant girls who were binding the stalks in sheaves. Their friendship would be very helpful. As a foreigner, as a young widow with no protector and no one to avenge her, she was easy prey! Effectively Boaz was beginning to take responsibility for her and effectively Ruth was being incorporated into the **reaper band**.

Following after other believers is very good advice. Soon after I became a believer, I was told to read the book, 'The Shadow of the Almighty' a biography of Jim Elliott and to do everything Jim did when he was at college! Paul said, ***"Be a follower of me, as I am of Christ"***. Is this risky?

"Where He may lead I'll follow.
My trust in Him repose.
And every hour in perfect peace
I'll say, 'He knows, He knows."

✧ ***"Drink from the water."*** (v. 9)

The water from the well in Bethlehem (that David so much loved) was probably stored in pots under the awning for the reapers. Ruth had not presumed to drink.

"How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast in the abundance of your house. You give them drink from the river of your delights." Ps. 36:7

So Boaz promises Ruth three things:

1. To help her gleaning by joining the reapers
2. Protection from harm
3. Water whenever she is thirsty

Ruth's reaction to Boaz

She falls on her face before Boaz! I think that Jesus finds our spontaneous reactions to His grace **precious**! Ruth asks why? ***"Why have I found favour in your eyes?"*** This is not an intellectual "why", but a worshipping "why" - a "why" out of which the worship of love is born.

It is not the wrath of God that usually leads us to repentance. This is certainly true of most Muslims. What calls us to fall at God's feet is a revelation of His goodness and graciousness.

I cannot tell why He whom angels worship,
Should set His love upon the sons of men;
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden.
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here.

So Ruth, who placed herself in the place of humility, bows down lower. **If** we humble ourselves enough to confess that we are failed Christians and that we have lost our honour and we feel the shame of disgrace, it is **then** that we find ourselves as the object of His special attention. As we bow before Him acknowledging our poverty, we will find great promises coming our way, much encouragement and cries of ***"Don't stop her. Don't stop her"***. ***"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved through Him."*** (Jn. 3:17)

Immediately after this interview Ruth's standing (her 'face') improved! The Lord of the Harvest had changed her status. She was no longer a stranger – a despised gleaner. She was now among the reapers! Boaz had treated her as a friend!

" I've found a friend, O such a friend.
He loved me ere I knew him."

Boaz gave her honour! He restored her 'face'! She had someone who would champion her cause. She had 'wasta'! And as she experienced grace, her mind and heart were filled with **wonder** (v. 12).

And she **wondered**! Wondering is a very human quality. Cows up in the mountains of Switzerland don't wonder at the astonishing beauty of the scenery. Out in the desert at night, I often wondered at the stillness and the beauty and the order of the stars. Even in a storm on the north Cornwall coast, seeing the enormous waves smash against the granite blocks, one is full of wonder.

Wondering brought Ruth on her face before Boaz - a picture of faith and faith wonders. Boaz tells her why he is giving her honour.

i) He knows her works (v. 11)

ii) He knows her choices (v. 12)

i) He knows her works

Jesus says to the churches in west Turkey (Rev. 2 and 3):

"I know your works." He says this not to judge us, but in order to show His sympathy and tenderness. ***"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance ....."*** That is what Boaz says to Ruth. He appreciates what she has done - forsaking her family and homeland in order to support Naomi.

ii) He knows her choices

Boaz hopes that she is beginning to enjoy ***"being under the wings of God."***

- Living under the shadow of God's wings

Boaz says to Ruth (v. 12), ***"May you be richly rewarded by the Lord ..... under whose wings you have come to take refuge"***. Ruth had chosen voluntarily to place herself under God's wings and so claim His protection.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.
For in you my soul takes refuge.
I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings
Until the disaster has passed." Ps. 57:1

"Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings." Ps. 63:7

"He will cover you with His feathers
And under His wings you will find refuge.
His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." Ps. 91:4

Under God's wings, we find:

- ✧ a place of refuge
- ✧ a place of refreshment
- ✧ a place of rejoicing
- ✧ a place of rest

God wants us to come under His wings, but we often refuse (Mt. 23:37). Under His wings the Lord gives us:

- ✧ Fullness of blessing
- ✧ Fullness of salvation

- ✧ Fullness of grace
- ✧ Fullness of His Spirit
- ✧ Fullness of His peace
- ✧ Fullness of His riches
- ✧ Fullness of His love
- ✧ Fullness of His joy

And there is more to come in heaven!

So Ruth, filled with wonder, asks that grace would continue – "grace upon grace".

"Thou who was rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor.
Thrones for a manger did surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who was rich beyond all splendour
All for love's sake becamest poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising
All for love's sake becamest man.
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards by Thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising
All for love's sake becamest man."

- The second interview with Boaz (v. 14)

Probably two or three hours later - soon after noon (about 2pm) - Boaz invites Ruth to join in a meal with his other workers. She started the day as an alien, poverty-stricken gleaner. She had been given honour/ 'face'! Now she is given more 'face'. Eating a meal with the master would give great honour. During the meal Boaz personally offers her 'bread'. She and other poor people ate barley loaves. This was the food of the poor. Boaz gave her bread (from wheat) - the food of the rich! She was being treated not as she was, but as she would one day be! So Boaz gave her the very best. All saw this and she gained much honour.

The Lord Jesus does this again and again. He gives us status! The eating of bread and vinegar (made from sour unripe grapes) is suggestive of the cross. Jesus is the Bread of God. His was a life lived out and a life laid down. He was born to be broken and broken to bleed. The 'Bread of God' was 'dipped in vinegar' on the cross.

But note: we start with faith in Jesus and He goes on to feed us. We believe individually, but we feast with others. So the principle is: **after trusting comes a table!** And the Lord's table implies an abiding fellowship with the Lord in all that He is - the champion of our honour, our Kinsman-Redeemer - and all that He provides. The Lord's Table is in continuous session - not just at 2 pm on a certain day during harvest!

So Boaz reaffirmed his:

- ✧ **Protection**

  "You are my King and my God who decrees victories." Ps. 44:4

- ✧ **Love and faithfulness**

  "By day the Lord directs His love and at night His song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life." Ps. 42:8

- ✧ **Strength**

  "Summon your power O God. Show us your strength O God, as you have done before." Ps. 68:28

3.3 Ruth returns to Naomi (v. 17-23)

Ruth worked all afternoon until sunset. It was hard work. You had to stoop to bind the stalks. Threshing will make anyone sweat. The principle is: **only what is beaten can be eaten – barley, wheat, olives and wine**. Jer. 23:28 says, ***"For what has straw to do with grain?"***

So what Ruth gleaned, she beat and what she beat, she measured and what she measured she gave to Naomi. Naomi was amazed how well she had done! Ruth gave Naomi some of her left-over lunch. They had that for supper. When Jesus gives there is always enough and to spare! ***"And of His fullness have we all received and grace upon grace."*** (Jn. 1:16)

Note: there is still some 'Moabitishness' about Ruth. Boaz says to her, ***"Stay with my girls"*** (v. 9). In her report to Naomi, Ruth says that Boaz said to her, (v. 21) ***"Stay with my workers"*** (actually young men in Hebrew). Naomi says, very sensibly in the cultural context, ***"Stay with the girls"*** (v. 22). So the Moabite flesh is still there! We are never so pure that we can't be tempted.

Notice also the very close relationship between Naomi and Ruth. The term 'mother-in-law' occurs ten times in the book of Ruth and the term 'daughter-in-law' occurs seven times. The mother-in-law relationship can be very terrible in Muslim families. See Appendix 3 as to why this is so. Mothers can be terrible and tyrannical to their daughters-in-law and treat them as an object of ridicule. Many families are torn to pieces by feuding built around this relationship. But Ruth and Naomi's relationship was very different. Naomi was planning for Ruth and Ruth was working for Naomi - not out of duty, but out of a genuine love for her.

So Ruth left early in the morning empty and she came back blessed. The secret of her success lay in this:

- She had been with a mighty man of wealth (Boaz). Boaz was like Jesus:
  - wealthy in possessions
  - wealthy in influence
  - wealthy in grace.
- She had been with one who understood her need.
- She had been with one who was not ashamed to acknowledge her publicly.
- She had been with one who planned for her good.
- She had been with her 'go'el' - although she did not know it.

She could have sung:

"How sweet the name of Boaz sounds
in a poor gleaners ear.
It soothes her sorrows, heals her wounds
and drives away her fear."

- An understanding of a Kinsman-Redeemer

  Ruth discovered at the end of the day that she had a real kinsman-redeemer in Boaz. The Lord Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer - our 'Go'el'. He brings to us:

  - real rest
  - real blessings
  - real restoration
  - real honour

  He is our 'Go'el' because He is a relative - bone of our bone - flesh of our flesh.

  "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that ...." (Heb. 2:14)

  "But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." (Gal. 4:4-5)

Jesus, the Redeemer of dishonoured shameful people and the Restorer of wholeness in situations, had to be a person exactly like us in order to be our Redeemer. He is **still** a man, seated on the throne of God with all authority and power.

So Naomi had a kinsman and we have a Kinsman. Because of this there is hope.

"I have swept away your offences like a cloud - your sins like a morning mist. Return to Me, <u>for I have redeemed you</u>." (Is. 44:22)

So Jesus is our God. He has made Himself responsible for us. He will redeem our inheritance for us. He will redeem us from the effects of the Fall. Each of us can say we have a Kinsman-Redeemer.

Boaz was clearly a very wealthy man. God says the same about our 'Go'el' in Ps. 89:12, ***"I have laid help upon One who is mighty"***. Jesus is that Mighty One. For no angel and no man is mighty enough to be our redeemer. Only God is mighty enough to redeem us. Jesus said, ***"All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth"***. All power is at His disposal.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." (Eph. 1:7)

He deals with us, not out of our poverty, but according to His wealth and generosity.

So Ruth had seen Boaz. She had talked to him. She had eaten with him and experienced something of his kindness and generosity. **Now** she realised that he was a relative who had special responsibility for her to restore her honour and that she had a special claim on him.

So many of us know Jesus as our Saviour and our Friend. We have heard His voice. We have received from Him mercy and loving kindness, but we do not know that we have a Redeemer and that if Jesus is our Redeemer, then we have a legal claim on His services and He will gladly accept and honour this claim!

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

Chapter Three

4. Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

4.1 Naomi instructs Ruth (v. 1-5)

- Putting in a claim for redemption
- Redemption is the secret of abiding rest
- Steps to take in claiming redemption
  - ✧ Go to the place of winnowing
  - ✧ Wash yourself before you go
  - ✧ Anoint yourself
  - ✧ Put on new clothes
  - ✧ Wait until the proper time
  - ✧ When you are there offer yourself
  - ✧ Then wait – don't speak

4.2 Boaz pledges to secure redemption (v. 6-15)

- The question Boaz asks
- "There is another kinsman"

4.3 Ruth returns to Naomi (v. 16-18)

4. Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

4.1 Naomi instructs Ruth (v. 1-5)

- Putting in a claim for redemption

  In Middle Eastern cultures - both now and then - marriages were arranged by parents. So it was fitting that Naomi should take the initiative in arranging Ruth's marriage.

  Ruth now knew that Boaz was her kinsman-redeemer. She knew that Boaz had been extraordinarily kind to her. She knew that although middle aged, Boaz was unmarried. He had the right to redeem her, but he didn't know that Naomi and Ruth wanted to be redeemed. So Naomi and Ruth's redemption depended not only on the fact that there was a redeemer, but also on Ruth putting in a claim to be redeemed. This is what chapter 3 is about.

  It is the same for us. It is not enough to know that Christ is the Redeemer. We must put in a claim if we are to enjoy His redemption. Sadly so many believers do not claim. They sing about Our Redeemer - about His glory and His power. But that is not enough unless, in faith, we lay our claim to full personal redemption at the feet of our Redeemer.

- Redemption is the secret of abiding rest

  Naomi was thinking about her family's field and who would marry her daughter-in-law Ruth. If no one would, then Elimelech's name would perish from the earth. Naomi was bound by law to induce a kinsman-redeemer to restore her husband's honour and land.

  So Naomi says to Ruth, ***"Should I not try and find a home for you?"*** In Hebrew, the phrase 'find a home' incorporates the concept of 'rest'. There are three Hebrew words for 'rest' in the book of Ruth:

  - **menuchah** - a place to dwell

    This is the word used by Naomi in 1:9, ***"May the Lord grant that each of you find rest in the home of another husband."*** So Naomi told Orpah and Ruth that they had to go and find their own rest. But there is no rest in Moab. There is no rest in the self-life. There is no future there.

    Where sin is, there is **no rest** for, ***" There is no rest*** (peace) ***for the wicked"*** (Is. 48:22). There is no rest where there is selfishness and pride. Rest comes when we are dead - dead to sin but alive to God. There are so many restless spirits among believers. God wants to breathe peace upon us and give us **rest** (a home).

  - **manoach** - a place to stand

    This is the word used in 3:1. The same word is used of the dove from Noah's Ark finding a 'resting place'. Naomi wanted Ruth to have a place to stand. 'Standing' in this sense implies having honour - having a good reputation, 'being in good standing' in the community and having a portion among the redeemed.

  - **shaqat** - a state of quietness

    This word is also used in 3:18, ***"For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today"***. Naomi has made Boaz concerned about Ruth's 'rest' (honour). Note the last words of Boaz in chapter four, ***"Today, you are witnesses that I have bought all ....."*** . The work of redemption has been done. The price has been paid and the law is satisfied. The honour of Naomi and Ruth is upheld. Ruth is in a state of quietness under the wings of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz said, in effect, ***"It is finished!"*** Jesus used this phrase as well!

So **'rest'** in the place of honour comes through union with the Lord Jesus, our Rest-giver. This is the union of a branch being united to a vine (Jn. 15). Rest in this sense means a

deep inner peace; for we no longer have to seek honour or defend our honour. No longer do we need to seek vengeance on those who dishonour us. Rest means that the spirit of heaven has come into our hearts leading to a graciousness and humility of spirit.

So union with a Kinsman-Redeemer is the secret of abiding rest. We have heard the call, ***"Come to me all you labour and are heavy laden and I will give you <u>rest</u>"***. *'Yes,'* we say, *'I need and want that rest'*. Then follows, ***"Take My yoke upon you"*** that is, *"be united to Me - as one ox is yoked to another - and you will find rest"*. This second 'rest' is a different word in the Greek. The first 'rest' is effectively 'a lodging' - a temporary rest, whereas the second 'rest' is 'home' – a settled rest.

So poor, outcast, destitute Ruth – a widow with absolutely no honour - has **hope** that she might find honour and a home with a very honourable, powerful man of wealth. This would be the remedy of all her needs. And so it is with us. The remedy for all our failures, weaknesses and poverty is union with Jesus Christ in Whom all fullness dwells. He supplies all our needs. He makes us wealthy. He gives us honour!

Redemption is being changed from being an outcast - poverty stricken, hopeless, restless and totally dishonoured person - to being beloved honoured and sharing in all the wealth and position of the one you are united with. (It is much more than just being forgiven our sins.)

- Steps to take in claiming redemption

  Naomi tells us how to put in a claim to be redeemed. There are several steps (7 in all).

  1. **Go to where the Redeemer is winnowing**

     At the end of the barley harvest there was a party for the workers to celebrate the completion of the collection of the sheaves and the threshing. Next followed the winnowing. The wind begins to blow off the Mediterranean at about 5 pm in the evening and lasts until midnight. This onshore breeze is enough for winnowing - separating the kernel from the chaff. Boaz and some of his men remained on the threshing floor - probably to prevent theft.

     So Ruth is told to go where Boaz is winnowing. We need to go to where Jesus is winnowing - where the kernel is separated from the husk, where the **content** is set apart from the mere external. Psalm 139:1-3 says,

     "O Lord, You have searched me and You know me.
     You know when I sit and when I rise.
     You perceive my thoughts from afar.
     You discern my going out and my lying down.
     You are familiar with all my ways."

     Allow the Lord to know you thoroughly and to winnow you. Allow Him to blow away the chaff. 1 Cor. 3:12 puts it another way:

     "If any man builds on this foundation (Jesus Christ) using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed by fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work."

     So wind or fire - symbols of the work of the Holy Spirit. The implications are that we should ask the Lord **now** to blow away and burn all that is not of value **now**. It is a request to be purified from the dross now. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to winnow you. He will do so if you go to the winnowing floor.

     "Let us lay aside every weight at the sin that so easily trips us up ...." We have to present our hearts and lives to be purified. We do this by coming into the light so that which is dirty can be seen and dealt with. We need to allow the water of the Word of God to wash us. Is there anything 'leprous' about us? Let us keep dipping until we are clean. Judicial righteousness is necessary, but it is not enough. There must be practical righteousness. We have spotless standing in Christ, but we also

need a consistent walk in following Christ.

Lastly, there is no hint of immodesty in Naomi's suggestion. Winnowing floors were out in the open - usually on a hilltop. Boaz was surrounded by other men helping in the winnowing and guarding. It was a suggestion for Ruth to put her claim to Boaz **privately**. There is a spiritual application! Our longings for personal holiness need not be expressed publicly.

So Ruth went not as a seducer but as a **suppliant**. She was not there contrary to the law, but that the provisions of the law might be honoured. She was not there to prostitute her womanhood, but to bring it honour.

Ruth did **all** that Naomi told her to do. It probably took a lot of courage to go privately to put her claim of needing a redeemer to Boaz. She had found the grace to humbly glean in the fields. Now she had to advance in grace and kneel low on his winnowing floor.

2. **Before you go to your redeemer to put in your claim, wash yourself** (v. 3)

   "Since we have promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." (2 Cor. 7:1)

   Let us get rid of everything that will prevent us getting the fullness of redemption.

3. **Anoint yourself** (v. 3)

   Let the oil of the Holy Spirit be on you. Ask Him to fill your heart and life to overflowing. If the oil of the Spirit is not freshly on us, we shall fail in our union with Christ.

4. **Put on new clothes**

   Take off the old clothes of mourning that speak of widowhood. Take off the old clothes that speak of being a Moabitess. Take off the clothes that mark you out as disgraced and dishonoured. Put on new clothes. ***"Take up beauty for ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness."*** (Is. 61:3)

   The Old Testament speaks of being clothed with power from on high. In Judges both Gideon and Samson were so clothed with 'new clothes' (Judges 6:34 'came upon' = clothed). [See also in Judges - Othniel (3:10), Jephthah (11:29), Samson (14:6,19) – also David 1 Sam. 16:13.] The metaphor is the Spirit of the Lord 'clothing' people. See Col. 3:8-9, ***Put off anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk. Put on the new - love, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness patience"***.

   So Ruth comes to Boaz as a bride who has made herself ready. In effect, she is saying to Boaz, *"I am available to be married again. Please marry me"*.

5. **Make sure the timing is right** (v. 3)

   "When he has finished eating and drinking ….. when he lies down …."

   There was a time before the cross, when Jesus was also done with eating and drinking. In Luke Jesus says, ***"With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."*** He was coming to the 'midnight hour' of Calvary with all its horror. It was God's threshing floor in the midst of the years, where the issue of grace and judgment would be brought to a climax. **We can only meet the Lord Jesus at the cross**.

6. **Offer yourself to your Redeemer**

   Before she had asked to glean in Boaz' field. Now she offers herself.

   "Trust in the Lord ……
   Delight yourself in the Lord ……

Commit your way to the Lord ……
Be still before the Lord…… **"** (Ps. 33:3-7)

Note the progression to rest.

Ruth got down on the floor and lay at the feet of her kinsman-redeemer. Eve, the first woman, tried to be head and swayed the First Man. Ruth places her head at the feet of the **Second Man.** For Ruth, Boaz was the second man. The first man, Mahlon, was weak and sickly and the grave had claimed him. But Boaz, the second man, lived and he could bring her into all the inheritance of God.

I can only infer that Naomi's instruction to uncover Boaz' feet would ensure that Boaz would wake up slowly and naturally. Cold feet in the night are sure to wake anyone! So again this is an instruction to reduce embarrassment and increase privacy. But by her actions Ruth was saying, *"I am Ruth …. I am yours. Please claim me".*

7. **Don't speak!**

'Wait, don't speak'. Jesus lay down. ***"They pierced His feet."*** His body was laid in a tomb. But Boaz woke and rose up, and so did Jesus. When Boaz lay down, So did Ruth. When Boaz rose up, so did Ruth. **We are not to speak, but to identify ourselves with Jesus in His death and resurrection**.

So washing, watching and waiting are all part of the steps in laying down a claim to redemption. We are to wait. ***"He will tell you what you should do"*** (v. 4). On the Damascus Road, Paul asked the question,***"Lord, what will you have me to do?"***

On Resurrection Day Jesus said, ***"Behold, …… My feet!"*** Uncover and see My feet - feet with wounds. In Rev. 1:5 we read, ***"His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace"***– feet of flame. They were feet of suffering and feet of glory - **feet that will tread all His enemies down!** So the instruction is to go and lie at the feet of Jesus. Only failed, shamed, dishonoured people lie there.

4.2 Boaz pledges to secure redemption (v. 6-15)

- The question Boaz asks (v. 9)

So Boaz wakes up with cold feet. He looks at his feet and in the dim light he sees a woman there! Boaz whispers, *"Who are you?"* Ruth gives two answers:

- ✧ She tells him, who she is

  "I am Ruth – poor, a stranger, poverty stricken and honourless. I belong to an accursed nation, 'but' I am your servant – i.e. a bond slave."

- ✧ She tells him what he is to her

  "You are my Redeemer. You have the right to redeem me out of all my alienation - all my shame and poverty." She puts it this way, ***"Spread your wings over me."***

  This is the same expression Boaz used in 2:12, ***"Under whose wings you have come to take refuge."*** In Hebrew in the same word is used for 'wings' and 'corners of a cloth'. In effect, Ruth is saying:

  "Take charge of me. Marry me. Be responsible for me. Give me your honour - or honour me." For honour is not acquired it is given.

  Ezekiel uses the same expression in Ez. 16:8 for entering a marriage relationship.

  " 'Later I passed by and when I looked at you and saw you were old enough for love, I 'spread the corner of my garment over you' and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into covenant with you,' declares the Sovereign Lord 'and you became Mine.' "

  It is a lovely expression and is used often in the Old Testament.

"Have mercy on me, O God. Have mercy on me. For in You my soul takes refuge. I take refuge in the shadow of your wings." (Ps. 57:1)

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." (Ps. 91:1)

"He will cover you with His feathers and under His wings you will find refuge." (Ps. 91:4)

Under the shadow of His wings there is deep comfort and protection. Our hearts cry out, *"O spread Your wings over me"* – rest!

So Ruth proposes marriage to Boaz! She gives the reason: ***"You are my 'go'el' - my kinsman-redeemer"***

The whispered reply of Boaz

"Blessed are you of the Lord, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier. You have not run after the younger men - whether rich or poor - and now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do all you ask ..... but ...."

Why was Boaz - a middle-aged man, rich and honourable - not married?. This is speculation, but his mother was Rahab - a Canaanite prostitute, a woman in the most dishonourable position of all, living in the cursed town of Jericho. But she too had experienced grace and come under the Covenant (under the wings of God). Perhaps, although Boaz was respected and admired, he was never quite good enough for any honourable family's daughter. Boaz, knowing God's kindness to his dear Gentile mother, shows kindness to Ruth.

There are several interesting midnight scenes in Scripture. Midnight seems symbolic of life-death and slavery-salvation moments of decision.

- ✓ It was midnight when the destroyer passed over Egypt. (Ex. 12:12-23)
- ✓ It was at midnight that Samson unhinged the gates of Gaza. (Judges 16:3)
- ✓ It was at midnight that Paul and Silas sang until the earth shook. (Acts 15:25)

How Ruth must have rejoiced in her heart to hear those words, ***"I will do what you have asked."*** For Ruth **could have said** to herself, "*There is no future for me if I stay with Naomi and just glean here and there, living in this old ruined house and looking after a dishonoured, ageing mother-in-law. I will cut my losses and look for a young husband."*

But then:

a) She would have a husband outside the family and Elimelech's name and inheritance would have been cut off.

b) Naomi would have been deserted for widows had no right of inheritance. She can only act on behalf of her sons, both of whom are dead.

c) The family lands would stay deserted.

Why did she stay with Naomi? Why didn't she, ***"Run after younger men - whether rich or poor"***? **She had a vision of revival**!! Instead of a **new** family, she wanted to see a revival of the old. Often people prefer to end things rather than see them mended! Ruth had faith in God that He would give Naomi and herself honour by redeeming all that had been lost.

- "There is another kinsman"

Boaz answer to Ruth was a "Yes – but" answer. This must have upset Ruth considerably!

Now in this story Boaz represents Jesus. Who then also has a claim on us? Who is our 'other kinsman'? Well, we cannot be dogmatic! Boaz, although willing to be Ruth's

'go'el', felt he could not do so illegally. There was a nearer kinsman who had a prior claim on this dishonourable, alien widow and the law had to be obeyed (satisfied). For us there are two possible **near kinsman** – 'the law' and 'the flesh'. It is hard to separate them.

- **The Law**

  the law of God has a prior claim on the sinner and that claim is to condemn him and to exclude him. The law sets high standards. ***"Do this and you shall live"*** (Rom. 10:5). If we keep its commands and attain its standards we will live, but if we fail, we will die (Rom. 7:10). So all the law can do for us is to condemn us. The law is never abrogated. Under **grace** the demands of the law are met and fulfilled in a different way. As we shall see in the next session, this law (just as the other kinsman in this story) says twice, ***"I cannot redeem it"***. 1 Cor. 15:56 says that the law strengthens sin rather than weakens it. It gives added power to condemn us when we fail, for it gives us a deep sense of shame and self-accusation.

  So all our promises to do better and all our aspirations of higher goals, only give the Evil One more opportunity to accuse us and shame us. We simply put a bigger stick into Satan's hand to thrash us.

  So two possible kinsman: Jesus our Kinsman-Redeemer and the Law our kinsman-condemner

- **The flesh** (our old nature)

  Like the law, it also has a claim on us. The flesh wants us to live under 'the law' and so in bondage to itself. This is a dangerous alternative kinsman. There is no "rest" with this 'other kinsman'. There is no redemption with this kinsman.

  "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us."
  (Rom. 7:18)

But whatever 'the other kinsman' represents, 'our Boaz' (Jesus) promises to deal with the situation, but it must be done legally and openly.

4.3 Ruth returns to Naomi (3:16-18)

It must have been a long slow night for Naomi waiting to see if her plan had worked. Naomi's question to Ruth as she came in was a very significant question. Literally the question Naomi asked was, *"Well, who are you now my daughter?"*

Boaz had given her six measures of clean, winnowed barley as a first fruits (a guarantee) of his intentions. Ruth had put the barley in her 'veil'. (The word only occurs in one other place in Scripture – Is. 32:11.) So she had uncovered her face and her hair for him. It was probably his first sight of Ruth like this, for in the fields her hair had been covered. It was a clever move by Boaz to fill her veil with barley!

So now Ruth tells everything to Naomi – how:

- She cast herself at his feet and offered herself. (v. 4-6)
- She claimed him as her 'go'el'. (v. 9)
- She received his promise - she asks and the promise is given.
- She now has to wait for Boaz to work on the problems.

Naomi said, ***"Wait …… for the man will not rest until the matter is settled."*** Our Redeemer pursued our redemption until he cried with a loud voice, ***"It is finished!"*** Then He 'rested'. We can sit and rest in what He has done. We cease from our own works. Note that Ruth had no part in her act of redemption.

So in summary:

- Ruth understood her rights. Do we know the promises of God?
- We need to surrender at Christ's feet and put in our claim for our rights.
- We need confidence that He will work.

Questions

1. Naomi was becoming encouraged. Things were starting to look better after returning to Bethlehem. So now all she was thinking about was finding a husband for Ruth. Why did she think of Boaz?

2. What do you think Ruth's actions show us about how she thought of herself? (v. 2-5) Compare with Genesis 38:13-30.

3. Why did Ruth ask Boaz, ***"Spread the corner of your garment over me"***?

4. What does it tell us about Boaz, when he said he would do for her all she asked?

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

Chapter Four

5. Redeemed and claimed

5.1 Boaz arranges to marry Ruth (v. 1-12)

- Ruth's advocate – her kinsman-redeemer

- The confrontation with the unknown kinsman (v. 1-8)
  - ✧ The right to redeem
  - ✧ The resources to redeem
  - ✧ The readiness to redeem

- The renunciation of the other claim
  - ✧ On an individual level
  - ✧ On a cosmic level
  - ✧ The other kinsman's acceptance of public dishonour

- Boaz buys Naomi's property and announces his marriage to Ruth (v. 9-12)
  - ✧ The declaration of marriage
  - ✧ The response of the witnesses
  - ✧ The prayer for the newlyweds – the three wishes

5.2 Naomi's life is now full (v. 13-17)

5.3 The genealogy of David (v. 18-22)

Ruth: Experiencing the Fullness of Redemption

5. Redeemed and claimed

5.1 Boaz arranges to marry Ruth (v.1-12)

- Ruth's advocate – her kinsman-redeemer

  Ruth is resting and trusting Boaz will make real his promise of redemption. First thing in the morning Boaz went to the gate (v.1). Legal matters were settled at the gate of the town.

  God is slow to anger and swift to bless. Those who love Him act most like Him. Boaz was swift to deal with this issue of the redemption of Ruth.

  The barley harvest was over and there was probably money in people's pockets. So even early in the day the market was starting to get busy. Probably the busiest place was the gate of Bethlehem, which was near the well. (This was the water that was so much loved by David – 2 Sam. 23:15.) Boaz was looking for a man - the other relative - in the crowds in the market and by the gate. Eventually he sees him. He grabs him and makes him sit down. We are not told the man's name, but he was a near relative of Elimelech. Apparently, from the story, this man had shown no interest in Naomi and her plight up to now. Perhaps he had no interest in family honour - much as Elimelech had shown scant regard for the law of the People of God. Many laws of the Old Testament involved the willingness to accept material loss for the sake of others in general and for family in particular. Obedience to these laws revealed the maturity of faith in those who obeyed.

  The gates were the 'law courts' of the town. It was at the gate that lawsuits were decided. 'Outside the gates' was the place of punishment and execution. Zechariah said later, ***"Speak every man the truth to his neighbour. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates."*** (Zech. 8:16) Note that Boaz also sat down. He calls ten elders – a full court for legal proceedings. (Ten men to represent the law – the Ten Commandments. Also note that if there had been ten righteous men in Sodom God would have spared it.)

  In 1 Jn. 1:9 we read, ***"If we confess our sins, God forgives and cleanses them. And He is faithful and just to do so."*** God forgives us in such a way that divine justice is **not** brought into disrepute. God wants to ***"justify the ungodly"*** (Rom. 4:5), but He must first find a way that is just! In Muslim societies the restoration of honour is dealt with scrupulously - usually in the open. It is treated with great legal exactitude for lives and blood are at stake.

  So Ruth and Naomi had rights under the law. Ruth, although she was a Moabitess and therefore outside the law, was by grace counted as being under the law through her marriage. And Boaz was her advocate to make sure that Ruth got full redemption.

  We too have an Advocate. The Lord Jesus came to earth to show love and grace, but He would only do so on the grounds of righteousness at the throne of God - the ultimate court. He died outside the gate in the place of disgrace. He died on a cross between two thieves as if He was one Himself so that love and grace would come together with justice and righteousness.

  On the cross Jesus robbed sin and shame of its power to condemn us and dishonour us and He did so by bearing the curse attached to the broken law Himself. The moment He said, ***"It is finished!"*** Satan could hold Him no longer. The price of redemption had been paid. And when the price has been paid, the Redeemer can start to redeem.

  The power of sin is that it leads to a 'hangover' of shame. The power of Jesus is that by His death, He deals not only with the root cause of sin - death to our "old nature" - not only with Satan and the "principalities and powers" (disarmed and triumphed over) thus proving that He is our avenger, but He pays the penalty of that sin so that we can have peace with God. The element of guilt is completely expunged. But in addition, the element of shame and dishonour is dealt with by redemption.

Redemption is a total concept - the restoration and renewal of our spirits, our souls and finally our bodies. There is nothing we have - temporal or eternal - natural or spiritual - that will not be redeemed. Every part of us belongs totally to the Redeemer. We are not our own. We cannot redeem ourselves. We, like Ruth, are totally inadequate and utterly bankrupt in terms of resources. But in Biblical redemption I belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to me! ***"We are joint heirs with Christ."*** (Rom. 8:17)

"For all things are yours, Paul, Apollos, Peter - the world - life or death - the present or the future. All are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's." (1 Cor. 3:22)

We are redeemed not because of the love of God or the mercy of God, but because of the righteousness and justice of God. Our Advocate, the Lord Jesus, has pleaded and continues to plead our redemption in heaven, surrounded by the living creatures and the twenty four elders and angels beyond count. And our Advocate **has proved** His case publicly to be our 'Go'el' – Kinsman-Redeemer.

All this emphasises the doctrine of grace. For ***"Who shall lay any charge to God's elect?"*** (Rom. 8:33). Jesus, our Redeemer, fulfilled the law. He paid the price. What the law demanded, grace provided. There was no debt left outstanding. There are no loose ends that the devil can exploit. Boaz made a relationship with Ruth that cannot be legally challenged.

- The confrontation with the unknown kinsman (v. 1-8)

Three questions had to be settled by the court:

Was there a kinsman who had the **right to redeem**?

Was there a kinsman who was **able** to redeem – i.e. had the **resources to redeem**?

Was there a kinsman who was willing and **ready to redeem**?

All these issues had to be dealt with in the open - publicly and legally. Our redemption was also done in the open and in public.

- ✧ **The right to redeem**

  Only 'go'els' have the right to redeem - a brother or a close kinsman. He has two roles:

  - ✓ To avenge dishonour [See Josh. 20:3; Lev. 24:17 and Num. 35:16-28]
  - ✓ To deliver and restore honour

  Hebrews 2:10-18 argues that Jesus is our 'Go'el' for Jesus is also of "flesh and blood" - the God who became man. In fact, He is our near kinsman - our Brother (Heb. 2:11) and He has fulfilled both the roles of a 'go'el'

  Jesus is our avenger.

  "That through death He might destroy him who has the power of death - that is the devil." (Heb. 2:11)

  This is a very powerful message in an honour/shame culture. Jesus has avenged my shame and sense of disgrace and dishonour by **destroying** (a very powerful word) the devil - the cause of all my shame.

  Jesus is my deliverer.

  "And delivered them who through the power of death were subject to lifelong bondage." (Heb. 2:15)

  In Hebrews 2:17 we read, ***"In all things it was necessary for Him to be made like <u>His brethren</u>."*** Why? In order that he might be **our 'Go'el'**. So there is no loss, no indignity no deprivation of rights, no dishonour or cause of shame suffered by people, that Jesus did not suffer. It was the incarnation of our Lord Jesus that enabled Him to be our brother and our 'Go'el'.

But the incarnation was not enough, for in itself it had no answer to our culpability – i.e. our sin. The incarnation made Jesus in ***"the likeness of men"*** (Phil. 2:7). It was at the cross that Jesus was made ***"in the likeness of sinful flesh"*** (Rom. 8:3). At the cross Jesus accepted the judgment of God for our culpability. It is the cross that fully makes Jesus our 'Go'el' - **our kinsman**. So each of us can say to Jesus. *"You are my 'Go'el' and you have the right to redeem me from my situation."*

There is a poetic picture in Isaiah 63:1-5 of Jesus redeeming by taking vengeance on the oppressor (Satan) and on all our foes - sin and death and shame. The cross was **a day of vengeance**.

"Who is this coming from Edom, From Bozrah
With his garments stained crimson?
Who is this robed in splendour,
Striding forward in the greatness of his strength?

It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.
Why are your garments red like those of one treading the wine press?
I have trodden the wine press alone:
From the nations no one was with me.
I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath.
….. For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
And the year of my redemption has come.
I looked, but there was no one to help ……
So my own arm worked salvation for me …….. **"**

So Jesus has the right to redeem!

✧ **The resources to redeem**

For Boaz this was money. He had the financial resources to redeem the land for he was a very wealthy man.

Jesus has power on earth to forgive sin. He has power on earth to make good the results of sin - the crippling sense of shame, the forfeiture of peace and happiness, the broken relationships with God and with others and with nature etc.

"Was My arm too short to redeem you? Do I lack the strength to deliver you?" (Is. 50:2) Then comes the third great Servant Song - Isaiah 50:4-9.

In context, the people of God in exile thought that God might forgive them, but that He was powerless to redeem them! The Servant Song speaks of the **competency** of the Redeemer.

"I have not been disgraced;" (v. 7) and resolute determination, ***"Therefore I have set my face like flint."*** (v. 7)

In the same context, Jer. 50:34 states, ***"Their Redeemer is strong. The Lord Almighty is His name. He will vigorously defend their cause."*** Their cause was the restoration of their land. The restoration was promised before they were exiled! Grace always antedates sin!

Jesus has promised to make all things new and He will. He is the Divine Potter who does not despair when He finds a spoiled pot in His hands. He makes it into another one.

"Jesus can solve every problem,
The tangles of life can undo.
There is nothing too hard for Jesus.
There is nothing that He cannot do."

The condition is that we repent and admit that we **are** the problem. Then, in the words of a Bill Gaither song:

"Something beautiful, something good?
All my confusion He understood.
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,
But he made something beautiful of my life."

- ✧ **The readiness to redeem**

  Boaz had lost his heart to this destitute Moabitish widow, whom he first met as a gleaner. He longed to be her redeemer.

  Jesus is ready to redeem us for the same reason Boaz was willing. He has lost his heart to us! Jesus is concerned not just in restoring what we have forfeited, in solving our problems and in making us happy. He is concerned in having us. Redemption means possessing you!

  "Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own." (Titus 2:14) This is an amazing truth!

  So both Boaz and Jesus had the right to redeem. They also had the resources and the readiness to redeem.

- **The renunciation of the other claim**

The 'other kinsman' was willing to redeem **the land**, but not **the bride**. But it was a package deal. The issue was the redemption of **the land and the bride**.

We tend to think dichotomistically and separate the bride from the land. We focus on the bride - our souls - the spiritual side of our nature. What does the land represent?

- ✧ On an individual level

  It is reclaiming for God all the gifts and qualities we have inherited here on earth.

  "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled to you ..... to present you holy....." (Col. 1:21)

  "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." (Eph. 4:23)

  So redemption includes our minds, our talents and our abilities. It includes what we **do**.

  "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labour working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that is in need." (Eph. 4:28)

  It includes what we **say**:

  "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up ....." (Eph. 4:28)

  It includes our home life. See what Eph 5:21-6:9 has to say about husbands, wives and children. It also includes our more public life, for it speaks about employer and employee relationships. So redemption affects our relationships in business, and with the state.

- ✧ On a cosmic level

  When Adam and Eve sinned, not only was the harmony destroyed between God and man, but disorder came into creation (Rom. 8:19-22). So when Christ paid for our redemption, He made peace possible between man and God, but He also laid the foundations of the restoration of harmony in the physical world. The full realisation of the redemption of the physical world will only come when Christ returns.

".....creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21)

The physical universe is not destined for destruction, but for renewal – see 2 Pet. 3:13 and Rev. 21:1.

So redemption involves not only the Bride (the spiritual), but also the land (the physical). So the unknown kinsman is willing to redeem the land, but he is unable and unwilling to marry this alien widow.

Note the contrast between these two men.

The First Man - the nearest kinsman after the flesh (the First Adam) said, *"I cannot redeem because that would spoil my inheritance."* Perhaps the inheritance of the children of his present marriage or perhaps he felt his reputation would suffer marrying a penniless, Moabite widow.

The Second Man - he steps in where the first man fails (the Second Adam).

There are four stages in the fall of Adam (the first man):

1. Adam is alone and unfallen
2. Adam and Eve are together - both unfallen
3. Eve is fallen - Adam is not
4. Both are fallen

Now, stage three is crucial! What could Adam have done? Well he could have asked God about Eve's fate. He would have been told that she would die - be banished from the garden. This would have been shattering news. Adam, unstained by sin or pride, in love with Eve, could have offered his life of hers. Moses did. Adam could have said, *"Let my name be blotted out of your book, if only Eve might live."*

But even if Adam was able, he was unwilling. Adam, our nearest kinsman, never raised any thought of redemption. He chose to go with Eve in the way she had taken and he fell. He never thought to lift her up - to redeem her. He argued, *"Better Eve without God, than to walk with God without Eve."* The natural man can never produce the spiritual. Adam, the first man, can never redeem us. He only has an appreciation of the physical, not the spiritual.

The flesh, the old Adamic nature, cannot redeem us. We may make resolutions, but that isn't redemption in all its fullness. The 'other kinsman' started with self-confidence in making claims for the land. Our old Adamic nature also starts with resolutions, but these prove hopeless in the end.

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Rom. 7:18)

The "law" - external pressure - cannot redeem us.

"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His Own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit." (Rom. 8:3-4)

The second man, the second Adam, steps forward and proclaims his power and willingness to redeem all the inheritance - the bride and the land. He has the right, the resources and the readiness to be the Redeemer. **He has what it takes!**

✧ The other kinsman's acceptance of public dishonour

Ruth was back in Naomi's house so she was not 'at the gate'. According to Deut. 25:5-10, Ruth should have pulled off the shoe of this her nearest kinsman and spat in his face (!) because of his refusal to build up his brother's house. In other words, she should have publicly shamed him.

But **this** story is full of grace. Here the man took off his own shoe and was not humiliated in public. But Jesus was shamed in public!. He was treated as if He had no right to redeem, as if He was unwilling to redeem and as if He had no power to redeem. Men spat in His face. His heel (i.e. no shoe) was made bare and the serpent bruised it. Shoeless and spittle-smeared, Jesus went to Calvary. He looked like the first Adam who failed to redeem. He took the shame of the first Adam's failure, but He was the Second Adam!

Why a sandal? Why should the other kinsman take off his sandal? God's promise to Joshua was, ***"Arise, go over Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I give them - even the Children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given to you."*** (Deut. 11:24)

The sandal - symbolic of a foot placed on the ground - indicates the right of possession. See Deut. 1:36, ***"... I will give him ... the land he set his feet on...."***

To take off the sandal in the presence of witnesses in a court of law in a land transaction, is to give notice that all rights to tread on that property were now relinquished. The law had no right to walk over (i.e. to condemn) that which has been redeemed by another.

Jesus first came in sandals. John the Baptist felt unworthy to loose them. But He took them off as He climbed to Calvary. Cruel nails pierced His feet. But when Jesus comes again in great glory and power, His feet will be as ***"burnished flaming bronze"*** (Rev. 2:18). They will stand on the Mount of Olives and Jesus will claim all of creation. In the meantime, the Lord of Hosts says, ***"Sit on My right hand until I make your enemies your footstool"***(Heb. 10:13). On that great day of the Lord's return His feet will be uncovered and all in the universe – seen and unseen - will be beneath Him. Why? Because, ***"His feet trod the wine press of the wrath of God alone"*** (Is. 63:3; Rev. 19:15). Jesus is our 'Go'el' – our Avenger and Deliverer - our Kinsman- Redeemer.

The payment

Note: Boaz says, ***"I have bought from Naomi ....."*** (4:9)

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes, He became poor that you through His poverty might be rich." (2 Cor. 8:9)

Jesus, unlike Boaz, had to empty Himself - give up His life - sacrifice Himself in order to purchase our redemption.

"For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Pet. 1:18-19)

Isaiah 53, the fourth Servant Song (Is. 52:13-53:13), is about the purchase price of our redemption - the servant's suffering and death. **Isaiah 54 is the result of redemption**. It speaks of songs of joy with reference to an Almighty Husband (Is. 54:5) – a barren desolate woman having children. Isaiah 54:6-10 speaks of a reconstituted marriage. It tells of what it means to have a Redeemer. Note again the promise:

"You will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace. You will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your Husband. The Lord Almighty is His name. The Holy One is your Redeemer."!

Boaz could easily have spoken these words.

Summary of Boaz' redemption

1. **Only he could redeem.**
   - He had the right.
   - He had the ability.
   - He was in the right condition to redeem (unmarried).
2. **This was a willing redemption.**
   - His heart was set on the purchase of Ruth.
3. **This was a gracious redemption.**
4. **This was a public redemption.**
   - Many witnesses - Jesus paid in public. They put Him to open shame "outside the gate".
   - Boaz "plucked off his shoe" - Jesus plucked off His grave clothes.
5. **The purpose of redemption.**
   - "That the name may not be cut off".
   - "To be my wife".
6. **It was a perfected redemption.**
   - "She became his wife". (4:13)

- Boaz buys Naomi's property and announces his marriage to Ruth (v. 9-12)

Note: 1. The declaration by Boaz (v. 9,10)
2. The response of the witnesses (v. 11)
3. The prayer for the newlyweds

✧ The declaration of marriage

In a little community like Bethlehem, the 'grapevine' works well. Half the town must have been watching the transaction. Almost certainly Naomi and Ruth were summoned at the end of the transaction. Naomi would have produced the title deed. The money would have been paid to Naomi for the land. Boaz was then declared the owner.

Boaz probably caused a sensation by saying, ***"I have also acquired Ruth <u>as my wife</u>"*** - not as a servant, as a wife. He could have given Ruth a small cottage on his land. But no, he announced that Ruth was his wife! Imagine Ruth's joy when she heard the news! This was the highest honour indeed!

Note Boaz speech, ***"You are witnesses .... I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Mahlon's and Chilion's from Naomi and I have also acquired Ruth as my wife.....You are witnesses"***.

"I have bought all". The purpose of grace, pursued according to the law, now confirmed and upheld by the law. **Now**, as wife, Ruth has standing before God, before the law and before all the people. In fact she has the immense honour of being one of the **Gentile** ancestresses of Jesus.

There were significant **Gentile brides** in the Old Testament:

Asenath: Joseph's Egyptian wife - speaking of the Church with Christ in glory

Zipporah: Moses wife - speaking of the Church of Christ in rejection

Rahab: Salmon's wife - speaking of the grace that has brought us **out** of sin

Ruth: Boaz' wife - speaking of what grace has brought us **into** - full union with our Kinsman-Redeemer

It is a story of **grace:**

Tamar (v. 13) pretended to be a prostitute.

Rahab was a prostitute.

Bathsheba played the role of a prostitute.

Ruth was delivered from a nation of prostitutes (Num. 25:1). Yet God made each of these a bride and a mother whose offspring stand in the lineage of His Son. This is grace! In this way God magnifies His name! We too are a blood-bought, ransomed people – often from very unsavoury, dishonourable backgrounds. But He makes us new people in Christ. He gives us honour. So from various backgrounds, from all peoples, we are coming to Jesus. What we were and what we thought, the things we said and did and planned and thought are all erased. We are loosed from our sin and our shame by His blood. And now we are not our own. We are a bride!

Jesus is our Redeem**er**. Redeem**er** has a suffix – 'er' and this implies continuous action. A driver - a worker - a writer - implies one who does the action every day.

Jesus is habitually and continually our Redeemer. So we should never be afraid of shame or sin. Afraid **to** sin - Yes, but never afraid **of** sin and shame. So many believers are afraid of sin. They are uptight, bound by fear, like a rabbit terrified of a snake. We should never be like that for we know we have a Redeemer.

"Dear dying lamb Thy precious blood,
Shall never lose its power."

So we can live and walk through life with confidence, living in victory on the knife-edge of holiness, knowing we have a Kinsman-Redeemer.

✧ The response of the witnesses (v. 11)

All the assembled crowd shouted, "We are witnesses". They represent the Law and the Nation. This is the kind of acclaim that Jesus should have had. It is the kind of acclaim accorded to Him at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19).

We too are witnesses. Our glad confession is to the Redeemer who has bought us all and holds us as His bride by the right of purchase. Ruth too was a witness.

Ruth is never called a Moabitess again. All that was of Moab had died. For now, "she had come home". She is a woman who had no honour, who has been brought home and given honour.

- ✓ She gleaned in the fields of Boaz.
- ✓ She sat at his table in the harvest.
- ✓ She tasted his bread and drank from his water.
- ✓ She had lain at his feet.
- ✓ She is received into his house.
- ✓ She finds rest in his love.

What began at the barley harvest was complete in the wheat harvest. What began at the Cross and is realised at Pentecost, will be completed in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb – a full, perfect redemption.

✧ The prayer for the newlyweds

The people of Bethlehem had watched the whole story. They had seen the humility and loyalty of this poor alien widow. They were so happy that Boaz had at last found a bride. So there was great joy at the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. They gave their wishes and prayers for the newly wedded couple.

Notice that they don't call Ruth, "that penniless, Moabite widow". They say, ***"The***

Lord make the woman who has come into your house ..... ". There is no mention of Moab again, for she was united to Boaz. There is no mention of her sad past, for the old is regarded as finished. Once Ruth had said, "I am a stranger (an outsider)…… ", but now she is part of the family. With Jesus, we are no longer strangers. We really belong to Him, for we are ***"the Church of God that He has purchased with his own blood"*** (Acts 20:28).

They had three wishes for Ruth and Boaz:

The first wish : that Ruth should ***"be like Rachel and like Leah, which two built up the house of Israel"***.

Rachel was the more loved and Leah was the more fruitful. Ruth was more loved than Rachel, for she shared Boaz' affection with no one else. Leah bore Jacob six sons. Ruth, in the birth of Obed, is declared as having a situation that is better than seven sons. Boaz was a descendant of Leah through Judah. If Rachel and Leah built the house of Israel, then Ruth and Boaz would build a house of kings. For through Obed the royal line was established. Elimelech's name now lives again - God reigns. This is grace. God delights to make beggars and outcasts kings! When God says, ***"Friend, come up higher"***. It is an invitation to a position far higher than we could ever think!

The second wish : ***"Do worthily in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem".***

Ephrathah was the rich agricultural land around Bethlehem. True fame is rooted in true worth. Worth ('chayil' in Hebrew) is the same word as 'strength' or 'might'. It is used of Boaz' riches in chapter 2 and of Ruth's virtue in chapter 3. It indicates great material and moral resources.

So Ruth - barren in Moab - bears a child in Bethlehem. The fame that really counts rests in God's favour. The story began with **famine** in Bethlehem and ends up with **fame** in Bethlehem.

What about the fame of Jesus? What makes Him famous is the sinner you bring to salvation - the failing saint you help to restore and where there is death and you pray in revival. In the Gospel there are many mentions of the fame of Jesus.

"His fame went throughout Syria." (Mt. 4:24)

"Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus." (Mt. 14:1)

When John the Baptist doubted, Jesus pointed out His fame, ***"The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the Good News preached to them."*** (Mt. 11:5)

This was Ruth's second marriage. Does that mean it was second-best? No, not at all. The reverse is true in Ruth's case. Many people come to the Lord out of a history of failure and shame. Do they only get the second-best? Never! Second perhaps in point of time, but never in quality. Second-best is still the best. Our past and our present are never a barrier to the grace of God and the best is yet to come.

The third wish : ***"Let your house be like Perez whom Tamar bore."***

Tamar's relationship with Judah is a very sordid tale (Gen. 38). And Ruth's situation was similar to Tamar's, who also married one of Judah's sons and he died childless. Tamar are also invoked the law of redemption ('ga'al'). Tamar is not exonerated in her methods, but she is in her intentions. She was the only one in the family concerned about the continuity of the family line. And she was a Canaanite woman! Judah admits, ***"She has been more righteous than I"***. She bears twins – Zarah (the firstborn, Zarah, was distinguished from Perez by a scarlet thread) and Perez, his brother. Boaz was a descendant of Perez.

God is interested in the tribe of Judah, for from it would come His Son - the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The messianic line is very slender and Tamar and Ruth were both outsiders who were used by God to preserve it. Any attempt to frustrate this family line was Satanic.

"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed." (Gal. 3:16) The Scripture doesn't say, *'and to His seeds'* – many, many people - but ***"and to your seed"*** meaning one person, who is Christ.

This was really a wish and a prayer that Ruth would have **a son of consequence**. And ultimately she did ….. Jesus! But when Obed was born he was recognised as a gift from God.

Note again a common pattern in Scripture: God's man is not necessarily the first, but often another. God chose:

not Cain but Abel
not Ishmael but Isaac
not Esau but Jacob
not Reuben but Joseph
not Manasseh but Ephraim
not Zarah but Perez
not Mahlon but Boaz

Ruth started as a woman of Moab (1:1) and ended up as the bride of God's man and the hope of Israel. Ruth's life up to this point can be summarised in the words of Ephesians 2:11-19:

"Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ….. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace…… So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but ….. members of the household of God."

5.2 Naomi's life is now full (v. 13-17)

Everyone loves a story with a happy ending and this story certainly has one!

*"**God's discipline is for a moment, His favour is for a lifetime."*** (Ps. 30:5)

It was true for Job, ***"The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning."*** (Job 42:15) And it was true for Naomi. We can all expect a bright future if we lie at the feet of our 'Go'el'.

A son for Naomi

It was barley harvest again one year later. At this time Obed was born. Naomi's loneliness and hopelessness had receded. The book begins with Naomi in her sorrow and emptiness, but it ends in joy and fullness.
Obed was born and laid in Naomi's arms. That day she was no longer 'Mara' (bitter), but Naomi again. Now there was no longer Moab. In the peace of the tiny baby in her arms God was wiping away her tears and her emptiness was filled to the brim – ***"A son for Naomi"***. Obed is a shortened form of Obadiah meaning a servant of the Lord (a messianic name). So God restores and renews Naomi's life and nourishes and enriches her old age.

"Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a 'go'el' that His name may be famous in Israel." So whatever the future held for Naomi, she would always have a 'go'el' in Obed to protect her, honour her and redeem her. He will be "a restorer" and "nourisher of old age". She will never again experience the pinch of poverty.

Isaiah says, ***"And they that be of you ..... shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations and you shall be called the Repairer of the breach, the Restorer of the paths to dwell in ....."*** (Is. 58:12).

We always have Jesus our Kinsman-Redeemer, so we will always have a continuous experience of grace. Our "Restorer", our "Repairer", our "Nourisher" will be constantly at work in our lives.

In the future, the fields of Bethlehem would hear another song sung by other voices - an angel host - and all the world would hear of it - the song of love to earth descending - the song of the birth of the great Kinsman-Redeemer.

5.3 The genealogy of David (v. 18-22)

Obed was the grandfather of David and from David came Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World. I wonder if David ever knew his great-grandmother Ruth? 1 Sam. 22:3-4 tells of David's visit to Moab and his request of the King to let his father and mother stay with him because of Saul's attempts to kill them.

In Matthew's Gospel is the lineage of Jesus on the male human side. In the list only fathers' names are mentioned with four exceptions. Four women are mentioned and all of them are women of dishonour and shame:

Tamar – a Canaanite woman (Mt. 1:3)
Rahab - a Canaanite prostitute (Mt. 1:5)
Ruth - a Moabitess (Mt. 1:5)
Bathsheba - with her shameful story (Mt. 1:6)

Why are these women of dishonour mentioned? I think it is to show that the dishonourable, the shamed and the guilty can have a share in Jesus! If these dishonoured and shamed people are among His ancestors, then there is a place for dishonoured, shamed and guilty people among His descendants - for I am one of them!

Questions

1. Why did Boaz go to the gate of the town and talk with his relatives and the judges about Ruth's troubles?
2. Why did her close relative change his mind about buying the land when Ruth's name was mentioned?
3. What did the man mean when he took off his sandal?
4. When Ruth had her first child with Boaz, whose name would he take? Whose land would be his? Why? Would Boaz lose something if he married Ruth?
5. Talk about the judge's blessing. What good things did they expect to come from this marriage?
6. What did the women of the town say about Obed's birth and all that Ruth did for Naomi? Why did Naomi care for Obed? (v. 16-17)

6. The Appendices

1. Some concepts of honour and shame in local cultures

2. Old Testament concepts of shame, sin and guilt and brief look at New Testament consequences of redemption

3. Mother and daughter-in-law relationships in the local cultures

Appendix 1

Some concepts of honour and shame in local cultures

Arab bedouin culture is built around patriarchal hierarchies where honour is the most important virtue. Honour is related to the preservation of tribal and family ascendancy and all their bedouin heritage. The desert ('badu' or badiya' in Arabic) has moulded the 'badwi' or 'badawi' (bedouin in English). 'Badu' also means 'beginning'. The desert gave the bedouin an undisturbed way of life for nearly 3000 years. The purity of blood developed a very strong culture. This culture is patrilineal and patriarchal - kin-based and strongly kin-oriented. The tribe consists of a number of extended families, all of whom trace their descent from a common ancestor. There are still two tribes today in Saudi Arabia named after two of the sons of Ishmael. Tribal aural tradition records 4000 years of tribal history! Tribes and the extended families in them have very strong cohesion. This cohesion is strengthened by first cousin marriage or at least relative marriage.

In history there have been tribal confederations, but in general, in bedouin society, the larger the social aggregate, the smaller the cohesion. Nomadic existence is poor and often harsh and no complex political structure can be erected. Political structures are developed in urban environments. The chief values of bedouin culture were developed to protect the individual from attack by others stronger than he. So there is a very strong commitment to group solidarity and mutual responsibility. There is very considerable pressure to conform and uphold group values. **Honour** is the bedrock of group cohesion. Honour is related to:

- bravery vs. cowardice
- aggressiveness vs. peacefulness – i.e. aggressiveness to outsiders - outside the tribe. Peacefulness is shameful because it implies you are not ready to defend the rights of your tribe.
- manliness vs. meekness - a sure sign of weakness

Bravery is a man's willingness to risk his life (or give his life in the case of martyrs) for the benefit of the group. With bravery there is also courage - the ability to stand pain or emotional stress with self-control. Heavy corporal punishment (beating - whipping etc.) is considered good for boys, as it will produce courage. The element of testing courage is discernible everywhere – i.e. on the roads! Girls/women are not supposed to be courageous. In fact, they are supposed to be only capable of cowardice.

Honour ('sharaf' and 'jah')
'Jah' is rank, standing, dignity, honour, glory and fame. Honour is like a coat of armour - even a small hole needs immediate repair. In people's minds there is a correlation between honour and group survival.

Aspects of maintaining honour:

- Having many sons demonstrates virility - daughters don't count.
- Tending camels is honourable - agricultural work is dishonourable and so is being an artisan in an urban setting.
- Ability with a sword (nowadays with a rifle – AK47) is honourable.
- It is dishonourable to pay protection money.
- Raiding another tribe is honourable.
- Defending livestock is honourable.
- Having pure blood is honourable.
- Strong family loyalty is honourable.
- Behaving with dignity is honourable.
- One must defend one's public image aggressively.
- To revenge dishonour is essential.
- Endogamy – i.e. marrying your uncle's daughter (bint 'amin) - is very honourable.

- Having 'asabiyya' (being family spirited - linked with 'asab' - to tie together) is honourable.
- Extremely important is the preservation of the sexual inviolability of the family's women.

So honour relates largely to supporting the family. Honour is what makes life worthwhile. Shame is a living death that cannot be endured and must be avenged. The Arabic word for shame is 'ayb'.

Face ('wajh' in Arabic)
One can have a blackened face (bad) or a whitened face (good). 'Face' is related to hospitality and generosity. A man is judged largely on the basis of the manner in which he receives his guests. A self-respecting man, upholding family honour, takes his generosity with him wherever he goes - meeting a friend on the street, he will invite him to a tea shop and pay. If he is driving and he sees a friend walking on the street, he will offer to drive him where he wants to go. If he meets a friend at a service-taxi stop, he will insist on paying both their fairs. To 'forget' to do any of these things is to show disrespect and to shame both that person and oneself. In old bedouin culture you could always expect three days of hospitality (food, lodging and protection) even from your greatest enemy. In practice, the family will spend very considerable amounts of money at various 'rites of passage' ceremonies – birth, naming parties, circumcision, betrothal, marriage, completion of house building, Ramadan, completion of the Hajj, burial etc.

Showing hospitality and generosity helps secure favour with a potential client or a political ally. Showing 'face' in this way strengthens the extended family. The exact opposite is what Cain expected (by killing his brother, Cain brought very great shame on himself). He stated, ***"Whoever finds me will kill me."***

Doing a dishonourable act is fine as long as such an action remains unknown. If unknown, 'face' is preserved, but if known, 'face' is 'blackened'. So 'face' (wajh) is the outside - the surface of who you are. It is a very weighty word. Honour and 'face' are closely related. If it comes to saving somebody else's 'face', especially a family member, then lying becomes a duty. An Arab proverb says, **"I'd rather die of starvation than ask for help."** To ask for help would be a loss of 'face'. Because of the tyranny of 'face', Arabs make great efforts to hide their troubles from their friends. We are all prisoners of our cultural values.

Self-respect
This is a third ingredient into this great cultural value – honour, 'face' and self-respect. Once honour is impaired, great efforts are needed to restore it. If honour is lost, it is hard to regain.

Honour and self-respect are the collective property of the family. If a single member of the family brings dishonour on himself, the whole family feels disgraced. So obeying all the rules of honour is very important. Therefore all adult males in a family must see to it that no member of the family shames the family. Women are considered weak and cannot be relied upon to maintain family honour. Therefore it is essential that the males in the family shoulder the responsibility.

Dignity ('karam' in Arabic) is a crucial part of self-respect. If a man is insulted this leads to an immediate loss of 'karam'/dignity. If this is not immediately dealt with, the family will assume that a domino effect will occur and they will all suffer a collective loss of family dignity. So immediate action is taken to restore 'karam'. You must not 'turn the other cheek'. You must react with a demonstration of your dignity. You do not accept the insult; you rebel against it. Usually such an insulted person 'ups the anti' and throws greater insults back. This compels others to respect him and restores his sense of self-respect.

Blood feuds
If a member of the family is injured or even killed by a member of another group, (this sort of injury occurs when there is an escalation from verbal abuse to physical violence) then the family has suffered because their family honour is weakened. Revenge is called for to restore family honour. A member of the 'Khamsa' - a man's kin group composed of all male relatives who are removed from the shamed man by no more than five male links - will call this group together and choose which member of the murderer's 'Khamsa' is a legitimate target for blood revenge (not necessarily the murderer). There are protocols related to mediation in such issues, but 'blood demands blood' is strong. Honour is restored by death or by the appropriate payment made in a reconciliation agreement. It is also possible for a family to

pay protection money if they suspect they are being targeted for attack by the family they have shamed. This money is called 'Khwawa' (brotherhood!)

Shame

So bedouin ethics largely revolve around self-respect honour and 'face'. The fear of reprobation and shame compels a man who is little motivated to conform to the 'code of honour', to conform. Self-respect depends on other people's view of you. As a result, inner motivations, intentions, feelings and attitudes are of very little importance. Arabs find introspection and self-reflection difficult.

Shame is a matter between a person and his society. Guilt is a matter between a person and his conscience. What drives people to be honourable is to escape the negative judgments of others. So their main concern is, *"If I perform or refrain from an act, will I be ashamed if people find out about it?"* Shaming techniques are widely used in child rearing.

Therefore more outward conformity to the ethical cultural codes of honour is all that is expected. Thinking about objective ethical codes is largely neglected.

The "Fahlawi personality"

This code of honour, leads to "the fahlawi personality" which is hard to define. Johar – a folklore character - personifies this type of personality. It implies being sharp-witted and clever. There are many Arabic short stories about such admired people. Such people have three characteristics:

- **Ready adaptability** to various situations when you understand what responses are required. You need to learn to be flexible and have an aptitude for digesting what is new and adapting it to your advantage in terms of honour. But it also implies a readiness to express superficial agreement and fleeting amiability, while concealing your true feelings. This leads to insincere, simulated, external agreement. This is understood within the culture - no one expects the truth to be told. For people of different codes of value, such behaviour is considered phoney and untrustworthy.
- **Quick-witted responses** in situations that are getting a bit "heavy". You make a bitter or ironic or at best funny comment that will divert the situation away from reality. This makes life bearable and stops people getting to the point of dishonouring each other. But there really is a tendency to cover up problems by just making light of them and never to deal with the hard issues.
- **Self assertiveness** - not self-confidence, but a tendency to want to dominate the situation. This usually involves a lack of desire to assess the situation objectively and as a result there is often:
  - Recklessness
  - Scorn for others
  - Excess and exaggeration – embellishment - flowery speech
  - Conspicuous display
  - Failure to look on authority or leadership as something necessary - rather to fawn to it but despise it
  - The development of the technique of 'removal and relegation'. You remove any responsibility from yourself by relegating the problem to an area outside your own sphere into someone else's.

What motivates 'the Fahlawi personality' types is not dedication to duty or a wish to reach one's potential (self-actualisation), but rather the desire for a reward (more honour) or the fear of shame.

'The Fahlawi personality' relies on individual activity in preference to teamwork, for this helps to assert one's personality and avoids friction with others. Some Arab proverbs illustrate this:

"A shared kettle does not boil." "Better a mat of my own than a house shared."

The goal of life is to achieve your aims by the shortest possible effort. This sometimes leads to enthusiasm and boldness, but these frequently wane when perseverance and patience are called for.

In summary, it is a desire for quick and easy results - trying to succeed by by-passing the necessary toil. If a task needs to be done, little effort is made to do it in the best possible way, but only in a way that will impress others with your ability to perform it. So formal, recognised, external success is very important, rather than an internal sense of a job well done.

'A Fahlawi personality' is inflated, full of self-importance, always ready to demonstrate his superior knowledge and mastery and to be in control of a situation - often accompanied by contempt of others. This personality excels in superficial accommodation and ephemeral courtesy that hides his true feelings.

When 'a Falawi personality' finds himself in a situation where there is no escape and shame is being heaped upon him, he will tend to disclaim all responsibility and to blame external forces - bad luck, the teacher, the country, the situation, God, being betrayed by friends. But he will never penetrate to the root of the issue through introspection.

So 'Fahlawi personalities' value chivalry, manliness, honour, courage and prowess!

Attitude to physical work

Work is a curse! The ideal is to acquire riches through a stroke of luck – i.e. Gods help – by:

- finding treasure like oil
- finding favour in the eyes of the king/government
- buying cheap and selling at a high price
- being helped by a jinn

Working in the open air with your hands is the worst possible fate. So all village agricultural workers are despised - slaves of the soil. This is probably one of the reasons for high rates of urbanisation. Also in a big city you are among strangers and there is no loss of 'face'.

A concept of sin

'Sharaf' (honour) is something that is flexible. It can be acquired, augmented, diminished, lost, regained and so on. 'Sharaf' or lack of it is not connected with any concept of sin.

The closest you get to a Biblical concept of sin is that sin is like a loss of 'ird'. 'Ird' is a rigid concept. A woman is born with it. She can't add to it because it is absolute. It is her duty to preserve it. If her 'ird' is lost, it can never be regained. Often 'ird' and virginity are almost transposed and they are transposed in the case of rape. But in a legal marriage virginity is lost, but 'ird' is preserved. The 'sharaf' of a man depends on the 'ird' of his womenfolk. Transgression or loss of 'ird' (by a woman and her lover) requires death. Her paternal family will put them both to death - married or not. The life of a member of a family is always expendable if the loss of 'ird' is involved. A woman's main value in the view of her family is her capacity (potential or actual) to mother the male members of the family. If 'ird' is lost, it makes her unfit for the supreme task of being a woman. So she dies. A Biblical concept of God's view of sin is closer to a loss of 'ird' then a loss of honour. Shame is not to be equated with sin!

So honour – 'sharaf' - has been twisted into vanity of reputation. The Kurds have a proverb, **"No man admits his yoghurt is sour"**. The Turks say, **"Even if shame was made of silk, no one would wear it."** No confession of sin is easy in a system where everyone works full-time to avoid taking responsibility for the bad things in their lives. The only culturally appropriate solution is to blame others. Repentance is almost impossible! Someone has said that this attitude is "the heaviest of chains that have ever shackled humanity".

The Islamic component

Nearly all Muslims unquestioningly believe what tradition has commanded them to believe and obey the rules. It is the central normative force in life. Islam has had the ability to generate a psychological certainty of possessing the truth, of following the right path and of wielding the perfect key to the gate of the Great Beyond.

The feeling is that you do what is right because you observe the laws and so are inwardly protected from serious harm because God, in whom you trust, keeps an eye on each individual, and ultimately metes out just retribution. This leads to a sense of security - an ability to preserve calm and dignity and detachment without depriving people of the ability to seek and enjoy whatever pleasures can be won from the world.

Appendix 2

Old Testament concepts of shame, sin and guilt and a brief look at New Testament consequences of redemption

Old Testament concepts of shame, sin and guilt

- Shame is a consequence of sin - feelings of guilt and shame are subjective.
- Guilt is judicial in character – shame is relational.
- Shame emphasizes sin's effect on self-identity.
- Various words are associated with shame: disconcerted, disappointed, confounded etc. These are found frequently in Isaiah and Jeremiah.
- David captures the pervasive OT perspective when he says, ***"Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to You . Let the wicked be put to shame …"*** (Ps. 31:17)
- But God can remove shame – Ps. 119:3.
- It is no good to presume on status and ignore faith and obedience. If you do, God will shame you. (Is. 22:18; Jer. 2:26; 7:19; Ez. 7:8; Dan. 9:7-8)
- Proverbs emphasizes the shame of public humiliation for undisciplined behaviour (13:18; 18:13; 25:8) and lack of attention to family (12:4; 17:2; 19:26; 29:15).
- Sin:
  - ✧ Disobedience or a breach of the law
  - ✧ Violation of relationships with people
  - ✧ Rebellion against God – a relationship of opposition to God
- Guilt ('asam'): In the Old Testament there are phrases that imply a guilty conscience, ***"David's heart smote him"*** (1 Sam. 14:5). A conscience feels guilty when a person's actions – begun or completed – transgress the moral limits of his nature. But in general 'having a guilty conscience' is not prominent in the Old Testament.

  The guilt offering sacrifice was more for purification of ceremonial defilement, although the moral aspect is not to be ruled out.

New Testament concepts of a guilty conscience

The word 'conscience' is used often in the Pauline letters (largely written to Greco-Romans) and also in 1 Peter. A major part of Pauline teaching on conscience is found in Romans 2. The word and the concept was often used by 4th/3rd century BC Greek philosophers. As Europe began to be affected by the Renaissance in the 14th and 15th centuries, Europeans switched from being primarily a 'shame' culture to being a 'guilt' culture.

New Testament consequences of redemption

In Palestine in the first century AD redemption was a politically loaded word full of messianic/eschatological concepts. So a Messiah would come who would redeem Israel – i.e. liberate Israel from the power of Rome as God has once liberated Israel from the power of Pharaoh.

The concept of redemption had strong "secular" nationalistic expectations. So Jesus is never called "the Redeemer" in the New Testament. But Jesus is the Redeemer of the Old Testament prophecies – redeeming His people (now both Jews and Gentiles) from a state of alienation from God by His death and resurrection (Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).

In the Roman World of the first three centuries AD redemption was seen in the context of slavery – i.e. liberating a slave by paying a price to the owner.

But the real price of Biblical redemption is both moral and material. So in the First Century AD the concepts of atonement, sacrifice, justification and other legal terms were used.

Ransom ('lytron' from the verb 'to purchase') is used three times (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). Paul uses 'apolytrosis' (meaning deliverance) more frequently (see Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

In essence, redemption in Scripture is that God has taken the initiative to act compassionately on behalf of those who are powerless to help themselves. God identifies with our humanity in our plight and secures the liberation of humankind through the obedience, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of the Incarnate Son.

Appendix 3

Mother and daughter-in-law relationships in the local cultures

- The greatest fear of wives is that they will be divorced (a very great shame) or replaced by another wife or wives. This again is a great source of shame and with shame comes a loss of influence and therefore a loss of protection.
- So a mother tries very hard to bind her sons to her. The mother-son relationship is very strong in the Middle East - the strongest there is. This produces spoiled sons for mothers never correct them. The mother tries to weaken, in whatever way possible, the father-son relationships that are often very stormy.
- When the son gets married, the daughter-in-law might become a threat to the mother-son relationship. Since most marriages are arranged, mothers often bring pressure to select a non-compatible bride for their sons – making the mother-in-law relationship difficult from the beginning. Dowry and finances
- are also a major consideration.
- When the daughter-in-law arrives in the son's parental home, her life is often made miserable by her mother-in-law. All attempts to make the marriage work emotionally are seen as a threat. The life of a daughter-in-law is hard. Her only hope is in having sons herself!