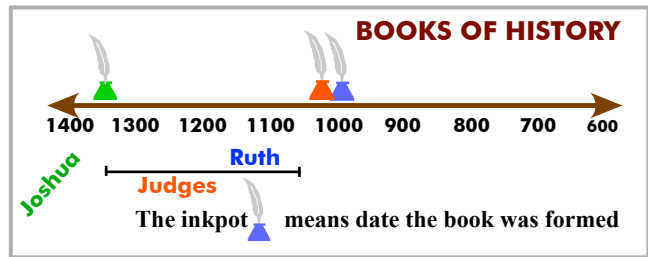


Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Ruth, chapters 1 – 4.**

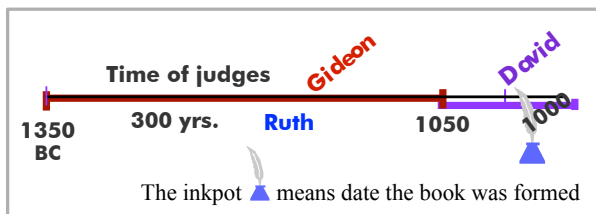
We have been studying the Old Testament books of history. We discovered that events happen at one time period, but the actual book is created many years later.

The events in **Joshua** happened over 25 years and were documented by the Levite **historians**. Fifty years after Joshua's death, Levite **scribes** used parts of those historical documents and created our book of Joshua. (1325 BC)

Next came the 300 years of failure during the time of the **Judges**. The events were written down by the **historians** and put away for safekeeping. Twenty years **after** the judges, during the time of King Saul (1030 BC), the Holy Spirit guided the **scribes** to go thru the documents, looking for the *reason, examples* and the *result* of all that failure. They took the information and created our book of Judges. This means the book of Judges was put together 300 years after the book of Joshua. The book of **Ruth** was created 30 years after that. (1000 BC).



Ruth 1:1 says the events in this story happened in the days of the judges. The verse also says it was a time when Israel was going thru a famine. This fits the time of Gideon. Just before he became judge, the nation went thru 7 years of famine.



about David's great, great grandparents. They take that part out, plus an earlier genealogy and create our book of Ruth, around the year of 1000 BC.

So the events of Ruth begin around 1157 BC and cover some 11 years. Levite **historians** write about these events as they happen and put them away for safekeeping.

One hundred fifty years later, David becomes king. The Holy Spirit now guides Levite **scribes** to go thru historical documents looking for David's ancestors and any unusual history that might be connected with them. They come to the time of the judges and read

**PURPOSE** Thru the book of Ruth, the scribes wanted...

- ...to show how God miraculously brought people together to become David's ancestors.
- ...to up-date his family tree from the time of Jacob to David himself, a period of 700 years.

Because God wanted this part of history to be permanent, He made it a part of Scripture.

It is why, 3000 years later, we are still reading it.

The book of Ruth is about Jewish history, Jewish families and a Jewish king. Yet it completely revolves around a woman who is **not** Jewish. **She** is the unusual part of the story, so she is the focus. We see this in the **OUTLINE**.

Ruth's decision	1
Ruth's work	2
Ruth's request	3
Ruth's reward	4

This book is unusual for another reason as well. The time of the judges was 300 years of failure. It was a dark period in their history. Yet in the midst of that darkness, God always had people who followed Him. They were called the **Jewish Remnant** - a minority of Jewish people scattered thruout the land. However, because of the evil around them, even they did not always obey.

Such is the case of the Jewish family in this story. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and 2 adult sons live in Bethlehem, near the northern end of the Dead Sea. It is a time of famine, around 1157 BC.

Thruout these lessons we have talked about the **JEWISH STYLE OF WRITING**. One style that has not been mentioned before is the **play on words**. Sometimes it is a pun or words that sound very similar. Other times there are opposites that create an irony. This is what we have in chapter 1:1.

We are told the family lives in Bethlehem. The name **Bethlehem** means **house of bread**. But with the famine,

there is no **bread** in the **house of bread**. This word play is evident in the original Hebrew language. It draws attention to the famine – a situation that should not happen among God’s people.

God had told the Jews, that as a nation and people, they would have a special relationship to Him. Because He gave them a **physical** land with **physical** leaders, their blessings and consequences would be based on the **PHYSICAL**.

If they obeyed, guaranteed, they would have abundant crops, long life and large families.

If they disobeyed, guaranteed, there would be famine, premature death and no children.

It is important to understand, this was *only* for the Jews in Old Testament times. This is not how God works with us today. God put the Jews in a **physical** kingdom. So the **physical** was guaranteed.

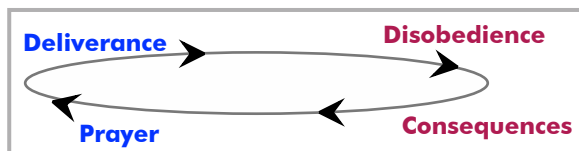
We, as God’s people today, are in a **spiritual** kingdom.

So our guaranteed blessings are based on the **SPIRITUAL**.

Guaranteed consequences are also **spiritual** – our relationship with God is always affected.

We may have **physical** blessings or consequences, but they are **not** guaranteed.

Back in the Old Testament, when there was famine, all Jewish people knew it was a consequence of their disobedience.



They also knew, even when they were living like the Canaanites, if there was desperation prayer and they repented, God would remove the famine. He would deliver them thru another leader-judge.

By the time of Elimelech, the Jews have experienced 170 years under these cycles and judges

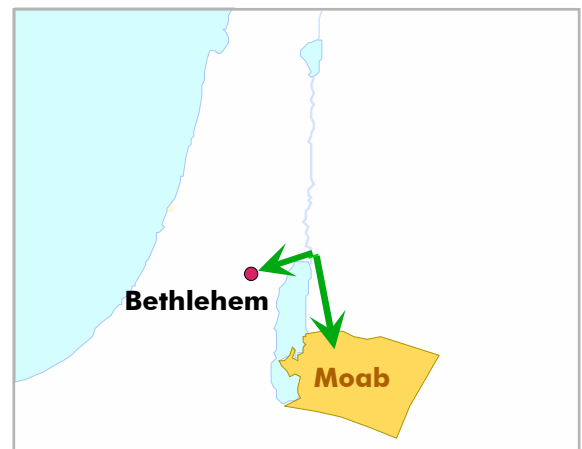
Elimelech and his family were even more aware of God’s action because they were part of the Remnant. They knew God had sent the famine because the nation was disobeying God. Elimelech should have said to his family,

*We cannot change our nation or leaders. But as a family unit of 4, let’s obey God and ask Him to provide food for us. Let’s encourage our neighbors and friends to obey. If no one responds, then we will ask God about moving to another country to get food.*

In earlier laws God had told the Jews they were not to live with the people who worshipped idols in the surrounding countries. This included Moab.

The name *Elimelech* means **God is King**. But Elimelech is not acting like he believes it. He does not turn to God for food or ask Him if they should move. Without consulting God, Elimelech moves his family from Bethlehem to Moab on the other side of the Dead Sea. It would be a trip of some 75 miles, going around the northern end.

After living in Moab only a short time, Elimelech dies. The 2 adult sons marry girls from Moab. Ten years go by and the 2 sons die. Neither of their wives had any children. All of this is God’s judgment, because the three Jewish men did not obey the Jewish laws God had given them.



This leaves Naomi with her daughters-in-law.

She is Jewish; they are not Jewish.

She worships Yahweh, the God of Israel. They worship Chemosh and other Moabite gods.

Not long afterwards, she hears the famine is over in Israel. She decides to return to Bethlehem. Because her daughters-in-law are part of the family, they feel a sense of obligation and plan to go with her.

After going a short distance, Naomi tells them they should stay in their country with their people. The girls still have a sense of responsibility, so Naomi tells them once again, *your safety and future is in remarriage but I do not have any other sons.*

In between the lines she is also saying, *You worship other gods. Our God has said Jewish men are not to marry you.* She fully knows that Jewish men had married lots of Canaanite women. But being part of the Remnant who follows God, she does not want to add to the problem. By bringing pagan women into her small town of Bethlehem, 2 Jewish young men might marry them and be led into idolatry. So Naomi encourages the girls to return to their family, their country and their religion.

One of the girls sees the wisdom in Naomi's words and decides to stay in Moab. From the story, we can tell that up to this point, the 2 girls have continued in the worship of their gods. *Look, said Naomi, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her **gods**.* 1:15

It is at this point that Ruth makes 3 decisions. In stating them, she gives us one of the most beautiful verses in the Old Testament. She says,

*Do not urge me to leave you or 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.* 1:16

Ruth decides...

...To identify with the land and people of Naomi.

Because Ruth wants to be a part of God's people, she is giving up her country, language, culture and the idolatry of her family.

...To take care of Naomi, even if she does not get to remarry.

...To worship and follow the **God** of Naomi.

During the 10 years in Moab, the husband and 2 sons had completely rebelled against God. We know this because of their premature death. If they had considered following God once again, He would have known and spared their life, waiting for them to return. But because it was total rejection, He took their lives.

Naomi, at the beginning, probably did not follow God as closely as **she** should. But at some point she made a commitment. She would worship and obey God even if she was the only one in the family to do it; even if she was the only one in the pagan country of Moab. She would obey, no matter what. As a result, Naomi would have been very lonely in her spiritual life. But her faithfulness had made an impression on Ruth. We know this because now, Ruth is giving up everything to follow and worship the God of Naomi.

Chapter one ends with an explanation that barley harvest is just beginning in Bethlehem. This means it is the month of April. It also tells us there is no more famine. Bethlehem is once again the *house of bread*. Some 4 years earlier, the people had turned to God in desperation prayer and repentance. He in turn gave them Gideon, their leader judge who led them in victory over their enemy.

Chapter 2:1 continues with another explanation. It is strictly for the benefit of the reader. The scribes have inserted it into the text. It is as tho they are saying, *By the way, before we go on with this story, you the reader should know that Naomi has a relative. He is from the family clan of her husband. His name is Boaz.*

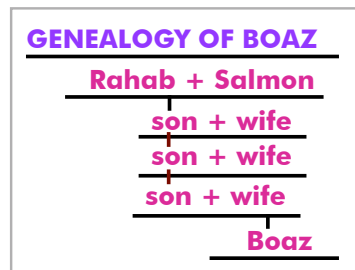
This comment is in our text as verse one, but Ruth does not know a thing about it. She is not reading this verse; she is living the experience.

The Bible does not tell us much about Boaz, but he is a very important link in Jewish history. We discover the link by reading the Jewish lists of genealogies or family trees. According to the one in Matthew 1:5 we read,

*Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose **mother** was Rahab.*

Rahab was the Canaanite woman who had been a prostitute in Jericho, but had chosen to follow the God of Israel. She proved her faith was genuine when she saved the lives of the scouts. When the Jews conquered Jericho, they spared Rahab and her family and she became a part of the Jewish community. Later on she married a Jewish man named Salmon and they had a little boy (around 1360 BC). He grew up, got married and had a son (around 1320). He grew up and had a son (around 1280). When that son grew up and got married, he had a son and named him Boaz (around 1240). This means Rahab was the great, great grandmother of Boaz.

The verse in Matthew says *mother*, but it can also mean grandmother or any further generation of mother. Because there was 120 years between Rahab and Boaz, we know Matthew leaves out 3 generations. This was common in Jewish culture. The complete family lines were safely stored with the Jewish historians. When **scribes** wanted to emphasize a special link between people in Scripture, they would skip over generations that were less known. Matthew is emphasizing the link between Rahab and Boaz so he purposely leaves out 3 generations.



When the Jews entered the Promised Land, it was divided between the 12 Jewish tribes. Each family clan received a piece of land, which was to be in that family forever. It was the family farm. Naomi's farm in Bethlehem had been in the family for the last 250 years. During her 10-year absence, extended family in adjoining property had been farming her land. But it was still Naomi's farm.

As they had passed the fields Ruth had seen people gleaning in the fields. Ruth wonders what they are doing. Naomi tells her of God's provision in the Jewish law.

*When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the immigrant, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*

Deuteronomy 24:19

Both Ruth and Naomi are widows and Ruth is also an immigrant. Because they have no source of income or food they have the right to go to the field and pick up grain after the reapers.

Ruth and Naomi find a place to live in town. Once they are settled, Ruth goes out, finds a field and begins to pick up the grain. The fact that only Ruth goes out to glean, means Naomi is not able to, either because of age or health. This no doubt is why Ruth wanted to stay with Naomi and take care of her.

Chapter 2:3 says Ruth ends up in the field of Boaz. But remember, at this point Ruth has never heard of him. We are not told the age of Boaz when he meets Ruth, but the story implies he is older. He is probably twice her age.

Every day Boaz leaves his home in Bethlehem and comes to the field, greeting his workers with the phrase ***the Lord be with you*** 2:4. ***The Lord bless you***, they called back. The scribes have included this detail to show us that Boaz was also part of the Jewish Remnant. He had established this custom of greeting his workers as a continual reminder that God was part of their everyday life, even when they were working in the fields.

As Boaz talks with his foreman, he notices Ruth out in the field. Because it is a small town, he ordinarily would know anyone qualified to glean. But he does not recognize her, so he asks the foreman, *who is that girl?*

His foreman replies, *she is the Moabite girl that came back with Naomi - it is her daughter-in-law*. Boaz approaches Ruth. He encourages her to stay in his field, makes her feel welcome and tells her that she can follow close behind the women who are binding the sheaves. 2:8-9.

Harvesting in those days involved reapers with a sickle. They cut the barley stalks by the handful and left them lying on the ground. They were followed by women who tied 8-10 of these handfuls into sheaves and left them in the field. Later on other reapers came and carried the big sheaves to a holding area. Only then were the poor allowed on the field to glean or pick up the leftovers. But Boaz tells Ruth that she can glean among the women as they are binding the sheaves. She does not know it, but he instructs the women and also the men who come later to purposely leave some on the ground for her.

Also in verse 9, Boaz guarantees Ruth's protection. Because she is a foreigner, the men might take advantage of her or mistreat her. He then tells her she can have all the water and food she needs. In fact, he invites her to eat the noon meal with the workers.

Ruth responds to this in chapter 2:10. In the literal Hebrew she makes a play on the words. She asks,

*Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me - the one who is unnoticed?*

Her response is surprise and humility. She does not think of herself as a victim, that she deserves something for her sacrifice or that anybody owes her anything. Instead she asks, *why are you doing this for me?*

Boaz says they are two reasons.

**1.** It is because of what she has done for Naomi.

**2.** It is because she has chosen to follow Yahweh God.

*May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, **under whose wings you have come to take refuge**.* 2:12

The Jews were an agricultural people so when they were talking about God, they used pictures from nature. Boaz is thinking of the mother hen who protects the helpless chicks by spreading her wings and letting them find safety underneath her. Boaz tells Ruth, *I want to help you because you have chosen to believe in and worship Yahweh God. You have placed yourself under His wings, for His protection.*

Ruth works hard all day long. Because of the grain that is purposely left on the ground for her, she is able to thresh out an ephah of barley. That was enough grain to feed 2 people for 5 days. Ordinarily gleaning was a hand to mouth existence. A person might get enough to feed one or at the most 2 people for just that day. It was unbelievable, a person could get enough to feed 2 people for 5 days. So when she gets home, Naomi immediately knows someone has been very generous. She asks, *where did you work? May Yahweh bless whomever it is.*

Ruth answers, *I worked on the farm belonging to a man named Boaz*. This is when Naomi gets excited. She responds, *That man is our close relative; he is our redeemer*. 2:20 This is the literal Hebrew. Your translation may read, *next of kin*. By using the phrase, *he is our redeemer*, she is saying, *he is the one person who can change our situation*.

To understand her excitement, we have to go back in Israel's history. When God gave the land to the family clans, He wanted it to always stay in the family name. The land belonged to God - it was His **gift** to His people to permanently maintain.

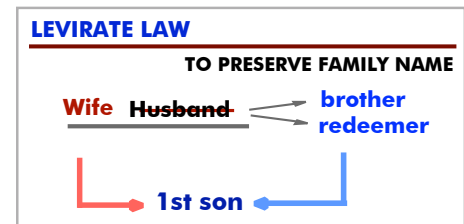
**But property could be lost** if the family might become poor and need to **sell** their land in order to get money.

So God created special property laws. When they needed to sell property, the nearest relative would buy it and hold it in trust. It was said, *the relative redeemed the land*. When the original family got re-established, they would go to the relative and buy back their property. This kept the land in the name of the family clan. Lev. 25:25

**Property could also be lost** if the husband died and there was **no son** to inherit the land and continue the family name

So there was another law to deal with that situation.

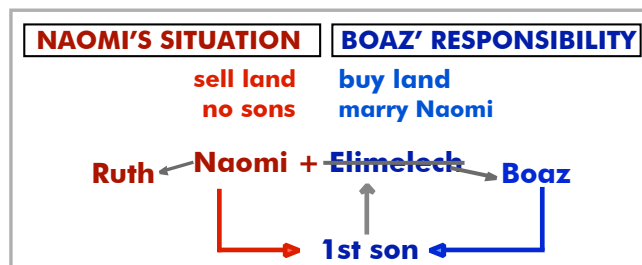
*If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.* Deuteronomy 25:5-6



This law in Deuteronomy had no official name. No doubt it was simply called the “brother-in-law marriage”. Later in history, the Latin word for “brother-in-law” was used – “levir”. So it became known as the **Levirate** marriage or law.

The redeemer, whether it be brother-in-law or the nearest relative, even if he was already married, was to marry the widow to have just one son by that marriage. That son would carry the family name of the dead relative, so the family line could continue. After that, the redeemer would have no further marital relations with her if he were already married.

In case there is any question, this was a law only for the Jews in the Old Testament when they needed to protect the family farm. By the time of the New Testament, this law was no longer used. It definitely is **not** for anyone to use in our day.



But Naomi lived in the days of the Old Testament.

Her situation involved both Jewish laws.

She is poor and needs to sell her land.

That requires a **kinsman-redeemer**.

She has no son to continue the name of Elimelech.

That requires a **“brother-in-law” marriage**.

Since Boaz is their redeemer and relative of Elimelech, it means he now has 2 responsibilities.

...To buy Naomi's land

...To keep the family name alive by marrying Naomi.

But Naomi is past the age of child bearing. So he will marry Ruth who is a member of Naomi's family. For **property rights** only, the son who is born will be considered the son of Naomi and her dead husband. The son will carry on Elimelech's family name.

Parents, in those days were responsible for arranging the marriage of their children. In order for Boaz and Ruth to marry, Naomi must take responsibility. Because it involves redemption - selling property and preserving the family name, **the person having the need must ask the one who can meet the need**. Ruth and Naomi have to **ask** Boaz to help them.

At the end of the barley harvest, the sheaves in the holding area are taken to a large flat area known as the threshing floor.

The grain is spread out and horses or oxen trample it so the grain is broken off from the stalks and husks. Once the wind picks up, it is time to winnow. The farmer separates the grain from its chaff or husks by putting handfuls of the mixture into a large shallow basket and tossing everything into the wind. The grain, which is heavier, falls back onto the basket, while the chaff is blown away. Because the wind does not begin in southern Israel until late afternoon, the farmers thresh during the day and winnow in the evening until sunset, about 9:00 p.m.



Naomi knows that Boaz is at the threshing floor in the evening. She sends Ruth to ask him for help. Because everything in chapter 3 is so different from our culture, we cannot help but wonder if it is appropriate. Knowing this was during the time of the judges makes us wonder even more. But I can assure you there is absolutely nothing immoral or wrong in any way.

That night after Boaz finishes the winnowing, he has a late supper and then sleeps at the threshing floor to protect his grain. He is fully dressed. He also has an outer tunic or robe that serves as a light blanket to cover his legs and feet. After he goes to sleep, Ruth comes and lays at his feet, moving the corner of his outer tunic over her. Sometime in the middle of the night, when it is dark, he awakens and realizes someone is at his feet. He asks, *who are you?* Ruth identifies herself.

When Boaz first met Ruth, he had told her, *you have asked God to spread His wings over you.*

Ruth uses this same idea in her request.

In the actual Hebrew she now says to Boaz, *spread your wings over me.*

The word for *wing* in Hebrew was sometimes used to refer to the hemmed edge of a robe.

In Middle East culture of that time, placing the corner of a garment over a girl was the sign of engagement or marriage. In fact, in some places of the Middle East, it is still done today. To use plain English, Ruth is asking Boaz to marry her and buy Naomi's property. She is asking him to be her redeemer. The paraphrase Living Bible says, *Take me as your wife according to God's law.* In our culture, it usually is the man who proposes, so Ruth's action seems out of place and aggressive.

But this is Jewish culture. Even tho Boaz is the redeemer and knows his responsibility, he cannot do anything until she asks him to be her redeemer. She has to **personally** make that request.

But why go at night? The answer is that it would not be fitting for her to go directly to his house. He is a wealthy, highly respected man in town. She is poor and a foreigner. This is the only opportunity to approach him privately, so if he wants, he can refuse without being made to look bad or be embarrassed.

Ruth has said, *I want you to be my redeemer.* He replies,

*Altho it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. If he is not willing, I promise I will do it.*  
3:12-13

Because it would have been dangerous for Ruth to return home in the middle of the night, Boaz tells her to stay there to sleep. Early the next morning she returns home with grain that Boaz has given her. The grain is evidence that he will respond to her request.

According to chapter 4:1, Boaz goes to the city gate, which is equivalent to our city hall. It is where all legal transactions take place. Boaz gets 10 city elders to serve as witnesses to the legal contract. When the relative goes by, he says to him, *since you are the nearest relative, are you willing to redeem Naomi's property?*

The relative agrees. Boaz then adds, *by the way, in redeeming the property, you will also have to marry Ruth, so she can have a son to keep the family name of Elimelech.* The man replies, *in that case, I am not interested. I do not want to endanger my inheritance.*

If he only has to buy the property, he can begin farming it and increase his income. With no son to claim the land, it will automatically become part of his inheritance. But if he has to marry Ruth, their son inherits the property. He is putting out money for land, which he will eventually lose. So he turns down the offer because he does not want to endanger his inheritance.

To make it official, he takes off his shoe and gives it to Boaz in front of the city leaders. This makes perfect sense when you know the complete custom and culture. To claim land, they had to set their foot on it and walk on it. To renounce their claim, they took their shoe off and gave it to the person who was claiming the land.

Boaz completes the legal transaction. He is now redeemer for the land and for Ruth.

Ruth's reward is marriage to Boaz and a son named Obed.

Naomi's part in this story is also amazing. She had gone thru a lot of suffering, not just for her disobedience, but even more so because of her family's disobedience. She lost her husband and both of her sons. She was left with an empty life. But when she made a commitment to obey, no matter what, God forgave and is now filling her life with blessings.

God still works this way in our lives. We cannot change the past, but we can decide to obey at this point in our life. When we do, God can take the consequences of the past and change them into blessings for the present.

Naomi's blessing and reward is a son. Chapter 4:16 - 17 explain that the son, Obed, is given to Naomi and the women say, *Naomi has a son*. Biologically, the baby is her grandson. But for **property** rights, he is her **son**.

Ruth will be the one to nurse him, but Naomi will care for him. This means she will raise and nurture him. He will carry the family name and be her help and support for the rest of her life. Since she will be living with Boaz and Ruth, they will always be part of Obed's everyday life as well.

Because Ruth is now the wife of Boaz, she becomes an ancestor of David and of Jesus.

The story of Ruth is part of the Bible...

...To give us the background of David's family and how the family line of Jesus developed.

...To present a view of life among the Jewish Remnant

JUDGES	RUTH
immorality	purity
idolatry	worship of God alone
disloyalty	devotion
lust	love
war	peace
cruelty	kindness
disobedience & consequences	obedience & blessing
spiritual darkness	spiritual light

In the book of Judges, life was filled with:

immorality, idolatry, disloyalty, lust, war, cruelty, disobedience, consequences and spiritual darkness.

But among the Jewish Remnant, there was:

purity, worship of Yahweh God, devotion, love, peace, kindness, obedience, blessing and spiritual light.

It was all determined by obedience or disobedience of God's commands.

(Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Commentary on Ruth*.)

The story of Ruth is part of the Bible...

...To give another of God's pictures. **Boaz is a picture of Jesus our Redeemer.**

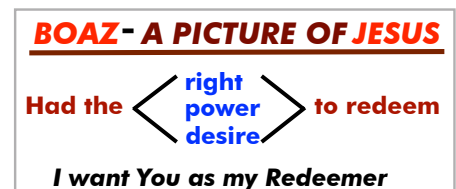
Boaz had the right to redeem; the power to redeem and the desire to redeem. All three were necessary.

Jesus is our Redeemer.

He had the **right** to redeem because He became part of humanity. He entered the human race, to become one of us. This made Him our relative, our kinsman.

He had the **power** to redeem, because as deity, His payment was sufficient for the sin of the whole world, for all time.

Jesus had the **desire** to redeem. He left heaven's glory and came to make our payment on the cross.



Boaz was willing and ready to redeem. **But**, he could not do anything until Ruth told him, *I want You as my redeemer*.

Jesus is ready and willing to be our Redeemer but He cannot do anything until we tell Him,

*Jesus, I want You as **my** redeemer. I accept the payment You made for **my** disobedience.*

## EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

### A blessing on Boaz

*May your family be like the family of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah*

The founder of Boaz' family clan was Perez. He was born out of a levirate marriage

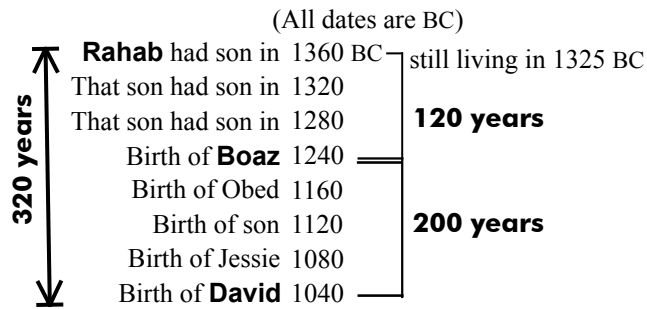
(but it was incest because Judah was her father-in-law and she was posing as a prostitute).

Perez was the son of a widow woman and an older man.

The Perezite clan was increasing and becoming more prominent.

The generations between Rahab and David – estimated because not all the generations are mentioned in Scripture

It is based on having children when 40 years old except for Boaz at 80.



Rahab is David's great grandmother 5 generations removed

Kingship of David 1010- 970

