

BaptistWay Press® Premium Commentary

By Dr. David Ritsema
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church
Waxahachie, Texas

Studies in Rescue and Redemption

Lesson Three

The Kinsman-Redeemer

Focal Text

Ruth 2:1-12, 17-23; 4:1-14

Background

Ruth 1-4

Main Idea

The story of Ruth and Boaz is a beautiful picture of God's redeeming love.

Question to Explore

How can you extend God's redeeming love to others?

Quick Read

After the death of her husband, Ruth goes to her mother-in-law's hometown, where she meets Boaz. Though not legally bound to do so, Boaz acts as the kinsman-redeemer for Ruth.

Introduction

A medieval monk announced the evening's sermon would be entitled "The Love of God." The congregation gathered that night. Outside it grew dark and the shadows fell. Inside it was also dark. The monk entered the sanctuary holding a lit candle and carrying a cross in his hand. The light illumined the crown of thorns and cast a brilliant shadow of the two, wounded hands of Jesus. A quiet hush fell over the crowd. Then, the monk, in silence, finished the service by blowing out the candle and leaving. The service was over, but its message came through loud and clear. God has demonstrated his redeeming love in Jesus' selfless sacrifice of the cross (John 3:16; cf. Romans 5:8).

Page 1 of 8

Premium Commentary. Rescue and Redemption—Lesson Three. Copyright © 2018 BAPTISTWAY PRESS®. A ministry of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Go to www.baptistwaypress.org or call 1-866-249-1799 toll-free for additional Bible study materials for all ages. ***This lesson is not to be sold or distributed beyond the subscription agreement. The copyright notice and identifying information in this note must be included on any copies made.***

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in *Premium Commentary* are from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Although the cross of Jesus is God's best demonstration of love, it is not his only example of redeeming love. We also see it in one of the Old Testament's greatest love stories. It is called the Book of Ruth. The book is named after its main character who is a Moabite woman. She was a widow who had been married to a man whose father and mother (named Naomi) had come from the Judean village town of Bethlehem (sometimes called Ephrathah in the Bible; cf. Micah 5:2). However, both she and her mother-in-law, Naomi, lost their husbands.

Although Ruth could have stayed with her own people, she decided to travel back to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. Ruth's decision to return with her mother-in-law is one of the more touching moments in the book (and indeed in the Bible) as she says, "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" (Ruth 1:16).

After arriving in Bethlehem during the harvest season (cf. 1:22, the first harvest of the year, around the month of April), Ruth goes out to glean some barley in the field of a man named Boaz, who turns out to be a relative and a candidate to be her kinsman-redeemer. After a series of challenges, Boaz accepts Ruth's subtle proposal for marriage—lying beside him in an open field and asking for him to cover her with his garment.

However, a problem arises when Boaz tells Ruth he is not the next closest of kin. This sets the stage for a dramatic resolution which takes place at the city gate, before the town elders. The situation culminates in Boaz being granted the right to become her kinsman-redeemer. They are married, and the story ends by telling us they have a child named Obed.

The story of Ruth and Boaz is a beautiful picture of love, not merely romantic love, but of God's redeeming love. Boaz' love for Ruth leads to her rescue and the redemption of Naomi's family lineage. Toward the close of the book we read,

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The woman said to Naomi: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!" (Ruth 4:13-14).

In fact, the child born to Boaz and Ruth (named Obed) became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of King David—who was not only Israel's greatest king but the precursor to the King of Kings (viz. Jesus Christ)!

Commentary

The backstory of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi involves Naomi's leaving Bethlehem with her husband to travel to Moab due to a famine (Ruth 1:1-2). Moab was a territory on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, with a fertile area where crops could be

grown and animals could graze. Due to the unique geographical features of the topography of the region, it received what other areas did not, an ample amount of rainfall (sixteen to eighteen inches per year).¹ It was while living here Naomi's sons married Moabite women, one of whom was named Ruth (1:4).

When her two sons died, Naomi returned to Bethlehem, but to her surprise one of her Moabite daughters-in-law wanted to return with her, saying, "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" (Ruth 1:16). The first chapter of Ruth gives this background and an important detail; they both arrived at the beginning of the harvest of barley (1:22)—this detail sets the stage for what transpires in the narrative.

In the ancient world, the plight of the widow could become dire. In some cases, these women became permanent slaves with no hope of emancipation. In the Book of Amos, Amaziah says that after his exile and death, his wife will be forced into prostitution and their children will be killed (Amos 7:17). Against this harsh background the practice of the kinsman-redeemer arose (Leviticus 25:39–55), built on the practices of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–10).² In some cases, if a widow made a vow she could not repay, she might be forced into prostitution (cf. Numbers 30; Proverbs 7:14–20).³ Again and again Scripture tells us of God's concern for the widows and the poor (Deut. 10:17–18; Psalm 68:5; 146:9; Jeremiah 49:11). God gives instructions for their preservation (Exodus 22:22–24; Deut. 14:28–29; 24:17–20; 26:12–13; 27:19).⁴

Ruth Meets Boaz in a Grain Field (Ruth 2)

2:2. Naomi's relative, on her husband's side, was Boaz—a man of "good standing" (lit. "a man of valor," which may imply his stature as a fighting man; cf. Joshua 6:2) in his "clan" (a social group smaller than a tribe but bigger than a family)—making him a prospective candidate to be Ruth's husband. But even more, Boaz could be the kinsman-redeemer for the family line based upon the clan (cf. Leviticus 25). The clan maintained the social and economic survival of relatives in times of crisis (cf. Deut. 25:5–10).⁵

The occasion of their meeting was when Ruth went out to pick up left over grain behind the harvesters. There was a custom of allowing gleaners to come behind the harvesters as commanded; in fact, the Mosaic law required landowners to leave some of the harvest for the poor and for the foreigner, which as Moabite, Ruth was (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22). Unfortunately, the Israelites did not always follow this command (cf. Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:10-15).

2:3. Ruth works the field only to discover that it is owned by Boaz. It is thought that this village had only a few hundred people with fields marked off into family plots—piles of stones usually served as boundary markers (cf. Deut. 19:14). Thus, it would be easy to go from field to field.

The text tells us that Ruth walked “behind” the harvesters. A painting in Egypt depicts the practice where one person would cut the grain heads (normally with a flint sickle) and the person behind them would gather them.⁶ This seems to be what Ruth was doing.

2:4-5. When Boaz arrived he greeted the harvesters, “The LORD be with you!” (the “all-caps” indicating the use of the sacred name Yahweh) and they responded, “The LORD bless you!” This exchange of greetings was not unusual but also helps set the tone for the book. Psalm 129:8 recounts how the harvesters used to exchange similar greetings. The use of God’s sacred name “Yahweh” was exclusive to Israel—some suggest that it might indicate that Ruth was a believer in Israel’s God.

Boaz asked his “overseer” about the identity of Ruth. The term “overseer” could also be translated “foreman” and referred to a person, ordinarily of military rank. In Scripture the term can refer to a “steward” who manages an estate (e.g., the man named Ziba who had custody of Saul’s estate; cf. 2 Samuel 9:9).

2:7. Ruth rose early in the morning to work, a typical practice of farmers who wanted to take advantage of the cooler part of the day. Some workers may have taken an afternoon break (cf. David’s afternoon walk on the roof in 2 Sam. 11:2), as Ruth did inside of a “shelter,” presumably from the heat of the sun.

2:8-9. After Boaz’ overseer gives information to him about Ruth and how she is gleaning, Boaz speaks to her personally. Using words of compassion, Boaz invites her to stay in his field, gleaning behind the men (who did the cutting), but in the company of women (who did the binding and where it would be safer for her). Boaz tells his men to leave Ruth alone (lit. not to “touch” her—which could mean verbal, physical or even sexual abuse, Prov. 6:29), and offers her drink and shade. The offering of drink was important, since water had to be brought to the field in containers from Bethlehem’s well (cf. David longing for a drink from the well in 2 Sam. 23:15), where it was kept cool by natural evaporation of the water through the porous jar.⁷

2:10-12. Ruth put her face to the ground to thank Boaz for his kindness. She wonders why he would show such kindness to a foreigner. Boaz’s response is surprising—he says that he has taken notice of the compassion that she has shown to her mother-in-law Naomi. And then offers a blessing on her that the LORD would repay her for her kind actions.

Then Boaz offers a subtle foreshadowing of what is to come when he says, “May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” The irony is that she has taken cover under the wings of the LORD (cf. Ps. 36:7), but also from Boaz himself. Ancient imagery from this time depicts various gods sheltering individuals under their wings—implying this was a common expression for God’s provision (cf. Exod. 25:17-22).

2:14. Boaz' kindness was again extended to Ruth when he invited her to eat with him at "mealtime." Normally there were three meals—light breakfast, light lunch, and a main meal in the evening (e.g., one-pot stew of vegetable with bread and soured wine).⁸ The "roasted grain" was also a common meal (1 Sam. 17:17), which could be prepared on a pan or iron plate, since the grain was too hard to eat until the kernel was broken.

2:15-18. Boaz then gave orders to his men to let Ruth gather sheaves, not to be harsh toward her, and to even drop some for her. The result was she gathered an "ephah" of barley (about three-fifths of a bushel). Ruth brought it back to Naomi along with her leftovers from dinner.

2:19-20. Naomi expressed her appreciation, and Ruth told her the name of the man whose field she had been working in was Boaz. Naomi proceeds to explain to Ruth that Boaz is their next of kin (a "closer relative" and "guardian-redeemer"), or better known as the "kinsman redeemer" (see Deut. 25:5-10).

2:21-22. Ruth told Naomi of his continued kindness—inviting her to stay with the workers until she got all the grain she needed. Naomi explained to Ruth how fortunate she was to gather in his field, since others may have harmed her.

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3)

3:1-3. After Ruth finished gleaning from Boaz' fields, she continued to stay with her mother-in-law. But Naomi wanted to find Ruth a permanent place to stay (v. 2), and suggested she wash, put on her best clothes, put on perfume, and go down to the threshing floor where Boaz was (v. 3).

3:4-9. Ruth was instructed to lay down next to Boaz, and in the middle of the night he awoke to find her there. He also discovered he was her kinsman-redeemer (v.9).

3:10-18. Boaz regarded her actions as "kindness"—apparently understanding the gesture of "putting the corner of your garment" as a marriage proposal (cf. Ezekiel 16:8)—but said another family member was more closely related.⁹

Boaz Marries Ruth (Ruth 4)

4:1-2. Boaz took the initiative to settle the matter of Ruth having a relative more closely related to her than him, possessing the right of kinsman-redeemer. He wanted to settle the matter legally with this "nameless" relative (which gives a negative impression) by calling the elders (Deut. 25:5-10) to meet at the town gate.¹⁰ Conducting official business at a city gate was commonplace.

4:3-6. Boaz is cunning in his dealings with the closer relative by presenting the matter as a business proposition—the purchase of Naomi's land—but then adds the caveat that marriage with Ruth would involve a kinsman-redeemer solution. The relative initially

wants to purchase the land, but upon discovering the complication of Ruth, prefers to let Boaz resolve the matter.

4:7-12. Boaz sealed the deal by exchanging sandals and then called upon the elders to be witnesses of the transaction. The elders agreed and acknowledge the legitimacy of the marriage with Ruth—offering a blessing.

4:13-22. Boaz and Ruth are married (v. 13); then she becomes pregnant with a son whom they name “Obed” (v. 17). In the genealogical record, Obed became the father of Jesse, the father of King David (v. 22).

Conclusion

The story is told of a young Winston Churchill. At a gathering of friends in an English estate, a tragedy almost transpired when one of the kids fell into the deep water. A gardener cried for help, jumped in, and rescued the drowning child. That youngster's name? It was a young Winston Churchill. Winston's grateful parents asked the gardener if they could reward him. He said that his only wish was that somehow, some way, his own son might go to college, so he could become a doctor. Churchill's parents promised to help.

Fast forward a few years and Sir Winston had become prime minister of England. He became stricken with pneumonia. They called upon the nation's finest physician. The man's name was Dr. Alexander Fleming, the very same man who discovered and developed penicillin. He was also the very same son of the gardener who had saved the young Winston from drowning. Later Churchill remarked, “Rarely has one man owed his life twice to the same person.”¹¹ The story of Alexander Fleming is the story of Scripture. The same God who created us in the beginning also comes to us again and saves us once more.

The Book of Ruth is also a story of salvation—a story of redemption and love. The first part of the book focuses on the love and devotion that Ruth has for her mother-in-law Naomi. The second part is a beautiful love story of how Ruth and Boaz meet and how he comes to her rescue through a series of kind actions. The third part of the story of Ruth and Boaz is a beautiful picture of God's redeeming love—through the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and then also their child, who becomes the grandfather of King David (and of course, eventually, in the line of Jesus himself; cf. Matthew 1:6).

This beautiful example of love and redemption leads us to the question: How can we extend God's redeeming love to others? Our purpose must go beyond simply reading the story to applying its message to our lives. The principle that lies behind this story is embedded in the ancient practice of the kinsman-redeemer. The practice was established to provide a means for the preservation of family inheritance as well as the care of needy widows. The practice shows God's great concern for the poorest and neediest among us. We also must look for ways to care for those in need.

However, there is more redeemed in the story than merely an inheritance. God redeems the sorrow of Naomi and Ruth. The pain of the loss of their husbands, their futures, and their fortunes is also eased. The sorrow of the past is transformed into hope and a promise and provision in the present. The story reminds us that God cares about our spiritual needs, but he also cares about our physical and emotional needs.

At the same, the entire story is foreshadowing and prelude to the greater drama of the Davidic kingdom which eventually gives rise to Israel's ultimate Messiah—Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate kinsman-redeemer. Through his kindness, mercy, and sacrifice, he laid down his life to redeem us from the worst of circumstances and provide the redemption of our sins.

Meet the Writer: Dr. David Ritsema

David Ritsema graduated from East Texas Baptist University (B.A. Christianity Ministry), George W. Truett Theological Seminary (M.Div. Theology), and B.H. Carroll Theological Institute (Ph.D. in New Testament). Dr. Ritsema is the senior pastor at FBC Waxahachie, Texas and is a Resident Fellow and Professor of New Testament at B.H. Carroll Theological Institute.

BaptistWay Press®

See www.baptistwaypress.org for additional study materials on

Rescue and Redemption

and more than fifty other Bible studies by BaptistWay Press®,
or call 1-866-249-1799 (M-Fri 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. central time).

¹ See “Moab” in Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, M-P* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 2009), 290.

² R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, vol. 1: *Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 21, 28, 216.

³ Karel van der Toorn, “Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 193–205.

⁴ John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 247.

⁵ de Vaux, 21, 28, 216.

⁶ Walton, 242.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁹ Ibid., 258.

¹⁰ K. Lawson Younger Jr., “Judges and Ruth,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 474.

¹¹ Ron Hutchcraft, *Wake Up Calls: Practical Insights for Busy People* (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 22.