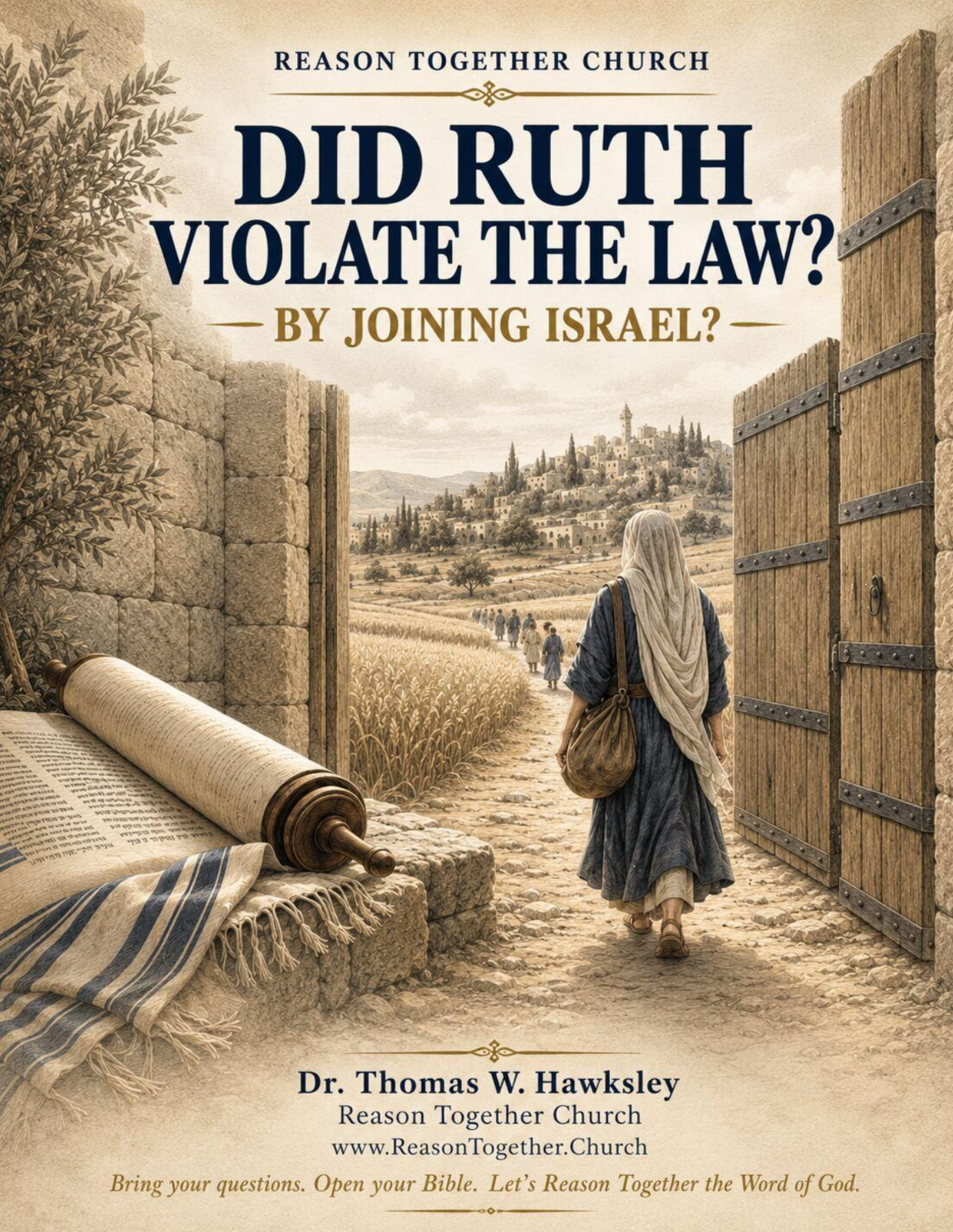




REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

DID RUTH VIOLATE THE LAW?

— BY JOINING ISRAEL? —

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
Reason Together Church
www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you worship with us regularly or this is your first time with us, I am grateful that you are here.

At Reason Together Church, you do not have to hide your questions.

You do not have to pretend that you have already figured everything out.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If you are our guest today, we are especially honored by your presence.

Our guest card asks for only your first name and your email address.

We are not asking for your address, your telephone number or the name of the person who persuaded you to come.

We simply want to thank you for being with us and let you know what is happening at Reason Together Church.

After our time together, I hope you will join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free.

The conversations are free.

And there are free refills on both.

Before we pray, let me also say something about giving.

We do not pass an offering plate.

If you are visiting today, we do not expect you to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

For those who call Reason Together Church their church home and feel led to help, there is a giving box in the back.

The Bible teaches that giving should never be forced, embarrassed or manipulated.

God loveth a cheerful giver.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word.

Thank You that every part of Scripture is true.

Thank You for the familiar stories, and thank You for the questions hidden beneath them.
As we study Ruth, protect us from turning a holy account into nothing more than a romance.
Help us understand Your law accurately.
Help us recognize the difference between holiness and prejudice.
Help us see what repentance, faithfulness and redemption truly mean.
And when we recognize Ruth standing as an outsider at the edge of Bethlehem, help us
remember how far away from You we once stood.
Show us the greater Redeemer who brings those who were far off near by His blood.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray.
Amen.

Our opening Scripture comes from Deuteronomy chapter 23, beginning in verse 3.

“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.”

Now listen to Ruth chapter 1, beginning in verse 16.

“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

Those are beautiful words.

They are among the most familiar words in the book of Ruth.

They are frequently read at weddings.

But Ruth did not say them to a bridegroom.

She said them to her mother-in-law.

That may cause some couples to reconsider how much of the passage they want read at the wedding.

Ruth was not standing before Boaz.

She had not yet met Boaz.

She did not know that there would ever be a Boaz.

She was standing beside a grieving widow on a road leading away from Moab.

She was choosing a people who might not want her.

She was choosing a land she had never seen.

She was choosing a future with no visible security.

And most importantly, she was choosing the LORD.

Most sermons about Ruth begin with loyalty.

Many move quickly to romance.

Eventually they reach Boaz as the kinsman-redeemer.

All of those themes belong in the story.

But before Ruth becomes a beautiful story about redemption, she presents us with a difficult question about the law.

God had said that an Ammonite or a Moabite could not enter the congregation of the LORD.

God said the restriction continued even to the tenth generation.

God added the words “for ever.”

Then Ruth arrived in Bethlehem.

The narrator did not hide her identity.

He repeatedly called her “Ruth the Moabitess.”

She joined herself to Naomi.

She lived among the people of Israel.

She gleaned under the protection of Israel’s law.

She worshipped Israel’s God.

She married an Israelite man.

The elders of Bethlehem blessed the marriage.

She gave birth to Obed.

Obed became the father of Jesse.

Jesse became the father of David.

And Matthew placed Ruth by name in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

So we must ask the question.

Did Ruth violate the law by joining Israel?

Did Boaz violate the law by marrying her?

Did Bethlehem simply ignore a commandment from Moses?

Or have we misunderstood what God was prohibiting?

The question reaches beyond Ruth.

If Ruth's marriage was unlawful, then questions would reach Obed.

They would reach Jesse.

They would reach David.

They would reach Israel's royal line.

And they would appear on the opening page of the New Testament.

So let us reason carefully.

We must begin by asking why Moab was excluded.

The Moabites were distant relatives of Israel.

They descended from Moab, the son born through the terrible events involving Lot and his eldest daughter in Genesis 19.

That origin was shameful.

But Ruth was not personally guilty of something an ancestor had done generations before she was born.

The Bible does not teach inherited personal guilt merely because someone was born into a troubled family.

In Deuteronomy 2, God told Israel not to distress Moab.

God had given the children of Lot their own possession.

Israel was not permitted to seize it.

That is important.

Separation never gave Israel permission for cruelty.

God's holiness never becomes an excuse for human hatred.

The major conflict came when Israel approached the promised land.

Balak, the king of Moab, saw Israel and became afraid.

He hired Balaam to curse the people of God.

Again and again, Balaam attempted to speak a curse.

Again and again, God placed blessing in his mouth.

Balak wanted spiritual destruction to fall upon Israel.

But Deuteronomy says:

“The LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.”

When the curse failed, another danger appeared.

Numbers 25 tells us that Israel began committing immorality with the women of Moab.

Those relationships drew Israel into pagan sacrifices.

The people ate.

They bowed down to false gods.

Israel joined itself unto Baal-peor.

The greatest danger was not that Moabites looked different.

The greatest danger was that Moab’s influence was drawing Israel away from the LORD.

Deuteronomy 23 gives two specific reasons for the exclusion.

First, Moab did not meet Israel with bread and water.

Second, Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel.

Moab withheld hospitality.

Moab sought Israel’s harm.

Moab attempted to place a curse where God had placed a blessing.

And Moab became associated with seduction into idolatry.

God was not protecting Israel from supposedly inferior blood.

God was protecting Israel from hostile allegiance, false worship and spiritual corruption.

That distinction matters.

Whenever people turn Biblical holiness into racial superiority, they have abandoned the holiness of the Bible.

God created every nation.

Every person bears the image of God.

Sin is not carried by skin color.

Righteousness is not guaranteed by an ancestry record.

Israel itself repeatedly proved that a person could possess Abraham's blood while rejecting Abraham's faith.

Ruth would prove that a person could possess Moabite blood while demonstrating extraordinary faith in Abraham's God.

But what did Deuteronomy mean by entering "the congregation of the LORD"?

The Hebrew word translated congregation is qahal.

Depending upon the setting, it can describe Israel's formal assembly.

It may involve full civic standing.

It may involve public leadership.

It may involve recognized participation in the covenant community.

Some interpreters understand the expression as including marriage eligibility.

The words do not necessarily mean that a Moabite could never live near Israel.

They do not necessarily mean that a Moabite could never hear the law.

They do not mean that a Moabite could never pray.

They do not mean that a Moabite could never seek mercy from Israel's God.

The exact legal reach of the expression has been debated for centuries.

We should be honest about that.

We should not pretend the Bible gives us a technical definition when it does not.

The phrase "even to their tenth generation" also requires care.

Some people attempt to count generations and imagine that generation eleven would remove the restriction.

But the verse adds "for ever."

The tenth generation emphasizes enduring exclusion.

It does not provide an easy expiration date.

Later Jewish teachers offered another explanation.

They observed that the Hebrew national term was masculine.

They concluded that the restriction applied to a Moabite man, but not a Moabite woman.

The ancient saying became:

A Moabite, but not a Moabite woman.

The Jewish Talmud even preserves a dispute over David.

David's enemies could ask whether he was qualified to enter the congregation because he descended from Ruth the Moabitess.

The traditional answer defended Ruth's eligibility and therefore defended David's legitimacy.

That interpretation is ancient.

It is significant.

It may form part of the answer.

But the book of Ruth never stops to say, "This command applies only to men."

So we should not rest the entire sermon on one grammatical argument.

The Bible gives us something stronger than a loophole.

It gives us Ruth's confession.

Naomi had lost her husband.

Naomi had lost both of her sons.

She decided to return to Bethlehem.

Her two daughters-in-law began walking with her.

Naomi told them to return to their mothers' houses.

Both women wept.

Both women loved Naomi.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned.

Ruth clave unto her.

We should not turn Orpah into a villain.

Orpah loved Naomi.

Orpah cried.

Orpah began the journey.

Orpah followed Naomi's repeated instruction to go home.

Orpah made the understandable choice.

Ruth made the extraordinary choice.

Naomi said that Orpah had gone back to her people and to her gods.

Then she urged Ruth to do the same.

Ruth refused.

"Whither thou goest, I will go."

Ruth surrendered her direction.

“Where thou lodgest, I will lodge.”

Ruth surrendered her home.

“Thy people shall be my people.”

Ruth surrendered her national security.

“Thy God my God.”

Ruth renounced the gods of Moab.

“Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried.”

Ruth surrendered even the burial place of her ancestors.

Then she invoked the covenant name of the LORD.

“The LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

This was more than affection.

This was more than family loyalty.

This was conversion.

This was covenant allegiance.

Ruth did not add the LORD to a collection of Moabite gods.

She left the gods of Moab behind.

She did not say, “I will follow your God as long as Bethlehem treats me well.”

She had no promise Bethlehem would welcome her.

She had no promise she would marry again.

She had no promise of property.

She had no promise of children.

She had no promise of comfort.

She chose the LORD before she knew what following Him would provide.

That is faith.

Many people want a contract before they will trust God.

They want to know where He will lead.

They want to know what He will provide.

They want to know which pain He will remove.

They want to know how quickly He will answer.

Ruth placed the unknown future into the hands of the known God.

Later Jewish tradition understood the importance of this moment.

The Targum of Ruth expands the conversation and portrays Ruth accepting Israel's commandments as a convert.

The Targum is not inspired Scripture.

We do not use it to add words to the Bible.

But it shows that Jewish readers recognized Ruth 1 as a conversion, not merely a sentimental promise.

Ruth did not merely change her address.

She changed her allegiance.

And then her life demonstrated that her confession was real.

This is where the story becomes remarkable.

Ruth reversed nearly everything for which Moab had been condemned.

Moab had withheld bread and water from Israel.

Ruth went into the field and gathered food for an Israelite widow.

Moab had hired Balaam to curse Israel.

Ruth entered Bethlehem and became surrounded by blessings.

Boaz blessed Ruth.

The elders blessed Ruth.

The people blessed Boaz.

The women blessed the LORD.

Moab had sought Israel's harm.

Ruth sought Naomi's welfare.

Moab had drawn Israelites toward false gods.

Ruth abandoned false gods for the LORD.

Moabite women had become associated with seduction at Baal-peor.

Ruth would stand at a threshing floor in a vulnerable situation and be declared a virtuous woman.

Moab had withheld covenant kindness.

Ruth practiced covenant kindness.

Ruth was born in Moab.

But Moab was no longer living in Ruth.

That is the line we must remember.

Ruth was not asking Israel to accept Moab's rebellion.
She was asking to leave that rebellion behind.
Her birthplace described where she came from.
It did not determine which God she would serve.
The contrast becomes especially clear through something as simple as bread.
Bethlehem means "house of bread."
Yet the story begins with no bread in the house of bread.
A famine had emptied the fields.
Elimelech took his family to Moab seeking food.
After the deaths, Naomi heard that the LORD had visited His people.
How had He visited them?
Ruth 1:6 says He had visited them "in giving them bread."
That report brought Naomi home.
And the woman who came home with her was from the nation condemned for withholding bread and water.
Ruth entered a field.
She gleaned barley.
Boaz told her to drink from the water drawn by his servants.
Boaz invited her to eat bread at his table.
Ruth ate until she was satisfied.
Then she saved what remained and carried it home to Naomi.
Boaz told the reapers to leave extra grain for her.
Ruth continued gathering through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.
Moab had withheld bread.
Ruth the Moabite kept bringing bread home.
The law that appeared to exclude her also provided for her.
Leviticus commanded landowners not to harvest every corner of a field.
Deuteronomy commanded them not to return for every forgotten sheaf.
What remained was for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow.
Ruth was a widow.
Ruth was a stranger.

She stepped into the field believing that somewhere in Bethlehem there might be someone willing to obey God's law.

Boaz did obey it.

Then he went beyond the minimum.

The law said, "Do not harvest everything."

Boaz said, "Let some fall on purpose."

The law permitted Ruth to glean.

Grace gave her handfuls of purpose.

Grace did not contradict the law.

Grace fulfilled its merciful intention.

Boaz prayed for Ruth.

"The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

That is a beautiful prayer.

But Boaz did not pray for God to feed Ruth and then send her away hungry.

He gave her water.

He gave her bread.

He gave her protection.

He gave her grain.

He ordered his young men not to touch or reproach her.

Boaz became part of the answer to his own prayer.

Sometimes God answers our prayer for another person by showing us what He expects us to do.

We can pray that the hungry will be fed.

Then God may point toward our table.

We can pray that the lonely will be welcomed.

Then God may point toward the empty chair beside us.

We can pray that someone will receive encouragement.

Then God may remind us that we know the person's telephone number.

Prayer is not an excuse to remain uninvolved.

Boaz placed Ruth beneath the protection of his field while praying that she would remain beneath the wings of God.

Naomi received the grain.

But at first, grief made it difficult for her to recognize what God had already given.

When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, the women asked, “Is this Naomi?”

Naomi answered:

“Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.”

Then she said:

“I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty.”

We should not scold Naomi for grieving.

Her husband was dead.

Both sons were dead.

Her expected future had collapsed.

Faith does not require us to pretend that loss does not hurt.

The Bible gives grieving people permission to speak honestly.

But notice who was standing beside Naomi when she called herself empty.

Ruth was there.

Naomi could see everyone she had lost.

She could not yet see what God would accomplish through the person He had preserved.

At the end of the book, the women of Bethlehem would say that Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons.

Naomi called herself empty while a woman better than seven sons was standing beside her.

Pain can accurately describe what we have lost while preventing us from seeing what God has preserved.

Naomi saw a grave.

God saw a genealogy.

Naomi believed her family had reached its ending.

God was preparing the beginning of a kingdom.

Perhaps you know something about Naomi’s words.

Perhaps you can list everything that left.

The relationship ended.

The loved one died.

The opportunity disappeared.

The health changed.

The plan failed.

Do not pretend that those things do not hurt.

But do not assume that your present ability to see is equal to God's eternal ability to provide.

The final chapter may call full what this chapter calls empty.

God's provision for Naomi would come through a man named Boaz.

Ruth 2:1 calls Boaz "a mighty man of wealth."

Ruth 3:11 calls Ruth "a virtuous woman."

Those English descriptions sound different.

But both contain the Hebrew word *chayil*.

The word can describe strength.

It can describe valor.

It can describe ability, substance, worth and noble character.

Boaz was an *ish chayil*, a man of worth.

Ruth was an *esheth chayil*, a woman of worth.

Boaz possessed resources.

Ruth possessed courage.

Both possessed integrity.

Their bank accounts were not equal.

Their character was.

The same expression used for Ruth appears in Proverbs 31.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."

Ruth is the only named woman in Scripture directly described with that expression.

She was not called virtuous because she had already married Boaz.

She had not.

She was not called virtuous because she was wealthy.

She was poor.

She was called virtuous because Bethlehem had watched how she lived.

"All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman."

Character is what remains visible after first impressions have faded.

Ruth's character becomes essential when we reach the strangest scene in the book.

Naomi wanted Ruth to find rest.

She told Ruth to wash.

She told her to anoint herself.

She told her to put on her raiment.

She told her to go to the threshing floor.

Ruth waited until Boaz had eaten and lain down.

She came softly.

She uncovered his feet.

And she lay down.

Modern readers become nervous.

Some assume that Naomi was arranging a seduction.

Some assume that Ruth was offering herself sexually.

The setting certainly carried risk.

The threshing floor was a place where grain, celebration and vulnerability could meet.

The time was night.

Boaz had eaten and drunk.

Ruth was a foreign widow.

But the narrator has already shown us the character of both people.

Boaz had protected Ruth from harassment.

Ruth was known as a woman of virtue.

When Boaz awoke, he asked:

“Who art thou?”

Ruth answered:

“I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.”

Ruth explained why she had come.

She was asking for redemption.

She was asking for covenant protection.

She was asking Boaz to marry her and preserve the family line.

There is a beautiful connection hidden in the English translation.

In Ruth 2, Boaz said that Ruth had come to trust under the LORD's wings.

In Ruth 3, Ruth asked Boaz to spread his skirt over her.

The Hebrew word behind “wings” and “skirt” is the same word, kanaph.

Ruth was effectively saying:

“Boaz, you prayed that I would find shelter beneath the wing of God.”

“Will you become the person through whom God provides that shelter?”

Ezekiel 16 uses the spreading of a garment as an image of marriage and covenant.

Ruth was not requesting a night of immorality.

She was requesting a lifetime of responsibility.

Boaz’s response confirms it.

He called her blessed.

He praised her covenant kindness.

He said she had not pursued young men, whether poor or rich.

He told her not to fear.

He called her a virtuous woman.

Then he told her the truth.

There was a nearer redeemer.

If Boaz had been looking for an excuse to satisfy himself, he would not have raised the legal obstacle.

If Ruth had been trying to seduce him, the discussion would not have centered upon redemption.

Boaz protected Ruth.

He protected her reputation.

He promised to resolve the matter.

And he refused to bypass the man who possessed the nearer claim.

Ruth did not go to the threshing floor asking Boaz to break God’s law.

She went asking him to accept the responsibility of redemption.

Boaz did not prove his love by ignoring the law.

He proved his love by honoring it.

That is a needed word in a culture that treats strong feelings as moral permission.

Wanting something does not make it right.

Feeling sincere does not remove God’s boundaries.

Love does not say, “The rules no longer apply because this feels special.”

Faithful love is willing to wait for the right process.

Boaz went to the city gate.

The city gate was where legal business was conducted.

He gathered ten elders.

The nearer relative passed by.

Boaz presented the land.

The man said he would redeem it.

For a moment, it appeared that Boaz might lose Ruth.

Then Boaz explained that the redemption included Ruth the Moabitess.

It included the responsibility to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

The nearer man withdrew.

He said:

“I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance.”

He was willing to acquire the land.

He was not willing to accept the cost.

That introduces an important distinction.

Redemption is not the same as opportunity.

Redemption is not sympathy from a distance.

Redemption accepts responsibility.

Redemption pays a price.

The law concerning Ruth’s situation involved several related principles.

The gleaning law protected the poor, the stranger and the widow.

The land law allowed a near relative to redeem family property.

The levirate principle sought to preserve the name of a man who died without a child.

Boaz was not Mahlon’s brother.

So this was not a simple, direct application of one verse in Deuteronomy.

The story brings land, family, inheritance, marriage and the preservation of a name together.

Boaz did more than satisfy a technical requirement.

He practiced covenant kindness at personal cost.

The nearer man tried to preserve his own inheritance.

And here is the irony.

The Bible never tells us his name.

He is remembered only as the nearer redeemer who refused.

He tried to protect his own name and disappeared from the story.

Boaz accepted the cost of preserving another man's name.

And God placed the name of Boaz in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

The man who tried to save his name lost it.

The man willing to preserve another man's name received a name remembered around the world.

Jesus would later teach:

“Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

The legal matter was settled publicly.

The nearer man relinquished his right.

The elders witnessed the transaction.

Boaz declared that he had acquired the property connected with Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon.

Then he said:

“Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife.”

Notice that he said it publicly.

He did not conceal her ancestry.

He did not whisper her name.

He called her Ruth the Moabitess in front of the elders.

And no elder rose to accuse him of violating Deuteronomy.

No witness protested that the marriage was forbidden.

Instead, the people said:

“We are witnesses.”

Then they blessed Ruth.

They asked the LORD to make her like Rachel and Leah, the women who built the house of Israel.

They invoked the house of Perez and the line of Judah.

The Moabite widow was spoken of alongside the mothers of Israel.

Bethlehem did not receive Ruth through a hidden loophole.

Her redemption was settled at the gate.

It was witnessed by the people.

It was blessed by the elders.

Then Ruth 4:13 says:

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife:

and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.”

The narrator does not present the marriage as tolerated sin.

The LORD gave conception.

The community celebrated.

Naomi’s family was restored.

The women said:

“Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman.”

The legal proceedings, the elders’ blessing and the LORD’s gift all point in the same direction.

Ruth’s marriage was not an act of rebellion against God’s law.

It was an act of covenant redemption carried out within it.

Now look at the larger setting.

Ruth begins with these words:

“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled.”

The book of Judges ends by saying:

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Israel appeared leaderless.

The nation was morally confused.

The people repeatedly turned from God.

Enemies oppressed them.

Judges rose and fell.

Everyone seemed to be doing what was right in his own eyes.

But God was working in Bethlehem.

A widow heard that bread had returned.

A Moabite woman followed her.

A gleaner entered a field.

A landowner arrived at the right time.
A woman lay at the feet of a redeemer.
A relative passed through a city gate.
Ten elders witnessed a transaction.
A marriage took place.
A child was born.
And the final word of the genealogy is David.
Israel thought it had no king.
God was already building the king's family.
History saw two widows gathering barley.
Providence saw the house of David.
The LORD rarely appears visibly in the book of Ruth.
No sea opens.
No fire falls.
No angel delivers a message.
No prophet announces what will happen next.
God visits His people by giving bread.
Ruth happens to enter the field belonging to Boaz.
Boaz happens to arrive while she is there.
The nearer redeemer happens to pass the gate.
The LORD gives conception.
The hand of God is quiet.
But it is never absent.
Providence is often God's activity without visible announcement.
Some of God's greatest works begin without anyone in the room recognizing their importance.
No one looking at Ruth's first handful of barley could see David.
No one watching Naomi hold Obed could yet see Bethlehem's future King.
But God sees the harvest inside the seed.
The genealogy takes us to another surprising family connection.
Matthew 1:5 says:

“And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth.”

Rahab was a Canaanite woman.

She had lived in Jericho.

She trusted the God of Israel.

She received the spies.

She was brought into Israel.

Ruth was a Moabite woman.

She trusted the God of Israel.

She cared for Naomi.

She was brought into Israel.

Matthew places Rahab, Boaz and Ruth together.

We should not invent conversations the Bible does not record.

We cannot prove what Rahab may have told Boaz.

But the Holy Ghost intentionally preserved these names in the genealogy.

The man who redeemed a faithful foreign woman descended from another foreign woman received through faith.

Matthew does not hide the women outsiders might have considered embarrassing.

He names Tamar.

He names Rahab.

He names Ruth.

He refers to the wife of Uriah.

Then he leads us to Mary and to Jesus Christ.

Ruth did not contaminate the Messianic line.

Her inclusion revealed what the Messiah came to accomplish.

The promise to Abraham was never meant to end with Abraham's natural descendants.

God said that in Abraham's seed all families of the earth would be blessed.

The prophets looked toward the nations.

Isaiah 56 spoke to the son of the stranger who joined himself to the LORD.

God promised:

“Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer.”

The New Testament announces that the promised Seed is Christ.

Jesus came through this family.

He was born in Bethlehem, the house of bread.

He declared:

“I am the bread of life.”

Boaz redeemed one faithful outsider in Bethlehem.

Jesus came through Bethlehem to redeem people from every kindred, tongue, people and nation.

Boaz helps us understand the shape of redemption.

A redeemer needed the proper relationship.

Jesus took upon Him flesh and entered the human family.

A redeemer needed the ability to pay.

Jesus possessed perfect righteousness and unlimited worth.

A redeemer needed willingness.

Jesus said:

“I lay down my life, that I might take it again.”

Redemption required a cost.

Peter says we were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold.

We were redeemed:

“With the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

And redemption had to be righteous.

God did not ignore His law to save us.

God did not say that sin no longer mattered.

Jesus fulfilled the law we had broken.

Jesus bore the judgment our sin deserved.

At the cross, mercy did not overthrow justice.

Mercy satisfied justice through the sacrifice of Christ.

That brings us back to our question.

Did Ruth violate the law by joining Israel?

No.

The book gives us cumulative evidence.

Ruth renounced the gods of Moab.

She confessed the LORD as her God.

She joined herself to God's covenant people.
 Her conduct reversed the very offenses for which Moab had been condemned.
 She lived beneath the law that protected strangers and widows.
 Bethlehem knew her as a virtuous woman.
 Boaz conducted the redemption publicly.
 The nearer relative relinquished his claim.
 The elders approved the marriage.
 The people pronounced blessing.
 The LORD gave Ruth conception.
 Her child entered the royal line.
 Matthew placed her name in the genealogy of Christ.
 Ruth did not enter because God pretended His law did not exist.
 She entered because God's law was never a declaration that repentant outsiders could not seek Him.
 God's holiness excludes persistent rebellion.
 God's mercy receives the repentant.
 This distinction still matters.
 The church must never lower God's standard of holiness.
 Sin does not become righteous because society approves it.
 Idolatry does not become harmless because it is culturally familiar.
 But the church must also never turn holiness into a wall of human pride.
 We do not possess grace because our family was better.
 We do not possess salvation because our nationality was favored.
 We do not belong to Christ because we were born near a church.
 Every one of us enters the household of God through mercy.
 Paul described the former condition of Gentile believers in Ephesians 2.
 He said they were:
"Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."
 That sounds like Ruth at the border of Bethlehem.
 She was a stranger.

She had no claim based upon birth.

She possessed no wealth.

She carried no guarantee that the community would accept her.

But Paul continued:

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

Then he said:

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

Ruth’s journey helps us feel the wonder of those words.

She moved from foreigner to family.

She moved from gleaning at the edge of a field to sitting within the household of a redeemer.

She moved from uncertainty to covenant protection.

She moved from an apparently dead family line to the ancestry of a king.

And Christ performs a greater redemption.

He does not merely give us permission to gather crumbs near His field.

He brings us to His table.

He does not merely protect us for one harvest.

He gives us an eternal inheritance.

He does not merely preserve our old name.

He gives us His name.

He does not merely cover us with the corner of an earthly garment.

He clothes us in His righteousness.

Perhaps you believe your past has excluded you.

Perhaps people still introduce you by the worst place you have been.

The narrator kept saying “Ruth the Moabitess.”

Her origin was not erased.

But her origin did not possess the final word.

You may come from a troubled family.

You may have served false gods.

You may have made choices that brought shame.

You may feel like a stranger standing outside the field.
The gospel does not say that your past never happened.
The gospel says that Jesus Christ can redeem it.
Your birthplace cannot prevent you.
Your family history cannot prevent you.
Your former religion cannot prevent you.
Your poverty cannot prevent you.
Your reputation cannot prevent you.
Your sin cannot overpower the blood of Christ when you come to Him in repentance and faith.
But notice that Ruth did not ask God to follow her back into Moab.
She left Moab to follow God.
Conversion is not adding Jesus to an unchanged life.
Conversion is turning.
It is saying:
“Thy people shall be my people.”
“Thy God shall be my God.”
It is placing direction, home, identity, life and death into His hands.
Ruth did not know every answer.
She knew whom she had chosen.
That may be where you stand today.
You may not know what obedience will cost.
You may not know where God will lead.
You may not know which relationships will change.
You may not know how quickly circumstances will improve.
Faith is not knowing every detail of the road.
Faith is trusting the One who calls you to walk it.
Perhaps you stand closer to Naomi.
You can see what has been taken.
You cannot yet see what God is building.
Do not deny your grief.
But do not declare the final chapter from the middle of the story.

The barley harvest may have begun before you noticed.
God's provision may already be standing beside you.
Perhaps you stand closer to Boaz.
You have prayed that God would help someone.
Now God is asking whether you will become part of that help.
There may be bread you can share.
There may be protection you can provide.
There may be dignity you can preserve.
There may be a person at the edge of the field who needs to hear, "Stay here. You are safe."
Perhaps you resemble the unnamed redeemer.
You are willing to obey while obedience appears profitable.
But when redemption becomes costly, you step away.
Remember the two names.
The man who protected his name lost it.
The man who accepted the cost is remembered in the family of Christ.
And perhaps today you simply need a Redeemer.
You cannot redeem yourself.
You cannot purchase forgiveness with good works.
You cannot rewrite your ancestry.
You cannot undo yesterday.
You cannot fulfill the law by promising to try harder tomorrow.
But Jesus has the relationship.
Jesus has the ability.
Jesus has the willingness.
Jesus has paid the cost.
Jesus died upon the cross for your sins.
He was buried.
He rose from the dead.
And He invites those who were far off to come near.
Ruth approached Boaz and asked him to spread his covering over her.
Today you can come to Jesus Christ and ask Him to cover you with His righteousness.

He will not exploit your vulnerability.

He will not turn away the repentant.

He will not leave the work unfinished.

Jesus said:

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can do that today.

Salvation is not repeating perfect words.

Salvation is placing genuine faith in the perfect Savior.

Admit that you have sinned.

Believe that Jesus died for you and rose again.

Turn from your sin.

Call upon His name.

You may pray with me.

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner.

I cannot redeem myself.

I believe that You died upon the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my faith in You.

Forgive me.

Cover me with Your righteousness.

Bring me near to God.

Become my Savior and my Lord.

I place my life, my future and my eternity into Your hands.

In Your name I pray.

Amen.

Ruth arrived in Bethlehem with no husband.

She had no child.

She had no property.

She had no certainty.

She had no standing based upon birth.

She had only faith in Israel's God.
By the end of the story, Ruth had a redeemer.
Naomi had a family.
Bethlehem had a child.
Israel had the beginning of a royal line.
David had a great-grandmother.
Matthew had a name to include.
And the world had another testimony of grace.
Ruth came to Bethlehem as a stranger from Moab.
God did not pretend that her past had never existed.
He redeemed it.
He placed her beneath His wings.
He placed her among His people.
He placed her within the family of David.
And He placed her in the earthly genealogy of Jesus Christ.
If Christ receives you, you are no longer finally defined by the gods you once served, the sins
you once committed or the life you once lived.
Those who were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.
The Moabitess became family.
The widow found a redeemer.
The empty home held a child.
And in the days when Israel had no king, God was preparing the line of the King of kings.
Aloha Nui Loa.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Ruth and the Law

Did Ruth Violate the Law by Joining Israel?

Deuteronomy 23, covenant conversion, legal redemption
and the line of Christ

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

The Apparent Contradiction

The book of Ruth appears gentle, domestic and uncomplicated. It tells of famine, bereavement, harvest and redemption. Yet one sentence in the law places the entire story under a difficult question. Ruth is repeatedly identified as a Moabitess. Deuteronomy declares that an Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the LORD. Ruth nevertheless comes to Bethlehem, worships Israel's God, marries an honored Israelite and becomes the great-grandmother of David. Matthew later names her in the ancestry of Jesus Christ.

The tension should not be dismissed. Scripture itself emphasizes Ruth's origin. Boaz calls her a Moabitish damsel. The narrator calls her Ruth the Moabitess even after she has lived in Bethlehem. The nearer kinsman is told that the field comes with Ruth the Moabitess. Her nationality is not hidden because the book wants the reader to see what God did with a woman from a condemned nation.

The proper question is not whether Ruth found a sentimental exception to a firm law. The question is how the law, Ruth's conversion and the legal actions in Bethlehem fit together. The answer must account for Deuteronomy without weakening it and for Ruth without treating her reception as an act of disobedience.

Deuteronomy 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.

GOVERNING ANSWER: Ruth did not violate the law by joining Israel. The book presents her as a true convert whose life reverses Moab's offenses. Her redemption is lawful, public and blessed by the LORD.

Read Deuteronomy 23 Carefully

Deuteronomy 23 regulates admission to the congregation of the LORD. The chapter names several categories and does not treat them all alike. It addresses damaged males, persons of illegitimate birth, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Egyptians. The differences matter. Edomites and Egyptians may be admitted in the third generation. Ammon and Moab receive a much sterner sentence because their offense was a hostile covenant posture toward Israel.

The phrase congregation of the LORD should not automatically be reduced to residence inside Israel's borders. Foreigners could live among Israel. The law provided justice, Sabbath rest and gleaning rights for the stranger. The disputed phrase may involve full standing in Israel's covenant assembly, participation in public religious life or eligibility for particular communal privileges. Interpreters differ on its exact legal range. That uncertainty counsels humility, but it does not support the claim that every Moabite was forbidden even to repent, worship the LORD or dwell among His people.

The expression even to the tenth generation reinforces the gravity and duration of the exclusion. It is unwise to solve the problem by counting ten names in Ruth's closing genealogy. The ten names run from Pharez to David, not from Ruth through ten generations. The genealogy is theological and royal, but it is not a numerical escape clause.

Why Moab Was Excluded

Deuteronomy 23:4-5 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor ... to curse thee. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee.

The law gives reasons. Moab refused covenant hospitality and sought Israel's destruction through Balaam. Numbers adds the tragedy at Baal-peor where Israel was drawn into sexual sin and idolatry.

Moab therefore represents more than foreign ancestry. It represents hostility to God's people, refusal of bread and water, attempted cursing and spiritual seduction.

This background is essential because Ruth's actions move in the opposite direction. Moab withheld bread, but Ruth labors in the barley fields so Naomi may eat. Moab sought Israel's curse, but Ruth seeks shelter beneath the wings of Israel's God. Moab enticed Israel away from the LORD, but Ruth abandons the gods of Moab and confesses the LORD as her own God. Her biography does not perpetuate Moab's rebellion. It repudiates it.

God's turning of Balaam's curse into blessing also anticipates the theological movement of Ruth. A name associated with exclusion becomes part of the line through which blessing comes to Israel and ultimately to the nations. This does not make the original curse unreal. It displays the divine power that overcomes a curse without approving the sin that caused it.

THE REVERSAL: The Moabitess did what Moab failed to do. She gave covenant loyalty, sought Israel's God and labored to place bread in an Israelite widow's hands.

A Moabite, but Not a Moabitess

Ancient Jewish interpretation recognized the same difficulty. A famous rabbinic discussion in Yevamot argues that the wording excludes a male Moabite but not a female Moabitess. The Hebrew national terms in Deuteronomy 23 are grammatically masculine. The stated offense of failing to meet Israel with bread and water was also understood as the public duty of men rather than women. This reading became important in defending David's legitimacy because David descended from Ruth.

That interpretation deserves serious attention. It is ancient, textually grounded and directly connected to the Davidic question. Yet it should not bear the entire Christian argument. Masculine forms can sometimes include both sexes, and the explanation concerning public hospitality depends partly upon social assumptions not fully stated in Deuteronomy. The book of Ruth itself gives a broader answer through conversion, character, lawful process, communal blessing and divine action.

The strongest conclusion is cumulative. The ancient gender reading may explain the technical reach of the prohibition. Ruth's confession explains her covenant change. Her conduct answers Moab's moral offense. Boaz's legal procedure answers the charge of lawlessness. The elders' blessing answers the question of communal recognition. The LORD's gift of conception answers the question of divine approval.

Ruth's Confession Is Conversion

Ruth 1:16-17 Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go ... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

These words express loyalty to Naomi, but they exceed ordinary family affection. Ruth binds herself to a land, a people, a God and a burial place. She invokes the covenant name LORD in an oath of judgment. She is not merely promising to escort an elderly widow home. She is leaving her former national and religious identity to live and die among the people of Israel.

Orpah's departure sharpens the meaning. Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their people and their gods. Orpah returns. Ruth cleaves to Naomi. The verb cleave is covenant language elsewhere in Scripture. It describes the bond of marriage and the allegiance Israel owes the LORD. Ruth's decision is therefore personal, costly and theological.

The narrative never records a formal conversion ceremony. It gives something more fundamental: a confession followed by a life that proves the confession. Ruth's words are tested by poverty, labor,

vulnerability and patience. She does not speak dramatically in Moab and then resume Moabite worship in Bethlehem. Her entire conduct confirms the direction of her vow.

COVENANT CHANGE: Ruth was born in Moab, but Moab was no longer living in Ruth.

The Witness of Ancient Noncanonical Sources

Later Jewish sources are not Scripture and should never govern the meaning of Scripture. They can still show how ancient readers understood a difficult text. The Targum of Ruth expands the conversation between Naomi and Ruth into instruction about Israel's commandments and penalties. In that retelling Ruth knowingly accepts the obligations of Israel's faith. The expansion is late, but it preserves a strong Jewish instinct that Ruth's confession represented conversion rather than simple relocation.

The rabbinic debate in Yevamot likewise shows that Ruth's Moabite identity and David's legitimacy were not ignored. Ancient interpreters wrestled with Deuteronomy 23 because they took both the law and Davidic descent seriously. Josephus also retells Ruth's story as part of Israel's national history and places the legal exchange before the elders in the public realm.

These witnesses do not prove the Christian interpretation. They add historical depth. Readers long before modern sermons understood Ruth as a legal and theological narrative. The romance is present, but conversion, inheritance, lineage and the interpretation of Torah are never far from the surface.

The Law Made Room for the Stranger

Leviticus 19:9-10 Thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field ... thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

Ruth does not enter Bethlehem by seizing a privilege. She enters the field as a poor stranger and asks permission to glean. The law itself created this space. Israel's landowners were commanded to leave portions of the harvest for the poor, the widow and the stranger. Deuteronomy 24 joins all three categories, and Ruth embodies all three at once.

The gleaning laws joined mercy to labor. Grain was left available, but the needy person still gathered it. Ruth's industry is therefore not evidence that grace was absent. It is evidence that God's grace had been written into Israel's economic life. The LORD provided through a command, through a field, through a landowner and through Ruth's willingness to work.

Boaz goes beyond the minimum. He protects Ruth, gives her water, feeds her at his table and orders his men to pull out handfuls on purpose. His generosity is not a rejection of law. It is the flowering of the law's intention. Obedience establishes the floor while lovingkindness rises above it.

LAW AND GRACE: The law permitted Ruth to glean. Grace gave her handfuls on purpose.

Bread, Water and Blessing

Deuteronomy accused Moab of withholding bread and water. Ruth enters a story where bread and water repeatedly matter. She comes to Bethlehem because the LORD has visited His people in giving them bread. She gathers food for Naomi. Boaz invites her to eat bread and dip her morsel in vinegar. He gives her access to the water drawn by his servants. The vocabulary quietly answers Moab's old failure.

Boaz also pronounces blessing where Moab once sought a curse. He asks the LORD to recompense Ruth's work and give her a full reward beneath His wings. The attempted curse of Balaam could not stand because God turned it into blessing. In Bethlehem the blessing is spoken openly over a Moabite woman who has sought refuge in the LORD.

This pattern is stronger than a bare legal technicality. Ruth's nationality explains the danger, but her allegiance explains her reception. She does not demand that Israel call evil good. She comes empty-handed to the God of Israel, and the people who fear that God recognize the faith visible in her life.

Naomi's Emptiness and Hidden Providence

Ruth 1:20-21 *Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty.*

Naomi interprets her life through grief. She left Bethlehem with a husband and two sons. She returns without them and calls herself empty even while Ruth is standing beside her. Her words are understandable, but the narrative will gently correct her vision. The woman she cannot yet count as fullness will become the means by which her family name is preserved.

The providence of Ruth is ordinarily quiet. No sea parts. No fire falls from heaven. Ruth happens to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz. Boaz happens to arrive from Bethlehem. The nearer kinsman happens to pass by the gate. Each event can be described in ordinary language, yet together they reveal divine direction.

Providence does not erase sorrow. Mahlon, Chilion and Elimelech remain dead. Naomi's restoration is not a denial of her losses. God moves through them toward a future she could not see when she entered the city. The genealogy at the end shows that her family crisis belonged to a much larger redemptive history.

PROVIDENCE: Naomi saw a grave. God saw a genealogy.

Ruth and Boaz as People of Worth

Ruth 2:1 introduces Boaz as a mighty man of wealth. The Hebrew expression includes the word *chayil*, which can describe strength, ability, valor, standing or noble character. In Ruth 3:11 Boaz tells Ruth that the city knows she is a virtuous woman. The same word stands behind his description of her.

This verbal link places Ruth and Boaz beside one another as people of proven worth. Boaz has standing and resources. Ruth has no wealth or native status, yet her character gives her a public reputation. Biblical virtue is not restricted to social class, sex or national birth. The Moabitess is recognized by an Israelite town as a woman of *chayil*.

Their union is fitting because both practice covenant faithfulness. Ruth serves Naomi at cost to herself. Boaz protects the vulnerable at cost to himself. Ruth does not manipulate Boaz, and Boaz does not exploit Ruth. The romance of the book is morally beautiful because it rests upon character and responsibility.

Why Ruth Lay at Boaz's Feet

Ruth 3:9 *I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.*

The threshing-floor scene is deliberately tense. Ruth goes at night, uncovers Boaz's feet and lies down. Modern readers may assume that the scene is a sexual proposition. The text resists that conclusion. Ruth identifies the purpose of her action: Boaz is a near kinsman, and she asks him to spread his garment over her. She is requesting covenant protection and the responsibilities of redemption.

The narrative guards the moral character of both participants. Boaz praises Ruth's kindness and assures her that the city knows her virtue. He immediately explains that a nearer kinsman has the first right. He sends her away before one person can recognize another, which protects her reputation. Nothing in his response suggests that immorality has occurred.

Naomi's plan uses cultural signs that are unfamiliar to many readers. The setting has risk, and the language contains a measure of modest ambiguity. Yet the request is clarified by kinship and redemption. Ruth is not asking for one secret night. She is asking Boaz to assume a public, lasting obligation.

THE THRESHING FLOOR: Ruth was not requesting a night of immorality. She was requesting a lifetime of responsibility.

The Wing and the Garment

***Ruth 2:12** A full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.*

The word translated wings in Ruth 2:12 can also describe the edge or corner of a garment. When Ruth later asks Boaz to spread his skirt over her, her words echo his earlier blessing. She has taken refuge under the LORD's wing, and now she asks Boaz to become part of the earthly answer to his own prayer.

The imagery carries covenant force. Ezekiel 16:8 uses the spreading of a garment to describe the LORD entering covenant with Jerusalem. Ruth's request is therefore compatible with marriage and protection. She asks Boaz to cover rather than expose her, to redeem rather than use her.

Divine refuge and human obedience are not rivals. God provides for Ruth through people who keep His commands. Boaz cannot become the divine wing, but he can act beneath it. His kindness becomes a visible expression of the God whose name he blesses.

ANSWERED PRAYER: Boaz became part of the answer to his own prayer.

Boaz Honors the Law

Boaz desires to redeem Ruth, but desire does not give him the right to ignore another man's claim. He tells Ruth the truth: there is a kinsman nearer than he. He promises to act, but he conditions his action upon the nearer man's lawful refusal. The next morning he goes to the gate where public business is conducted.

This delay is not weakness. It is integrity. Boaz will not use a righteous goal to justify an unrighteous method. He could have concealed the relationship or hurried a private marriage, but he brings the matter before witnesses. His conduct answers the title question with legal seriousness.

The book draws upon more than one portion of Torah. Leviticus 25 concerns redemption of family land. Deuteronomy 25 concerns the duty to preserve the name of a deceased brother. Boaz is not literally Mahlon's brother, so the transaction is not a simple application of levirate marriage. Bethlehem appears to combine the purposes of land redemption, family preservation and marriage through recognized custom. The text shows lawful continuity without forcing every detail into one statute.

RIGHTEOUS LOVE: Boaz did not prove his love by ignoring the law. He proved his love by honoring it.

Redemption at the Gate

***Ruth 4:9-10** Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's ... Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.*

The city gate functions as a place of judgment, transaction and witness. Boaz sits there, summons the nearer kinsman and gathers ten elders. He explains the land first. When the man agrees to redeem it,

Boaz states that Ruth and the preservation of the dead man's name are bound to the transaction. The nearer kinsman then declines because he fears damage to his own inheritance.

The sandal confirms the transfer according to the custom described in the narrative. The elders declare themselves witnesses. They bless Ruth as Rachel and Leah, the women who built the house of Israel. They also invoke Tamar, whose story likewise concerns threatened family continuity and the line of Pharez.

The public character of the proceeding is decisive. The narrator does not portray Bethlehem as sneaking a forbidden Moabite into Israel. The town's elders hear her identity, recognize the transaction and pronounce covenant blessing. The legal process does not hide Ruth's origin. It names her and receives her.

PUBLIC REDEMPTION: Bethlehem did not receive Ruth through a secret loophole. Her redemption was settled at the gate.

The Unnamed Redeemer and the Cost

The nearer kinsman is addressed with an expression roughly equivalent to such a one. His personal name is not preserved. He is willing to acquire the field, but he withdraws when redemption includes Ruth and responsibility for the dead man's name. He fears that the arrangement will mar his own inheritance.

Boaz accepts the cost the nearer man refuses. Redemption in Ruth is not an emotion. It involves land, lineage, public obligation and personal sacrifice. Boaz must use his resources in a way that will preserve another man's name. The act is generous precisely because it costs him something.

The narrative contains a quiet irony. The man who seeks to preserve his own inheritance disappears into anonymity. Boaz, who acts to preserve the name of the dead, has his own name preserved in Scripture and in the genealogy of Christ. Faithfulness does not always protect immediate advantage, but God remembers it within His larger purpose.

The LORD's Verdict

***Ruth 4:13** So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.*

The narrator attributes Ruth's conception to the LORD. The statement is especially meaningful after years of childlessness in Moab. God gives life where death and barrenness have dominated the story. Obed is not merely the happy ending of a marriage. He is the visible sign that the family line has been restored.

The women bless the LORD for not leaving Naomi without a kinsman. They call Ruth better to Naomi than seven sons. In a patriarchal setting, that is extraordinary praise. The foreign daughter-in-law whom Naomi once failed to count as fullness is publicly valued above the ideal number of sons.

No single narrative event should be isolated as a complete legal argument, yet the total verdict is unmistakable. The elders bless. The women praise. The LORD gives conception. The genealogy leads to David. Scripture does not frame Ruth as a tolerated transgressor. It frames her as an instrument of covenant restoration.

The Book Ends with David

Ruth begins in the days when the judges ruled. Judges closes with repeated moral disorder and the declaration that every man did what was right in his own eyes. Ruth takes place within that dark era, but it shows ordinary people doing what is right in God's eyes. The final word of the book is David.

The genealogy reveals that a family story in Bethlehem is also a royal story. The survival of Elimelech's line contributes to the rise of Israel's king. Ruth's inclusion therefore cannot be treated as a minor local irregularity. It stands within the inspired explanation of Davidic ancestry.

The genealogy also warns against making human respectability the measure of divine purpose. Pharez enters through the troubled history of Judah and Tamar. Boaz is associated in Matthew with Rahab. Obed is born to Ruth the Moabitess. God's redemptive line does not celebrate sin, but it repeatedly shows grace restoring people and overruling broken histories.

Ruth in Matthew's Genealogy

Matthew 1:5-6 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king.

Matthew deliberately names women in a genealogy where women are not normally required for the legal line. Ruth's name appears beside Rahab, another woman whose national background might have made readers question her place. Both are joined to Israel's story through faith and providence.

Ruth does not enter Christ's genealogy because Moabite idolatry was harmless. She enters because the God of Israel receives those who turn to Him. Her presence in the line of Christ anticipates the Gospel movement toward the nations while remaining rooted in the covenant history of Israel.

Jesus is not embarrassed by Ruth's name. The genealogy places it in the opening movement of the New Testament. The Messiah comes through a family line marked by kings and outsiders, honor and scandal, judgment and mercy. He enters the real human story in order to redeem real human beings.

THE MESSIANIC LINE: Ruth did not contaminate the line of Christ. Her inclusion revealed what the Christ came to accomplish.

Boaz and the Greater Redeemer

Christian preaching has long seen Boaz as an image of Christ. The comparison is fruitful when it follows the text. Boaz has the standing to redeem, accepts the cost, acts publicly and restores an endangered inheritance. Christ likewise comes near to His people, pays the cost they cannot pay and gives them an inheritance they could not secure.

The comparison must remain responsible. Boaz is not sinless, divine or the Savior of the world. The nearer kinsman is not a secret code for a particular theological system. Every incidental feature should not be turned into an allegory. Biblical typology is strongest where the pattern of redemption is clear and later Scripture confirms Christ as the ultimate Redeemer.

Boaz redeems one household within Israel. Jesus redeems people from every kindred, tongue, people and nation. Boaz preserves the name of the dead. Jesus gives His own name and life to those who were dead in sins. Boaz opens a future for Naomi and Ruth. Christ opens an eternal inheritance for all who trust Him.

The Outsider Who Seeks the LORD

Isaiah 56:6-7 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD ... even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

The Old Testament does not speak with one flat word about foreigners. It condemns nations for pride, cruelty and idolatry. It forbids Israel from covenant compromise. It also protects the stranger, remembers believing outsiders and anticipates a day when foreigners who join themselves to the LORD will worship in His house.

Ruth fits that biblical pattern. She is not received while clinging to Chemosh. She renounces the old allegiance and joins herself to the LORD. Her story therefore offers no support for religious indifference. It offers strong support for the mercy of God toward the repentant outsider.

The church should learn both sides of the truth. Holiness must not be abandoned in the name of welcome. Welcome must not be withheld in the name of holiness when God has cleansed and received a person through faith. The same grace that welcomes also transforms allegiance.

What Deuteronomy 7 Does and Does Not Say

Some discussions assume that Ruth's marriage violates the general prohibition against intermarriage in Deuteronomy 7. That passage specifically names seven Canaanite nations dwelling in the land. Moab is not in that list. More important, the stated danger is that foreign spouses will turn Israel's children away from the LORD to serve other gods.

Ruth presents the reverse case. She is not drawing Boaz toward idolatry. She has turned from Moab's gods to the LORD. The central biblical concern is covenant allegiance rather than a modern theory of racial purity. Scripture can condemn an Israelite marriage that produces apostasy while honoring a foreign woman who embraces Israel's God.

This distinction appears elsewhere. Rahab of Jericho is spared because she confesses the LORD and protects the spies. Naaman returns to Syria confessing that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. The Gibeonite episode shows the complications of covenant and deception. Each text has its own legal setting, but together they prove that foreign birth is not an unchangeable spiritual destiny.

Was Ruth Really a Love Story?

Ruth contains real affection, and it is not wrong to admire the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. Yet the book is not a modern courtship story. It never records a private declaration of romantic love. Its central vocabulary concerns kindness, refuge, kinship, name, inheritance, witness and redemption.

The primary human relationship in the opening chapter is between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth's first great act of love is not toward Boaz. It is toward a bereaved woman who has no wealth or obvious future to offer. Boaz is drawn to Ruth partly because he has heard all that she has done for Naomi.

The marriage matters because it becomes the means of family restoration. Romance serves redemption rather than replacing it. This richer reading does not make the story less beautiful. It makes the beauty more durable because love is measured by covenant faithfulness, protection and sacrifice.

What Ruth Teaches the Church

First, difficult texts should be allowed to ask difficult questions. Deuteronomy 23 should not be ignored because Ruth is beloved. Ruth should not be condemned because one verse has been isolated from its legal and narrative setting. Scripture rewards patient comparison.

Second, conversion changes allegiance. Ruth's past remains part of her testimony, but it no longer governs her worship. The church must never confuse grace with the idea that nothing needs to change. Ruth receives a new people because she has confessed a new God.

Third, godliness is visible in ordinary responsibility. Ruth gleans. Boaz protects workers and strangers. Elders witness a transaction. Women bless a child. God advances the line of David through faithful acts that seem small beside the miracles of Exodus.

Fourth, redemption has a cost. The nearer kinsman calculates what he may lose. Boaz accepts responsibility. Christian use of the word redemption should retain this weight. Forgiveness is free to the recipient because the Redeemer bears the price.

Fifth, the church must not preserve barriers that God has overcome. Ephesians says that Gentiles who were once strangers from the covenants of promise are made nigh by the blood of Christ. Ruth's story is not the full New Testament doctrine, but it prepares the heart to recognize it.

***Ephesians 2:12-13** At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel ... But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

Commentary Summary

Deuteronomy 23 records a severe exclusion of Ammon and Moab because of covenant hostility. The expression congregation of the LORD has a debated legal range and should not be casually equated with mere residence or the possibility of repentance. An ancient Jewish reading further limits the wording to male Moabites, though the case for Ruth need not rest on grammar alone.

Ruth confesses Israel's people and Israel's God as her own. Her actions reverse Moab's offenses. She brings food rather than withholding it. She seeks blessing rather than a curse. She leaves idolatry rather than seducing Israel into it. The law protects her gleaning, and Boaz extends generous kindness beyond the minimum.

At the threshing floor Ruth asks for covenant covering from a near kinsman. Boaz protects her honor and refuses to bypass the nearer claimant. At the gate the transaction is heard, witnessed and blessed. The LORD gives conception. Obed leads to Jesse, David and ultimately Jesus Christ.

The narrative therefore does not ask readers to choose between law and grace. It shows grace working through truth, conversion and lawful redemption. Ruth is not the story of a hostile Moabite demanding covenant privilege while retaining Moab's gods. She is the story of a believing outsider who forsakes her old allegiance and finds refuge under the wings of the LORD.

FINAL ANSWER: Ruth did not violate the law by joining Israel. She came by faith, lived by covenant loyalty and was received through a redemption that honored God's law.

A Final Word

Ruth's story begins with famine and funerals. It ends with bread, a child and a king. Between those endings stands a woman who could not change her birthplace but could entrust her future to the God of Israel. She came with no claim except faith and no wealth except loyalty.

Her testimony still speaks to those who feel defined by origin, loss or exclusion. God does not call evil good, and He does not erase the seriousness of covenant rebellion. He does something greater. He receives the one who turns to Him, places that person beneath His wings and writes redemption into a future that grief could not imagine.

The law named Moab's offense. Ruth's life displayed repentance from it. Bethlehem witnessed her redemption. David inherited its fruit. Matthew recorded her name. Christ completed the promise toward which her story was moving.

CLOSING AFFIRMATION: The question is not whether grace ignored the law for Ruth. The wonder is that the God who gave the law also made a righteous way for the outsider to come home.