

Nahshon the father of Salmon,^a

²¹**Salmon the father of Boaz,**

Boaz the father of Obed,

²²**Obed the father of Jesse,**

and Jesse the father of David.

^a**20** A few Hebrew manuscripts, some Septuagint manuscripts and Vulgate (see also verse 21 and Septuagint of 1 Chron. 2:11); most Hebrew manuscripts *Salma*

4:13 That which was announced in 4:10 is enacted, as the story rushes to a conclusion. **So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife.** Naomi's blessing of 1:8-9 is fulfilled as Ruth receives *hesed*-kindness and goes to "the home of another husband." Beyond this, Boaz **went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.** The one whose existence was only a threat in the gateway, and a remote one at that, becomes a reality. In terms reminiscent of a host of other Old Testament narratives, the previously barren wife conceives and produces a son. Biblically such things are chalked up to miracle. Interestingly, this is the second overt action of God described in the narrative. As such it provides a working frame: He relieves the problem of famine by giving his people food (1:6); he relieves the problem of family by giving Ruth a child (4:13). The latter passage may also indirectly confirm the innocence of the threshing-floor meeting between Ruth and Boaz. Only now are they physically united and only now is a child conceived.

4:14-15 The birth prompts the chorus of women to speak to Naomi.³² It must be remembered that at one time, a female chorus

³²Trible's proposal ("Two Women," pp. 277-278) that the chorus of Bethlehem women functions in opposition to the chorus of male elders is too strong. Certainly, as one compares the blessing of 4:11-12 and the blessing of 4:14-15 there are different interests expressed, e.g., the gateway blessing is concerned for the "name of the dead," while the blessing of the women includes a naming of the living. Against this reading, two things must be remembered. First, the two blessings are voiced in two different contexts. One concludes a legal decision, the other is offered in the midst of a nativity scene. Different issues arise in different settings. Second, it is hardly a foregone conclusion that "all the people" of v. 9 and "the elders and all those at the gate" of v. 11 are strictly male. Removing this unnecessary gender-loading allows each chorus to function in a way that is both complete and complementary.

questioned her identity. When she returned from Moab, bitter and sad, they asked “Can this be Naomi?” (1:19). Now they speak again, gathering together closing words like loose threads that function on no less than two levels. At one level, their words are a blessing or prayer, opening in formulaic phrase, “blessed be Yahweh.” At another level, however, their words expand into a series of final assessments, circling again around the question of identity: Who is Yahweh? Who is Ruth? Who is the *gō’ēl*-redeemer?

The blessing begins, **“Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer.”** Through these words, Yahweh is identified and praised. He “has not ceased” or “put an end to” a *gō’ēl*-redeemer for you. Note that the activity of this *gō’ēl*-redeemer, as recognized, is rightly applied to Naomi. One expects this special one to be identified as Boaz; however, a closer read reveals an unexpected twist.³³ **“May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”** Three directions are fruitful for exploration. First, a description of the *gō’ēl*-redeemer is noted.³⁴ His name will become famous in Israel; he will “return” life to Naomi,³⁵ and he will support (or even “nourish”) Naomi when her hair turns grey. Second, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is underlined. While Ruth offers a child (but has no voice) in this closing chapter, it is significant that her love for Naomi provides the final word on her character. Here, the chorus uncharacteristically (for Hebrew narrative) pulls back the curtain and reveals inner feelings,

³³Nonetheless, some have tried to argue for Boaz as this *gō’ēl*-redeemer. Note Sasson’s arguments against Bewer (*Ruth*, p. 163-164).

³⁴Besides Boaz, it is tempting to read Yahweh as the subject of these statements. Grammatically, it is possible as Campbell has shown (*Ruth*, p. 163-164). However, the final line describing his “birth” makes this a difficult reading, as Campbell concedes.

³⁵The notion of “return” has been thematic throughout the book, albeit more often than not with a negative edge. Recall in 1:12 Naomi encouraged her two daughters-in-law to “return” home, and later in the chapter Naomi laments that Yahweh caused her to “return” from Moab empty (1:21). Still, Ruth refused to “return” (1:16), and, of course, here it is the newborn who will cause Naomi’s life to “return.” Hence, the greatest “return” is saved for the last; she who once spewed bitterness, has no need to even open her mouth.

suggesting in part, why this daughter-in-law has been so loyal to Naomi. Who is Ruth? She is the one who truly loves Naomi.³⁶ In fact, this attachment is so strong, that from the perspective of the chorus, such a daughter-in-law is preferable to a whole battery of sons, a remarkable statement given Naomi's personal loss and the male-oriented world in which she lives.³⁷ Third and finally, the identity of the *gō'el*-redeemer is revealed. Although it is the same word used by Naomi to describe Boaz (2:20), and by Boaz and the narrator to describe the anonymous kinsman (3:12; 4:1,3,6,8), neither of these is the focus. Who is the *gō'el*-redeemer? In a twist, the women proclaim that he is *the son* born to Ruth! It is the newborn child who will become famous, be a restorer of life, and will maintain Naomi in her old age.

The introduction of this child provides the final piece of the *gō'el*-redeemer puzzle for the book. Boaz has heroically functioned in this role in order to achieve legal satisfaction. But as the chorus points out, there is more at stake here than *torah*. Their words suggest that Naomi, the returning one, has returned, but the genealogical list makes it clear that there are greater issues than Naomi's place in the world or even her personal comfort. Perhaps it is better to hold this idea at arm's length for a moment, consider Naomi's embrace first, and then return to it in the context of the closing genealogical discussion.

³⁶The term אָהָב (*'āhab*) is used of the affection shared between a parent and a child (Gen 22:2; 25:28), a husband and a wife (Gen 24:67; Judg 16:4), a slave and a master (Exod 21:5), or friends (1 Sam 16:21; 18:1,3). This is a very broad term that describes both pure and impure feelings.

Certainly to achieve the reading of Fewell and Gunn, Ruth's "love" cannot be taken at face value and rests somewhere between pure and impure. "We suggest a loyal friendship that is not without mixed motives. Sacrificial love? Perhaps—but not a love that recklessly loses sight of the self" (*Compromising Redemption*, p. 98).

³⁷Kristin Moen Saxegaard presents an interpretation of the book of Ruth through the expression, "more than seven sons." Several points are of interest. First, she points out that Ruth functions as both daughter and son to Naomi, challenging conventional gender roles. Second, she compares the phrase found here, "more to you than x sons," to a similar expression in 1 Sam 1:8. Third, she briefly offers the observation that Ruth has become the "eighth son" to Naomi, and as such can be compared, as a type, to David, also an eighth son (cf. 1 Sam 16:10-11). Both Ruth and David go beyond the perfect. See her "'More Than Seven Sons': Ruth as Example of the Good Son," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, 15 (2001): 257-275.

4:16-17 Whereas before Naomi responded to the women in complaint (1:20-21) — trading her identity as “sweet” for “bitter” — her response now is one of actions, not words. She takes the child and tenderly cares for him. The women see this action and proclaim, **“Naomi has a son.”** Rather than view this statement as a sentimental exercise, or, even worse, a factual error (isn’t Ruth the child’s mother?), the twist prompts the reader to think narratively. The words of the women may be a play on imagery. The child is quietly pressed to Naomi’s bosom; she “cares for him,” possibly even “nurses him.”³⁸ While it is physically unlikely that she suckled the child, the raw symbolism of her action cannot be missed. As Boaz promised, a son born to his union with Ruth would be dedicated to preserve the name of the dead (4:5), and, in time, fit into a larger construct (4:21-22). To this is the cleverly added point that the newborn also functions in the place of Mahlon and therefore becomes, in a round about way, the son of Naomi.³⁹ A further thought on this phrase emphasizes a contrast. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem and spoke to the women, her self-assessment was that of empty. Now, as a result of described events, she has become “full.” The disasters in Moab, while not explained, have been reversed. Food and family are now secure.

Just as the identity of Naomi is key to the closing of the book, so too is the identity of the child. In the final surprise of this book of surprises, the reader learns of the child’s name and lineage. **They named him Obed.** The name attached to the child means “Worker” or “Servant,” or in a more pious context, one who performs acts of service, “Worshiper.” This is a unique biblical example where the women of the village offer a name, rather than the parents. Hubbard observes this in the context of reversals, “In 1:19-21, they (the cho-

³⁸While the verb may suggest a suckling child (Num 11:12), it certainly does not require it (cf. 2 Sam 4:4, Esth 2:7).

³⁹Naomi’s act here has been variously debated. Some have even seen it as a legal action formalizing adoption. Compare with statements elsewhere of a child “placed on the knees” (e.g., Gen 30:3; 50:23). It is safe to say that this text offers no further information about who specifically would rear the child, nor are details of childcare in ancient Israel very illuminating.

Along another line, while it is clear here that this newborn will, in a sense, serve in Mahlon’s place, the pedigree of the child will clearly be that of Boaz. Mahlon will not be mentioned again.

rus of women) listened while Naomi lamented; here she listens while they rejoice.”⁴⁰

4:18-22 It is his lineage, though, that is most striking, as offered in a concluding genealogy. **“This, then, is the family line of Perez”** echoes with vocabulary from the book of Genesis and suggests a measure of continuity with that book.⁴¹ It also provides a kind of bridge over the tumultuous period recorded by Joshua and Judges. By means of these names, the reader may step carefully from the Patriarchs into the Davidic Monarchy with the confidence that this path is not outside of the will or blessing of Yahweh. Ten generations link **Perez** to **David**, the great king of Israel (cf. 1 Chr 2:5-15).⁴² Wrangling over the question of exact succession is hardly useful, as “father” may simply mean “ancestor.”⁴³ More crucial is the demonstration of directness, and even possibly, a consciously crafted structure that is parallel to the genealogies of Genesis 4 and 5. Just as ten generations separate Adam from Noah, ten generations are offered here. It is fascinating to observe that just as Enoch (the man who “walked with God”) occupies the seventh position in the Genesis 5 account, here, Boaz fills this key slot. Could such placement be coincidence? No. The great action plan of God, initiated in the beginning, continues in Ruth.

In the end, the genealogy demonstrates the fulfillment of the gateway pronouncement, “may your family be like that of Perez” (4:12), and, most significantly, the realization that this child of Ruth and Boaz is a link in the chain that stretches from the Patriarchs, through David, and ultimately, to the Messiah (Matt 1:1-17; cf. Luke

⁴⁰Hubbard, *Ruth*, p. 276.

⁴¹The phrase **אֵלֶּה דֹּדוֹתַי** (*‘ēleh tôl’ôdôth*) (“these are the generations” or better, “this is the legacy”) is a well known structuring formula used in the book of Genesis. See Gen 2:4; 10:1; etc.

⁴²Reading the text with this end in mind causes a second glance to be given to Elimelech (of Ruth 1:2), a name meaning, “My God is king.” While other voices emphasize David’s role as king, Hubbard wisely points out, “that David was born at all amply attested the presence of . . . providence. . . . David’s ascent to power provided weighty corroborating evidence, God is, indeed, King!” (Hubbard, *Ruth*, p. 285).

⁴³Kitchen, Hubbard, and others observe how this list must have gaps if it is to be correlated with what is currently known of chronological fix points in and out of the Bible. See K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 357, or Hubbard, *Ruth*, p. 284.

3:23-38). From this broad biblical perspective, the complete picture of the *gō'el*-redeemer is finally realized. How can a *son* “become famous throughout Israel,” “renew your life, and sustain you in your old age” (4:14)? A temporary and local fulfillment, to be sure, is seen in the image of what must have been regarded as a miracle baby, resting in the arms of widowed Naomi. However, an eternal and worldwide fulfillment is recognized in the image of another miracle baby, likewise born in Bethlehem, some thousand years later. Through his teachings and actions, this *son* will offer the final and fullest meaning to the expression *gō'el*-redeemer.