

From Emptiness to Fullness

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes you read a movie review in the newspaper that goes something like this: The first two-thirds of this film was filled with snappy dialogue and a sweet romance, but then the film bogs down in a dreary courtroom drama and the great promise of the movie just never delivers. Well, a cynical reader could say that about the book of Ruth. After three chapters of narrative drama, suspense, romance, and intrigue, suddenly the fourth and final chapter spends most of its time on a kind of legal transaction replete with sideline commentary to explain the intricacies of all of that legal stuff. It is maybe not quite what we expected of this love story, and yet, for those with eyes to see, it is pretty wonderful after all. Today on *Groundwork*, we look at Ruth 4. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now at the end of the four chapters of Ruth and the four programs in this series on Ruth. Naomi lost her husband and sons in the foreign land of Moab, came back to Bethlehem, but with one of the daughters-in-law, Ruth, in tow. They do what they can to survive by going out into the barley fields to glean. Ruth, wonderfully, providentially, meets Boaz, who is a wonderful man but also a family member, who is a kinsman redeemer, which means he is one of the people in line to marry Ruth and keep the family property in the family.

DAVE BAST

And also protect her and preserve her...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right.

DAVE BAST

And provide for Naomi in an age when there is no safety net, no Social Security, no retirement plan, no insurance, nothing. So, he is the guy, and in that role he really is a figure representing God himself for Israel, and ultimately Jesus for all who trust in him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right; and in the previous program we saw that both Ruth and Boaz have made their intentions known to each other. Ruth would like to marry Boaz, Boaz would like to marry Ruth; problem is, there is somebody in line ahead of him. He cannot just drop down to one knee and propose to Ruth. He has to do this in good order. Maybe we should just say a minute before we get into this fourth chapter, this story comes from the ancient world; it comes from a male-dominated, patriarchal society; and some of our listeners are going to find that Ruth kind of seems to be reduced to almost a piece of property here—something to be bargained over; and if it seems that way to you it is because it is kind of true. I mean, we are just going to have to admit that. That is kind of the social strictures of the story and of the setting of the story. We can be

thankful that in most societies women are not treated that way anymore, but that is the way it was in the ancient world three thousand years ago or however long ago this was. So, we just want to acknowledge that up front.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, the interesting thing, too, though, it is now Boaz's turn to act. In fact, Ruth spoke her last line in this book in Chapter 3. She won't speak again, even at the end of Ruth 4, as we will see in a few minutes. Naomi is more prominent than Ruth; so, Ruth has done everything she can. She has pushed the boundaries pretty far. She has taken some risks...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But now, she has done all she can do; it is in Boaz's hands.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. So, the title character kind of fades away in Chapter 4, and Boaz steps into the spotlight; and Naomi and Ruth have been proactive, as they say...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very much.

DAVE BAST

They have come up with a plan and they have taken the steps that they could; but as you say, Scott, now Boaz has to do something, and he does. He doesn't let any time go by. Naomi has said to Ruth: He is going to take care of this. He will settle it tomorrow; and sure enough, he does. So, we pick up the reading in Ruth 4...[0:03:50.2] ¹No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there, (and that, by the way, was the public area outside the entrance to the city where everything happened)...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And we still see this in the New Testament; things go on in the gate. That is where business is done, that is the courtroom, that is the public place of assembly.

So, Boaz sits down there, ^{1b}and the next-of-kin of whom Boaz had spoken came passing by. So Boaz said, "Come over, friend. Sit down here," and he went over and sat down. ²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. ³Then he said to the next-of-kin, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman, Elimelech; ⁴so I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it, but if you will not tell me so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you."

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{4b}So he said, "I will redeem it," ⁵And Boaz said, "The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name and his inheritance." ⁶At this, the next-of-kin said, "I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

So, there is the reading.

DAVE BAST

Yes, this is great. It's a great story...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is. Boaz has a chessboard set up here and he is moving the chess pieces around. We know what Boaz wants, but we know that he cannot do that without this guy getting out of the way. You cannot just jump to the head of line; it is a line of succession like Queen Elizabeth in England. It follows birth order, and this guy is a little older than Boaz, so he is next in line...

DAVE BAST

Or, I suppose we could also assume he might be a closer relative than Boaz.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; one way or the other; however that went...

DAVE BAST

But anyway, he is ahead in line, like you say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you know, Boaz needs to deal with this guy; and so he waited for the guy, knowing almost certainly that this...I am going to call this relative Shlomo...Shlomo walked by the gate every day along about that time; don't think Boaz didn't know that; and Boaz also had arranged it that: Oh, well, look; there are ten of the elders just happen to be nearby...

DAVE BAST

Just what we needed. It is a synagogue. It is the legal number. We can do business here, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, I mean, Boaz has clearly set up everything here. He knows this relative is going to come by. He knows what he wants to do, and he has arranged it so that some elders are there as witnesses so that whatever happens is going to be official and legal. So, you know, Boaz has pretty much set up his chessboard, and he has to be making the first move; and we just saw what that move was.

DAVE BAST

I love this, too, in the detail. So, Boaz starts out by saying: Oh, by the way, did you know that Naomi is interested in selling her land; the land that belonged to Elimelech?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which we hadn't heard about in this story...

DAVE BAST

No, she is really not interested in selling it, I don't think; but it is again illustrative of something we pointed out before. Not everybody in Israel, really, took the law seriously, especially these provisions about land and money and releasing slaves and all that. A lot of people just sort of turned a blind eye to that, but Boaz is a man who takes the law seriously...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And so, Shlomo thinks he is just going to be able to lay out a little bit of silver and pick up this choice piece of property. Then Boaz hits him with: Oh, by the way, if you take the land you have to take the girl, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we are going to see what happens next in this story, and how it all plays out. It will play out in Boaz's favor, but there is some tension, and we will look at that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are in Ruth Chapter 4. We are sitting at the gate of the city of Bethlehem; a spot where legal transactions and a lot of official business got done. Boaz conveniently enough has set things up so that he can talk to the person who is next in line to marry Ruth, and he set it up conveniently enough so that the town elders are there—ten of them, in fact—conveniently enough; the number you needed for witnesses. Again, as we said just in the last sequence: Boaz begins innocently enough: Hey, bad business for Elimelech, huh? Too bad he died. He and his sons, they dropped like flies over there in Moab; and you probably heard Naomi came back...his widow...and she brought some baggage back, too, this Moabite woman. She sticks to Naomi like glue! And yeah, yeah, yeah, this relative had heard all about it; but then Boaz says: So, she has this property. Do you want it? You are next in line to buy it. And he says: Sure, I'll buy it. And then Boaz kind of lowers the boom on him.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. He says: I will buy it; but with no intention, really, of being the kinsman redeemer—the *goel*—which is the crucial figure. So then Boaz says to him: Yeah, well what about Ruth? And he says: Oh, oh, oh; no, no, no, no. Sorry, I didn't realize that. I've got my own business affairs. They are so very tangled. I am afraid if I introduce that...and so, he backs out and Boaz then turns to the witnesses that they have arranged so conveniently to have there and says: All right, I want this to be legal; I want this to be above board. I want you to see exactly what is going on. You have got to wonder what was going on, you know, at that crucial moment in Boaz's mind. I mean, was he holding his breath?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, yes, I think he must have been holding his breath because it could have been that the guy would have said: Yeah, yeah, I will take the girl, too. Yeah, yeah, fine, fine, fine; which would have broken Boaz's heart at this point; we know that already. So, he is holding his breath. It is interesting, though, that we don't know why, but certainly the land alone wasn't going to complicate this relative's business practices. He already...without thinking he just said: I will take it. It was only when he found out: Oh, you would have to marry the woman—the Moabite, foreign woman—that he backs out. Maybe he didn't like foreign women. Maybe he was like an Israel-first kind of guy, that I don't want to sully my family or my reputation or my bed with a foreign girl. Maybe Boaz was counting on his kind of getting squeamish about marrying a Moabite girl. Boaz not only has no compunction about that, he is eager to do it. He is in love with Ruth; but maybe he was counting on this guy being...I don't know...I don't think we want to call him racist, but kind of an Israel-first guy who just didn't want to mess with Moabite women. Either way, it works out for Boaz. The guy says: Yep; boy, the price for that property is a little more pricey than I thought. Never mind. You may have it; and I am sure Boaz probably had to suppress joyful laughter at this point. It is working out really well.

DAVE BAST

Right; and then comes a little strange interchange here, which the narrator, again, is really interested in, and many modern readers aren't so terribly interested in; but again, you know, the Bible is written with its own

set of interests and assumptions, and it isn't necessarily like modern literature, pitched to us only.

So, we pick it up in verse 7 of Ruth 4, and we read:

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging to confirm a transaction. (And incidentally, this is an indication that the book of Ruth is written later)...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Quite a bit later.

DAVE BAST

So, it is written maybe during the time of the Kings or maybe even later than that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Maybe even during the exile.

DAVE BAST

Right; so they have to explain how things were back then in the days of the Judges; so that is just an interesting time note there.

⁷To confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he took off his sandal.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon (their sons). ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth, the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife."

Again, as we said earlier in the program, if this makes Ruth look like something with a title and deed attached to her the way you would sell a car today, that is true. I mean, it is maybe a little uncomfortable for us in more equal societies today, but that is just the way it was, Dave. So, it was all very legal and all very tidy and all very official...

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is like they drew up a contract, they signed it, they had it notarized, they had witnesses. So again, this is something we are very familiar with, and it is actually...in a sense, it is a testimony to human nature that we aren't trustworthy—that we cannot just give our word. It has to be kind of formalized in this way and witnessed so that we can be held to it; but that is what is going on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right; and it is interesting...you noted this, Dave...the fact that the author...we have no idea who wrote the book of Ruth...but the fact that the author had to say, even to Israelite readers whenever this was written: I have to fill you in on a little history, folks. You haven't seen this in your lifetime. So, this is a long time ago; and it is interesting...this may have been written much later, during the reign of the Kings. It may have been written down as a good bit of the Old Testament was, we think, during the period of exile in Babylon. It was mostly oral tradition. A lot of things were not written down until then; and the exile, of course...if it did happen then, that was a time when they were really longing for the Messiah, really longing to see if God was going to come through on his promises; and so, maybe that was the time when somebody said: You know, the story of Ruth that we have been telling to each other and to our kids at bedtime for centuries now, that is a key story. I think that is how we got King David; that is maybe how we are going to get the ultimate Son of David. This story needs to be preserved. And so, long after Ruth and Boaz were dead, this finally got written down and preserved for Israel as a story of hope.

DAVE BAST

Right; and if it was written then, as you suggest, Scott, during the exile, that would make it roughly contemporary with the words of Isaiah...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DAVE BAST

That we quoted in the last program about how God is the ultimate kinsman redeemer. God is the one who has given that name to himself, and through the prophet Isaiah has promised that his people need not fear, because he will be with them. He is going to rescue them. He is going to restore them to wholeness and health and happiness, as Boaz will restore not only Ruth, but also Naomi. So, just these wonderful kind of crossover applications into different parts of scripture; but meanwhile, this legal stuff has taken place. It seems to us maybe to be kind of slowing the story down.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

As you pointed out, I mean, here we have this nice love story that is moving along briskly, then all of a sudden we descend into the law court in the gate and all that; but there is something even more unusual at the very end of this story, and we will look at that as we wrap up this series and this program in just a moment.
Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork* and our final program in a four-part series on the book of Ruth. Boaz has successfully advanced to the head of the line. He is now next in line to redeem property of Naomi's husband, Elimelech, but also to marry the widow of one of the sons, the only widow who is present because the other woman stayed back in Moab. So, he has moved to the head of the line, and now we read this following that legal transaction and the exchange of the sandal that we just noted.

Ruth 4:11:

Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the House of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹²and through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

So, it is a benediction of a kind.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; and a wonderful prayer for blessing. You know, we have been speculating a little bit about the author of this story and when he may have lived; and you know I wonder, if it was from later, if he had possibly any...he was a brilliant writer, the way this story is told...but I wonder if he had any familiarity with Greek writing and Greek tragedy in particular. One of the key elements of Greek tragedy is that everything had to take place in a day; and that comes to my mind because basically after the set up of the story, where they go away to Moab and come back again, everything that happens, happens in a day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we are in about a 24, 36, 48-hour at max time frame...

DAVE BAST

No more than that; so...

SCOTT HOEZEE

From the end of Ruth 1, anyway.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; so, Ruth goes out, she gleanes for a day, comes back, tells where she has been. Naomi understands: Whoa, this guy is our relative. He could be the kinsman redeemer. Ruth cleans up and goes...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That very night.

DAVE BAST

And has this beautiful exchange with Boaz. They are falling in love; and then Boaz comes and does the deal in the gate and manages to clear away the problems. He becomes first in line, and the people burst out in this blessing; but it is...you know, the beginning is great: May the Lord make you like Leah and Rachel...the mothers of Jacob's twelve children...the tribes of Israel; but then they add this rather odd reference to Judah and Tamar.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is odd indeed because...not because they are not in the line of succession of the family that ultimately leads to David and ultimately leads to Christ. If you have ever read Genesis 38...and a lot of people probably don't because I think they skip it. It is right in the middle of what happens to Joseph, right? Joseph had the coat of many colors. His brothers hated him. They sell him into slavery, and Joseph gets carted off into Egypt. That is the end of Genesis 37. We will catch back up with Joseph along about 39 and 40, but meanwhile, in between we get this weird R-rated Bible story in Genesis 38. One of Joseph's brothers, Judah, has a situation in his family where his son dies, who is married to a foreign woman named Tamar, but Judah does not do the right thing. He does not secure a new husband for Tamar; so Tamar takes things into her own hands, disguises herself as a prostitute, goes to a nearby town that she knows Judah is going to visit while he is traveling on business or something. He does not recognize her. She seduces him, she gets pregnant. Eventually she confronts him with this, that the child that she has is from her father-in-law, Judah. It is all very embarrassing...

DAVE BAST

And she can prove it, by the way, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right...

DAVE BAST

Because she is careful to...

SCOTT HOEZEE

She kept a couple of his possessions so she could say: Yes, I am the one you slept with over that in that nearby town. It is kind of an R-rated story. We don't tell this one in Sunday school. We stick with Joseph, thank you very much.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is a very strange story, but you notice the common elements with Ruth. They are both foreigners, so therefore they should not be part of the covenant line of promise. They are both widowed through no fault of their own...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And they should have the benefit of the law of levirate marriage. They should be taken care of and provided for; and in the case of Judah, he refuses. He does not do what Boaz does. So, there is some commonality

there, but the wonderful thing is, the Lord takes them both in, and they both become part of the family line, not just of King David, but of Jesus the Messiah. They are both mentioned in Matthew 1.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so these Bethlehem townsfolk, when they do this blessing, they mention Tamar and Judah at the end, and maybe they made those connections, too, or Ruth was...maybe there was an edge to it, too; I don't know. I mean, Ruth is a foreigner, Tamar was a foreigner; yes, there are some echoes going on here. Whatever! They remind us of that story; and it is also interesting that, of course, in Matthew Chapter 1, Matthew does the unusual thing in family trees of including four women, and they are basically all foreign women; and Tamar and Ruth are in that same line. So, it is interesting how this all goes and how it all kind of ends up being connected; but, the real end of the story will center again, oddly enough, not on Ruth but on Naomi. Boaz and Ruth get married. Not long after, they have a little boy and they name him Obed.

DAVE BAST

And this is what the narrator says as he wraps up the story: ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel. ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse, the father of David.
Beautiful ending!

SCOTT HOEZEE

A beautiful ending, but I picture...

DAVE BAST

But again, a little bit odd.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I picture Ruth on the side saying: Hello, me; hello, mother; hello!

DAVE BAST

Yes, what about me?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, it centers on Naomi because we started with Naomi and her emptiness has now become full; her bitterness has now become sweet; her despair has now turned into a profound hope for the future. So, it makes sense in that sense that...we know Ruth is the mother, and so forth. It is a wonderful ending to this book that started as tragically as a story could; and I think, Dave, we have been saying this all along in this series, but it bears repeating as we wrap things up. This is finally the story of all of us. We all face loss, we all face bitterness and emptiness eventually. We lose a job we loved; we lose to death a person in our family whom we loved. Sometimes we lose our strength, and at the end of the day we might start losing our memory; and we wonder: Is God here? Does God do anything? Is God even paying attention? We wonder the same things Naomi and Ruth wondered as the story began; and yet, we see what God was up to all along.

DAVE BAST

I don't know if I have told this story on *Groundwork* before, but I happened to be in a hotel room a while back and I opened the Gideon's Bible, and somebody in an angry scrawl had written on the first page: All religions are fairytales. Some angry atheist, I guess; and I remember thinking: No, friend; actually the opposite is true. All fairytales really point to the truth of the God who is our redeemer in Jesus Christ and who is guaranteeing that those of us who know him and love him will have a happy ending. We will live happily ever after. That is the story that Ruth tells.

SCOTT HOEZEE

[0:24:11.4g] And that is exactly the way it ends; but you know, Dave, it is not just a happy ending, it is finally God's happy ending, which means it is deeper than happiness, it is joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and that is the message of Ruth; thanks be to God.

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast. We always want to help you to dig deeper into the scriptures. So you can make suggestions for our future programs at groundworkonline.com. Give topics and passages that we can dig into next.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/from-emptiness-to-fullness>

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