

RUTH: AN ALLEGORICAL READING

Mack C. Stirling

Introduction

Ruth is a finely crafted story that has brought joy to many readers traumatized by the pervasive darkness and violence at the end of Judges and the beginning of the monarchy. The book is an island of tranquility in a sea of tribulation, giving us seemingly ordinary humans and a happy ending. Although the author and date of composition are unknown, Ruth functions well as a bridge between the end of rule by judges and the rise of kingship, anticipating the Davidic dynasty that will prove so significant in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Importantly, the book of Ruth also serves to explain the (scandalous) Moabite ancestry of King David.

Because of uncertainties in ancient Hebrew law and customs, uncertainties in the meaning of some Hebrew words, and what appear to be intentional ambiguities on the part of the author, there are several valid ways of interpreting or reading the book of Ruth. Some interpreters, diminishing or extinguishing altogether the role of romantic love in the story, tend to elevate Boaz and Ruth as paragons of virtue who embody pure charity.¹ In this approach, Ruth marries a man she does not really desire romantically in order to provide for Naomi. Similarly, Boaz, acting out of charity for Ruth and Naomi, takes on a burden and a marriage he does not really want from a romantic perspective. Other interpreters, recognizing an important role for romantic love, tend to see the characters in the story as more ordinary (realistic) people with potentially ambivalent motives.²

There is also significant debate about what, if anything, the book of Ruth has to say about divine providence. God is not directly present as a character in the story, always remaining off-stage. The only actions that are attributed to him are events that seem to be beyond human control, such as extreme misfortune (Ruth 1:13, 21) and blessings (Ruth 1:8, 4:13). Although the blessings of the Lord are regularly invoked by the human actors, especially Naomi and Boaz, it is the individual people themselves who actually *do* the blessing, with the possible exception of Ruth's conception (Ruth 4:13). Nonetheless, many scholars see God as being actively present behind all of the events in the story, bringing matters to a predetermined (foreordained) conclusion, notably the birth of David.³ In contrast, others emphasize the role and importance of human agency and initiative in the story.⁴

I propose an allegorical reading of the book of Ruth, intending to show that it can be read profitably both on a realistic, human level and as an allegory of salvation. Specifically, I see Ruth as undergoing a fall in Moab and then undertaking a journey to her Redeemer, represented by Boaz. In this journey, Ruth is provided with truth and guidance by Naomi, who represents a spiritual guide or leader or even the Holy Ghost. Read as an allegory, Ruth's journey has many points of contact with the temple endowment and also with Job's spiritual journey.⁵ I do consider romantic attraction and love to be very important in the human story of Ruth, and I consider this romantic love to be emblematic both of the genuine disciple's love for God and of God's love for the disciple in the allegory. In this paper, I will first retell the story of Ruth, emphasizing those points which are important to an allegorical reading and commenting on the text. I will then summarize Ruth as an allegory, demonstrating that the book of Ruth easily lends itself to a meaningful allegorical reading that corresponds naturally to the basic story of Ruth and Boaz.

An allegorical interpretation presupposes that there is more than one level of (valid) meaning in the text. However, an allegorical reading may well go beyond the original intent of the (human) author and should, therefore, be done with caution. In my

view, an ideal and meaningful allegorical interpretation should be suggested by the text itself, should be self-consistent and coherent, should take into account all or most of the elements of the text, should generally be in harmony with the corpus of scripture, and should increase one's understanding or appreciation of God's plan of salvation. Furthermore, each element of the allegory should relate to or derive from the corresponding elements in the base text in a natural and scripturally harmonious way. I have endeavored, successfully I believe, to meet these criteria in my presentation of the story of Ruth as an allegory of salvation.

Barley (bread) plays an important role in the book of Ruth. It is essential for my allegorical reading to understand that bread (or grain) can be used to symbolize spiritual nourishment or the word of God, even in the Hebrew Bible. For example, in Proverbs 9, Wisdom invites us to partake of her bread and wine, clearly using bread to symbolize wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 9:1–10). Isaiah similarly uses bread to symbolize spiritual nourishment from God, corresponding to the word of God (Isaiah 55:1–3). Thus, acquisition of bread or grain can be understood symbolically as acquisition of the word of God or light and truth (Doctrine and Covenants 84:45).

Before proceeding further, it is helpful to review some biblical law and the definitions of a few Hebrew words of significance in Ruth. In Deuteronomy, Moabites are prohibited from entering the congregation of the Lord: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation." (Deuteronomy 23:3, KJV). In the story, Ruth, a Moabitess, is completely absorbed into the Israelite community, thus violating or transcending this law. There are a number of other examples in Ruth where the law is transcended by actions of love.

Chapter 25 of Deuteronomy legislates levirate marriage, wherein a brother of a deceased husband is exhorted to marry the widow and carry on the name and inheritance of the deceased with the first son of the levirate union. When Boaz marries Ruth, he does so with the express intent of carrying on the name and inheritance of her deceased husband, thus fulfilling the levirate responsibility

(Ruth 4:9–10). However, by the prescription of Deuteronomy, their marriage is technically not a levirate marriage since Boaz is not Ruth’s deceased husband’s brother but only a somewhat distant relative. Nonetheless, the Deuteronomic law may be incomplete or details of the law might have varied over time. So the marriage of Ruth and Boaz may have been considered a levirate marriage either at their time or at the time of the author.

The לֹאֵלֹהֵי *gō’ēl*. The Hebrew word *gō’ēl* is used in two different but related ways. It can refer to a designated family member who has the responsibility to buy back land or family members sold because of debt (Leviticus 25:24–25, 47–55), to receive restitution payments on behalf of injured or killed family members (Numbers 5:5–8), or to pursue blood vengeance under certain circumstances (Numbers 35:9–28). In these cases, *gō’ēl* is usually translated as “kinsman” or “near relative,” less commonly as “avenger.” The second use of *gō’ēl* in the Hebrew Bible is to refer to the Lord as redeemer and is, of course, translated as “redeemer” (Isaiah 41:14–16; Job 19:25–27).

Outside of the book of Ruth, *gō’ēl* is used with about equal frequency in each of these two ways. In Ruth, *gō’ēl* is variously translated as “kinsman” (KJV, RSV, REB), “kinsman-redeemer” (NIV), or simply “redeemer” (ESV). In the book of Ruth, I suggest that both meanings are active at every point where *gō’ēl* is used, with the meaning of “kinsman” relating to the human level of the story and “redeemer” to the allegorical level.

It is also critical to note that the institutions of levirate marriage and the familial *gō’ēl* are not linked in biblical law. Redemption by the *gō’ēl* does not include marriage of any kind. However, when Ruth meets with Boaz at the threshing floor, she appears to link marriage with land redemption in a creative and hopeful way (Ruth 3:9). Boaz accepts this idea and subsequently uses it publicly as he attempts to integrate Ruth into the community (Ruth 4:1–10).

Three other Hebrew words are worth mentioning. חֵן *hên*, translated as “grace” or “favor,” generally refers to unearned goodness from a superior to an inferior (Ruth 2:2, 10, 13). חֶסֶד *hesed*, which means “kindness,” “love,” “loyalty,” or “mercy,” is often translated as “steadfast love,” “covenant faithfulness,” or

“loving kindness” (Ruth 1:8, 2:20, 3:10). *Hesed* often refers to the loving kindness God shows to man; in Ruth, it is the human characters who most clearly demonstrate *hesed*. כָּנָף *kànāp* means “wing” and, secondarily, the edge of something, like the “edge of a garment.” *Kànāp* as wing includes the idea of protection (Ruth 2:12; Psalms 17:8; Psalms 36:7). Spreading the edge, *kànāp*, of one’s garment or skirt over someone means betrothal or marriage (Ruth 3:9).⁶ *Kànāp* might also refer to the male sex organ (Deuteronomy 22:30; 1 Samuel 24).⁷

As a final point before examining Ruth’s journey, it is instructive to remember that Israel is often portrayed as the bride of the Lord (Isaiah 54:1–6; Jeremiah 2–3; Hosea 2). Ezekiel describes this symbolic marital relationship between the Lord and Israel in terms strikingly similar to the description of the relationship between Ruth and Boaz in Ruth 3: “When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment [*kànāp*] over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, . . . and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and . . . fine linen” (Ezekiel 16:8–10, ESV). Here, Ezekiel portrays the redemption of Israel in terms of a betrothal or marriage, indicated by the Lord spreading his garment over her. Ruth’s redemption (betrothal or marriage) is described using the same image (Ruth 3:9).

Ruth’s Journey

I. Ruth 1. Moab to Bethlehem of Judah (Garden and Fall)

Naomi and her husband and two sons had left the land of Judah because of famine and had gone to the country (literally “field” שָׂדֵה *sâdeh*) of Moab, where the Lord was neither well-known nor worshiped. Moab was nonetheless a place of relative plenty where physical life could be sustained. Ruth and Orpah, native Moabites and therefore relatively ignorant of YHWH (the Lord), married Naomi’s two sons and partook, for a while, of a life full of substance and family. Suddenly, Naomi’s husband died, followed by Ruth’s

and Orpah's. The three widows are plunged from a state of fulness, characterized by family and sufficient food, into a state of loss and sorrow. Starvation threatens them since they are unable to provide for themselves in a patriarchal society. Naomi accurately describes their situation as emptiness and bitterness (Ruth 1: 20–21). They have lost two essential requirements of a satisfying life for an ancient Israelite: food and family.

Hearing that there is now food in Israel, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem in Judah initially accompanied by her two daughters-in-law. Warning them that she is unable to provide them with either food or husbands, Naomi urges them to stay in Moab and to return to their mothers' homes, their people, and their gods. Doing this, they would likely receive food from their families and would have the chance to obtain new husbands. Orpah chooses to remain in Moab. In contrast, Ruth, undoubtedly having learned something of YHWH from her in-laws, chooses to bind herself with an oath both to Naomi and YHWH, stating: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16–17, NIV). This remarkable vow indicates a change of culture that for a woman of that time and place is almost inconceivable.

Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem with a hope of grain at the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth has bound herself by covenant to a God about whom she has incomplete knowledge and has chosen to leave a place of probable security, risking all on a search for life, family, and sustenance in the land of YHWH. The presence of barley also indicates the potential for increasing knowledge of the Lord (barley turns to bread, symbolizing the word of God. See Proverbs 9:1–5; Isaiah 55:1–3; Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:1–40). It also suggests the possibility of offspring, as Hebrew has the same word for "seed" and "offspring": זֶרַע *zera'* (Ruth 4:12).

Naomi has accurately characterized her condition, and by extension Ruth's, as empty and bitter (Ruth 1:13–21), though the human Naomi does not yet understand what Ruth can become

to her. Throughout the story, Naomi will continue to assess and express the exact status of Ruth's journey and will progressively serve as Ruth's guide. The women of Bethlehem react to Naomi's arrival with surprise, initially ignoring Ruth. We are told that they were "stirred" (NIV, RSV) or "moved" (KJV) by Ruth's arrival (Ruth 1:19). Linafelt points out that this word is ambiguous, referring both to agitation and shock as well as to excitement or joy.⁸ This ambiguity thus raises the question of whether the two women are returning under a curse or blessing. Both possibilities are present; the rest of the story will determine which dominates: emptiness or fulness.

There are many parallels, significant in my view, between the story of Ruth in chapter one and the fall story of Genesis 2–3. Ruth begins ignorant and innocent of YHWH in a place with (relative) fulness of bread and food, and her fulness of life is increased when she obtains a husband. This state is similar to that of Adam in the Garden of Eden where food was plentiful and where Adam's life was made more complete when he obtained Eve as his wife. Furthermore, Adam and Eve, like Ruth, were initially innocent and ignorant of the full nature of God, not yet having experienced the opposition between good and evil that potentially leads to knowledge (Genesis 2:17, 3:5–6; 2 Nephi 2:11, 16–17).

Ruth chooses to enter a darker and emptier world where she must struggle even more for her existence. Having obtained some knowledge of the Lord, she binds herself to Naomi and to Naomi's God, YHWH, with a vow and self-imprecation. Ruth thus decides to leave the potential security of Moab for an uncertain and risky future. While seemingly under a curse, there appears to be the potential (represented by the barley in Israel) for Ruth to gain temporal and spiritual sustenance as well as offspring (seed) in the land of YHWH.

Naomi strenuously warns Ruth about the dangers of leaving the relative security of Moab, typifying an agent of the Lord who educates people about the potential negative consequences of their choices. Similarly, God himself warned Adam about the negative consequences (death) of deciding to leave the Garden of

Table 1. Moab Compared to the Garden of Eden and the Fall.

MOAB	GARDEN
<u>Before</u>	<u>Before</u>
Relative Abundance of Food	Eat of Any Tree of the Garden
Relative Ignorance of YHWH	Relative Ignorance of YHWH
Ignorance of YHWH's Law	Ignorance of Good and Evil
No Children	No Children
Security	Security
Warned of Consequences	Warned of Consequences
<u>After The Fall</u>	<u>After the Fall</u>
Death of Male Family	Death
Threatened Starvation	Threatened Starvation
Need to Glean Grain	Need to Till Earth
Potential for Children	Potential for Children
Potential for Greater Knowledge of YHWH	Potential for Greater Knowledge of YHWH
Covenant with YHWH	Commitment to YHWH
Risk and Uncertainty	Risk and Uncertainty
Bitterness and Emptiness	Bitterness and Emptiness

Eden by partaking of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17). Resonant with Ruth's story, Adam and Eve leave the Garden under a curse (Genesis 3:17–24) but also with potential for offspring and greater knowledge of their redeemer (Moses 5:11). Furthermore, Adam's evident commitment to obedience (Moses 5:4–6) parallels Ruth's vow binding herself to the Lord (Ruth 1:16–17). Table 1 summarizes the correspondences between Ruth 1 and the Garden of Eden and Fall in Genesis 2–3.

In journeying from Moab to Israel, Ruth leaves a land of idolatry and arrives in the promised land committed to the Lord. She thus retraces Abraham's journey from a land of idolatry in Mesopotamia to the promised land after he had bound himself to the Lord (Abraham 1–2). Will Ruth also receive Abrahamic blessings?

II. Ruth 2. In the Field of Boaz (On the Path to the Redeemer)

Ruth and Naomi have been sustained in their journey so far by the hope of finding grain in Israel. Ruth now asks Naomi for permission to glean “behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor” (Ruth 2:2, NIV). The place of the action now moves from Bethlehem of Judah to, more narrowly, the field of Boaz, where Ruth, surprisingly,

develops a bond with Boaz despite the barriers between them. Virtually everything in this chapter can be understood on two levels: (1) a very human story with strong romantic overtones and (2) an allegorical level wherein the Redeemer seeks out and gives grace to a striving person. Critical to my allegorical approach is Naomi's announcement (Ruth 2:20) that Boaz is a *gō'el* ("kinsman" in KJV, "redeemer" in ESV).

We are not told how Ruth came to be in the field of Boaz, a man of great stature (Ruth 2:1), after setting out to glean. Although Israelite law permitted the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widows to glean after the reapers for their very survival (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19), Ruth, who qualifies on all three counts, nonetheless asks for permission to glean (Ruth 2:6–7). Perhaps she is creatively seeking the grace or favor she desires. Ruth works many hours, literally earning her bread by the sweat of her brow, just like Adam after the Fall (Genesis 3:19).

Boaz comes to his field later in the day, having previously been informed of Naomi's return to Bethlehem with her supportive Moabite daughter-in-law (Ruth 2:11). Boaz is immediately drawn to Ruth, learning from his foreman that she is the widowed (and therefore available) Moabite who had returned with Naomi. He approaches and speaks to Ruth, encouraging her to glean only in his field, offering protection from the male workers and provision of water when she thirsts (Ruth 2:8–9). Ruth falls immediately on her face, a response appropriate to deity (Ezekiel 1:28, 3:23; Ether 3:6).

Prolonging the encounter and probing Boaz's motives, Ruth asks why she has found such grace in his eyes that he has taken notice of her, a foreigner. The human Boaz, perhaps veiling personal romantic motives, answers that it is because of her leaving Moab unselfishly to serve her mother-in-law. He then invokes the Lord's blessing on Ruth that the Lord will reward (show grace to) her for her devotion, noting that she has sought shelter or refuge under the wings (*kānāp*) of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:11–12). However, in the story of Ruth, it is *always* Boaz who shows grace and provides shelter to Ruth. In other words, Boaz embodies YHWH in giving

Ruth the very blessings he had prayed the Lord give her.⁹ Ruth acknowledges this directly, stating: “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord” (Ruth 2:13, ESV). Ruth thus treats Boaz as lord and seeks protection under his wings (*kānāp*).

Boaz then continues to keep Ruth present by inviting her to a meal with his workers, offering her bread and sour wine (Ruth 2:14–16). At the meal, Boaz himself serves roasted grain to Ruth, anticipating their ongoing relationship on both the human and allegorical levels. We are told that Ruth “ate until she was satisfied” (Ruth 2:14, ESV). Providing food until the individual is *satisfied* is an activity almost always attributed to the Lord and often implies spiritual as well as temporal sustenance (Jeremiah 31:14; Psalms 22:16, 78:25, 107:9, 132:15; Matthew 5:6, John 6:1–42).

By inviting Ruth to the meal, Boaz has gone beyond what the law requires. He has shown *hesed* (loving kindness, mercy, grace). After the meal, Boaz again transcends the requirements of the law, instructing the young men not to humiliate her and to allow her to glean among the sheaves (bound and harvested grain) instead of being limited to the uncut grain left at the margins by the harvesters (Ruth 2:15–16). Because of this grace, Ruth is able to glean a tremendous amount of grain (an “*ephah*”) later that day (Ruth 2:17).

Boaz has thus fulfilled for Ruth the promised blessings of nourishment and protection of the Lord to his people, whom Ruth typifies individually and collectively:

For this what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. . . . I will rescue them from all the places they were scattered . . . I will bring them out from the nations . . . and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel . . . I myself will tend my sheep . . . I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. (Ezek. 34:11–16 NIV)

Ruth, continuing to practice *hesed* after receiving *hesed* from Boaz, takes the *ephah* of barley home to her mother-in-law and

feeds her with the leftover roasted grain from the meal (Ruth 2:17–19). Realizing that something unusual has happened and finding out that Ruth had gleaned in Boaz' field, Naomi exclaims: "The Lord bless him! . . . He has not stopped showing his kindness (*hesed*) to the living and the dead" (Ruth 2:20, NIV). This text is ambiguous, intentionally in my view, as to whether the mentioned *hesed* came from Boaz or from the Lord, further corroborating the overlap between the two of them.

Naomi has once again correctly apprehended and expressed the status of Ruth's journey. She then aligns herself with Boaz, encouraging Ruth to glean only in Boaz's field and to stick close to Boaz's female servants, avoiding other fields and other men (Ruth 2:21–23). Although Naomi and Boaz never meet each other in the story, they always seem to be aware of each other's situation, and they work hand in hand to bring about Ruth's eventual union with Boaz. Furthermore, some scholars have seen a connection between Boaz and Naomi in their speech patterns, with both tending to use archaic and formal syntax and vocabulary.¹⁰ In addition, both repeatedly call Ruth "my daughter."

So Boaz has sought out Ruth, arranged for her protection, given her access to water, and provided two gracious gifts of food (the meal with roasted grain and the harvested barley). Ruth has exerted herself to benefit from this grace and has creatively sought to structure a relationship with Boaz. At the beginning of Ruth 2, there were many barriers between Ruth and Boaz: nationality, gender, age, great difference of power, great difference of wealth, geographical separation, and relative ignorance of one another, with Ruth being more ignorant than Boaz. Ruth and Boaz have worked together to diminish these barriers, which can be understood as a veil between them. Will these barriers be sufficiently removed that Ruth and Boaz may become one? Will Ruth, having committed herself to YHWH in Moab be able to complete her journey to the Lord and Redeemer, typified by Boaz?

III. Ruth 3. Ruth at the Threshing Floor (Ruth at the Veil)

We now come to the culmination of Ruth's journey. As Ruth achieves a promise of union with Boaz (the redeemer) at the threshing floor, the means for reversing her emptiness and that of Naomi are secured. Since the women's return from Moab, the site or focus of the action has continued to narrow, first from the land of Bethlehem in Judah to the field of Boaz and now further to the threshing floor, giving three levels of increasing nearness to Boaz or Redeemer. The term "threshing floor" has two associations in the Hebrew Bible worthy of note. In Hosea, threshing floors are associated with prostitution (Hosea 9:12). Secondly, during the reign of King David, the destroying angel stopped at the threshing floor of Araunah. David purchased the site, built an altar there, and then designated it as the place to build the temple (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:14–1 Chronicles 22:1).

Ruth has continued to glean in the field of Boaz through harvest season, after which the prospects for Ruth and Naomi will be less certain. Accurately assessing this situation, Naomi decides to guide Ruth to find a place of rest, or greater security (Ruth 3:1). After mentioning that Boaz will be at the threshing floor that night, Naomi instructs Ruth, "Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do." (3:3–4, KJV)

Ruth commits to obey Naomi's instructions exactly and thus consecrates herself in a manner similar to the consecration of ancient Israelite priests (Exodus 28:4–9, 40:12–15) before approaching Boaz. Boaz has lain down by a pile of grain, which is suggestive of his power, wealth, wisdom, and potential for offspring. She approaches Boaz "quietly" (NIV) or "softly" (KJV), in Hebrew בַּלְאָת *ballāt*, which literally means "in secret" (Ruth 3:7). This Hebrew word is thought to be derived from a Hebrew verb meaning to "wrap closely" or to "envelop."¹¹ Ruth thus goes to Boaz figuratively veiled

and under the cover, or veil, of a dark night, with the darkness itself severely impeding facial recognition (Ruth: 3:14). There is clearly an element of deception in this ploy to gain the kind of access to Boaz not available to Ruth within normal societal conventions.

Ruth uncovers the “feet” of Boaz and lies down. What “feet” means here is not entirely clear, and the uncertainty again seems to be intentional on the part of the author. The Hebrew word, *תּוֹלַגְרָמַ*, *margelot*, literally means “place of the feet” but is also used to mean “lower legs” or “feet,” which in turn are sometimes used as euphemisms for male genitalia.¹² Even though it is unclear exactly what Ruth has uncovered, her actions of going alone in secret at night and uncovering part of man’s lower body would have been considered inappropriate, even scandalous. Ruth is taking a great risk to her reputation and future well-being depending on Boaz’s response.

In the middle of the night, something startles Boaz; turning, he notices Ruth. Apparently unable to recognize her in the dark night, Boaz asks “Who are you?” (Ruth 3:9, NIV). Ruth gives her name and calls herself Boaz’s handmaiden or servant.

Ruth then asks Boaz to spread the “corner of your garment (*kānāp*) over [her] since [he is] a guardian-redeemer (*gō’ēl*)” (Ruth 3:9, NIV). This seems clearly to be a proposal of marriage by Ruth to Boaz. But, creatively, Ruth links marriage to the responsibility of the *gō’ēl* by calling Boaz a redeemer. As noted previously, marriage of any kind was never connected to the duties of the *gō’ēl* in Israelite law. As will be learned in the next chapter (Ruth 4), Naomi has a piece of property in need of redemption, which could potentially provide her with a secure means of living. Ruth is thus challenging Boaz to consider redeeming both her and Naomi in the fullest sense of the word. So Ruth is offering her whole self to Boaz, risking all but trusting in his love for her; she is asking for the greatest of blessings for herself (marital union with Boaz) and for Naomi (redemption of her field). Such a comprehensive redemption would have the potential to restore to Ruth and Naomi all that they had lost in Moab and more.

Elated that Ruth has chosen him and not gone after younger men, Boaz commends her kindness (*hesed*) to him, promises that he will do all she asks, and states that all his townspeople know she is “a woman of noble character” (Ruth 3:10–11, NIV)—Heb. חַיִל *hayil* meaning literally a woman of “strength,” “ability,” or “substance.”¹³ Pondering the matter, Boaz realizes there is another *gō’ēl* nearer than him, the man who has first right of redemption, explaining, “In the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it” (Ruth 3:13, NIV). Whether Boaz is speaking of the legally sanctioned redemption of Naomi’s property or the broader redemption of Ruth by marriage is not made clear in the text.¹⁴ It seems unlikely that Boaz would so easily yield Ruth to the other *gō’ēl* based on his joy at her marriage proposal and subsequent events in the story. So I take Boaz’s words as a rumination on the legal issues relating to the redemption of Naomi’s property. In any case, Boaz vows in the name of YHWH to ensure that the redemption takes place.

Invited to spend the night, Ruth lies down at the feet of Boaz, leaving only in the dark of the early morning before she can be recognized. This entire scene (Ruth 3:7–14) is permeated with Hebrew words that have sexual overtones: the verbs “to know,” “to go into,” “to uncover,” “to lie down.”¹⁵ Indeed, both “to know” and “to lie down” are directly used to denote sexual intercourse in the Hebrew Bible. The sexual connotations of “legs” and “wing” (*kānāp*) were noted previously. It is clear that Ruth and Boaz share some level of intimacy in the night on the threshing floor, but exactly what that intimacy consists of, we are not told. It is left for the reader to decide.

By going to the threshing floor and uncovering Boaz’s feet, Ruth breaks down more of the barriers between her and Boaz. By washing and anointing herself and putting on special clothing, Ruth has elevated herself, in a sense, and prepared herself as much as she can for a meeting with Boaz. For his part, Boaz steps down from his public position of power, wealth, and honor and interacts with Ruth more as an equal. Boaz puts Ruth at ease by telling

her not to fear, commending her character, expressing joy at her arrival, agreeing to fulfill her deepest desires, and inviting her to spend the night (Ruth 3:10–13). Of note, the word, $\etaָיִל$ *hayil*, which Boaz uses to describe the townspeople’s opinion of Ruth’s character (Ruth 3:11) is the same word used by the narrator to describe Boaz’s high stature in the community (Ruth 2:1). Thus, at the threshing floor, Ruth and Boaz are on the same plane, inhabiting the same social space.¹⁶ The barriers have come down, and they are ready to become one in marriage (Genesis 2:24). Both leave the threshing floor with increased knowledge of each other.

Before Ruth leaves the threshing floor, Boaz gives her six measures of barley as a token of their bond and his ongoing commitment. The barley seed symbolizes Ruth’s increasing nearness to Boaz as well as her increasing understanding and the possibility of offspring. Ruth returns with the grain to Naomi, who again advises Ruth after assessing the situation. Still without meeting Boaz, Naomi seems to know his plans (Ruth 3:2), desires (Ruth 3:4, 10–11), and character. She says, “Wait my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today” (Ruth 3:18, NIV).

IV. Ruth 4. Aftermath: Blessings on Ruth and her Posterity

After a less than restful night sharing common social space with Ruth, Boaz resumes his full public stature at the city gate the next morning. In full command of the situation, he places ten town elders at the gate and then induces the other *gō’ēl*, who just happens to be passing by, to sit. The man’s name in Hebrew, *almoni peloni*, generally omitted in English translation, is something like “nobody special,” which has the effect of rendering the man anonymous (and, consequently, not a source of embarrassment to succeeding generations of descendants) in contrast to Boaz.¹⁷

Apparently catching “nobody special” by surprise, Boaz announces in front of the witnesses that Naomi is selling a piece of land that has belonged to the family of Elimelech for which “nobody special” has first right of redemption, followed by him, Boaz. The simplest explanation for this matter is that Elimelech had previously

sold the right to use the land because of debt before going to Moab. Now, Naomi is hoping to transfer the right to use the land back to a relative of Elimelech with this redeemer presumably assuming some responsibility for her support. Finding the idea of obtaining the field attractive, the other *gō'ēl*, “nobody special,” initially says that he will redeem it.

Then, Boaz announces a “complication,” outlined in Ruth 4:5. There are two different ways to translate this verse, which lead to two different readings. Let’s consider each in turn.¹⁸ I prefer to follow the received consonantal text (Ketiv), although this option is chosen in only a minority of English versions of the Bible. This approach yields: “On the day you take over the field from Naomi I [Boaz] take over the widow, Ruth the Moabite, so as to perpetuate the name of the dead man on his holding” (Ruth 4:5, REB, emphasis added). This reading easily explains why “nobody special” then refuses to redeem: he will lose the property as soon as Ruth and Boaz have a son. In this scenario, Boaz’s marriage to Ruth is not at risk. The question here is why Boaz brings up the issue of land redemption if all he really wants is Ruth. There are two potential reasons. The first is that Boaz wants publicly to link his magnanimity in redeeming Naomi’s land to his marriage to a socially undesirable Moabite woman in order to induce public acceptance of the marriage. The second is that Naomi may be linked in some way with the land, possibly having to go live with the redeeming family. Thus, Boaz’s redemption of the land would allow Ruth and Naomi to stay together after Ruth’s marriage.¹⁹

In contrast, following the Masoretic notes for pronunciation (Qere), Ruth 4:5 reads: “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, **you** [“nobody special”] also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance” (ESV, most other English translations similar, emphasis added). In this scenario, Boaz is putting his relationship with Ruth at risk, probably hoping that “nobody special” will reject the deal and refuse to redeem either because he does not want to marry a Moabite or because the financial cost of supporting both

Ruth and Naomi might seem to outweigh the benefit of obtaining the land.

In any case, “nobody special” refuses to fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer, stating “I might endanger my own estate” (Ruth 4:6, NIV). He thus becomes a *gō’ēl* who does not redeem, not a real redeemer (4:6–8). In contrast, having been motivated to show *hesed* because of his love for Ruth, Boaz publicly commits to redeem Naomi’s field (the legal responsibility of the *gō’ēl*) and also to fulfill the levirate responsibility by maintaining the name and property of Ruth’s deceased husband (Ruth 4:9–10). Boaz has thus become a true redeemer, setting Ruth and Naomi free from bondage to poverty and keeping them united, figuratively spreading his wings over them. Ruth has regained everything she lost in Moab and now has the opportunity to have children. Boaz has gone beyond what the law requires but has also ensured that there can be no legal nor societal objection to his marriage to Ruth.

Ruth 4:7 contains an authorial aside, vaguely describing a ceremony related to the institution of the familial *gō’ēl*, not otherwise attested in the Hebrew Bible. During the ceremony of the redemption transaction, one party would take off his sandal and give it to the other party. Precisely which party does what is not described. Interestingly, though, this described ceremony of redemption by the *gō’ēl* does echo another sandal ceremony related to the institution of levirate marriage. When a levirate widow was rejected by her husband’s brother, she was to spit in his face, pull off his sandal, and declare that this is what is done to a man who refuses to build up his brother’s house (Deuteronomy 25:7–9). Thus, the institutions of the *gō’ēl* and levirate marriage become mutually connected in the book of Ruth by ceremonies involving sandal removal. The author’s apposition of the *gō’ēl* and levirate marriage in this way serves to link them together in the reader’s mind, just as Ruth did at the threshing floor and Boaz is now doing publicly.²⁰

The public response to Boaz’s statement that he is redeeming Ruth and Naomi is instantaneous and powerful, affirming Boaz’s hopes for Ruth’s acceptance and validating Boaz’s public magnanimity. The ten elders and all those at the gate acknowledge

that they are witnesses, thereby accepting a *Moabite woman* into the assembly of Israel (Ruth 4:11–12). Furthermore, they invoke the blessings of YHWH on Ruth that she might be like Rachel and Leah, who with their maidservants gave birth to the entire house of Israel. Then, they invoke the blessings of YHWH on Boaz that his family might be “like that of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah” through the offspring (seed) the Lord will give to Ruth (Ruth 4:12, NIV). The entire tribe of Judah descended from Tamar, whom Judah took as his wife in a modified or distorted form of levirate marriage (Genesis 38). So just as Rachel and Leah were the founding mothers of the house of Israel and Tamar was the founding mother of the tribe of Judah, Ruth is blessed to become the founding mother of a significant clan or family group within the tribe of Judah.

Boaz marries Ruth, who gives birth to a son. We are told that the Lord gave “conception” to Ruth (Ruth 4:13). It is not clear if this is merely a standard attribution of a blessing to YHWH or whether the author intends us to understand that the Lord specifically enabled her to conceive as he did Sarah and probably Hannah (Genesis 17 1 Samuel 1). This attribution of blessing stands in apposition to Naomi’s earlier attribution of her misfortune to the Lord (Ruth 1:20–21). Nonetheless, the book of Ruth always maintains the focus on the human agents and their choices. With the birth of her son, Ruth has been restored to a fulness of life: bread, land, husband, and posterity.

Similar to when Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, the women of the neighborhood again comment on Naomi’s status, stating that *Naomi* has a son whom they name Obed and whom they see as a redeemer (*gō’ēl*) who will sustain and nourish Naomi’s life in her old age (Ruth 4:14–17). Naomi and the women thus remain tightly linked in their perspectives. When Naomi first returned to Bethlehem, the women ignored the presence of Ruth, uncertain like the human Naomi as to what the presence of Ruth might mean. Now, however, they proclaim Ruth’s value, stating that this Moabite woman is worth more to Naomi than seven (Israelite) sons! Thus, these women add their voices to those at the town gate who had previously welcomed Ruth into the Israelite congregation.

Finally, we learn that Ruth is the great-grandmother of David; thus, she is the founding mother of the Davidic dynasty. Having retraced, in a sense, the lives of the patriarch Abraham and the founding mothers of Israel, and now becoming a progenitor of David, Ruth links the Abrahamic (Genesis 15, 22:15–19, 26:2–7, 28:12–15) and Davidic covenants (2 Samuel 7:8–16). She has received the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant—inheritance in the promised land, numerous offspring, covenant protection, and offspring who will bless the entire earth—and she has received the blessings of the Davidic covenant: her descendants will possess an eternal kingship with its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:2–16).

Allegory

Introduction

Ruth, who represents a genuine disciple, is the focus of the allegory. Boaz represents the Lord (YHWH), and I will refer to him in this allegorical telling as “Redeemer.” Not only is Boaz called *gō’ēl* in the text but he also embodies the actions and *hesed* of the Lord to Ruth, bringing about her redemption. Ruth’s initial response to Boaz in the field when she bows down, calls him lord, and asks that she might find grace in his eyes further corroborates seeing Boaz in the role of Redeemer. The love between Ruth and Boaz typifies the love between a disciple and God the redeemer, drawing them to each other.

Naomi is somewhat more difficult.²¹ She reflects truth (the status of Ruth’s journey) and gives wise counsel and guidance to Ruth, wishing to guide her to a secure place of rest. Naomi is constantly present in Ruth’s life, and Ruth loves and obeys Naomi. Naomi and Boaz work together to effect Ruth’s redemption, each fulfilling different roles. Naomi guides Ruth to union with Boaz. She always seems to know Boaz’s mind, plans, and character even though they never meet; they are separate but linked in some mysterious way. Overall, Naomi’s role corresponds well to the role of the Holy Ghost in the plan of salvation, gender notwithstanding.

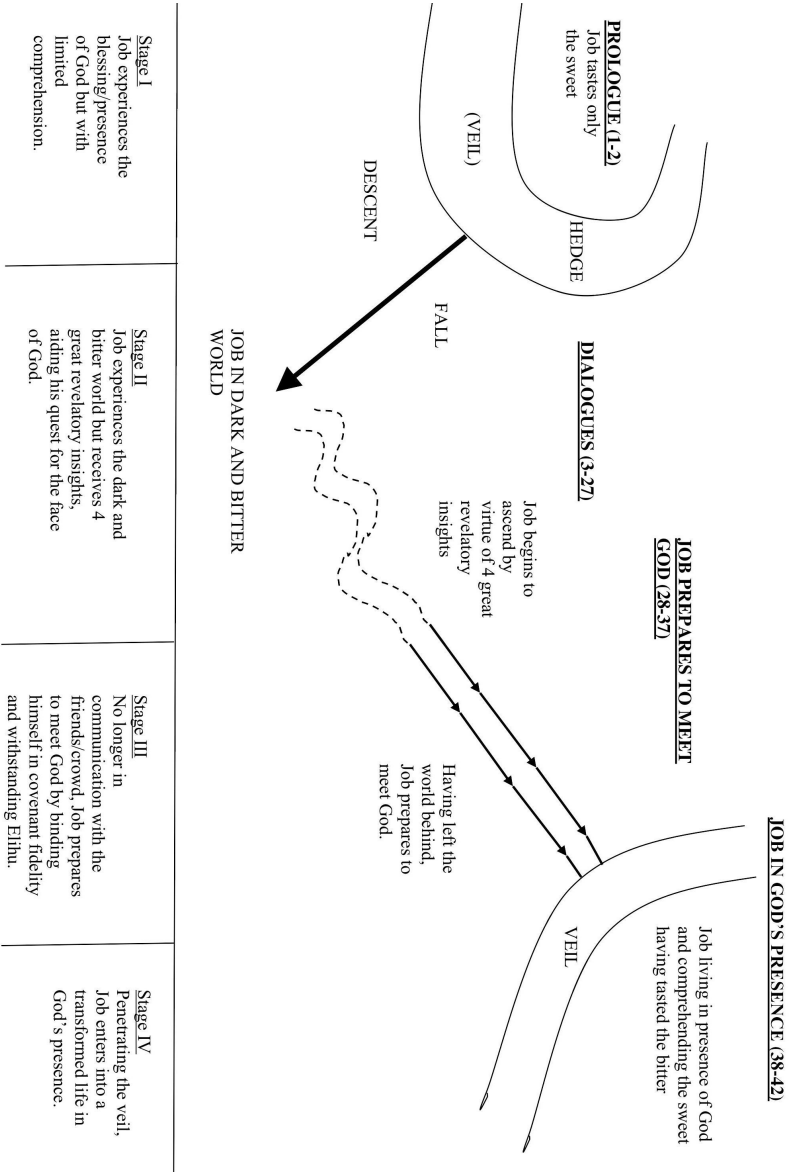


Figure 1. Summary of Job's journey.

reason for not redeeming is telling: "I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate" (Ruth 4:6, NIV). In other words, he considers the cost of redemption to be too high. This corresponds

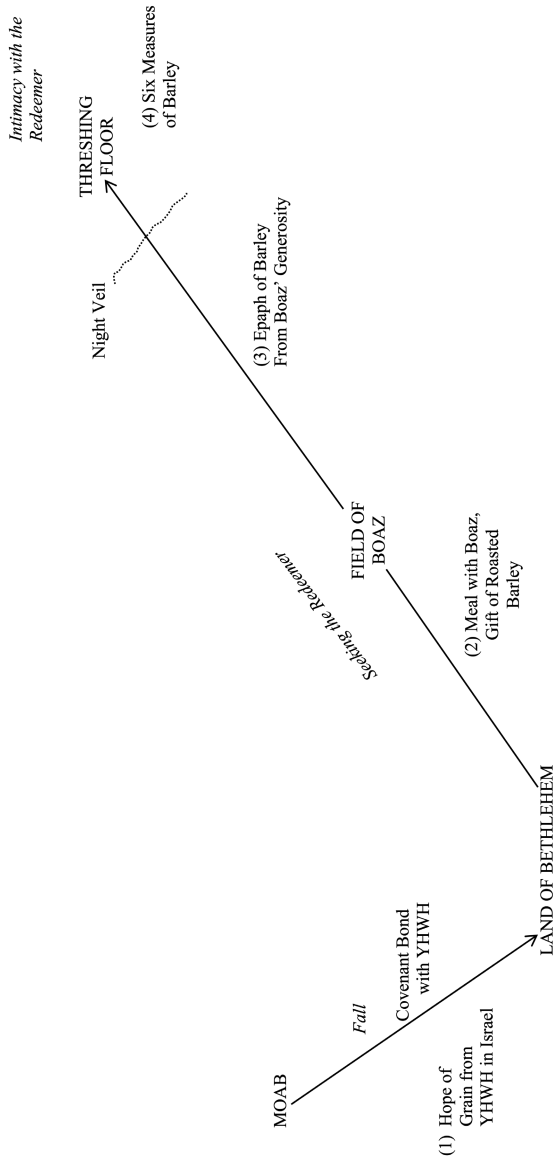


Figure 2. Summary of Ruth's journey.

precisely to Satan's lack of desire for a redeeming mission: the cost of dealing with the consequences of human agency was too high (Moses 4:1-4). Like Satan, "nobody special" is a false redeemer;

thus, “false redeemer” will be my term for him in the allegory. This false redeemer’s case is adjudicated at the city gate, which I take to be a figure for judgment.²⁶

The various places in the story where the action occurs are very significant. As demonstrated previously, Moab can be seen as a type of the Garden of Eden, with the journey from Moab as a fall as life turns bitter. Ruth then undertakes a journey to Boaz, or Redeemer, in three stages: (1) land of Judah or Bethlehem, (2) field of Boaz, and then through a night veil to (3) the threshing floor. Understood as indicative of increasing proximity to the Redeemer, these three stages correspond to the experience of Israel at Mt. Sinai. At Sinai, there were three zones of increasing holiness or nearness to the Lord: (1) the foot of the mountain for the people in general (Exodus 19:17, 23), (2) higher up in the mountain for seventy elders (Exodus 9–11, 24:1–2), and through the cloud veil to (3) the summit of the mountain where Moses alone spoke with God face to face (Exodus 19:20, 24:15–18). In turn, the ancient tabernacle incorporated the Sinai experience and also contained three zones of increasing holiness: (1) the courtyard for the people in general, (2) the Holy Place for the priests, and through the veil (3) the Most Holy Place for the high priest alone only on the Day of Atonement.²⁷ Table 2 outlines the correspondence between Ruth’s journey, Sinai, the tabernacle, and Job’s journey.

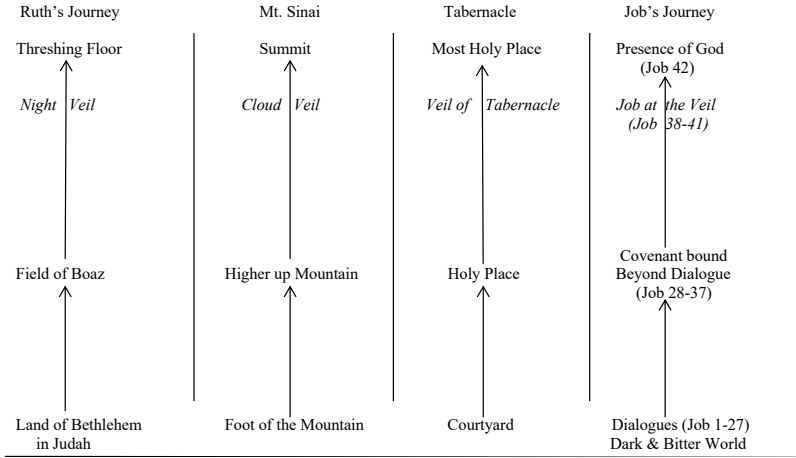
The gifts of grain, which Ruth receives, are also meaningful (figure 1). After receiving a hope of grain in Moab, which itself is a gift, Ruth receives roasted grain in a meal, then an *ephah* of barley from gleaning in the harvested grain, and lastly six measures of barley at the threshing floor. These gifts come in response to her faith, effort, and obedience and betoken progressive acquisition of light and truth as well as an ever-strengthening connection to Boaz, or Redeemer.

Allegorical Retelling

I. Moab to Bethlehem of Judah (Garden and Fall)

Having grown up in Moab, or the Garden, in relative security but in ignorance of the Lord, Ruth suffers the loss of her husband.

Table 2. *Ruth's journey compared.*



Rejecting easier temporal security by staying, Ruth decides to accompany Lady Wisdom, whom she has come to love, as Lady Wisdom returns to her natural home in the land of YHWH. Although Lady Wisdom has mentioned the possibility of bread, or spiritual food, in Israel, she strongly urges Ruth to avoid the risky journey. Nonetheless, committing herself to the journey, Ruth makes a sacred covenant binding her to both Lady Wisdom and the Lord. Only then does Lady Wisdom stop entreating Ruth to return to Moab, or the Garden.

Ruth arrives in Bethlehem of Judah destitute. She has fallen from the relative security of Moab, or the Garden, but also has begun to leave behind her innocence and ignorance of YHWH. Her only resources appear to be Lady Wisdom, whose value is not yet fully clear, and her own initiative. There is, however, a hope of spiritual food (grain) in Israel, which hope has sustained and motivated their journey, and they arrive just as the barley harvest is beginning. Ignoring the presence of Ruth, Lady Wisdom's former acquaintances are agitated by her return in what appear to be dire circumstances. Lady Wisdom accurately describes the situation she and Ruth find themselves in as empty and bitter. Will the fall (journey to Bethlehem) turn out for good or harm to Ruth? Even in the land of YHWH, there is still the risk of falling into idolatry.

II. In the Field of Boaz (Increasing Nearness to the Redeemer)

Acting on her own initiative but with the permission of Lady Wisdom, Ruth goes to seek (glean) spiritual knowledge. She ends up in the field of the Redeemer, a man of the highest stature (Ruth 2:1, 4:1–2). As she struggles to find spiritual nourishment, she is visited by the Redeemer, who encourages her to avoid temptation, danger, and idolatry by staying in his field. He places her under the wings of his protection and provides her with (living) water to quench her thirst. Ruth falls on her face before the Redeemer and prays that she will continue to find grace in his eyes.

Subsequently, the Redeemer graciously invites her to a meal of bread and wine, also serving her roasted grain. Ruth eats this spiritual food until she is filled and has some left over. In another gracious act, the Redeemer commands his servants to help her gain spiritual food (letting her collect among the sheaves), enabling her to obtain a very large amount. Having received the bread, water of life, and protection from the Redeemer, Ruth has gone from grace to grace. She has progressed from a mere hope of spiritual nourishment to a meal and then to an even larger gift, symbolizing her increasing nearness to the Redeemer.

She returns to Lady Wisdom, who teaches her the significance of the Redeemer and counsels her to stay with his female servants, which Ruth obediently does.

III. Ruth at the Threshing Floor (Ruth at the Veil)

Lady Wisdom proposes that she help Ruth find a place of rest and security. Knowing that the Redeemer will be sleeping at the threshing floor that night and knowing how best to approach him, Lady Wisdom instructs Ruth to wash and anoint herself and to put on her best clothes. Ruth is to approach in secret (literally “enveloped”), being veiled from the Redeemer by the darkness of the night and by his state of sleep. Then she is to uncover his feet, a token of desired intimacy, and lie down.

Having previously tasted of the Redeemer’s goodness and now having consecrated herself to him, Ruth approaches the Redeemer at the veil. She uncovers the Redeemer’s feet hoping he will cover

her, thus bringing her completely into his sphere of existence. Something startles the Redeemer awake, and he asks the apparently still unseen or unrecognized Ruth her name. Ruth answers honestly. She had previously bound herself to YHWH by covenant; now, she offers her whole self to the Redeemer, asking that they be united and that her bond with Lady Wisdom be maintained. This requires that the Redeemer once more act graciously. With joy, the Redeemer grants the total redemption she requests, states that she is in good standing with his Divine Council, and commits to remove any legal barrier to their union. Ruth and the Redeemer share intimacy with each other on the same plane during the night. As Ruth leaves, the Redeemer bestows upon her a final gift of grace (six measures of barley) as a token of the upcoming redemption, his life-giving powers being symbolized by the heap of grain next to which he slept.

When Ruth returns home, she and Lady Wisdom rejoice in her progress. Knowing the character of the Redeemer, Lady Wisdom counsels Ruth to wait because the matter will soon be resolved.

IV. Judgment and Aftermath

In the morning, the Redeemer assembles his court to adjudicate his redemption of and union with Ruth. The claims of the false redeemer are easily resolved because he does not want to bear the cost of redemption. Thus, the Redeemer does as he promised and ensures that there is no legal nor social barrier to his complete redemption of Ruth. The Divine Council witnesses and acclaims the redemption of Ruth, blessing her to be a mother in Israel. Ruth has come to Mount Zion, to the general assembly of true Israel, and to an innumerable company of angels (Psalms 149; Hebrews 11:13–16; Doctrine and Covenants 76:66–67). Lady Wisdom, who has led Ruth to the Redeemer, is returned to her rightful place in the Divine Council. She rejoices in the fruit of Ruth's union with the Redeemer, which fruit is emblematic of eternal dominion or kingship in the house of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8–16).

Discussion

The story of Ruth is a story of salvation, unusual in that it has a woman in the role of protagonist. We learn that a true Israelite is not one by birth (or circumcision), but by covenant love for the Lord and acts of *hesed* (Romans 2:28–29). In the allegorical telling, I have treated Ruth as an individual disciple whose salvation is brought about by the interaction of her covenant efforts in seeking the Lord and of the grace of her Redeemer as she follows the voice of the Spirit. Ruth can also be seen as typifying Israel as a whole, indeed being virtually acclaimed as Mother Israel in Ruth 4:11. Thus, the allegorical marriage of Ruth and the Redeemer typologically fulfills the inspired hopes of the prophets who envisioned Israel as the wayward bride of YHWH to be restored to him in the last days after passing through much tribulation (Isaiah 54:1–6; Jeremiah 2–3; Ezekiel 16, Hosea 2). As a Moabite, Ruth also represents the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel (Is. 49:6–23; 1 Ne. 14:1–2; 3 Ne. 16:13, 21:6 and 22).

At the beginning of this paper, I noted that interpreters of the book of Ruth have differed on whether romantic love plays a significant role in the story as opposed to seeing *hesed* as the only motive for the actions of the characters. Reading Ruth on two levels—as a charming human story and as an allegory—easily allows for a major role for romantic love on the human level with *hesed* dominating on the allegorical level. This approach also elucidates somewhat the issue of God’s providence. Ordinarily in mortality, God works through human agents as they carry out inspired works of *hesed*. However, “seeing” the allegory in Ruth, allows us to see more clearly God’s active presence behind all human life, calling us to him and effecting our redemption.

Whenever God appears to man, his appearance always implies an element of condescension by definition (Genesis 32:10; Exodus 24:9–11, 33:9–11; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:25–28; Joseph Smith—History 1:17). We see clear echoes of this at the threshing floor when humble Ruth and man of great stature Boaz the Redeemer become unveiled to each other, sharing the same social space or plane. Interestingly, Ruth helped bring this about by an act of deception as she crept

in secret to the threshing floor and uncovered Boaz's feet. Ruth's deception reminds us that every person who approaches the Lord at the veil during probation does so without having lived totally free of sin (Ether 3:2). God's forgiveness and healing are of course necessary to resolve this problem. In many ways, the greatest example of God's unveiling, or condescension, is the birth of Christ into our world (John 14:7-9; 1 Nephi 11:9-21). As Abinadi said, referring to Israel's prophets, "Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth?" (Mosiah 13:34). Since Christ's mission is made necessary by (or caused by) our fall, in a backwards sort of way, our sins caused him to come down among us, to unveil God to us. Similarly, in a state of deception or sin, Ruth began to unveil her Redeemer by uncovering his feet. His uncovering results from her sin; the incarnation occurs in response to our sin.

Ruth's allegorical experience with her Redeemer at night at the threshing floor has strong echoes of Jacob's struggle with the Lord, which also occurred also under the veil of night (Genesis 32:22-32). Like Ruth, Jacob was a deceiver (Genesis 27:36), and his name has become associated with cheating.²⁸ Despite this, we are told that he wrestled all night until daybreak with a man who proved to be God, the divine redeemer (Genesis 32:30). According to Wenham, the word "wrestle" is related to and possibly derived from the word "to embrace."²⁹ Accepting Hugh Nibley's suggestion that we take "wrestling" in this text to mean "ritually embracing,"³⁰ we have an image of intimacy with the Lord, which corresponds to Ruth's experience with Boaz-Redeemer. As with Ruth, Jacob is asked for his name, but unlike Ruth, he gets a new name, "Israel," which literally means "God struggles" but which is taken to mean "he who struggles with God" in the context of the story (Genesis 32:28).³¹ Jacob was the father of all Israel. Ruth became a founding mother in Israel, acclaimed to be like Jacob's wives, Rachel and Leah. Asking God for his name, Jacob received a blessing instead, parallel to Ruth's blessing from Boaz-Redeemer (marriage and redemption).

As described above, Ruth acts courageously in lying at the Redeemer Boaz's exposed feet and asking him for the great blessing of redemption, creatively linking her marriage with the redemption of Naomi's field. Similarly, the brother of Jared went before the Lord at the veil, his courage and trust overcoming his feeling of unworthiness, to ask creatively for a great blessing, that the Lord would touch sixteen stones to light his transoceanic voyage (Ether 3:1–5). There is a much less compelling parallel in that in both cases, an appendage of the Lord was unveiled first, a finger (hand) in the case of the brother of Jared and a foot (feet) in the case of Ruth (Ether 3:6; Ruth 3:7).

In my proposed reading of Ruth as an allegory, I have Ruth getting a promise of redemption from the Redeemer (Ruth 3:11) before the day of judgment (Ruth 4:1–12). This structurally corresponds to a person receiving a certain promise of redemption or exaltation in advance of the day of judgment (Mosiah 26:15–20 Doctrine and Covenants 132:49; 2 Peter 1:10–11). Perhaps that is pressing the allegory and the analogy too far. In any case, we are all dependent upon the redeemer, Christ, to shield us from any claim of law that would prevent our union with him, as was Ruth on her redeemer at the city gate. We are all “exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” unless we receive mercy, or grace, which “can satisfy the demands of justice and [encircle us] in the arms of safety” (Alma 34:16).

The idea of seeking the presence of the Lord is also suggested by Naomi's proposition to Ruth: “My daughter, shall I not seek *rest* for thee, that it may be well with thee?” (Ruth 3:1, KJV, emphasis added). The Hebrew word, מָנוּחַ *mānōah*, translated as “rest,” means a place of security, peace, safety, ultimately referring to God's presence.³² Likewise, in scripture for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the “rest of the Lord” generally means the presence of the Lord (Exodus 34:1–2 JST; Doctrine and Covenants 84:22–25). Mormon taught, “I would speak unto you . . . that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven” (Moroni 7:3). Allegorically, Ruth does just this, entering

the presence of the Redeemer at the threshing floor and there receiving a promise of more lasting rest in the Redeemer's presence after judgement.

Ruth's act of offering herself to Boaz-Redeemer after consecration can be understood as a kind of sacrifice on the allegorical level. Amaleki challenged the Nephites to "come unto [Christ], and offer [their] whole souls as an offering to him" (Omni 1:26). Likewise, the apostle Paul urged the Roman saints to "offer [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1, NIV). By going to the Redeemer voluntarily and offering her whole self to him, Ruth has become a living sacrifice, enabling the Redeemer to take hold of her without violating her agency. That she does this at the threshing floor resonates with King David's erection of a *sacrificial* altar at the threshing floor of Araunah (1 Chronicles 21:14–30, 22:1).

I have identified many elements of correspondence between the book of Ruth, read allegorically, and the modern temple endowment. In my view, there are far too many connections to be accounted for by chance alone or by general correspondence of scriptural depictions of salvation to the endowment. Nor do I believe that I am imposing my understanding of the endowment on the book of Ruth in a way that is not naturally harmonious with the book's meaning, although each reader must judge for him or herself. Previously, I identified a remarkable correspondence between the book of Job and the endowment, terming Job a "literary analogue" of the endowment.³³ Both Job and Ruth reflect our endowment and aid in our understanding of it.

Before addressing what may account for these findings, I need to mention another issue. The historical Israelite temple is discontinuous with the modern temple in at least two major ways: (1) the presence of animal sacrifice performed by mediating priests, which was necessary in order to move into and through the temple, and (2) the inability of the ordinary worshipper to pass beyond the courtyard into the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place, where God was believed to dwell. Yet neither Ruth (allegorically) nor Job require blood sacrifice to approach God or enter his presence in

contrast to the priests of the Hebrew Bible.³⁴ Although it is not possible to be certain of the authors' conscious intentions, both Job and Ruth anticipate the ending of animal sacrifice and the opening up of the way into the Most Holy Place for all by Christ (Alma 34:13–14; Hebrews 10:19–22). Thus, the books of Ruth and Job reflect a temple understanding that corresponds well to the modern temple, but less closely to the actual historical temple, which was active (except 587–515 BC) when the books were composed. I know of no evidence that the authors of Ruth and Job influenced each other nor of any evidence that the modern temple endowment was influenced by them. I conclude that all three are inspired products of the divine mind, given by revelation to prophets.³⁵

Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there are no other books in scripture, besides Ruth and Job, whose entire contents correspond to the whole sweep of the endowment. Mary Douglas does make a compelling case, however, that the book of Leviticus in its structure and content precisely corresponds to the structure and function of the ancient tabernacle, showing that the book itself is an analog of the temple.³⁶ Both Leviticus and the tabernacle are anchored in animal sacrifice and are, therefore, discontinuous with the modern endowment to a significant extent. Nonetheless, Leviticus, as seen by Douglas, does set a precedent for an entire book of scripture being devoted to temple ritual, such as I have found with Ruth and Job.³⁷

Notes

1. Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Frederick C. Bush, *Ruth-Esther. Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 9, (Dallas: Word Books, 1996); Daniel I. Block, *Ruth. Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).
2. Tod Linafelt, "Ruth," in *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, ed. David W. Cotter, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 1–90; L. Daniel Hawk, *Ruth. Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 7B, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth. The Anchor Bible*, vol. 7, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975).

3. Hubbard, *Ruth*; Bush, *Ruth-Esther*; Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth*, trans. Edward Broadbridge (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).
4. Linafelt, "Ruth"; Hawk, *Ruth*. I owe much to these two commentaries. My debt to them is certainly greater than the attributions in the notes.
5. Mack C. Stirling, "Job: An LDS Reading" in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, vol. 12 (Orem: The Interpreter Foundation, 2014), 127–181.
6. Nielsen, *Ruth*, 73. Campbell, *Ruth*, 123. Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, 164–165. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 212.
7. Linafelt, "Ruth," 55.
8. Linafelt, "Ruth," 18–19.
9. Hawk, *Ruth*, 98.
10. Linafelt, "Ruth," 34; Campbell, *Ruth*, 110; Jacob M. Myers, *The Linguistic and Literary Form of The Book of Ruth* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1955), 50.
11. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 473; Linafelt, "Ruth," 51.
12. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. William L. Holladay, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 214; *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1048–1049; Campbell, *Ruth*, 121; Linafelt, "Ruth," 51–55. Hawk, *Ruth*, 102–103.
13. Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, 271.
14. In fact, the Hebrew text translated literally speaks of the redemption of Ruth, three times attaching the feminine singular second person object pronoun (referring to Ruth) to the verb redeem. Thus, literally, Boaz does say that it is fine if the other redeemer redeems Ruth. However, since the exact meaning of redemption in Boaz' statement is ambiguous (referring to marriage or land redemption or both), most translations either remove the direct object pronoun referring to Ruth or insert prepositions that essentially convert Ruth into the indirect object or recipient of the still ambiguous redemption. *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985). These translations thus preserve more clearly the possibility that Boaz actually wants to marry Ruth, which I believe best makes sense of the entire story. However, those interpreters for whom romantic love is not important in the story and who see Boaz as acting only out of *hesed* (charity) leave Ruth as the direct object of the verb to redeem (Hubbard, Bush, Block). The ESV alone among major English translations retains Ruth as the direct object.

15. Campbell, *Ruth*, 131–132; Linafelt, “Ruth,” 52–55.
16. Hawk, *Ruth*, 111.
17. Hawk, *Ruth*, 119, 127.
18. Linafelt, “Ruth,” 68.
19. Linafelt, “Ruth,” 68.
20. Linafelt, “Ruth,” 70–72.
21. Naomi’s life before Ruth appears on the scene (Ruth 1:1–3) does not fit as easily into the allegory and will not be addressed.
22. Consideration of whether “Wisdom” represents a real person or is simply a poetic literary creation is beyond the scope of this paper. It does not matter for the purposes of the allegory.
23. “Prophet,” “prophetess,” or “spiritual guide” may be substituted for “Lady Wisdom” if preferred.
24. E. Theodore Mullen Jr, “Divine Assembly” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 214–217; Stephen O. Smoot, “The Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible and the Book of Mormon” in *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, vol. 27, 155–180.
25. Linafelt, “Ruth,” 60–70; Hawk, *Ruth*, 128–129.
26. It may seem strange to have a Satan-like figure present at the judgment. However, a symbolic vision of Zechariah does just that:
27. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him And the Lord said to Satan, “ The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! . . . Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with rich apparel.” (Zechariah 3:1–4, RSV)
28. So, Satan can be envisioned poetically as being present at the judgment, pressing the claims of law against our sins (filthy garments) but being rendered powerless or insignificant as the Lord clothes us with the garments of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).
29. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 203–21.
30. Stanley D. Walters, “Jacob Narrative” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 599.
31. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50. Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 295.
32. Hugh Nibley, *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and The Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2005), 383–385.
33. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 296–297.
34. Harris, *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1323–1324.

35. Stirling, "Job," 128.
36. Job sacrifices in the prologue (Job 1:5) before his fall and spiritual journey to the presence of the Lord, but these sacrifices have nothing to do with Job penetrating the veil. Job also oversees sacrifices by his friends at God's command in the epilogue (Job 42:8). The friends at that point seem still to be uncomprehending of Job's journey and transformation. God thus "speaks" to the friends in the only language they understand, that of animal sacrifice. In this respect, the friends resemble most of ancient Israel. For a more thorough explanation of these points, see Stirling, "Job" and René Girard, *Job: The Victim of His People*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).
37. I suggest that we should be grateful for our temple endowment and take it very seriously.
38. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 195–251.
39. The book of Revelation is replete with images of the ancient Israelite temple. Margaret Barker has demonstrated that the book itself can be understood as a series of visions set in the ancient temple. See Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 82. However, the contents of the book of Revelation do not correspond to temple ritual in any consistent way.