

THE ONE WHO RETURNED: A RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE READING OF RUTH

JUSTIN JACKSON*

Abstract: *This article sets out to provide a basic biblical theology for the book of Ruth, considering its historical context, its literary structure, its theological message, and its typological trajectory to Jesus Christ. Borrowing from themes found in the Pentateuch, the author seeks to show that David's genealogy and reign is a continuation of God's redemptive work in the past. In this way, the book of Ruth builds upon the preceding redemptive-historical narrative and points beyond itself to the future ingathering of the nations. Ruth is to be read as a covenantal, canonical connector that links God's covenant promises in the Torah to Davidic kingship, which then sets the trajectory to the final fulfillment of Abrahamic blessing to the nations through the Messiah.*

Key words: *Ruth, Boaz, biblical theology, redemption, David, Pentateuch, typology*

Biblical theology, properly engaged, requires an appropriate tension between unity and diversity. The unified theological message of the Bible is not monotonal but rather harmonic. The choral arrangement of the canon is filled with the bass of the Torah-narratives, the altos and tenors of the Prophets, the sopranos of the Psalms, and the baritones of the Gospels and Epistles—each one remains distinct and yet, when heard together, they create a satisfying melody that sings the song of God's redemptive work in and through Christ Jesus. The task of biblical theology is to amplify the Bible's theological harmony while at the same time recognizing the rich diversity found in each book of the canon. Paul House summarizes, "Unitary reading should proceed on a book-by-book exegetical basis so that each book's discrete message will be recognized."¹ He adds, "Unitary canonical biblical theology must be built through the sustained testimony of successive books; it must not be constructed at the expense of any part of Scripture."² In other words, biblical theology first listens to the individual voices of the biblical authors (in their various historical contexts) and only afterward hears those voices singing together in canonical harmony.

This paper sets out to portray Ruth as the continuation of God's promises in the Pentateuch, which are carried out and partially fulfilled in the story of Naomi,

* Justin Jackson is a Ph.D. student at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Adjunct Professor of Biblical Studies at Southern Bible Institute and College, 7200 S. Hampton Rd., Dallas, TX 75232. He may be contacted at jjackson18232@mbts.edu.

¹ Paul R. House, "Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 274.

² *Ibid.*

Ruth, and Boaz. The first task in accomplishing this theological overview is to consider Ruth's historical context, including the book's genre and its canonical placement. The second step is to propose a basic literary structure of the book, thus showing the literary flow of the narrative. Third, building a basic theology of Ruth requires recognizing key motifs at play in the book and considering each motif exegetically and on its own terms. Finally, to complete the task of biblical theology, it is important to consider how the theological message of Ruth points retrospectively to the past and prospectively to its telos in Jesus Christ. For the purposes of this paper, this retrospective and prospective vantage point has been labeled as "typological trajectory."

To state the goal even more explicitly, this survey of Ruth's literary themes is intended to demonstrate how Ruth builds upon preceding redemptive narrative and points beyond itself to the climax of redemption and the subsequent in-gathering of the nations. In this way, Ruth legitimizes David's reign by showing how his life and future reign is a continuation of God's promises in the Pentateuch. The author of Ruth does this by deliberately alluding to Pentateuchal themes that are played out and partially fulfilled in Ruth's redemption. Ruth, then, should be read as a covenantal, canonical connector that links God's covenant promises in the Torah to Davidic kingship and then on to the global blessing of Gentile nations. In her own unique way, Ruth adds her own distinct, beautiful voice to the overall harmony of Scripture.

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first step in understanding a book's theological message is to understand its historical context, which also includes considering the book's authorship, genre, and canonical placement. Whereas authorship and genre consider the immediate historical context of Ruth, canonical placement considers how certain views of Ruth's position in the canon can highlight various emphases. The goal in this is not to reconstruct a speculative historical theory hiding behind the literary-grammatical text. Instead, the goal is an attempt to read the book according to the author's desired historical, literary, and theological intent.

1. *Authorship, dating, and genre.* A book's authorship and date are important because they reveal the author's point of view and historical place in redemptive history. There are three basic positions one may take in dating the book: a transitional dating (before or during David's reign); a post-Davidic dating (after David's reign);³ and a postexilic dating (during or after Israel's deportation).⁴ Out of these prevail-

³ Exemplifying this view is Daniel Block, who believes that Ruth was written by a Northern-tribe Israelite, who wanted his contemporaries to return "to the only legitimate dynasty the Israelites had ever known." Accordingly, Block dates Ruth's composition as late as Josiah's reign (540–609 BC).

⁴ Fredrick Bush, *Ruth/Esther* (WBC 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 30. Some scholars in this camp suggest that Ruth was written as a counter culture to Israel's exclusivist culture. See L. Daniel Hawk, *Ruth* (Apollos OT Commentary; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 36. This also happens to be the view of Robert Alter in *The Hebrew Bible: The Writings, Ketuvim*, vol. 3 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 622–23. Lau and Goswell are correct in their critique of Hawk's proposal: "We cannot ...

ing views, a transitional dating seems to hold the most validity, corresponding with the Babylonian Talmud, which credits Samuel as the author and suggests that after his death, Samuel's writings were completed by Gad the Seer and Nathan (Bava Batra 14b).⁵

Some scholars, such as Edward Young and Mark Rooker, have argued against Samuel's authorship because the book of Ruth already assumes Davidic reign. For instance, Rooker argues, "Samuel died before David became king (1 Sam 28:3), and Ruth 4:22 presupposes that David was a well-known figure at the time of writing."⁶ Rooker's position is too narrow. Granted, Samuel did indeed die before David was crowned king of Israel, but it was Samuel who prophetically anointed David to become the future monarch (1 Sam 16:1–13). This means that Samuel would have known about David's reign, though he did not live to see it fulfilled. Therefore, Ruth's Davidic preeminence does not discredit Samuel from being the author.⁷ Moreover, even Rooker willingly admits that the exclusion of Solomon's name in Ruth's genealogy indicates that the book was written before Solomon inherited the throne. The fact that Solomon is not included in the genealogy strongly suggests that it was penned before Solomon's ascension, and therefore during David's lifetime.

This transitional dating with Samuel as the author further strengthens the fact that Ruth was written to be an important link between Israel's past (particularly, the lives of the patriarchs and the Exodus-redemption) and Israel's future (the reign of a Davidic king). As is typical of the prophets, Samuel's concern would have been to show how God's present and future workings correspond with previously given revelation (just as Isaiah uses the exodus motif to speak of the new exodus or Jeremiah uses old covenant themes to speak of a new covenant). If Samuel did indeed write the book of Ruth, then it makes sense that he would have used the Torah as the backdrop of his narrative.

As concerns genre, some scholars recommend that it is a *novella*. However, this view ultimately falls short because *novella* does not mandate a historical reading.⁸ Ruth, on the other hand, is clearly intended to be read as a true history. Daniel Block calls it "an independent historiographic short story," but the description of Ruth as "independent" is misleading.⁹ If Ruth is to be understood and appreciated for both its retrospective and prospective value, then it must not be viewed as "in-

follow Hawk when he views the book of Ruth as recording dissent to these reforms, for the reforms were not opposing marriage to foreign women like Ruth, namely women who had left their foreign gods behind and embraced the Israelite faith. Put simply, the book of Ruth and Ezra-Nehemiah are about different things." Peter H. W. Lau and Gregory Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth* (NSBT 41; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 9–10.

⁵ John J. Yeo, "Ruth," *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 400.

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 301.

⁷ Yeo, "Ruth," 401.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 603.

dependent.” Instead, it is meant to be read as a continuation of Israel’s covenantal history. The book of Ruth, then, is a brief historical narrative that tracks the continuation of God’s promises to Israel’s patriarchs to the birth of Israel’s king. In this light, Ruth should be labeled as an *intermediary history*—that is, it is a work written explicitly to link Israel’s past with God’s future, unfolding redemption.

2. *Placement in the canon and purpose.* The book of Ruth is a wandering nomad; and in every canonical position it has lived, its emphasis seems to change. In fact, Webb calls Ruth “one of the most mobile books in the canon.”¹⁰ In the Masoretic Text (MT), Ruth comes after the book of Proverbs, which connects Ruth with Proverbs 31’s “worthy woman” (אִשָּׁת־חַיִל). This worthy woman stands as a model of a covenant-keeping wife, whose service and sacrifice teach *hesed* (חֶסֶד) to those who are near her (Prov 31:26). In the Masoretic canonical placement, Ruth serves as a visible representation of a “worthy woman,” especially as she diligently serves her mother-in-law and shows *hesed* to Boaz.¹¹

The Septuagint differs greatly as it places Ruth after the book of Judges and before the book of Samuel. The reason for this placement is because of the historical marker placed in Ruth 1:1, “In the days when the judges ruled.” Because the narrative’s historical setting is placed squarely in the “days of judges” it makes sense that Ruth is to be read alongside the book of Judges. In this reading, Ruth serves as a foil to the sins and failures of God’s covenant people.¹² Rascas, for example, says that Ruth is intended to “repudiate the transgressions enumerated in the final chapters of Judges.”¹³ Whereas in Judges, Israel rejects God to serve the gods of the nations, Ruth leaves behind her gods to seek refuge in YHWH. Moreover, Boaz as a man from Bethlehem serves as a foil to the Levite of Bethlehem in Judges 17. Boaz audibly brings the presence of the Lord to the workers in his fields, while the Levite of Bethlehem provides only false hopes of the Lord’s presence with the sinful and idolatrous Danites (Judg 18:6). The narrative of Judges is marred by the theme of covenant infidelity, but Ruth follows as an example of covenant faithfulness. Both Ruth’s and Boaz’s faithfulness eventually leads to the birth of Israel’s king, which solves the problem that is presented in Judges—namely that there was no king in Israel, and so everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judg 21:25).

A third canonical placement is offered in Bava Batra, which places the book before Psalms. In this way, Ruth serves as a transition to the writings. There are two potential reasons for this placement. First, it is possible that Ruth serves as the

¹⁰ Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments* (NSBT 10; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 52.

¹¹ Webb writes, “The location after Proverbs implies that Ruth is the supreme example in the Old Testament of the ‘noble woman’ (*‘ēšet hayil*) who is the subject of the acrostic poem of Proverbs 31” (ibid., 53).

¹² Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, 24.

¹³ Jennifer Rascas, “The Book of Ruth: A Contrast to the End of the Book of Judges,” *JBQ* 43 (2015): 231. Michael Moore argues similarly, “[Judges 17–21 and Ruth 1–4 ... both end in climactic courtroom scenes, an observation which seems obvious, yet is seldom noted. Comparing and contrasting these scenes greatly helps us to appreciate better each narrative’s theological intentions.” Michael S. Moore, “To King or Not to King: A Canonical-Historical Approach to Ruth,” *BBR* 11 (2001): 31.

canonical gateway to the Psalms and wisdom literature since much of the OT wisdom literature was authored by Davidic kings (much of Psalms having been written by David, and Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes by David's son Solomon). In this light, God's providential work in the life of David's great-grandparents paves the way for wise Davidic kings, like Solomon. A second possibility for canonical placement in the writings is that it connects Ruth's and Boaz's actions to true wisdom. Here two people seek to live in a way that is faithful to the covenant and thereby pleasing to YHWH. Wisdom is forsaking one's gods and seeking refuge in YHWH. Likewise, wisdom is obeying God's commands by showing *hesed* to the foreigners and widows.

A fourth and final potential placement is in the Megilloth itself. The five festal scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther) are often read together and intended to commemorate God's redemptive work for Israel.¹⁴ This placement comes solely from liturgical purposes but also theologically echoes the fact that God has worked on Israel's behalf.

The four potential placements of Ruth in the canon show that Ruth is well suited as an *intermediary history*. It is specifically written to link past and future. Moreover, with regard to the Pentateuch, all four of these canonical options are cast against the backdrop of the Torah. Proverbs teaches how one can live in accordance with the Law and thereby attain wisdom. Judges records Israel's disregard for God's covenant commands. Psalms is replete with allusions to God's promises to Abraham, his work in the exodus, and a love for his law. Even the Megilloth cannot be divorced from the Pentateuch. The ambiguity of Ruth's canonical placement, therefore, validates the claim that Ruth serves as a multi-faceted covenant connector that is intended to link past promises and future redemption.¹⁵

II. LITERARY STRUCTURE

Ruth is beautifully structured and contains a redemptive narrative that mirrors much of God's redemptive work in other Scriptures, particularly the Torah.

1. *Famine, exile, and bitterness (1:1–22)*. Ruth 1 opens with a famine in the land. With the connection to Judges, it is valid to understand the famine as a consequence of Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness.¹⁶ However, the occurrence of a famine in Ruth should also hint at what tends to happen when a famine strikes the promised land. That is, the occurrence of a famine in the OT tends to be followed by Israel's sojourning in a foreign nation.¹⁷ When famine struck in Genesis 12, Abra-

¹⁴ For an example of scholarship that views the Megilloth as a "coherent collection," see Amy Erickson and Andrew R. Davis, "Recent Research on the Megilloth (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther)," *CurrBR* 14 (2015): 298–318.

¹⁵ Lau and Goswell argue that "no one canonical position need be privileged above the others" (*Unceasing Kindness*, 23).

¹⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 129.

¹⁷ Lau and Goswell explain, "Within God's purposes, famine drives God's people to Egypt, where God's promise of offspring and nationhood is fulfilled (Gen. 46:3)." They conclude, "The causes of

ham sojourned in Egypt. The situation recurs in Genesis 43–44 as Jacob and his sons sojourn in Egypt to flee a severe famine. Therefore, it is no surprise that Elimelech, Naomi and their family leave the land to “sojourn” (גָּוַר) in the land of Moab. To be sure, there are some differences in Jacob’s journey to Egypt and Elimelech’s journey to Moab, especially in light of the fact that God commanded Jacob to sojourn to Egypt, while no such command is given to Elimelech. In Moab, Elimelech dies, and his sons, Mahlon and Chilion, marry Moabite women. In due course, Elimelech’s sons also die, leaving Naomi and the two Moabite women as destitute widows.

Naomi, after hearing about the Lord’s visitation on his people in Bethlehem, decides to return home. On the way, Naomi pleads with her daughters-in-law each to return to her mother’s house and, implicitly, back to her people’s gods (1:15). Orpah accepts the offer to return, but Ruth refuses. Even after an emotional plea from her mother-in-law, Ruth remains settled in her decision to follow Naomi. She publicly states her conversion, saying: “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried” (1:16–17a). Ruth’s clinging to Naomi and the fact that the covenant formula is heard from the mouth of the Moabitess demonstrates that she has fully thrust herself in faith upon YHWH.¹⁸ Her words and her actions show Ruth to be “the proselyte *par excellence*.”¹⁹

Seeing Ruth’s determination, Naomi consents, and the two journey together to Bethlehem. Once they arrive, Naomi changes her name to Mara (מָרָא), indicating her bitterness and the weight of her emptiness.²⁰ She attributes her suffering to the work of “the Almighty,” who has brought her back empty. It is at the end of this chapter (v. 22) that Ruth is remarkably labeled as “the one who returned” (הַשָּׁבֵת), though there are no indications that she has ever been to Israel. This designation is pregnant with significance. Concerning this return motif, Robert Alter suggests that Ruth is “actually coming back to the unknown homeland of her new destiny.”²¹

2. *The ideal redeemer* (2:1–23). The second chapter opens with the introduction of a “worthy man” named Boaz. Ruth proposes to go and glean in the fields and

famine and suffering are not always revealed to us; ultimately, God is free in his sovereignty” (*Unceasing Kindness*, 75).

¹⁸ Thomas Schreiner writes, “Clearly, Ruth had put her faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel. This was illustrated by her ‘clinging’ to Naomi (1:14). The word ‘cling’ (*dabaq*) is a covenantal term, denoting the responsibility to cling to one’s wife (Gen. 2:24) and, even more profoundly, the covenantal obligation to cling to Yahweh (Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:5; 30:20)” (*King in His Beauty*, 131).

¹⁹ Christian M. M. Brady, “The Conversion of Ruth in Targum Ruth,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 16 (2013): 134. Likewise, M. D. Gow recognizes Ruth’s confession to be a “clear acknowledgement of her conversion to Yahwism” (“Ruth,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture* [ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, and Graeme Goldsworthy; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 177).

²⁰ Webb writes, “It is as though Naomi has lost not only her family, but even her own name. That is the symbolic end point of her descent into emptiness” (*Five Festal Scrolls*, 40).

²¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 59.

“chances” upon Boaz’s field. Verse 4 expresses the surprising turn of events by saying, “And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.” In essence, this meeting is an example of sovereign serendipity, in which God is working behind the scenes, and yet his work is entirely (or at least partially) hidden from a human vantage point. What seems like chance to men is actually, from a heavenly perspective, God’s sovereign work.

Boaz, coming from Bethlehem, audibly brings the presence of God to his reapers. Upon seeing Ruth in his field, Boaz promises protection and even hints at Ruth’s inclusion into the people of God. He refers to her as “my daughter” (בַּתִּי) and even commands her to drink from the very same vessels with which his reapers draw water.²² Overwhelmed by such kindness, Ruth openly wonders at Boaz’s grace (חַן). Boaz answers by telling her that he has heard of her actions on her mother-in-law’s behalf and speaks a blessing over her: “The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” (2:12). The invocation of God’s wings as a refuge carries redemptive significance and foreshadows what will happen in Ruth 3 and 4. The imagery of God’s wings evokes the theme of protection or escape.²³ The result of Boaz’s kindness is that Ruth is comforted (2:13). At mealtime, Boaz takes on the role of a servant by passing Ruth grain. She eats and is satisfied (2:14), a blessing not known by most destitute widows of the day. After the meal, Ruth continues her gleaning and then returns home with an overabundance of grain (weighing in at over twenty-two liters of barley).

Naomi saw the day’s gleanings and responded in pleasant surprise, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you” (2:19a). Ruth answers that it was Boaz’s field. Naomi’s interpretation of the hand of *Shaddai* against her begins to change as she now sees that the Lord’s *hesed* has not abandoned her or her family.²⁴ Her open praise of God’s faithful kindness is due to the fact that Boaz happens to be a kinsman-redeemer (גֹּאֵל), which opens the possibility of Naomi and Ruth’s redemption.

3. *Plea and promise of redemption (3:1–18)*. Ruth 3 opens with Naomi seeking “rest” (מְנוּחָה) for her daughter-in-law. Naomi lays out a careful strategy, by which Ruth might win Boaz’s favor. Scholars have debated about the nature of Naomi’s advice: “Then go and uncover his feet (וּגְלִית מְרֵגְלָתָיו) and lie down, and he will tell you what to do” (3:4). Some suggest that Naomi’s advice was sexual in nature.²⁵ If this is true, however, then how can Boaz just a few verses later claim that he and his fellow townsmen know that Ruth is a “worthy woman” (3:11)?²⁶ Such a noble

²² By calling her “my daughter,” Boaz hints at Ruth’s inclusion into Israel. See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 855.

²³ “Wings,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 954.

²⁴ Naomi’s words most likely refer to YHWH’s *hesed*, but the ambiguity also could be referring to YHWH’s *hesed* through Boaz’s kindness. See Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, 33.

²⁵ Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, 155.

²⁶ Robert Alter rightly says that a sexual interpretation of this passage is “highly dubious” (*Ketuvim*, 632).

designation would not be an accurate characterization of someone who deliberately transgressed God's law by trying to commit fornication. As is made clear by Ruth's own understanding in 3:9, the garment covering his feet served as symbolic "wings." By uncovering his feet and then asking him to spread his wings over her, she was symbolically asking him to marry her. In modern terms, it would be as if a woman handed her beloved a wedding ring and asked him to propose to her.

This understanding is consistent with Ezekiel's use of this symbolism as YHWH says to Israel, "I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made a vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine" (Ezek 16:8). The corner of the garment spread over a young maiden is literary symbolism of a man taking a woman under the protection of his wings. She becomes his beloved, and he becomes her protector and husband. The irony of the symbolism is that though Boaz prayed for YHWH to spread his wings over Ruth as a refuge, his prayer will ultimately be answered by his own work for Ruth's redemption.²⁷ YHWH's wings cover Ruth as the corner of Boaz's cloak covers her. This action is exemplary of a true "redeemer."

Boaz blesses Ruth for her *hesed* and praises her as a "worthy woman." He agrees to her request saying, "I will do for you all that you ask" (v. 11), but acknowledges that there is a redeemer "nearer than I." This nearer redeemer presents a potential hindrance to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. Nevertheless, Boaz ensures that Ruth will be redeemed by the next day—whether it be through him or through the nearer kinsman. He makes an oath by saying, "as the LORD lives, I will redeem you" (3:13). He then instructs Ruth to lie down until morning, which foreshadows that rest will indeed be secured for Ruth through Boaz's action.

Before daybreak the next morning, Ruth arose and Boaz instructs an unnamed servant, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." This instruction was given only because Boaz was concerned about Ruth's wellbeing and reputation; and he also seems to show respect for the nearer kinsmen.²⁸ Before sending her away, Boaz filled her garment with six measures of barley. This was not for only for Ruth's benefit, but it was also a sign from Boaz to Naomi. His words in verse 17, "You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law" demonstrate his commitment to fill Naomi's emptiness.²⁹ A redemption leading to the reversal of Naomi's woes is about to take place. Naomi received the intended sign and instructed Ruth, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today" (3:18).

4. *Purchase and redemption (4:1–12)*. Boaz was true to his word. Every move in Ruth 4 shows him to be a man of action.³⁰ His vow would not go unfulfilled, and Ruth's redemption would be accomplished quickly. Boaz sat by the gate, "and be-

²⁷ Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁹ Robert Alter writes, "The fullness of the shawl bearing the barley is a hint of the fullness of offspring that Ruth will enjoy and bring to Naomi" (*Ketuvim*, 635).

³⁰ Block writes, "The other characters merely respond to his initiatives" (*Judges, Ruth*, 707).

hold” the nearer kinsmen arrives on the scene. Once again, the word “behold” (הִנֵּה) describes a sovereign serendipity. Boaz did not have to wait long, for God was at work behind the scenes. Just as Ruth chanced upon Boaz’s field, so now the nearer kinsman chances upon Boaz, who has a judicial matter to settle with him. From there, Boaz takes ten of the elders of the city and requests them to sit down.

Boaz’s wisdom is displayed as he shrewdly tells the man of Elimelech’s unredeemed parcel of land, and the nearer kinsman rashly says that he will redeem it.³¹ Only after securing the man’s initial commitment does Boaz inform the man that redeeming the land means also marrying Mahlon’s widow in order to “perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance” (4:5). Underlying Boaz’s words are two covenantal laws—land redemption and kinsman redemption. Though these two laws were given separately in the Torah, Boaz’s instructions show that the laws were to be practiced together if necessary.

As an example, Josh Ketchum’s article, “The Go’el Custom in Ruth: A Comparative Study,” argues that “the redemption of property was merged with the practice of levirate marriage.”³² Ketchum adds that “the application of the laws of land redemption and levirate marriage in the Torah were fluid and flexible and were adapted by Israelite society to the changing context of everyday life.”³³ Ketchum is not alone in this conclusion. In his article “The Eschatological Meaning of the Book of Ruth,” Abraham Cohen argues, “In Ruth this term [*ge’ulah*] transcends its legal meaning as found in Deuteronomy, and the actions associated with this term transcend the purely legal boundaries of Deuteronomy.”³⁴ The important truth to see is that redemption, while it transcends the original legal context, it is still in obedience to the Torah.

Having learned that he must redeem Ruth as well, the nearer redeemer surrenders his rights as the nearest *go’el*. The Hebrew Scriptures do not interpret this kindly as the man is referred to as only “Mr. So-and-So,” and is by and large cut out of the text after his rejection of covenantal duty.³⁵ Boaz, on the other hand, does not fail. He willingly takes up the responsibility and redeems Ruth himself. Through an ancient symbol of purchase and acquirement, Boaz receives the nearer kinsman’s sandal showing that a transaction had been made.

Boaz states publicly, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought (קָנָה) from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought (קָנָה) to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day” (4:9–10). The people

³¹ Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 245.

³² Josh Ketchum, “The Go’el Custom in Ruth: A Comparative Study,” *ResQ* 52 (2010): 237.

³³ *Ibid.* See also Millar Burrows, “The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth,” *JBL* 59 (1940): 453–54.

³⁴ Abraham D. Cohen, “The Eschatological Meaning of the Book of Ruth: ‘Blessed be God: Asher Lo Hishbit Lakh Go’el,’” *JBQ* 40 (2010): 165.

³⁵ Victor Hamilton writes, “That the closer redeemer is denied a personal name and identity may be the narrative’s way of pronouncing a condemnation upon him for withdrawing from his (levirate/*go’el*) responsibilities” (*Handbook on the Historical Books* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 199).

acknowledge their role as witnesses and then proceed to bless Ruth and Boaz's union. By invoking the Pentateuchal characters Rachel, Leah, and Tamar, the people extend a prophetic blessing that Ruth will play an important role in continuing the line of the promised offspring.

5. *Restoration through an offspring* (4:13–22). The final section of Ruth focuses on the offspring Ruth bore to Boaz. His name was Obed, and he is declared to be Naomi's redeemer—the one who will be “a restorer of life and a nourisher of [her] old age.” Naomi's redemption has come full circle and her bitterness has been put to an end. The book of Ruth ends with a genealogy that traces the chosen line from Perez, Judah's son, to David, Israel's king. With this, Ruth passes the baton to the next stage of redemptive history—the dominion of David.

III. KEY PENTATEUCHAL THEMES

Following Ruth's literary structure helps to highlight significant themes in the book. Surprisingly, Davidic kingship is not the central theme—though it is a significant theme. Reading according to the literary structure keeps readers from losing sight of crucial redemptive themes in the shadow of David. What follows is a list of other themes seen clearly in the book of Ruth. It is not insignificant that all of the themes that follow are themes found in the Pentateuch.

1. *Exodus-like redemption*. Redemption is a clear theme found in the narrative of Ruth, and it is, arguably, one of the foundational themes for the entire narrative. A failure to see the author's allusions to the exodus-redemption misses out on a crucial point the author is making. R. L. Hubbard Jr. rightly recognizes that “Redemption by a kinsman-redeemer (Heb. *gō'el*) is the most common kind of redemption in the OT.”³⁶

According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, redemption requires three things: (1) a person's need to be freed from some form of bondage; (2) a payment made for redemption; and (3) a human intermediary who can pay the price and secure redemption.³⁷ All three of these criteria are met both in Israel's exodus from Egypt and in Ruth's exodus from Moab and the bitterness of widowhood. The author of Ruth alludes to the exodus in order to show that Ruth's individual redemption is in reality a rehearsal of Israel's corporate redemption.

The thematic and textual allusions point back to Israel's exodus from Egypt.³⁸ First, the narrative of Ruth begins in much the same way as the story of the exodus—that is, with a famine and with the emergence of *marā* (מַרָּא) for those who

³⁶ R. L. Hubbard Jr., “Redemption,” *NDBT*, 717. Peter Leithart says that the beginning of Ruth is an “inverted Exodus.” Peter J. Leithart, “When Gentile Meets Jew: A Christian Reading of Ruth and the Hebrew Scriptures,” *Touchstone* 20.4 (2009): 21.

³⁷ “Redeem, Redemption,” *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 698.

³⁸ Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson correctly say that Ruth “has a clear Exodus shape.” Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 84.

sojourn (גור) in a foreign land, all lexical terms that are found in Exodus 1.³⁹ Moreover, Ruth is described as the “one who returned” (שוב). This participial designation is ironic because there is no indication that Ruth had ever been to Israel before. Therefore, the word *šwb* should be understood theologically.⁴⁰ The idea of “return” in the OT sometimes invokes the idea of an exodus—returning from a foreign nation to come to the Promised Land, in which YHWH dwells with his people. This is especially true of prophetic literature.

Boaz’s blessing over Ruth in 2:12 invokes the God who redeemed his people from Egypt. In Exod 19:4, God says to his people, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings (פְּנִינִי) and brought you to myself.” If God’s eagle-like wings invoke the concept of protection, then his wings also invoke the idea of exodus-like redemption. Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson demonstrate the parallel in this way, “The God whose wingspan provides protection until the raging storm has passed by is present to bless Ruth and deliver her, as he was with Israel as they left Egypt.”⁴¹

Boaz’s overabundant generosity and kindness also echo exodus themes.⁴² His provision of water from his own vessels, the meal of roasted grain served at his table with Boaz himself taking up the role of a servant, and his commands for his reapers to leave behind entire bushels of grain all exceed Deuteronomy 24’s command to show kindness to the sojourners and widows by allowing them to glean from Israel’s fields (Deut 24:17–21). The reason given for this kindness is stated in Deut 24:22: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.” In other words, a Hebrew’s actions toward sojourners, orphans, and widows was meant to mirror or (at least on a more microcosmic scale) replicate God’s kindness to Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. Noble field owners allowing the destitute to glean in the fields was an enacted parable that exemplified the type of kindness God showed to his helpless and once-enslaved people.

³⁹ Lau and Goswell note, “An episode in the early history of the family (the sojourn in Moab) foreshadows what will happen in the experience of its most famous descendant. This is in line with Israelite storytelling generally, wherein typological parallels drawn between earlier and later historical events support a belief in the providential ordering of history (e.g. the description of what is, in effect, an Egyptian sojourn and exodus of Abram in Gen. 12:10–13:1)” (*Unceasing Kindness*, 31).

⁴⁰ Lau and Goswell comment, “From a biblical-theological viewpoint, departure from and return to the land is often more than just a physical departure. When Moses foresees Israel’s disobedience leading to their expulsion, he also foresees their restoration, but only after the people of Israel return to God or repent (שׁוּב; Deut. 30:1–5). . . . In a physical sense, it makes no sense for Ruth to ‘return’ to Israel. Yet in a spiritual sense, it is only when Ruth repents—that is, turns to trust in Yahweh (1:16–17)—that she begins to be blessed and becomes a blessing to others” (*ibid.*, 81–82).

⁴¹ Roberts and Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus*, 85.

⁴² Goldsworthy writes, “Redemption as release from slavery or from a position of misfortune now becomes one of the most significant themes in the Bible. In this regard the book of Ruth provides an illustration as Boaz acts with kindness to perform the duty of a close relative to redeem Ruth’s land (Ruth 4:1–11).” Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 137.

The same truth can be argued about the work of a kinsman-redeemer. The *gō'el's* work was meant to remind observers of the first and ultimate *gō'el's* redemption of Israel. Lau and Goswell note,

Just as God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, kinsman-redeemers redeem land and people from bondage to debt. As such, kinsman-redeemers act on behalf of God. In their action of releasing relatives from slavery to debt, kinsman-redeemers also remind Israelites of God's great act of liberty for them: their redemption from slavery in Egypt in the exodus.⁴³

Exodus themes abound in Ruth 3 and 4. Naomi initiates a new stage in the narrative by asking, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?" (3:1). The word "rest" (מנוח) can also be translated as "resting place," and it is oftentimes used in the context of marriage.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the same Hebrew word is used throughout the Pentateuch in reference to the Promised Land (i.e. Gen 49:15; Num 10:33; Deut 12:9), and it is described as a consequent blessing of the Exodus-redemption (Exod 33:14). Along these lines, the related Hebrew word נָחַ, which carries the same basic idea of resting place (lit. "a grazing place"), is found in Exod 15:13 while speaking of God's holy "abode" or "resting place" to which YHWH has brought his people.

Moreover, Naomi believes that this rest is to be achieved only if Boaz, the kinsman redeemer, acts on Ruth's behalf. In Ruth 3, the central hope is for redemption through a man whose name means "strength" (בועז) and who stands as a *gō'el*. It does not seem coincidental that Exodus 15 describes how God "redeemed" (גאל) Israel and guided them by his "strength" (עז).⁴⁵ Conceptually, the means of redemption remains the same in both Exodus and Ruth—namely, someone helpless and destitute is rescued by the strength of a redeemer.⁴⁶

Ruth 4 carries forward the theme of Exodus as Boaz redeems all that belonged to Elimelech and "purchased" (קנה) Ruth to become his bride. This is the very same action that YHWH is credited with doing for Israel in the Exodus: "till the people pass by whom you have purchased (קנה)" (Exod 15:16). Brad Embry argues that this redemption-acquisition theme is "employed exclusively to express an action undertaken by Yahweh on behalf of Israel and likely draws on the exodus tradition. In this way, the author of Ruth has constructed a story in which two of the primary characters, while functioning within an unfolding story of loss and res-

⁴³ Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, 130.

⁴⁴ Robert Alter connects *manoh* to the Hebrew word *nabalab*, a word that speaks of "inheritance." It is no coincidence that "inheritance" also speaks of Israel's inheritance of the land. Alter, *Ketuvim*, 626.

⁴⁵ Hubbard points out that "some scholars believe that it portrays Yahweh as a kinsman-redeemer, releasing his 'kinfold' from slavery and restoring the 'family's' wholeness. ... In light of the Exodus, *gō'el* ('Redeemer') becomes a popular title for Yahweh" ("Redemption," 717).

⁴⁶ Embry writes, "In Exod 15, the terms *hesed* (a key term for the story of Ruth) and 'עז ('strength' or 'power') are used in reference to Yahweh, and there appears in v. 15 a reference to Moab. The full Hebrew term of which 'strength' is a part is *be'ozekā*, that is, 'in your strength,' which resonates phonetically with the name for Boaz (*bo'z*)." Brad Embry, "'Redemption-Acquisition': The Marriage of Ruth as a Theological Commentary on Yahweh and Yahweh's People," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7 (2013): 263.

toration for a particular household, can also be emblematic of Yahweh's actions on behalf of Israel.⁴⁷ Accordingly, Boaz's purchase of Ruth rehearses the way God purchased Israel out of Egypt.⁴⁸

Redemption, particularly an exodus-like redemption, is one of the most prevalent themes in Ruth and serves as the foundational theme upon which the rest of the themes are built. Even if the author's primary goal is to provide an apologetic for David's reign, he does so by showing how David's grandmother was redeemed in a way that mirrored Israel's exodus from Egypt. David's lineage, therefore, stands as a continuation of what God accomplished through the first exodus.

2. *Abramic faith and covenantal blessing.* The author presents Ruth's faith and action as a reenactment of Abraham's faith and action. In Genesis 17, God promises Abraham that he will be "God to you and to your offspring" (v. 7). In the next verse, he restates his promise, "And I will be their God" (וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לְאֱלֹהִים). Wenham argues that this promise is the "ultimate covenant blessing" and is "the overarching goal of the covenant."⁴⁹ This promise is repeated in Exod 6:7: "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God" (וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעַם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים). Looking forward, the phrase, "You will be my people, and I will be your God," becomes a covenant formula that appears again and again in the Pentateuch (Exod 29:45; Lev 22:31; 26:12; Num 15:41; Deut 29:13). It is interesting that a similar phraseology is heard coming from the mouth of Ruth in 1:16 when she says, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (עַמִּי עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי). Granted, this is not a one-to-one lexical correspondence between Ruth's statement and the covenant formula. However, there seems to be enough conceptual correspondence to accept Ruth's statement as an echo of the Pentateuchal covenant formula. At a minimum, Ruth's statement expresses her desire to be included in this ultimate covenant blessing of having God as her God. The fact that Ruth makes this statement while clinging (דָּבַק) to Naomi exemplifies Ruth's desire to cling to God—a characteristic that is celebrated in the Pentateuch (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 30:20).⁵⁰

After Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem, the women of the town greet her saying, "Is this Naomi?" Naomi answers, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me" (Ruth 1:20–21). Here, Naomi's words form a chiasmic ABBA pattern:

⁴⁷ Embry, "Redemption-Acquisition," 258–59.

⁴⁸ Mitch Chase says that Boaz's work "was a picture of what God had done and would do for Israel." Mitchell L. Chase, "A True and Greater Boaz: Typology and Jesus in the Book of Ruth," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21.1 (2017): 91. Thomas Schreiner also takes this position, "The redeemer theme points back to Yahweh's work in freeing his people at the exodus and forward to what he would do on their behalf in the future" (*King in his Beauty*, 132–33).

⁴⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 21–22.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 131

A *The Almighty* has dealt bitterly with me.
 B The LORD has brought me back empty.
 B' The LORD has testified against me
 A' *The Almighty* has brought calamity upon me.⁵¹

Her invocation of *Shaddai* is meant to draw to mind the previous uses and contexts in which the name was used. Terrance Wardlaw Jr. rightly argues that “the use of the name Shaddai within the speech of Naomi (Ruth 1:20–21) draws upon conventionalized knowledge from the repository of Israelite traditions in order to foreshadow what follows and in order to indicate its significance.”⁵² He goes on to conclude, “The use of the name ‘Shaddai’ both foreshadows the plot resolution and contextualizes this story within the *Heilsgeschichte* of the patriarchal and Davidic lineage.”⁵³ In other words, Naomi’s invocation of *Shaddai*’s name works both retrospectively and prospectively. It works retrospectively by pointing to the earlier uses of *Shaddai* in the Pentateuch.

The first instance occurs in Gen 17:1 right after Abram’s sinfully synergistic attempt to bring the promised offspring on his own terms—of course, Ishmael was not the promised offspring. In Genesis 17, God reveals himself as *El Shaddai* (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי), the God who can overcome any hindrance in order to keep his promises, including overcoming Sarai’s barrenness. *El Shaddai* is used again in Genesis 28 when Jacob is sent away from the Promised Land to his uncle Laban’s house. It is used again in Genesis 35 when God reveals himself to Jacob as “God Almighty” and commissions him to “be fruitful and multiply” (v. 11). Three other instances of *Shaddai* occur in the rest of Genesis. It is significant that the next time *God Almighty* is used outside of Genesis, it is in the context of Exodus. In Exod 6:3, God reveals himself to be the same *Shaddai* that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew, though now he will show himself to be the “I AM.”

The composite picture that is painted with these uses of *Shaddai* shows God to be the one who powerfully overcomes obstacles in order to keep his promises—particularly his promises having to do with Abraham’s offspring. Wardlaw explains, “One may conclude from usage within the Pentateuch that the name ‘Shaddai’ is associated with narrative complexes in which the promise of children and land is threatened from without. In the face of threats to divine promise, ‘Shaddai’ acts in order to protect the patriarchal family and their descendants in order to fulfill the promises of offspring and land (Gen. 17:1).”⁵⁴ The significance of this in the context of Ruth should be apparent. Serious obstacles face both Naomi and Ruth as both are in some way barren—Naomi’s sons being dead and Ruth having had no

⁵¹ Daniel Block points out the ABBA pattern of these verses (*Judges, Ruth*, 645).

⁵² Terrance R. Wardlaw Jr., “Shaddai, Providence, and the Narrative Structure of Ruth,” *JETS* 58 (2015): 32.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Wardlaw, “Shaddai, Providence, and the Narrative Structure of Ruth,” 35. Wenham says that the use of “Shaddai” is “always used in connection with promises of descendants: Shaddai evokes the idea that God is able to make the barren fertile and to fulfill the promises” (*Genesis 16–50*, 20).

children with Mahlon. Nevertheless, the obstacles facing Naomi and Ruth are no hindrance to the Almighty. The *Shaddai* who overcame Sarai's barrenness, Jacob's exile from the Promised Land, and Israel's slavery in Egypt is the very same *Shaddai* who will overcome Naomi and Ruth's widowhood and emptiness. He himself will work to progress his promises even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The same can be said about Naomi's invocation of YHWH. As the Pentateuch demonstrates, the name of YHWH is his covenant name. That is, it is the name by which God revealed himself to be a relational, promise-keeping King over his covenant people. By the end of Ruth, God will show himself to be *El Shaddai*, who overcomes every obstacle, and YHWH, who keeps his covenant with Israel.

A final potential allusion can be found in Ruth 2:11, Boaz recounts to Ruth, "You left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know." This echoes Abraham's faith in leaving his kindred and father's house to go to an unknown land, which would be shown to him by YHWH.⁵⁵ Reg Grant concludes, "[The author's] wording in 2:11 is so close to the wording of Genesis 12:1 as to make the connection of Ruth with Abraham unmistakable."⁵⁶ Ruth, then, follows and reenacts Abrahamic faith by leaving her homeland in search of a land and blessing given by the Lord, and the Lord—as he did for Abram—overcomes Ruth's tragic circumstances in order to secure blessing for both her and Naomi.

3. *Covenant life (hesed) and covenantal presence.* When Boaz first emerges onto the scene, he brings the covenantal presence of God to bear. Ruth 2:4 says, "And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you (יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם)!' And they answered, 'The LORD bless you (לוֹ יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה).'" This greeting and response echoes the covenantal blessing of Numbers 6:24–26, which says, "The LORD bless you (יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה) and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." The phrase, "YHWH bless you" in Ruth 2 is a word-for-word restatement of the blessing of Numbers, which is characteristic of God's covenantal presence.⁵⁷ The blessing "YHWH be with you," corresponds with the latter half of the blessing in Numbers 6 that speaks of God's personal presence over his people—his face shining upon them and his countenance being lifted upon them. It would seem that this allusion to Numbers 6 is meant to show how God's covenantal promises and plan progress in the lives of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi. It is not presumptuous to argue that the blessing formula in Numbers 6 is an extension of the Abrahamic blessing in Genesis 12. Logically, then, Boaz's use of the blessing from Numbers can be seen as a continuation of the Abrahamic blessing. In this

⁵⁵ Robert Alter says, "These words are the most significant literary allusion in the book. They explicitly echo God's first words to Abraham in Genesis 12:1, 'Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father's house.' Now it is a woman, and a Moabite, who reenacts Abraham's long trek from the east to Canaan. She will become a founding mother of the nation as he was the founding father" (*Ketuvim*, 630).

⁵⁶ Reg Grant, "Literary Structure in the Book of Ruth," *BSac* 148.592 (1991): 436.

⁵⁷ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 65.

light, Boaz stands as a type of Abraham who is blessed and dispenses blessing to those around him. It also foreshadows the blessing that will come to the Moabitess, Ruth (a representative of the nations), through a son of Abraham. Though YHWH's direct actions are sparse in the book of Ruth, his covenantal presence is nonetheless assumed. And so, the God who gives the blessing of presence to his people in the Pentateuch is the same God who gives the blessing of his presence through Boaz, and eventually sovereignly allows it to be extended to Ruth.

Another key subtheme that carries Pentateuchal overtones is that of *hesed*.⁵⁸ For the purposes of Ruth, *hesed* can be understood as "lovingkindness."⁵⁹ Midrashic interpretation of Ruth elevates *hesed* to be the primary theme of the book.⁶⁰ In Ruth 2:20, Naomi praises YHWH because his *hesed* has not "forsaken the living or the dead." In Ruth 3:10, Boaz praises Ruth for her great *hesed* that she shows by not pursuing younger, richer men. The concept of *hesed* is implicit in Boaz's provision for Ruth in chapter 2. In this way, the story of Ruth and Boaz serves as an idyll of how God's people are to live in covenantal harmony with one another.⁶¹ Ruth's kindness to Naomi and Boaz, as well as Boaz's kindness to Ruth and Naomi, pictures what God intended for his people's daily, covenantal interaction. As mentioned earlier, Boaz's *hesed*, which is consistent with the Torah's teaching of *hesed*, reflects YHWH's kindness toward his people. Therefore, according to the book of Ruth's example, daily human acts of *hesed* should be theocentric and theocentric.

4. *Abrahamic offspring and the emergence of a Judahite king.* A fourth thematic connection to the Pentateuch is that of Abrahamic offspring. The seed theme extends all the way back to Gen 3:15 when God promises to give the woman an offspring who will crush the head of the serpent. Genesis 12 shows that this promise will be accomplished through the lineage of Abraham. These themes continue to develop in Genesis through a series of genealogies. Jacob's wives, Rachel and Leah, play a crucial role as Israel's twelve tribes come through them.⁶² Moreover, Genesis narrows the promised line of blessing to the offspring of Judah.

It seems that the author intended for his readers to recognize the allusion back to Genesis 38, which records the strange but important series of events involving the Canaanite woman, Tamar. In this way, the author shows that what God did through Tamar, he would do again through Ruth. There are a number of paral-

⁵⁸ Webb beautifully describes the book as "the garment of kindness" among the five festal scrolls known as the Megilloth (*Five Festal Garments*, 37–57).

⁵⁹ Gow, "Ruth," 177.

⁶⁰ R. Ze'ira writes, "This scroll tells us nothing either of cleanliness or of uncleanness, either of prohibition or permission. For what purpose then was it written? To teach how great is the reward of those who do deeds of kindness (Ruth Rabbah 2:14)." Hayyim J. Angel, "A Midrashic View of Ruth: Amidst a Sea of Ambiguity," *JBQ* 33.2 (2005): 91.

⁶¹ Hubbard says that the book's record of *hesed* demonstrate "the ideal lifestyle for Israel" (*Book of Ruth*, 72).

⁶² Alter says that this blessing "transforms Ruth into a kind of adopted matriarch" (*Ketuvim*, 637).

lels between the Tamar story and the Ruth story, as will be seen in the table below.⁶³

Tamar and Judah	Ruth and Boaz
Husband(s) die (38:6–10)	Husband dies (1:5)
Told to return to her father’s house (38:11)	Told to return to her mother’s house (1:8)
Onan unwilling to redeem (38:8–9)	Nearer redeemer unwilling to redeem (4:6)
Took off widows’ garments and wrapped herself in a veil, and went out to meet Judah during the sheep shearing (38:13–14)	Put on her cloak and went down to the threshing floor to meet Boaz during the harvest festival (3:3)
Judah praises Tamar as “righteous” (38:26)	Boaz praises Ruth as “worthy” (3:10–11)
Tamar gives birth to Perez, the ancestor of David (38:29)	Ruth gives birth to Obed, the ancestor of David (4:13–17)

Table 1: Parallels between Tamar and Ruth

Seeing these connections, it makes sense why the author of Ruth would include the people’s blessing over Boaz and Ruth’s union:

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 act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.

In this blessing there is a play on the words “built up the house of Israel.” Retrospectively, Rachel and Leah built up the house of Israel by providing offspring for Jacob. Hubbard comments that by linking Ruth to the patriarchal mothers, the author was “suggesting that she stood in continuity with that line.”⁶⁴ Prospectively, looking forward to 2 Samuel 7, God is the one who builds a house through David’s royal son. Dempster comments, “[Ruth] and Boaz continue the building of the house of Israel with the birth of Obed, whose birth continues to build not only the national house but also the royal house of David.”⁶⁵ Moreover, the mention of Judah, Tamar, and Perez should also draw the mind back to Genesis 49 and Jacob’s prophetic declaration of Judah’s future offspring: “The scepter shall not depart from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (v. 10). The mention of Judah and Tamar in the

⁶³ This table has been modified from Victor Hamilton’s table of parallels (*Handbook on the Historical Books*, 200). For more on the links between Tamar and Ruth see T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1998), 52–53.

⁶⁴ Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 259.

⁶⁵ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 193.

book of Ruth elicits the promise of kingship from Genesis and puts kingship squarely on center stage through the people's blessing. Furthermore, the ten-member genealogy in Ruth 4 is intended to draw the reader's mind back to the ten-member genealogies found in Genesis.⁶⁶ Thus, Boaz's family line progresses the line of the promised seed sourced in Genesis 3, with the serpent-crushing offspring of the woman.⁶⁷ Once again, this demonstrates that Ruth works both retrospectively pointing back to Pentateuchal anticipation and prospectively to David's dominion.⁶⁸

5. *Broader themes sourced from the Pentateuch.* Broader themes are also at play in the book of Ruth. These are themes that begin in the Torah but are not necessarily stated directly. In other words, these are themes that are conceptual rather than lexical. First, the theme of great reversal is evident. In the Pentateuch, there are many examples of great reversals. For example, Abraham, the elderly nomad, defeats the armies of the mighty Chedorlaomer; Sarai's barrenness is reversed and she becomes fruitful; Esau, the stronger, older brother, serves the weaker, younger Jacob; Jacob comes to Laban empty but leaves with wives, children, and abundant flocks and herds. Even the exodus contains a great reversal as the impoverished Hebrew slaves plunder their Egyptian overlords. This great reversal theme is found also in the book of Ruth as Naomi's bitterness is turned to blessing. Barry G. Webb notes how "the overall movement is from death to life, barrenness to fruitfulness, emptiness to fullness, curse to blessing."⁶⁹ The same can be said about Ruth's status. She goes from being only "the Moabitess" and Mahlon's widow to being David's great-grandmother and worth more "than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15).

A second theme is that of God's hidden providence. Sometimes biblical authors highlight important truths by highlighting God's "hiddenness."⁷⁰ The point of employing this literary technique is to emphasize God's sovereign work even when his work is not apparent. Sometimes, a biblical author may keep God's sovereign hand hidden in order to demonstrate his providential work through the daily

⁶⁶ Alter, *Ketuvim*, 639.

⁶⁷ Lau and Goswell note, "The effect of the genealogy is to link the story of Ruth with the Bible's 'main narrative' (= Primary History), namely Genesis to Kings, in which as we briefly noted at the start of this chapter, kingship is a major concern" (*Unceasing Kindness*, 27). James Hamilton writes, "As Yahweh reverses these outworkings of the curses on the land and gender relations, he is also sustaining the line of descent from which the seed of the woman will arise to crush the head of the serpent. . . . As the triumphant seed of the woman crushing the head of the serpent points to salvation through judgment in Genesis 3:15, so the birth of a male child at the end of Ruth portends deliverance." James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 305, 308.

⁶⁸ Dempster writes, "This new ten-member genealogy, set within the context of the exile, keeps the reader on track, ensuring that the movement toward a divine goal within history is not forgotten" (*Dominion and Dynasty*, 193). See also Moshe Reiss, "Ruth and Naomi: Foremothers of David," *JBQ* 35.3 (2007): 192.

⁶⁹ Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 38.

⁷⁰ Hubbard agrees, "Far from downplaying God's providence in the story . . . the indirectness only heightens the reader's awareness of it" (*Book of Ruth*, 69).

faithfulness of his people.⁷¹ In this way, redemption is accomplished on a micro-cosmic scale as well as a macrocosmic scale.⁷² The book of Esther, in which the name of God does not appear even once, is one example.

The theme of God's hidden providence is seen first in Genesis 37–46. From Genesis 1–36, God's direct sovereign action is conspicuous. In Genesis 37–46, however, there is a noticeable shift as God's direct speech and action in the lives of his people stop. God's direct speaking to his people is not heard again until Genesis 46 when God commands Jacob not to be afraid and to go down to Egypt. This means that God's hand is hidden as Joseph is sold as a slave to Egypt and Jacob is deceived into believing his son is dead. His sovereign hand is not revealed again until after Jacob receives news from his sons that Joseph was alive and ruling in Egypt. The theological message of Genesis 37–46 is that God is still sovereignly working even when his work is not easily seen.⁷³

The author of Ruth employs the same literary tactic. Edward Campbell suggests that God's work in Ruth is completed "in the shadows."⁷⁴ Similarly, commentator Frederic Bush says that even "Ruth's accidental steps are part of the control God effects over his world behind the scenes and in the shadows."⁷⁵ The direct work of God in Ruth is evident in only two places—first in 1:6 as YHWH "visited his people" and afterwards in 4:13 when YHWH "gave [Ruth] conception." By and large, God's hand in the suffering of Ruth and Naomi and their return to Israel remains unseen. And yet, though his hand may have been hidden, he was still working through Boaz, whose kindness proved that God's *hesed* had not forsaken Ruth and Naomi.⁷⁶ As was true for Jacob, Naomi regains a son. Jacob was "revived" (חיה), and Naomi's life was restored (4:14). In both cases, God's hidden providence works out for his people's good in their redemption and restoration.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Rabbi Hayyim Angel writes, "Ambiguity runs through all of Ruth, as the reader often cannot tell where human initiative stops, and God's intervention begins" ("A Midrashic view of Ruth: Amidst a Sea of Ambiguity," 97).

⁷² Barry Webb writes, "[Ruth] shows us that those whom God saves by signs and wonders, as at the exodus, he continues to save by his providential workings in their day-to-day lives, and that his kindness (*hesed*), by which Israel is built up, is to be found not only in great national deliverances, but in the way his covenant people treat one another on a daily basis. It is micro, as opposed to macro, salvation history" (Webb, *Five Festal Garments*, 53).

⁷³ Lau and Goswell also connect the theme of God's hiddenness to the Exodus (*Unceasing Kindness*, 109).

⁷⁴ Campbell, *Ruth*, 28.

⁷⁵ Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, 47. Kirsten Nielsen restates a similar idea saying, "God guides and controls events, but from beneath the surface" (*Ruth: A Commentary* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997], 31).

⁷⁶ Lau and Goswell say that the book of Ruth shows that God's work is sometimes "quiet and continuous." They elaborate, "He is working in and through the seemingly mundane day-to-day agency of people who lived according to his will to achieve his purposes" (*Unceasing Kindness*, 105).

⁷⁷ Lau and Goswell write, "With the book of Ruth's affirmation of Yahweh's behind-the-scenes providential ordering of events, Israelites can confidently place their trust in Yahweh" (*ibid.*, 13).

IV. RUTH'S THEOLOGICAL TYPOLOGICAL TRAJECTORY

Ruth serves as an apology for David's reign by showing that David's dominion is no theological or redemptive outlier.⁷⁸ Instead, his life and reign, which comes from God's redemptive work in the lives of Boaz and Ruth, stands in continuity with God's promises to Abraham, his redemptive work through the Exodus, his covenantal commands to live in *hesed*, and his promise to provide a royal offspring from Judah's lineage. Ruth stands in the same redemptive trajectory that begins in the Torah and extends through the records of David's reign. J. Andrew Dearman contends that "the composer(s) presents the book as a part of a national storyline running from the ancestral accounts to the dynasty of David, with YHWH at work over generations to preserve a chosen family (the 'House of Israel')." ⁷⁹

The fact that this national storyline is played out in the life of Ruth, the Moabitess, sets the trajectory toward a multi-national redemption brought about by an Abrahamic, Davidic Son, who brings blessing to the whole world.⁸⁰ Dempster is right when he says that Boaz's marriage to Ruth "anticipates the nations' finding refuge under the wings of Yahweh through a Davidic servant."⁸¹ In this light, God was not dependent upon Israel's faithfulness to accomplish his work among the nations.⁸² Just as was true in the life of Abraham and the work of the exodus, God himself would accomplish his redemptive purposes so that the whole world would see that he alone is God. Ultimately, Boaz's redemptive work in purchasing for himself a Moabitess bride sets readers on a typological trajectory that undeniably leads to Jesus, who accomplishes the same type of redemption as he also purchased (*ἀγοράζω*) for himself a bride from among the nations, not with gold or silver, but with his own blood (Rev 5:9–10).⁸³ In this light, Paul House's words about Ruth are accurate: "It is hard to imagine a book so short doing more to maintain the faith of the whole canon."⁸⁴ By connecting Abraham, the exodus, and Sinai to Boaz and Ruth, to David, and on to Christ himself, Ruth serves as a covenant connector in which the redemptive themes are intertwined beautifully in the grand melody of salvation.

⁷⁸ Yeo, "Ruth," 403.

⁷⁹ J. Andrew Dearman, "David, the Book of Ruth, and Its Place in a Larger National Storyline," *Southeastern Theological Review* 5.2 (2014): 157–70.

⁸⁰ "The foreign ethnicity of Ruth is ... significant. This aspect of the story connects to the inclusion of many peoples in the promise of Abraham and it points to the further expansion of this theme that will appear in the Prophets. Relating to the big story of sin, exile and restoration, Ruth's entry into the people of God underscores that the ultimate restoration will have a multiethnic component." C. Marvin Pate, J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, E. Randolph Richards, W. Dennis Tucker Jr., and Preben Vang, *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 60.

⁸¹ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 194.

⁸² Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, 143.

⁸³ Boaz could be labeled as an ectype that stands between the original *go'el* redemption and Jesus's redemption. David Schrock defines ectypes as "intermediate types that stand between the original type and Christ." David Schrock, "What Designates a Valid Type? A Christotelic, Covenantal Proposal," *Southeastern Theological Review* 5.1 (2014): 23.

⁸⁴ Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 462.