

The Women of Matthew 1

George Booker



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Published by

The Christadelphian Tidings Publishing Company
567 Astorian Drive, Simi Valley, CA 93065 USA
www.tidings.org

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ISBN 9798392793969

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INTRODUCTION

We begin with what might seem like a rather difficult (and unpromising) section of Scripture. It is surely difficult. What brother, doing a Sunday morning reading, wants to be assigned the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17? But "unpromising"? *Never!* It is, as we shall see, one of the *most* promising portions of the Bible!

Are genealogies important? Well, they are to me if they are mine! And they are to you if they are yours! Furthermore, all Bible genealogies are important because they deal with God's people, and their families. Families are terribly important because it is, most often, through them that truths, hopes, and values are passed along from one generation to the next. Genealogies also serve to establish rights of inheritance. Land, property, and other assets are passed along from parents to children and grandchildren.

And this genealogy in Matthew 1 is very important because it is the genealogy (at least one genealogy) of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Generation of Jesus Christ

One of the most marvelous verses in the whole Bible is Matthew 1:1:

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (KJV).

In the NIV, this is: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...." The Greek word, which is translated as "record," is literally *biblos* (Bible). Reading further, it is: "the Bible of the genesis" or "the Bible of a new creation". This new "book" with a new beginning is pointing to a new "creation" – a spiritual creation that culminates in Jesus Christ!

Think about Matthew 1:1 for a minute. There it sits, at the very beginning of the New Testament. Anybody can find it, and anybody can remember where it is. It is neither necessary to search the

memory banks for this verse nor flip through pages, muttering, “Now, where was that verse?”

When you think about Matthew 1:1, this is pretty much *the* beginning of the Bible for many people – people who may say, “I don’t bother much with the Old Testament, of course. There’s too much dull history and lists of names. The New Testament is all I need.”

Let us therefore look at the message of this single verse that lies at the very crossroads of the Bible. This single verse is the bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. It is breathtaking! Here, at the very beginning — the jumping-off place — of the New Testament, the reader is actually directed to look back at the Old Testament. “Stop! Wait just a minute. Proceed no further until you look back and understand why it is important that Jesus Christ is the son of Abraham and the son of David.”

Right away, the reader will be introduced to the promises — resurrection and eternal life on the earth, the Kingdom of God, the throne of David, and the Second Coming of Jesus. These are some of the most positive and fundamental teachings of the Bible.

And, if you have a memory like a sieve, or you can’t remember a single thing under pressure, how do you get to those promises? Alongside Matthew 1:1 in your Bible margin, simply write:

- Abraham: Genesis 12 and Genesis 13 (and Galatians 3:16, 27-29 if you want to be adventurous); and
- David: 2 Samuel 7 (and maybe Isaiah 9:6, 7 and Luke 1:31-33)

Now you are off and running!

Overview

Matthew 1 traces Jesus’ lineage forward from Abraham through to David. It emphasizes the great Jewish covenants and the progression of God’s purpose, finally fulfilled in Jesus, who is the seed of Abraham and the king of Israel.

Both David and Abraham received the promises of God with faith and joy (Matt 22:43; John 8:56). As Harry Whittaker wrote in his book, *Enjoying the Bible*: “How they would have rejoiced to read this ‘dull’

chapter!"¹

Think of the analogy of a wealthy family (this analogy is actually used in Galatians 4). All the children receive a generous "inheritance" (or at least their share is laid up in trusts or the like for their use at a later date). But the children, as they grow up, also willingly and eagerly go to work in the family business, doing their own part to help the family enterprise to grow and make wise and prudent decisions about the "investments" of the company, not just for themselves, but especially for their own children and grandchildren.

Here in Matthew 1 is a lengthy list of names, a list that can be very dull to read. But if we make the genealogy personal, it comes alive. Read the genealogy as though it were your own family history. It is! "For if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed (Gal 3:26-29), and heirs according to the promises" (Gal 3:16, 27-29).

When read that way, the boring list is immensely exciting. You suddenly discover that you are an heir to a vast inheritance — the whole world in fact (Gen 13:14, 15; Rom 4:13; 2 Sam 7:12-16) through an obscure branch of the family tree that you never knew about before. Just think: if you learned of this possible inheritance, with what excitement would you read and re-read that "dull", "dry" list of names, just to be sure that it did, in fact, lead finally to you? And then how eagerly and seriously would you go to work at the family's enterprise, knowing that one day it would all belong to you!

Forty-two Generations

There are forty-two generations in the list of Matthew 1 — three groups of 14 each.

The total of forty-two is actually an artificial or contrived number. At least four generations are skipped by Matthew. Three generations are between Joram and Uzziah (Matt 1:8): Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah are probably passed over because they are the seed of the wicked Athaliah (possibly a daughter of Jezebel) and because they proved true to their heritage. It is perhaps not surprising that each of these three died a violent death. The fourth exclusion is Jehoiakim, who fits between Josiah and Jeconiah (Matt. 1:11) — and is perhaps omitted because he was appointed king by the Pharaoh of Egypt and not by

¹ H.A. Whittaker, *Enjoying the Bible* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1970)

God. The use of an artificial or contrived number suggests intentionality, and thus a couple of questions are raised.

The First: Why 42?

- a) There were 42 stations/camps in the wilderness (Num 33), which points to a complete journey from Egypt (the land of darkness) to Israel (the land of promise).
- b) Prophetically, there are 42 periods of tribulation and affliction (time, times, and half a time = 12 months plus 24 months plus 6 months, or 42 "months") (Rev 11:2; 12:6; 13:5; and cp. Dan 12:7,11) until the coming of the Kingdom.

Thus, 42 might represent a full and complete cycle from death to life, from exile to the kingdom, and from darkness to light. Most especially in this case, 42 could represent a cycle from the first great promise to the wonderful, final fulfillment of that promise: "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he was glad." (John 8:56)

The Second: Why Three Groups of 14?

First of all, and simply doubling 14 days was the lunar cycle of 28 days – the waxing and waning (the growth and the decline) of the moon's light. So 42 days would be one and one half cycles:

- a) the first 14 "days" (waxing, to fullness): up to David — the Kingdom of God given; then
- b) the next 14 "days" (waning, decline): from David to Jeconiah — the Kingdom of God taken away; and finally
- c) from Jeconiah to Jesus Christ — the Kingdom of God was restored and increased to its fullness again!

One other significant 14: On the 14th day of the first month, the Passover was slain (Exod 12:6). The last and greatest king of Israel, Jesus himself, must first be the Passover lamb, slain on the 14th day!

One other point: Even though there are supposed to be 42 generations in this list, I challenge you to find those 42 true generations!

Let's take a look: Start with verse 2, and count. If Abraham is #1, then

we begin to count: Isaac #2, Jacob #3, etc., and David (at the end of the first cycle) is #14. So far, so good.

Now start the second cycle. But you can't count David again. He was #14; he can't be #15 also. So Solomon must be #15... and then... counting, etc.... we come to Jeconiah (at the end of the second cycle), who is #28. Still okay.

Now we start the third cycle. But you can't count Jeconiah again either. He was #28; he can't be #29 too. So Salathiel, or Shealtiel (NIV), must be #29... and we continue counting... etc... So the third cycle: If Shealtiel is #29... then we count again... and — here's the surprise! — Jesus is... #41!

Now I'm fairly certain I (we) didn't make a mistake. We didn't leave anyone out, we didn't count extraneous names, and we didn't count anyone twice... and there are only 41 generations. What do we make of this?

How does Matthew (the inspired writer of this Gospel) arrive at 42? A couple of possible answers:

1. Jesus is 41st, and Christ is 42nd — being "born" twice — the first time from Mary's womb, and the second time being his "birth" from the tomb!

Or, even better...

2. Perhaps "Jesus" alone is #41, and the multitudinous "Christ" is the 42nd and last generation, the "seed" of Isaiah 53:10,11, and the "generation" of Psalm 22:31 — all of those believers given life through him!

Thus...

All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. and... if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed [Matt 1:1-2], and heirs according to the promise! (Gal 3:27-29).

This is your genealogy too!

And how can this be that we all may be made a part of Jesus' genealogy and heir to all the promises that were fulfilled through him?

The answer is also here in Matthew 1, this time in verses 20 and 21, where an angel of the LORD tells Joseph in a dream:

Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "He who will save"!] because... **he will save his people from their sins.**

This profound statement comes at the end of the genealogy, very significantly. We have seen a brief list of "his people", and we are being reminded that — whatever their sins... and they were many — they, Jesus' ancestors, will be saved from their sins through the sacrifice of this descendant of theirs!

Not only will the redemptive work of Jesus Christ be efficacious for those who come after him— those who are baptized into his name, thus becoming the greater spiritual "seed of Abraham"; but also, it will be so powerful that its influence will reach back in time, to the very beginning, to all those men and women — ancestors and otherwise — who looked forward in faith to the One who was to come — the Messiah. They believed that, when he finally came, he would be of the human race. Essentially, he would be one with *all mankind*, but especially he would belong to Israel and the royal line of Judah. Through him, their faith in him and the God who had promised them such wonderful blessings, they would be saved from their vile bodies, their grossest sins, and their lives of falling short — and they would be made, or remade, fresh and new, and perfect and immortal. For they were... "*his people*"! Because of their faith, they belonged to him and thus to his God and Father.

Five Special Women

This then becomes our starting point to review the lives of the five women who are mentioned in this genealogy — Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and (last and most extraordinary of all) Mary, the mother of Jesus.

What makes them special? Or, to put it another way (and since Mary is quite obviously necessary for the story itself), why these first four in particular? And why not Sarah... or Rebekah... or Leah? (Surely they — if no others — were more important to the line of Abraham than the ones who *are* mentioned.)

Some points are worth noting:

1. Of the four women, three were Gentiles — and the fourth (Bathsheba) was, initially, the wife of a Gentile (Uriah the Hittite).
2. Quite significantly, all were guilty (or at least presumed "guilty") of serious sins involving sexual matters — sins like incest, adultery, prostitution, and fornication. Every one of these sins would throw shadows upon the lineage (and legitimacy) of their sons. This would, in turn, cast doubt upon their seeds' "right" of inheritance; this is implied in a passage that is all about inheritance!
3. All these women would have "secrets" in their lives, and thus, through them, Judah (the royal family of all Israel) would have skeletons in its closet as well! Shouldn't they have been hidden away — like the crazy old aunt in the attic — and never mentioned in proper society again? But here, in the beginning of the New Testament, where Jesus himself is being introduced, these family "embarrassments" are brought front and center for all to see! "He will save *his people* from *their sins*" (Matt 1:25). As if to say, 'No question! If Jesus can save *this questionable bunch* from their sins, then he can surely save you and me!'
4. Finally, this genealogy would remind its readers of some of the biggest questions of all — the ones involving Mary and Joseph and the conception, birth, and ancestry of Jesus! (But the exploration of those questions will have to wait until later.)

All this suggests that when God intervenes in the affairs of a sinful man when He sends His Son to perform the greatest work which He could ever arrange, then... certain assumptions and certain "truths" may be turned upside down! First of all, the greatest "righteousness" (the sort that wears white robes and dwells in palaces and temples) may be shown for what it is — *sin*! And then, the greatest "sins" (real or imagined) may become, by God's grace and the covering which His Son provides — the only true *righteousness*:

"For he [God] hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin;

that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5:21 KJV)."

"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3 KJV).

Jesus was conceived and born in human flesh — he was a man. He was tempted in all points like his brothers. He was a possessor of "sinful flesh", or "flesh of sin" — born into a family of sinners, and himself was accused of the most dreadful sins. Yet he did **not** commit sin, and thus his life, death, and resurrection marked the most marvelous victory imaginable over the flesh, sin, and death. This was something no angel could have done, but it was what a perfect man, a man of faith — who was also the Son of God — could do.

And this is also part of our story.

CHAPTER ONE

Tamar (Genesis 38)

"Judah [became] the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar."

(Matt 1:3)

The little we know of Tamar is found in Genesis 38.

In contrast to the righteous Joseph (Gen 37; 39), Judah voluntarily left his family and then went to live with the Canaanites. Unlike Joseph, he chose to associate with the world, which was the beginning of all his problems (Gen 38:1).

Then he married a Canaanite (v 2), just as his uncle Esau had done. Like Esau, he seemingly despised his "birthright". (Notice: there is no conversion story for his wife — she apparently remained outside the Abrahamic covenant.)

"Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar" (v 6). For the first time, Tamar entered the story, being married to Judah's son. She certainly seemed to be a Canaanite since these were the people with which Judah was living (v 1, 2).

After some time, the wicked Er died (v 7-9). Then his brother Onan slept with Tamar to raise up seed for his dead brother, according to the Levirate law (Deut 25:5-10). This is the first time we are told of the kinsman-redeemer provision being invoked.² But Onan avoided giving her the "seed" by which she could conceive. He disregarded his father, his brother, and Tamar, treating her as an object for his lust and nothing else.

Onan also died as the object of God's wrath (v 10).

² See Appendix: The *Gaal*, or "Kinsman-redeemer"

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For Tamar, she had the sorrow of bereavement twice at an early age, but it seemed that her character was developed through trials.

Then she realized that she was being neglected and ignored by Judah, her father-in-law: "Why has he forgotten me?"

Judah was now afraid to give his third son Shelah to Tamar, according to the Law (v 11). He sent Tamar back to her father's house for a long time, describing this time as "until my son grows up", which seemed to be equivalent to dismissing her altogether. It was as if he said, "I want nothing to do with you at all!" Thus, Judah neglected the need to perpetuate Abraham's "seed".

But... here is a key:

Tamar the Canaanite was much more concerned about the covenant seed (and evidently, about the covenant promises) than was Judah, the son of Jacob!

After a long time Judah's wife also died (v 12). The "long time" meant Judah had no intention of giving his third son to Tamar. Since his wife had died also, it seemed there were no more children to be had.

When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law has gone up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she had seen that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. When Judah saw her, he thought that she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. He turned to her at the roadside, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law (v 13-16).

In the second case of hidden identity in the family history of Abraham (compare Genesis 29), Tamar played the part of a harlot. Since it was not in her nature to do such a thing, she forced herself to behave in such a manner. Nevertheless, she risked being treated as a prostitute, and thus she put her own life on the line in order to secretly perpetuate the family line of the Promised Seed.

By doing this, Tamar took upon herself the shame of presumed sin. What an example for us. And especially, what an example for Jesus too — when he looked back to contemplate the stories of his ancestors!

We see quite a contrast here: Judah sought to satisfy himself in sin, while unbeknownst to him, Tamar was seeking a promised seed.

As payment for her "services", Tamar had the foresight to ask for a

pledge which at a later time might provide evidence of the intercourse between Judah and herself. The pledge consisted of a signet ring, a bracelet ("cord": NIV), and a staff (v 16-18).

These belongings would be the ancient Middle East equivalent of a person's identification, something like a driver's license and major credit cards.

- a) The signet ring was the means by which a wealthy man gave his guarantee — i.e., a seal in soft wax that would harden and mark a paper or letter as coming from him.
- b) The staff might have had an insignia or other mark by which Judah himself could be identified.
- c) Especially, there were the "bracelets" or "cord" (from the Hebrew root word "pathal", meaning to entwine or wrap around). This possession will become very significant later.

In giving up his identity to the prostitute, Judah became like Esau — who sold his birthright for a meager supper!

"So Judah slept with her, and she became pregnant by him" (v 18). Right after this, the woman disappeared... We shall call this "The Mystery of the Vanishing Prostitute".

Several months later, when Judah found out that Tamar was pregnant, he professed great righteousness and demanded she be killed for disgracing his family (v 24).

Verses 25-26: *Who is righteous, and who isn't?* Tamar used Judah's own property to prove he was the father of her children. Judah's sin was unmasked, and her righteous (if rather unorthodox) plan — to preserve and perpetuate the royal lineage of Abraham through Judah — was revealed. Judah could only confess, "She is more righteous than I."

Verses 27-30: The midwife took a scarlet "cord, or thread" (cp. v 18: the "cord" of Judah!) to mark the firstborn. Quite possibly, this was the same "cord" Judah had given her nine months earlier — an emblem by which the royal family of Judah could be identified.

Here are the first mentions of "the scarlet thread" of the house of Judah. It will be seen again and hinted at again and again as we continue through the story of this family of Jesus. It seems to signify the legitimacy of one's ancestry and one's claim to property and other rights of inheritance. It is even possible that — like a Scottish clan tartan — the pattern and scarlet color became part of a fabric, a flag or

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ensign, or a special garment. These would mark out the family of Judah forever. This is not the last we shall see of the "scarlet thread" of Judah.

Though the story is brief, Tamar comes across as a righteous and far-sighted woman. Even though a Gentile, she saw the promises afar off, was persuaded by them, and embraced them (Heb 11:13). She did what it took to associate herself with them. By her faith in action, she shared in Judah's inheritance, although he conceded it rather reluctantly at first. Here, the Gentile is clearly seen to have greater faith than the Jew.

Judah's loss of two of his three sons is restored by the birth of twins through the Gentile Tamar. Thus, in the future, the loss of two-thirds of Israel in the last great tribulation (see Zech. 13:8) will be made up by Christ's Gentile bride!

This incident seemed to change Judah's overall attitude and conduct. The effect could be seen in his response to his brother Joseph. Whereas earlier in life, Judah had been foremost in selling Joseph into slavery (Gen 37:26-28), he now began to see that Joseph was more righteous than he. In his later dealings with Joseph, Judah seemed to take the lead again, but this time he took the lead in confessing and seeking Joseph's forgiveness for himself and for his brothers (Gen 44:14-16). Also, Tamar may have been the means by which Judah was reminded of the wonderful inheritance he himself had in the promises to Abraham! And so he was prepared to repent and seek the protection of Joseph, who became *his* "Kinsman-redeemer".

Lesson

As for Tamar, there is perhaps a little New Testament echo of her firmness of faith, resolve, and refusal to be turned aside from claiming her inheritance in Abraham. In Matthew 15:22-28 we read:

A Canaanite woman **[like Tamar]**... came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away **[like Judah sent Tamar away]**, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." **[And you... why, you are just a Canaanite!]** The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread **[the inheritance of Abraham!]** and toss it to their **[Gentile]** dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs **[such as I]** can eat the crumbs that

fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! ***[greater than that of these Jews here]***. Your request is granted..."

Gentiles we may be, but like Tamar and the Canaanite woman, we know that even the "breadcrumbs" of Abraham's inheritance are worth more than the greatest banquet the "world" can provide!

We should never become discouraged because we have failed to do the right thing or because we have fallen miserably into a pit of sin. As long as there is life, there is hope. The communication network between ourselves and our God in heaven is always open, and all calls to Him are accepted. The Lord Jesus Christ is manning the telephone system — or should we say: the heavenly internet? Either way, everything is in perfect working order, 24-7!

CHAPTER TWO

Rahab (Joshua 2; 6)

*"Salmon [became] the father of Boaz, whose mother was **Rahab**."*
(Matt 1:5)

The story of Rahab is found primarily in Joshua 2 and 6:

The two Israelite spies went to Jericho and entered the house of Rahab, the "prostitute" (Josh 2:1). The Hebrew word "zanah" is the ordinary word meaning "prostitute" or "harlot". It is also used for Tamar in Genesis 38:15, 24.

There should be no question about this word. But a number of writers—including Josephus, the rabbis, and certain Christian commentators—have taken pains trying to show that Rahab was an innkeeper and not a harlot. The well-respected Bible commentator Arthur Pink, in his desire to escape the stigma attached to the word, states that Rahab was an "ex-harlot" and that at the time of the spies' visit, she had reformed. His actual words are: "not that she was still plying her evil trade, but that formerly she had been a woman of ill fame, the stigma of which still clung to her."³ However, there is no verse in Scripture to support such a statement. Rahab is referred to as a prostitute, or harlot, in the New Testament also—by the writer to the Hebrews and by James (See Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25; in these references, the Greek "porne" is used, from which is derived the English word "pornography").

The question for us is, why should anyone bother trying to deny the fact of Rahab's profession? If our tendency is in that direction, then we should perhaps remember the Pharisees, who would not associate with anyone whom they considered to be a "sinner". Unfortunately for them, this set up a barrier between them and the man Jesus, for Jesus was not afraid of those who were despised by the society of the first

³ A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in Joshua* (n.p. n.d.)

century. One expositor writes of Rahab:

Here dwells an unfortunate woman. She has had no spiritual advantages — no Sabbaths, no Scriptures, no teachers — and yet in the base atmosphere of a Jericho, in the heart of that poor harlot, like a fair pearl that lies within a rough shell among the weeds and rocks at the bottom of the sea, there is found precious faith; faith that finds utterance in a good confession (v 11). Here is encouragement for those who are called, in the providence of God, to [preach] where worldliness and frivolity, and pride and bitter opposition to the truth prevail. Here too, is encouragement for those who [preach] in uncouth regions, where sin and ignorance seem to shut out hope of blessing. Let missionaries and visitors in alleys and courts, in attics and cellars, which seem like nests of blasphemy and impurity, take heart. The unholy atmosphere of gin palaces, and even of houses like that in which Joshua's spies sought refuge, cannot... nullify the Gospel message.⁴

Rahab and the Spies

Probably the two spies met her at a well outside the city walls, entering the city gate in her company (as many others had done) so as not to arouse suspicion. Only later would they discover that she, of all Jericho, had faith in the God of Israel. But others suspected these men of being Jews or were, at any rate, suspicious of any strangers in the area because of the nearness of the people of Israel. And so Rahab was determined to save these men, even if it meant telling a dangerous lie to the king of Jericho himself (v 2-3).

Lying is always a sin (Lev 19:11; Eph 4:25; Prov 12:22). Rahab is praised for her great faith in befriending Israel (Heb 11:31; James 2:25), but not for lying.

A case may be made that, in very limited circumstances, some exceptions to this general rule may be tolerated. For example:

- a) The Jewish midwives lied about the delivery times of Jewish mothers, so as to save the lives of some babies from Pharaoh's soldiers (Exod 1).
- b) During a battle, the Jewish army pretended to retreat from Ai but set an ambush to attack the fighting men of Ai when they came out of the city to pursue the fleeing army (Josh 8).

⁴ G.W. Butler, The Biblical Illustrator
(www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/tbi/joshua-2.html)

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- c) Hushai's profession of allegiance to Absalom (2 Sam 16) was a lie too, but apparently allowable because a state of war existed.
- d) In modern times, many people living in Europe lied about their Jewish neighbors' whereabouts while they hid them in their own attics or basements in hopes of protecting them from the murderous Nazis.

Only later (Josh 2:9) did the spies discover that Rahab believed in the God of Israel. This was when she came to them on the roof where they were sleeping and told them: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you" (v 9). In saying this, she demonstrated faith that God would fulfill His promises.

She continued to say: "We have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt" (v 10). But this had been 40 years before, while Rahab probably wasn't even 40 years old. From whom had she heard? Her parents, perhaps? And so she begged for their lives to be spared also (v 12-13).

"As soon as we [the people of Jericho] heard [what the Lord God did to Israel's previous enemies on the other side of Jordan], our hearts melted within us". That is, "our courage failed." To this, she added, "For the Lord your God *is* God in heaven above, and on earth below." Here is, for Rahab at least, an absolute profession of faith in the One True God, the God of Israel!

Such a profession was apparently made by the family of Rahab only out of all the families of Jericho. In cultures and among people who believed in a multitude of "little gods", their profession of one unique and great God was the most significant statement of faith. Why do **we** believe? Because of what the One True God has done for His people Israel.

In verses 12 and 13, Rahab begged for mercy when the Israelites came (as they surely will) into their own Promised Land: "Remember *me, and my family!*" Her plea was pathetically like that of the thief on the cross: "Lord, remember *me* when you come into your Kingdom!" (Luke 23:42). In fact, her whole profession of faith was very much like his — although she was a prostitute, and he was a thief (and perhaps a murderer).

Both statements of faith recognize that God's people will receive His great and precious promises and that those promises involve a special Land and a special Kingdom. In short, they accepted "the gospel (good

news) of the Kingdom of God".

There have been others whose sins, though great, were forgiven... and other "murderers" who found mercy in time of need. Some of them are also among the Lord Jesus Christ's "own people" here in the genealogy of Matthew 1 and also among us today. We should never close the door, or turn a cold shoulder, to some seeker of God because we are "offended" by his past life, the way she dresses, or the way he talks. "Whom God can cleanse, you must not call common or unclean" (Acts 10:15).

Rahab's house was within the wall (Josh 2:15). Archaeologists tell us the walls of Jericho were approximately 20 feet wide, and houses or apartments called "casemates" were built inside the walls. Some of these houses had windows that were accessible from the outside of the city but at a considerable height above the ground.

In verses 15 and 16, Rahab lowered the spies down from her window by a rope and told them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you" (v 16). This would be to the west, the opposite direction from the camp of Israel. Presumably, they were to hide there until their pursuers went off in the wrong direction.

The Mystery of the Scarlet Cord

Verses 17-18 show the unraveling of a mystery step by step. Where have we seen a scarlet cord (or thread) before?

- a) Genesis 38:18: Judah gave Tamar a cord (a part of a garment?) as a token of his identity.
- b) Genesis 38:28: The midwife (at Tamar's direction?) used a scarlet cord to identify the firstborn of Tamar's twins — i.e., the one who will receive the birthright.
- c) And now, a **scarlet** cord is used to identify Rahab's house, and her family, for special protection. Clearly, this is reminiscent of the Passover in Egypt, where the scarlet blood of the Passover lamb marked the doors of the Israelite houses.

"Cord" here (actually, "line" in the KJV) is the Hebrew word *tiqvah*, the same word for "hope". *Tiqvah* is a word used often with the hope of having children (esp. Ruth 1:12-13), and the hope, placed in future generations, that they will carry on and fulfill the aspirations of their parents and grandparents.

Ha Tiqvah ("The Hope") is the national anthem of the State of Israel.

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Today, the Israelis sing...

While yet within the heart, inwardly,
The soul of the Jew yearns,
And towards the vistas of the East, eastward,
An eye looks toward Zion...
Our hope is not yet lost,
The hope born of two thousand years,
To be a free people in our land,
In the land of Zion and Jerusalem,
To be a free people in our land,
In the land of Zion and Jerusalem.

For us, who are the spiritual "Israel" of God, our hope is not lost either, so long as our eyes look eastward toward Zion and look upward, expectantly, for the Coming One — the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. *Tiqvah* is from the root, meaning to twist, to bend, and thus to tie together. To have hope in another is to attach or tie oneself to that person. To have hope in God is to tie oneself to Him and trust in Him, no matter what happens. *Tiqvah* expresses a shared hope in the fulfillment of God's special promises, fulfilled in and by the Messiah of the tribe of Judah. This *tiqvah* binds together husbands and wives and parents and children.

The "scarlet cord" of Judah, like a Scottish clan tartan or a royal crest, marks out the family as special. Its possession, its integration into one's garments, or its use on a flag or ensign flown from a house marks out the bearer or holder as *belonging* — belonging to the royal family. It demonstrates legitimacy, property rights, and ultimate inheritance. Such an emblem, or family crest, is never cherished so much as when the royalty to which it points is unrecognized, and as yet unfulfilled, in the eyes of the world! Then it is a very special hope indeed. This was the "scarlet cord" of Judah.

The Mystery of the Hidden Lovers

Here is one of the great hidden "love stories" of the Bible. Some sleuthing and some detective work are required to bring it to light.

First of all, what do we know for sure?

- ☐ One of the two spies (who are unnamed in the narrative) gives Rahab a "scarlet cord".
- ☐ This scarlet cord was clearly visible from outside the city walls

of Jericho, easily recognizable by the Israelites, and like the Passover blood on the doorposts in Egypt, guaranteed protection to the householders.

- When the great trumpets of war sounded (cp. Rev 8:2, 6), and the walls of the great city fell down, Joshua sent the two spies back to rescue Rahab and her whole family (Josh 6:20-25).
- "And [Rahab] lives among the Israelites to this day" (Josh 6:25).
- And finally, in Matthew 1:5: Rahab married Salmon, the prince of the house of Judah.

Here's what we don't know for sure. Put in the form of questions, the answers become quite reasonable:

1. ***Was Salmon one of the spies?*** Possible answer: the earlier (12) spies sent into the Land, at the beginning of the 40 years were the princes of the tribes (Num 3:2, 3). So, was a similar method used at this later time? But which tribal princes would be sent this time? Since Judah's prince (Caleb) and Ephraim's prince (Joshua) were the only two to bring back a good report at that earlier time, why shouldn't these two later spies come from the same tribes? And if so, then the prince of the tribe of Judah was almost certainly Salmon!
2. ***Did Salmon (the great-great-great-grandson of Judah and Tamar) carry with him the ancestral garment (with the scarlet cord) that marked him as the heir and leader of the tribe of Judah?*** Answer: Why not?
3. ***Was this, then, the scarlet cord he gave to Rahab to protect her life?*** Answer: Again, why not?

So... after the victory was won and the Land was liberated, then the prince Salmon married Rahab, the woman with whom he'd fallen in love. Thus the former prostitute became the princess of the tribe of Judah and an ancestor of the royal line. She left her old way of life, had faith in the God of Israel, and grasped the scarlet cord offered by the prince of Judah. That cord, taken in faith, became her "Passover", her "covering blood", which bound her forever to the Hope of Israel.

Here is our hidden love story with a wonderful ending. Rahab is a harlot no longer, and her sins are forgiven. Like Tamar, another "Gentile", Rahab of Jericho became a Jew by faith in the promises, a bride, and a mother in Israel. She and her children are bound up in the

scarlet cord of shared hopes which binds one generation to the next.

Lessons

Acts 10:34-35: "God does not show favoritism but accepts men [and women] from every nation who fear him and do what is right."

Hebrews 11:31: "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." In the great "faith chapter", the harlot Rahab occupies a place of honor right next to Moses (Heb 11:23-29). She is justified by her faith.

James 2:25: "In the same way [as Abraham: v 23], was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" In James' letter, the harlot Rahab occupies another place of honor, right after Abraham (James 2:21-24), the man of faith and the friend of God. And here, she is justified by her works! What exalted company Rahab keeps!

Prostitutes: Tamar (by a one-time circumstance and by appearances) and Rahab (by a longstanding lifestyle) were "prostitutes". They also symbolize the nation of Israel. They were like Israel of old (Ezek 16) and like Israel of today — seeking lovers (political alliances) rather than the true God. But repentance and faith demonstrated by works rights all wrongs. "These are my people," says the Lord Jesus. "I will save them from their sins!" And he will say it yet again when he returns.

Is there an echo of this story in the New Testament? How about John 4? There, in John 4, was a woman whom Jesus, the prince of the tribe of Judah, met by a well outside a city. It appeared that her life was far from pure and holy: she had had five husbands, and the man she was living with then was not her husband. But this Samaritan woman — suspicious, jaded, calloused by sin — was intrigued, challenged, convicted, taught, won over, and converted by a Jewish Savior. In listening to him, she came to understand that "salvation is [only] from the Jews" (John 4:22). She drank from him, the spring of water welling up to eternal life. Her life was changed forever.

Was This Trip Necessary?

Was the spies' visit to Jericho necessary? Evidently, God had already planned that the walls of the city would fall down, and Israel would

overwhelm the city. So why did the spies need to go there? The answer is plain: for the sole purpose of finding Rahab and her family. The royal family of Judah depended on their visit. The lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ would not have been complete without Rahab.

The worst of sinners, and the most degraded of persons, may be a living stone essential to the building of God's holy eternal temple. Do we believe this? Let us be careful how we judge others. Can we ever assume that any particular person is not quite the type God wants? Or do we sometimes decide that a particular person is not quite the sort of person we want? Who are we to discriminate? Who are we to judge another man's servant?

"Show kindness to me" (Josh 2:12): Like Rahab, each one of us will have an occasion, one time or another, to plead: "Show kindness to me!" We may never have kept a house of prostitution. We may never have entered such a house. But in the hidden rooms of our "hearts", we have played out wicked thoughts and committed terrible sins. "Lord, deal kindly with each of us" (Ruth 1:8). "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Hebrews 13:2: "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." The two spies were "angels", or "messengers", sent from Joshua — and ultimately God — to find the woman Rahab. In this context, compare with Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Rahab's bed was anything but pure, and there was every reason to expect that she would be judged and condemned, along with a city destined to be utterly destroyed. But the God of Israel sees beyond the surface. The "sexually immoral" may be forgiven. And their marriage beds may be made "honorable". From such beds came the ancestors of the Messiah. From such beds, even today, may come future "kings and priests" and "a holy nation"!

Not a single one of us has a true claim to being holy, honorable, and pure. But Jesus Christ, our spiritual husband, loved us so much that he laid down his life, shed his scarlet blood, and tied us to himself by a cord of blood, suffering, and sacrifice. He bought us from "Sin" and bound us to himself by the nails that bound him to the cross. In faith and hope, we are bound to him, and in love, he has cleansed us from sin so that we may be holy and pure in his sight.

Our Lord says this to us, not so much in actual words, but in the spirit of his life: "I don't care where you came from or what you did. I care

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only that you love me! Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of my hands... you are my signet ring... you are my treasured possession... you belong to me! Follow me!"

Paul captured this spirit when he wrote, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless"* (Eph 5:25-27).

Thanks be to God — and His Son — for this indescribable gift!

CHAPTER THREE

Ruth (Ruth 1-4)

*"Boaz [became] the father of Obed, whose mother was **Ruth**."*
(Matt 1:5)

The story of Ruth is set "in the days when the judges ruled" and "there was no king in Israel" (Judg 17:6). There are two possible meanings here:

1. that there was no human king at this early stage — as we know; or
2. that the Lord God — who should have been considered the true king of Israel — was not respected as king.

Thus it was a time of great wickedness, both institutionally and individually.

The story of Ruth presents an excellent example of personal faith in the midst of a society in which indifference and wickedness prevailed. In contrast to most of the period of the Judges, this is a story of ordinary people going about quiet lives in a quiet corner of history. Yet they are — some by birth, and others by character — the "unrecognized royalty" of Israel.

Verse 2

In a time of great trial due to a famine in Israel, Elimelech and Naomi left the Land of Promise. Their departure was a step toward falling away from the Lord God, with sad consequences. It began as a downward spiral: they sojourned in Moab briefly, then they decided to remain there, and finally, their sons married Moabite women (Ruth 1:1-2).

Moab was a land of idolatry. Though close in distance to Bethlehem (30 miles), it was remote in mind. The irony is that Elimelech and

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Naomi, with their two sons, went to Moab to prosper and to be safe. Instead, in Moab, all the men die, and the women are reduced to poverty.

Is this a punishment? The Bible does not say so specifically, though we might be driven to that conclusion by the circumstances. Yet, even if the story describes a serious failure of character, along with a series of bad life decisions, nevertheless, out of the failures and sins, God can bring great good. He can, by His wondrous providence, bring salvation and the furtherance of His purpose on earth. What a great God we worship!

At this point, Naomi learns that while Moab was suffering famine, the land of Israel was prospering, and there was food there. Ironically, there was grain and thus bread in her hometown of Bethlehem, a name which signified “the house of bread”.

Naomi had endured great hardship and terrible loss in Moab, but she still believed in the God of Israel and found solace in the hope that He would save her and her family. There is a thin line between despair and faith, death and life, and anger with a God who brings (or allows) suffering... and trusting in a God who chastens His children. Naomi stood on that line and looked both ways... and she chose to return home. Despite her trials, she chose faith and life and placed her trust in the Lord. Like the “prodigal son” who went to a far land and was beset with troubles, Naomi, the old woman, can also echo the words of the young man: ‘In my father’s house there is food in abundance; why do I remain here in the land of the Gentiles?’

Verses 7-14

Naomi offered her daughters-in-law the chance to stay in Moab or go with their mother-in-law to her homeland of Israel. At this, the two young women wept. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and left (v 7-14). But Ruth clung to Naomi, replying: “Please don’t urge me to leave you” (v 14-17).

The depth of our conviction must be measured not just by our intellectual grasp of the gospel but also by what we are prepared to let go of. Orpah had been willing to *go* to Israel but not to “*let go*” of Moab. Bethlehem was in her eye, but Moab was still in her heart. As it was with Lot’s wife, who turned her eyes and her thoughts back to Sodom and lost her opportunity, Orpah’s heart pulled her back to Moab. So she returned there to Moab, the land of false gods, false hopes, and

ultimately death.

Like Naomi and Orpah, Ruth also stood at a crossroads, looking both ways. What would she choose? The rest of her life hung in the balance. Ruth replied: "Don't urge me to leave you. Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." Ruth chose Naomi's life and Naomi's God. She chose an unseen land and an unseen God.

Ruth's words are an echo of the great Abrahamic promise — perhaps the greatest of promises:

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God. (Gen 17:7-8)

Ruth knew that even Abraham, the father of all the faithful, was an "alien" coming to a strange land, as she was about to do. She knew that the God who offered him everlasting possession of that Land would offer it to her as well. Ruth sold all that she had to "buy" these promises, and thereby she showed that, despite her Moabitish roots, she was a "daughter" of Abraham by faith. "Where you die, there I will die, and there I will be buried..." — she might well have added: "And there I will be raised up again!"

Compare this with the words of Jesus. Many people had been following him and listening to his teachings. He had multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed the multitude. But then, in John 6, Jesus began to tell them some very hard sayings. Gradually, then in increasing numbers, his followers began to leave him. So, with his closest disciples near him, he asked them: "Will you go away?" (like Orpah did?) But, along with Peter, the apostles reply: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" (John 6:66-68). Is there any real choice... no matter how hard the road is?

Along with Naomi, Ruth now set out on the last leg of her journey. Abraham had been called to leave (a) his country, (b) his people, and (c) his father's house (Gen 12:1). Like Abraham, Ruth had already left:

- ☐ her father's house (when she married Mahlon)
- ☐ her people (by converting to worship the God of Israel), and finally,
- ☐ her country (Moab) to go to a new country.

Ruth the Moabitess

An important question is suggested by Deuteronomy 23:3: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation." Was this a problem? Consider the possible explanations:

- ☐ Ruth, being a "convert", was now no longer a Moabite.
- ☐ The restriction of the Law applied only to males.
- ☐ Ruth was, more or less, the 11th generation from Moses — a real stretch and a rather artificial and legalistic "answer".
- ☐ Or... (by the way, I like this one best): The Lord God of Israel was (and is?) prepared to make an exception even to His own Law for one who truly believed in Him! The Law of faith is greater than the Law of exclusion! Are there other Biblical examples of this? Do we believe God can do this? Is it wrong to believe that God can do this?

Later, the specter of Deuteronomy 23:3 (and some of these related questions) may have occupied the minds of the people of Bethlehem: Boaz, and the unnamed near-kinsman, as we shall see.

Several days' journey brought Naomi and Ruth home to Bethlehem. The women of Bethlehem asked: "Is this the Naomi we once knew?" There had been a great change, due to her sufferings and her bereavements in the land of Moab (v 19-23).

Naomi (which signifies: "pleasant") says, "Call me *Mara*" — meaning bitter. Her trials had left her bitter, but she had *not* abandoned her faith. Life is full of startling developments. Out of her sorrow, there would come — surprisingly soon — new beauty and joy and life. Wait and see!

We can almost hear an echo of Israel's history: The Jews stood on the shores of the Red Sea, literally "between the devil [Pharaoh] and the deep blue sea". Then God told Moses, and Moses told the people, "Stand still! And see the salvation of the LORD!" Sometimes all we can do is stand still and wait. In the fullness of time, God will act on behalf of His people who believe in Him.

Boaz, a Wealthy Kinsman

"Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz" (Ruth 2:1).

If Elimelech and Naomi had a wealthy kinsman all along, then why did they go to Moab in the first place instead of going to him for help? What foolishness it is in the hour of weakness and need to forget the "near kinsman" who is strong and able to help. And when we also need help, to whom do we turn? To everything and everyone *except* the One who has promised, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." We have a "near kinsman" who holds the key to the universe and all of its treasure! Let us go to his fields, and humbly work there, and ask for and wait for his blessing. It will surely come.

There was poverty in the household (v 2) — two widows with no visible means of support. Ruth, the daughter of Moabites, a hated race, and only a proselyte at best, showed a wonderful knowledge of and dependence upon the Law, which allowed widows the special privilege of gleaning the fields during harvest. Ruth represents the anxious person in search of truth; forsaking her old companions and "gods", she leaves all and is not ashamed to put on the apron of a gleaner. Ruth did not need to keep her poverty a secret, and it was that very poverty and how she dealt with it that brought her to the attention of her rich kinsman.

And what about us? When we are weak, and when we know it, then we may begin to find strength in the Lord. His strength is perfected, and finds fulfillment, in our weakness. We may be frail vessels of clay, but we can take our vessels to the place where the riches and glory of our Father are dispensed, and there we can ask for our share!

So Ruth went to the field belonging to Boaz, asking permission to glean in the fields (v 2-7).

For the second time in these stories, we are reminded of the Canaanite woman who approached Jesus. Though a member of a hated Gentile race, she still needed his help, and being "unclean", she didn't mind likening herself to the unclean dogs that eat crumbs falling from the children's table. She was a gleaner too, taking what scraps were available to her. Even the bits of bread that fell from the Master's table were a blessing to her. Jesus commended the great faith of the Gentile woman. For didn't he count such Gentile women among his "grandmothers"?

Was her coming by chance or was it by the overruling providence of God? God does work in mysterious ways to perform His wonders. How strange it is, but a revelation for us, that the entire redemptive purpose

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of God in Christ should hang on such an apparently trivial circumstance. In the life of the believer, the dividing line between random chance and God's design is so thin that it can scarcely be discerned. In short, we might ask: what is *not* according to the design of God?

In the fields of Boaz, she came to the attention of her rich kinsman, with whom she talked. Boaz told her, "Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars which the men have filled" (v 8-9).

To us also, our "Boaz", our "strong man", says, "Abide in my fields" — don't stray away. "Remain with me" (John 15:4).

Verse 10

At this, Ruth bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me — a foreigner?" (v 10).

There is such charming modesty here. Ruth doesn't realize how attractive she is...

... how noble is her devotion to an old woman...

...how exalted is her choice of an unseen God...

...how impressive is her diligence in gleaning...

...how touching is her intelligent

meekness and her sincere thankfulness.

There is no false pride in Ruth. We have the feeling that she isn't the sort of person to spend hours in front of a mirror or fretting about clothes and makeup. Rather, she's the sort of person you'll find in the study, or the kitchen, or the garden, or teaching the children.

It is extraordinary: nowhere in the Bible is Ruth called "beautiful" — like some other women. But the good man Boaz, a rich man who might have commanded the attention of all sorts of beautiful young women and their families, noticed her right away! He was impressed, not by her outward beauty, though she may have been beautiful. Instead, he was impressed by what she had done (v 11). (Compare Christ's words to the ecclesias: "I know your *works*...".) Ruth is the perfection of the "virtuous woman" (Prov 31:10). And later in chapter 3, Boaz called her just that (Ruth 3:11).

Boaz said: "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you

be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12).

Ruth came to the Land of Promise to seek refuge under the wings of Almighty God — an allusion to the cherubim in the tabernacle and later in the Temple. Many of David's psalms echoed this language (Psa 17:8,9; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; etc.); these words and the words of David's greater son spoke of his yearning to take Jerusalem under his wings, as a mother bird protects her chicks (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34).

Here especially, "wings" represent the arms of a husband and protector, as he overshadows his beloved under his arms and in the folds of his garment. (This language will recur again in the next chapter.)

Ruth proves to be the most diligent of gleaners. She is not only intensely grateful for what she is given, but she labors long and hard to make the most of the gift (v 15-17).

Now, through her daughter-in-law Ruth, Naomi once again sees God's providence: There *is* a "near-kinsman" (Deuteronomy 25 again) — a "redeemer" to redeem their property, marry Ruth, care for Naomi, and raise up "seed" for Naomi, her family, and the royal line of Judah (v 19-20).

Verses 21-23: Naomi's advice to Ruth: "Stay close to the One who is blessing you. Be patient. Don't stray or wander away from him (*as if to say, 'like I strayed away from God'*)."

Naomi's Plan (Chapter 3)

Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, said to her:

"My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak, and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." (v 1-4)

It was an extraordinary request, bordering on the outrageous. Nevertheless, Ruth's faith in her mother-in-law Naomi was so strong that she answered: "All that you say I will do" (v 5).

All this suggests the preparation of a bride (Psa 45:10-14) and/or the

purification of a Gentile woman (Deut 21:10-14). In the New Testament, washing and new garments also symbolize baptism and conversion. All this is essential to the story of redemption. "The bride has made herself ready!"

Was Naomi's plan for Ruth indecent? No, but it was potentially dangerous, for it could appear to be immodest or unseemly. Perhaps it was, but it was also a carefully thought-out and carefully measured indiscretion. It was as if Naomi planned to put Ruth into a mildly compromising position, in the hope and expectation that Boaz would "save" her from it.

The background is this: by custom, Boaz would sleep (fully clothed) on the threshing floor during the harvest, the better to guard his crops. Also, by custom, a servant might sleep nearby, at his feet.

"Spread the corner of your garment over your servant, for you are a redeemer!" (v 9). Literally, this is the same word as "wing" of Ruth 2:12. Such a demand is a request for protection, that is, a marriage proposal...

And more!... Echoes of the past! Where have we seen this before?... a special garment, a special fabric, and in the corner of Boaz's garment a special emblem... of a great prince of the tribe of Judah? Perhaps not so obvious here, as in the earlier stories of Tamar (with Judah), and Rahab (with Salmon?), but quite possible under the circumstances....

In essence, Ruth was begging for Boaz's protection. 'Take me under your wing, under your care! Make me a part of the ongoing redemptive story of your people and your tribe! May the scarlet thread, that is, the thread of faith and blood, bind me to you and both of us to the people of faith, generation by generation. May your God be my God. I will live and die with you, and our seed will bind us with the 'cord of hope' to the promises of the past and the glorious expectation of the future!'

To this, Boaz replied, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman" (v 11).

Boaz, not a young man at all, showed dignity and restraint under these circumstances while commending Ruth's faith once more.

Not only was Ruth faithful to her God, but she was also "a virtuous [*chayil*] woman" (KJV), or as other versions put it, she was "a woman

of noble character" or "a worthy woman". This suggests a force of character as well as a strength of faith. In the Old Testament, this phrase is applied to Ruth and to no other individual woman (Prov 31:10, 29, KJV).

Boaz had told Ruth: "Don't be afraid." Virtuous women may sometimes be found in situations, through no fault of their own, which might naturally expose them to suspicion, like Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor. But if their former behavior has been uniformly virtuous, then they have every right to be absolved of any suspicion. The blessing of freedom from suspicion is one continuing value of a virtuous life.

Boaz continued: "Now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning" (v 12-13).

Ruth at the Feet of Boaz

"So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another" (v 14).

We imagine the scene of Ruth lying asleep at the feet of the "mighty man", Boaz. We also remember that many faithful Gentiles lay in their graves, awaiting the "morning" of the resurrection when Jesus will stand at the "gate" of the great city. There he will proclaim his "bride" for his very own.

Afterward, Boaz let it be known, presumably to his workers, that they were not to tell anyone of Ruth's night-time visit to the threshing floor.

Then Boaz said to Ruth: "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." Then he measured out a considerable amount of his grain, telling her, "You must not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."

Ruth brought the grain back to Naomi, who recognized the great gift from Boaz and the significance thereof. She told Ruth, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for Boaz will not rest until he settles the matter today."

Thanks be to God that His Son — our "Boaz", or strong redeemer — did not rest until the matter of our redemption was settled! Relieved and happy are we when we hand over our worries and anxieties to the

Lord, in the certainty that he will bear the burdens for us: "Cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you" (1 Pet 5:7).

Boaz Redeems Ruth (Chapter 4)

So that very morning, Boaz found the other kinsman, and in the presence of ten men, he offered that kinsman the opportunity to redeem the property of Naomi. When the kinsman said that he would do so, Boaz then pointed out that he would also be required to acquire Ruth, the Moabitess and the widow of Mahlon, in order to raise up seed to the deceased Mahlon and so perpetuate the name of the dead in that property.

When the would-be redeemer realized that this transaction would imperil his own personal inheritance, he readily declined the proposal: "Take my right of redemption yourself," he said, "for I cannot redeem it" (Ruth 4:6).

As outlined in Leviticus 25, the *gaal* or "kinsman-redeemer" did three things:

1. He redeemed or bought back the land that had been sold out of the family to pay debts or left in disuse. Then he returned it to the family and put it into service again (Lev 25:23-27). *Boaz was prepared to do this, as we see in chapter 4 here.*
2. He saved his relatives from poverty and bondage (Lev 25:47-53). *This Boaz would do in caring for Naomi as well as Ruth.*
3. And he preserved the family by raising up seed to the "brother" who had died without children (Deut 25:5-10). *Boaz was prepared to do this as well, by marrying Ruth.*

In all this, Boaz is one of the most beautiful types or patterns of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament:

- As King of Israel, Jesus will bring back God's land from the Gentiles and establish it as the basis of God's Kingdom forever.
- He will redeem his brethren, Jew and Gentile, out of bondage to sin and the poverty of death. By his life and death, he has paid the price of redemption for all who believe in him.
- And as the Lamb of God, and the great bridegroom, he will "marry" his bride, consisting of all those who, through faith in him, will bring forth fruit to God eternally in His Kingdom.

Notice that God's plan of salvation involves:

- His Land — there is no eternal life apart from God's land (as Abraham understood perfectly: Genesis 13:15-17);
- His people: "I will be their God, and they will be my people!" (Exod 6:7; 29:45, 46; Lev 26:11, 12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; and many more).
- His "bride" — since nothing else, in this world or the world to come, so perfectly expresses the Love of God as the love of a Husband for his devoted wife. All of God's work, from the beginning, has been to prepare a special "companion" for Himself, for all eternity. "They will be my jewels, my treasured possession," He says (Mal 3:17).

But in carrying through to the end of the story, some questions remain about the unnamed nearest kinsman. He must be offered the opportunity to "redeem" the land, the family, and the woman, Ruth. Boaz does this while the nearest kinsman refuses his obligation.

Why Does the Nearest Kinsman Say "No"?

- Is he prejudiced against Moabites? Is he afraid of the Law (Deut 23:3) that excludes them from God's congregation? *But God has cleansed; so who are we to call common or unclean? Boaz is not prejudiced. How could he be — being the son of the harlot Rahab?*
- Is he not prepared to risk his own inheritance (v 6)? *But where is that inheritance now? Vanished!*
- Is he afraid of God's "curse" that seemed to have fallen on the family of Elimelech? *But Boaz is not afraid. And neither is Christ afraid to bear the "curse" of being our kinsman-redeemer. "He will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).*
- Does he lack the faith to see Ruth's faith and act upon it? *If so, he disappears from Israel, still without a name.*

In all this, the unnamed kinsman is like the Law of Moses. Though it is given by God, it cannot (because of human weakness) provide the means to complete God's plan of redemption. While the Law of Moses should have been the agency to develop faith in others, it all too often caught its followers in a trap of prejudice, fear, and doubt. True faith had to be found outside the Law, as Paul argues in his letters to the

Romans and the Galatians.

A Treasure Hidden in the Field

Consider this story of Ruth, who was gleaning in the fields, alongside Christ's parable of the treasure hidden in the field: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matt 13:44).

Ruth was the real "treasure hidden in the field". Boaz was the one who discovered what a "treasure" she was, and then he set about buying, or redeeming, the field (meanwhile seeming to conceal the true value of the treasure, which is Ruth). The kinsman, with his prior claim, gave up the "treasure" along with the land, not realizing its value!

In this sense, also consider Proverbs 31:10: "A wife of noble character [a virtuous woman] who can find? She is worth far more than rubies." Thus Christ, our "Boaz", sold all that he had in order to buy the "field" — that was, to redeem the Land of Promise — and in the process claimed us as his "special treasure"!

Remembering Tamar

"May your family be like that of Perez, whom **Tamar** bore to Judah" (v 12).

This is a remembrance of Tamar, the earlier Gentile bound by cords of faith into the royal family of Judah. "May her fruitfulness (both naturally and spiritually) be yours!"

Verse 13: Ruth, who was childless for years, now conceived and gave birth to a son, Obed, who will perpetuate the line of the tribe of Judah.

Verses 18-22: "Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron; Hezron was the father of Ram; Ram was the father of Amminadab; Amminadab was the father of Nahshon; Nahshon was the father of Salmon; Salmon was the father of Boaz; Boaz was the father of Obed; Obed was the father of Jesse; and Jesse was the father of David."

This little genealogy at the end of the Book of Ruth gives the real reason for the inclusion of this lovely story in the Bible. It connects the Book of Ruth with the great king David and with the special genealogy that leads, at last, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Scarlet threads and

threads of blood abound. These threads bind together portions of Scripture, promises with fulfillments, and generation upon generation in hope and love.

Lessons

- Elimelech and Naomi left the Land of Promise and went to Moab. Nevertheless, God can overrule for good even the unfortunate decisions of His children if they have faith in Him. After all, God became, through His Son, our "Kinsman-Redeemer".
- Ruth made a hard choice, a long journey, and demonstrated faith in adversity. She desired the spiritual crumbs that fell from the Lord's table, and she gleaned in the fields of the Lord. She was, in short, a Gentile who became a Jew by faith.
- "Where is God anyway?" The unseen providential Hand of God guides, protects, chastens... and, in the end, blesses those who love Him. God is active in the lives of seemingly ordinary people: people who are yet to become kings, queens, and rulers, with the Messiah of Israel:

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him." (Mal 3:16-17 NIV)

- Boaz (signifying strength) was the provider, the kinsman, the redeemer, the Lord of the harvest, and finally, the Bridegroom, who spread his arm (the wing of his garment of protection) over the Gentile bride who came to him in faith:

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left us this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, and is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a

name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (v 13-17)

A Great-grandmother Looks Back and Then Forward

Imagine, for just a moment, that we can see Ruth, another woman in Bethlehem, now very old:

They put the sleeping bundle of life into my arms, and as I gazed upon him through aged eyes, I remembered... I remembered another baby a long, long time ago. I was the new mother who had placed my son in another pair of old arms, and I remembered how Naomi's face had glowed with joy at the sight of him, my little Obed.

And now, much greater in years than Naomi had been, I, Ruth, widow of Boaz, held my seventh great-grandson, David... and... I remember... I remember it all — now, as I gaze upon this new bundle of life, this is my latest great-grandson, David... David, son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz and Ruth, son of Salmon and Rahab... son of Abraham... and son of Israel!

And I have the strangest yet powerful feeling, at what must be nearly the end of a very long and full life, that something fresh and new and wonderful is just beginning.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11; 12; 1 Kings 1)

"David [became] the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife."

(Matt 1:8)

The story of Bathsheba is told primarily in 2 Samuel 11 and 12; and 1 Kings 1.

2 Samuel 11:1: "At the time when kings go off to war"... David stayed at home, and sent someone else! *'Here am I, Lord; send Joab!'*

Surely, King David had some business to take care of, but instead of doing that, he lounged around the palace, bored and susceptible to temptation.

While Joab and his army were busy besieging and capturing Rabbah, the fortress of the king of Ammon, David's own "fortress" was being besieged and captured in a matter of minutes... by the sight of a beautiful woman! "Better a man who controls his own spirit than one who captures a city" (Prov 16:32).

The Woman in this Case

"It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful" (2 Sam 11:3).

Bathsheba was the granddaughter of Ahithophel, David's close and trusted counselor, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's mighty warriors (2 Sam. 23:39). She was probably much younger than David, being referred to as a little ewe lamb in the parable of Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12:1-3).

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Although a Gentile, Uriah (whose name signifies "the light of the LORD") was evidently a devout convert to the hope of Israel (v 11).

Question: How "innocent" is Bathsheba?

Was Bathsheba deliberately exposing herself in the courtyard of her house in order to seduce the king? Or was David spying (in a quite improper way) upon an innocent event? If it were the former, then David could have sent a warning to Bathsheba of the dangers of such an activity. Instead, he sent to "find out about her" (v 3).

The servant asked, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (v 3) — as if to say, "Don't you know that she's a married woman? You should leave her alone."

Verse 4: Probably David hoped to learn that she was unmarried. But even this knowledge that she had a husband did not stop him. And even the punishment for the sin of adultery was put out of his mind — he *must* have her!

"So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her" (v 4).

She might have known what his invitation meant. If so, she could have politely refused. And even if she didn't understand his intention until she got to his private chambers, couldn't she have resisted and protested strenuously? Yes, there was room and opportunity for a virtuous woman to resist or protest.

An Interesting Comparison

Consider how the righteous woman Abigail turned aside the temper and the anger of David, using kind, carefully-chosen words when he contemplated murder.

The account is found in 1 Samuel 25. David and his small army of men, along with their families, were on the run from King Saul, who sought David's life.

A wealthy but wretched man named Nabal had refused any aid to David and his company when they asked for his help. David had pointed out to him that his men had guarded Nabal's sheep and goats during their time in the area, but Nabal refused to offer them any provisions. Moreover, Nabal had scoffed at David as though he was a nobody, and David would have perceived such insults as being insults

to the Lord God also.

Knowing that David was coming with his band of men to kill her husband Nabal, Abigail got food together and, with her servants, went to meet David. Bowing down before him and presenting him with the food, she reminded him of his God and his anointing and of the type of man — righteous and kind — that he was known to be:

Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good he has spoken concerning you and he has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant. (1 Sam 25:28-31)

David gratefully said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and also from avenging myself with my own hands" (1 Sam 25:32-33).

In all of this, Abigail could have been a model for Bathsheba.

David was an honorable, honest, and good man: his faults were rooted in an emotional, impulsive nature. Bathsheba could have made an appeal to his well-known and beloved character; she might have said, 'A man such as you, a man after God's own heart... surely you must realize how wrong this is! Think about what you are doing!'

As in the case of Abigail, such an appeal would surely have turned David aside from the terrible sin which he might have committed impulsively in a moment of anger. And if Bathsheba had made such an appeal successfully, then we might expect that, after his passions cooled, she would have won the same gratitude as David showed toward Abigail on that earlier occasion.

In Nathan's parable spoken to King David (see below), Bathsheba was characterized by the prophet as a "little ewe lamb" (12:3). And the "lamb" did not, after all, "eat" the rich man — but the other way around. So, while there seems to be blame on both sides, who takes most of the blame? On David's side? But by what proportion? In the final analysis, does it really matter how blame is assigned or guilt is determined? Thankfully we do not have to judge.

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Proverbs 6:32-33 says: "A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot [and many were to come upon David], and his shame will never be wiped away."

Did the sight of the woman *cause* David to sin? Such an assessment is easy to make ("He/she *made* me do it!" "I just can't control myself — there's something about him... when he comes into the room..."). Such excuses are not much different, really, from the silly parody that points out the false doctrine: "The devil made me do it!" But of course, he didn't! We are the "devil", and we cause ourselves to sin.

Did the woman *cause* David to sin? No. The right answer is found in James 1:14, 15: "Every man is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

No external temptation or outside stimuli can really *cause* a man to commit sin. It may *suggest* such a sin, but it is the lust within himself which is the true culprit.

Then... "she went back home" (2 Sam 11:4). And now, everything would be forgotten... except for... the next thing we hear... "I am pregnant" (v 5). Such complications! Was this a simple chance, or was it by God's design? As Moses told the children of Israel on one occasion: "You may be sure that your sin will find you out!" (Num 32:23). Fig leaves couldn't hide the sin of our first parents, and no "fig leaves" of our own contriving can truly hide our sins either.

For those who pay attention to modern politics, there follows a cover-up of the first magnitude (v 6-8). Unfortunately, the cover-up may turn out to be worse than the initial crime and may come at the expense of even more heinous sins. This is the first step down the slippery slope. What a tangled web we weave when we first decide to deceive!

In an effort to cover up his sin, David sent for Uriah and brought him back to Jerusalem. When Uriah reported to David, the king suggested that Uriah go home to his wife (2 Sam 11:5-8). However, Uriah chose not to go home, but to sleep at the door of the king's house, along with the other servants (v 9).

When David realized that his first attempt to cover his sin had been unsuccessful, he went to Plan Two: he invited Uriah to dine with him, and especially to drink with him, in the hopes of getting him drunk. This did not work either; once more, Uriah slept near the king's house that night also (v 10-14).

By then, Uriah may have suspected a trick. Or he may have heard palace gossip; royal households can be fertile ground for rumors. In either case, he was determined not to go home to his wife. In fact, his last words to his king sounded like a straightforward rebuke, which left David tongue-tied: “The ark, and Israel, and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife. As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing” (v 11).

David took the last and ugliest step down into the swamp of sin. The ill-considered but momentary sin of passion led inexorably into the cold-blooded, calculating sin of murder. The king sent a message to Joab, telling him to put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, where Uriah stood a good chance of being killed. And it was so; he was killed by the Ammonites, but the true murderer was his king, to which he had been loyal (v 14-15). But now, even more people (and especially Joab) knew of David's scheme. How many times will David pay for this in years to come? Possibly, Joab kept the letter for purposes of blackmail.

Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting:

The messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell... “The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.” David said to the messenger, “Thus shall you say to Joab, ‘Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.’ And encourage him.” (2 Sam 11:18-25)

So the risky plan actually worked, at least for a while. But what a terrible work it was, and what a price it entailed: other innocent men died as well (v 24).

“When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her into his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord” (v 18-27).

The mourning for Uriah could have lasted as little as seven days (cp. 1 Sam 31:13; John 2:13). Then would come the hasty marriage of David and Bathsheba – but not hasty enough, of course: people can always count the months! By now, many people knew, or strongly suspected, what had actually happened.

Should Bathsheba be Part of the Royal line?

Now let us consider Bathsheba: the other side of the ledger: Like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, Bathsheba is now initiated into the royal line of Judah, though for decidedly different motives, on *her* part.

Bathsheba plays a part in both Matthew's genealogy, through Solomon, and in Luke's genealogy, through Nathan, another son of hers by David. She is thus the mother of both the sons of David found in the genealogies of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Why her, and not some "more righteous" wife of David — like **Abigail**, for example?*

The first three women in Matthew 1 were treated by many as outcasts and sinners, yet they were justified by their extraordinary faith. *Even though her situation is somewhat different — and her sin serious and beyond question — are we justified in seeing Bathsheba in that same light?*

Now, a Break

From the scriptures, we can determine that a considerable time passed — not just a few months, but at least a few years. The child which was conceived in adultery died (2 Sam 12:18) as a punishment for David and Bathsheba. Nevertheless, over the next few years, God gave to David and Bathsheba several children, the *fourth* of which was Solomon (v 24, 25). And we know from 1 Chronicles 3:5 (or so it would seem), that Solomon was the *fourth* son born to David and Bathsheba.

This point is noteworthy as it helps us to understand the grief and illness and other consequences of his hidden sins, as described by David in some of his psalms (Psa 6; 32; 38; 51). The effect of his sins extended over the years and took a tremendous toll on his life.

The ensuing repentance, outlined in 2 Samuel 12 (and described by David in Psalm 32), was not a simple and easy fix. Reading this Bible narrative quickly, as we sometimes do, may convey the impression that everything was much easier than it really was.

So... perhaps several years later, we come to:

The Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to

eat of his morsel and drink from his cup, and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him. But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him." (2 Sam 12:1-4)

Nathan's parable (like a parable of Christ) is a suitable way to convey unpleasant truths to closed ears, unwilling minds and hardened hearts. It was the subtle "taking of the barricades" — a breach of the mental defenses that men build up carefully around themselves, to shield themselves from contemplating the consequences of their sins.

We see how David and Joab used the hidden, secret passageway from the Gihon Spring up into the city, to capture Jebus, or Jerusalem. In the same way the parable of Nathan — like a "thief in the night" — snuck into the heart unexpectedly and accomplished its purpose.

"Now there came a traveler" (v 4) suggests that such lust was not the constant companion of David — but the passing of a tempting thought that should have been sent on its way immediately, but instead stayed around too long.

When he heard Nathan's story, David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (v 5-6).

Here is the wrong way to listen to the word of exhortation: that is, with an eye as to how it applies to someone else. David's first emotional reaction (he was always emotional, it seems) was to cry out, "Kill him!" — much like Judah immediately sought the death of his daughter-in-law Tamar, having forgotten entirely any sin of his own. But David's first reaction, "Kill him!" was followed quickly, by the more measured "Restore fourfold", which was what the Law required for this specific offense (Exod 22:1).

Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul'" (v 7).

Nathan has sprung his trap: "You are the man!" And there came to David the sudden, lightning-bolt realization: **"I am the man!"** Such a paradigm shift, or attitude adjustment, must come to each of us from time to time when reading the Bible — when it suddenly dawns upon us that a lesson — hidden to our eyes and hearts for perhaps years — has been brought home with powerful effect: **"It is... I..."**

I ought to say, "If that never happens to you, then my guess is: you're not really paying attention." And why bother reading, in the first place, if the warnings, parables, examples, and commandments of the Bible never have anything to say to **you**? One of the most important questions we can ask ourselves as we read the Bible is, **"Lord, is it I?"**

God had blessed David beyond measure:

And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." (v 8-10)

In other words, "I made you king over all Israel. Knowing your weakness for women, I gave you many wives. But it was not enough! And now the enemies of the LORD gloat over this vile sin, blaspheming the name of the God you pretend to serve!"

It is still true today; cynics and skeptics still point to King David, and ask, 'What kind of a righteous man is this?'

David said to Nathan, **"I have sinned against the Lord."** And Nathan said to David, **"The Lord also has taken away your sin: you shall not die" (v 13).**

David's nobility and honesty of character were reasserted. "I have sinned." Now he made no excuses, and no pathetic pleas for mercy. There was just a plain humble admission of the awful truth. The marvel is that, as soon as the confession was put into words... as soon as those words left his lips... there came the wonderful reply:

"The LORD has taken away your sin" (v 13).

Although years had passed in the wilderness of unrepented sin... although illness and worry and fear had followed David into his later years... *one simple truth remained! There is mercy with the Most High!* There is mercy, in abundance. As far as the east is from the west, so David's sin is put behind him.

But there *are* limits to what God's mercy will do: Nathan continued, "Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die" (v 14).

"The child will die": Which child? The child of the adulterous union, now probably several years old.

"On the seventh day, the child died" (v 18). Remember: some considerable time had passed, as we discussed earlier. This means the "seventh day" of verse 18 is not the seventh day of the baby's life, but probably the seventh day since the parable and the pronouncement of Nathan.

Lessons

Sins may be forgiven and still have terrible and far-reaching consequences. Oh, what consequences! This was only the beginning: "The sword will never depart from your house!" (v 10): David would pay fourfold (compare David's words in verse 6), with:

1. The death of Bathsheba's son...

But even the death of Bathsheba's child would not truly close this "chapter" of David's life... Next there would also be the deaths of...

2. Amnon,

3. Absalom, and

4. Adonijah.

All these three sons would die victims of lust, greed and hunger for power. Their deaths were set in motion by David's adultery. Like a pebble tossed in a pond, his sins brought on a series of events, in which David paid little or no attention to his sons because he was absorbed with his own sufferings. His consequent lack of concern for those sons left them to plan and plot their own sins. In some imitation of their father's sin, they lusted for women and power and wealth, which brought only death in its train.

As we think back on the genealogy and the lessons of Matthew 1, we remember 2 Samuel 12:10 again: "The sword will never depart from your house." It would reach all the way to Golgotha! When the old man Simeon took the baby Jesus into his arms and blessed God and the little family before him, he also turned to Mary the mother of Jesus, and said, "A sword shall pierce your own soul also" (Luke 2:28-35, esp. v 35).

The "scarlet thread" of sin and suffering (and the consequent need for a true sacrifice for sins) would stretch down the ages, from mother to child, and mother to child again, generation after generation. It would

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continue until it reached the cross. And there the scarlet thread of sin and death would all be wrapped up and done away with! And especially, once again, Matthew 1:21 says: "He shall save his people from their sins." Jesus would take upon himself the burden of the sins of others — even his own family!

The sins of David and Bathsheba had been particularly terrible sins. But once they were forgiven, the book of account on David and Bathsheba (at least for this incident) could be closed, and blessings could come, even such a blessing as the perpetuation of the royal line of the Messiah through *two adulterers*. God chose one of Bathsheba's sons to sit on His throne, and to build His temple. Even more extraordinary is the fact that another of her descendants will sit on God's throne forever, and build up His eternal, spiritual temple.

Now notice a special comparison, among all four of the women of Matthew 1 which have been considered thus far:

- a) Tamar had two husbands; both died — and she was still childless. But a prince of the tribe (Judah himself) raised up a godly seed to continue what would become the royal line of Judah.
- b) Rahab had had "many husbands", fornicators and idolaters, but no child. But a prince of Judah (Salmon) married her and raised up a godly seed in the royal line of Judah.
- c) Ruth had a first husband who died, leaving her no children. But a prince of Judah (Boaz) married her and raised up a godly seed to continue the line of Judah.
- d) And now Bathsheba, married to Uriah but childless, married David the king of Israel, and even after their adultery, she became the mother of the next king, and a progenitor of the royal line of Judah.

So those who *seem* to have been barren women are all given children by a prince of Judah — after their first "husbands" die.

The Final Chapter: 1 Kings 1

Here we reflect on the later character of Bathsheba. At a time of crisis for the throne of Israel, she showed great faith in the promise of God to her son Solomon. When David was on his deathbed, and his succession was uncertain, Bathsheba was the one who went to the aged king: "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the

LORD your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne'" (v 17). Then... the king then took an oath:

"As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." Then Bathsheba bowed low with her face to the ground and, kneeling before the king, said, "May my lord, King David, live forever!" (1 Kgs 1:29-31)

"May my lord King David live forever!" What a marvelous hope that is bound up in this wish! "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were **dead** in transgressions — it is by grace you have been **saved**" (Eph 2:4-5).

Despite her past sins, Bathsheba (her name signifies "daughter of the oath, or the covenant") proved to be a woman of faith. Her faith in her coming descendant, who is the promised Messiah, was shown by her deeds in seeking David's rightful selection of Solomon for the throne. This secured her rightful place in the lineage of the Son of God: As Peter preached to the Jews, "God had promised [David] on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne" (Acts 2:30).

And Bathsheba made sure it happened — that the right one would be chosen!

"Oh My Son!"

Finally, we pause to consider Proverbs 31. There is a tradition that the King "Lemuel" (a name which signifies "belonging to God"), mentioned in verse 1, was simply another name for Solomon, and therefore that the "king's mother", also mentioned there, is Bathsheba. If this is so, then consider the weight of her words in Proverbs 31:1-5, especially:

1. "The sayings of King Lemuel — an oracle his mother taught him.
2. O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows,
3. Do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings.
4. It is not for kings, O Lemuel — not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer,
5. lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights."

"Son of my vows" refers to the promised son, dedicated to God. As if

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to say, "Since you have forgiven my sin, I dedicate my son, this Solomon, to you..."

"Do not spend your strength on women" (v 3) then becomes Bathsheba's motherly counsel, born out of her own bitter experiences. Sadly, it appears Solomon did not heed her warnings.

Nevertheless, the "scarlet thread" of hope, binding together generation after generation of the tribe of Judah, is sufficient protection even for an adulteress, just as it was for a harlot.

And the rest of us, conscious of our own sins (even if less spectacular), and disregarding any (presumed) "righteous works" — as if such could make up for our sins! — may say, "Thank God it is so!"

The one who saves "his people" from their sins will save us from our sins. For, wonder of wonders, you and I are "his people" too.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mary (Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2)

"Joseph [became — not the father of Jesus, but...] the husband of Mary... of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

(Matt 1:16)

Our story begins in Nazareth, a little town of no special consequence in the hills of Galilee. It was a village like many others — simple people going forth to labor in their shops or work in their fields. The men would pause to discuss the weather, or perhaps the news of the latest Roman outrage. Women drew water from the well at the town square, stopping a while to chat with their friends, to learn perhaps who was ill or who had had a baby. Children played in the dusty streets, sometimes ignoring their mothers' calls and the approaching darkness.

But when the Sabbath came, all activity ceased, and families dressed in their best clothes and gathered at the old stone synagogue. There the grandfatherly rabbi read, with carefully measured phrasing, from the Holy Scriptures, and offered his simple exhortation for the week. He was not an eloquent speaker. Nor was he a subtle expounder of legal details, like the teachers from Jerusalem who passed through occasionally on their way to some place more important. But he was well respected, even loved, for his honesty and kindness. He was faithful and diligent in teaching the boys of Nazareth, preparing them to assume their positions as men in the congregation of Israel.

A Special Announcement

This particular Sabbath he had a special announcement, which was a little something extra to enliven the proceedings. It was not a total surprise to his listeners, but then, in a village like Nazareth, very few things were secret: "Joseph, son of Jacob the carpenter, having brought a satisfactory dowry, desires the hand of Mary, daughter of

Heli, both being of the house of David. May God bless their union."

The following week was a time of joyful celebration. It was a time for older folks to relive their youth, and for the very young to dream of the future. The old songs of love and marriage were sung again. That most romantic of the scrolls, The Song of Songs would be remembered and read, and listeners would thrill to the rich exotic poetry of love — love which was sensual and yet spiritual, truly a mystery. The loving eyes of family and friends would see Joseph in the young shepherd, and Mary in the beautiful Shulamite:

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!...
Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon⁵; your mouth is
lovely... there is no flaw in you...
You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my
heart
with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.
How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance
of your perfume than any spice!" (Song 4:1, 3, 7, 9-10)

"No Flaw in You"

In those days, and for those people, marriage was a sacred covenant, and a token of God's love for Israel, His bride. It was an enacted parable teaching the necessity of purity in the bride, of faithful devotion to one Master alone: "There is no flaw in you... a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain" (Song 4:7, 12).

Betrothal was a formal and binding engagement. It was a legal contract sealed, before witnesses, by a dowry or purchase price. It was in fact, a marriage under law; the young woman was now a bride and a wife, although a suitable interval (as much as a year) must elapse before the marriage could be consummated. But if her betrothed were to die during this period she would be, under law, a widow with guaranteed property rights. And if she were unfaithful, the law would have no mercy. Single women who sinned might have their shame mitigated with payments or dowries and hasty marriages; but she would be an adulteress, and the sentence would be death by stoning.

There would be yet months and months until the marriage could be finalized, but Mary could close her eyes and see it all: the procession as the bridegroom comes to the house of the bride, to carry her away

⁵ Song 4:3 — part of the "scarlet thread" of our story

to his own home; the virgins or "bride's maids" with their lamps to light the way. Then would come the joyous marriage feast, the special wedding garments, and the wine of joy. It would all come true for her and her beloved. God had indeed richly blessed them.

But first must come the months of waiting, preparation, and anticipation before the young virgin-bride would become truly the wife of Joseph. In the meantime, ever present as a reminder, was the memory of that pledge of purity already taken: to have and to hold, to forsake all others, to cleave only to her husband, to be "a garden locked up, a sealed fountain" (v 12).

How much of our lives is waiting, in anticipation of something better, something different? And how often has it happened that "fate" or "chance" has intervened, and that which we hoped for, which we had reason to expect (a new job, an award, a marriage proposal, a windfall profit), was snatched away, and instead we received something else altogether different? This is what happened to Mary.

An Unexpected Visitor

"In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you' (Luke 1:26-28).

No greater honor had ever been bestowed upon a woman than was soon to be the privilege of Mary. But it was an honor that carried an awesome responsibility. And it would mean the shattering of other cherished dreams and desires. Her life would never be as simple and pleasant as she had reason to expect it would be only a short while before.

When she saw the angel, Mary was greatly troubled in her mind (Luke 1:29). Being visited by an angel between morning and midday was, of course, somewhat disconcerting -- even frightening. However, Mary's fear was overridden by her curiosity and quiet reflection.

No matter what happened to Mary, she paused to consider, to ponder, and to reflect. She is one of the great "spectators" in the Bible. We thank God for Mary and her examples. When she stops to consider, we are also compelled to do the same. When she stands still to see the salvation of the Lord, we too halt in our headlong rush through overcrowded lives, and pause for a moment with her. We catch a little

of the infinite wonder in the calm, clear eyes of this young woman; an attitude molded by careful Bible study and frequent prayer. Like her, we learn to treasure in our hearts the sayings we hear (Luke 2:51). Like her, we "ponder" them (2:19) in the stillness of the night so that, when the storms of life beat upon us, like her we will be strong in faith.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (Luke 1:30-31).

To find favor implies a request answered, and we might conclude that this young, pure Jewish woman may have been praying, though never really expecting a favorable answer: "May I be the mother of the Messiah." This would be in keeping with one traditional Jewish view of Isaiah 7:14: that a virgin would marry and then conceive (by natural means) a son who would become the Messiah, but not literally the Son of God. Since Mary and Joseph were both of the house of David, perhaps such thoughts had come to her. And since up to this point the Holy Spirit had not been mentioned, Mary might reasonably have concluded that this child would be the son of Joseph.

Even as she pondered these words, Gabriel continued: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High." The Son of God! Even great King David was never so called. Would her son be somehow greater than even David? Perhaps Mary staggered at the thought and so scarcely heard the rest of the great promise: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David"; son of David, of course (2 Sam 7:12-14, 16; Psa 89:29, 36), and heir to his fallen throne. But also the "Son of the Most High"! What can this mean?

"How will this be?" Could this great thing happen to Mary even without her "knowing" Joseph (v 34)? Now Gabriel speaks plainly: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God... For nothing is impossible with God" (v 35-37).

The language of Gabriel calls to mind that of Genesis; the Spirit of God "overshadowing", or moving upon the face of the waters (Gen 1:2) to bring forth life, as a mother hen brooding over her eggs and then her chicks. It is a picture of vast creative power, coupled with the sweetest tenderness and love. It is a picture of a God who sustains all things by His omnipotence, who acts as and when He chooses, and no man can understand, much less question, His prerogative. But also it is a picture of a God who is a Father, who pities His children, and who lavishes mercies unnumbered upon those who can never hope to

repay Him. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us...."

This view of the Messiah's conception, which we as Christians take for granted today, was by no means as certain to the faithful Jews of Mary's day. Nonetheless, the message she received would also give additional weight to Isaiah 9:6-7, the companion passage to Isaiah 7:14 — which, in light of Gabriel's announcement, might now read: "To us a child is born; to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called... 'Wonderful in counsel is the Mighty God, **who is the everlasting Father** of the Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."

Mary responded to this great message without hesitation. She revealed an extraordinary grasp of the Scriptures for such a young girl: "I am the Lord's maidservant... May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Mary knew the passages in the psalms in which the Messiah is called the son of God's maidservant (Psa 86:16; 116:16). Immediately she made the connection, and gave her consent to become the mother of His Son — a consent that was essential to His purpose.

A veil is now modestly drawn over the scene. Of the actual conception, Luke tells us nothing, and we must conclude that such knowledge is too sacred for mortals. How was this miracle accomplished? In the language of modern science, what was the "genetic code" begotten of such a union? Prudence, and some sense of the Divine majesty, counsels us to explore no further along these lines than Scripture expressly warrants. Perhaps Psalm 139 gives us an insight into this greatest of all mysteries — God manifests in the flesh. There David (and, prophetically, Jesus) says:

For you created my inmost being;
 You knit me together in my mother's womb.
 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
 Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.
 When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
 your eyes saw my unformed body.
 All the days ordained for me were written in your book
 before one of them came to be.
 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them! (v 13-17)

Blessed Among Women?

The veil is lifted, and we see Mary again, but in some sense a new person now, touched by the Almighty, never to regain the naiveté and innocence of her youth. Her faith had been great, but now she could feel the great change that had come upon her; a change that could not be hidden for long — even if she wanted to hide it. What doubts might have come upon her! How would she explain her condition? Whom should she tell, if anyone? Who would believe her? Would even her beloved Joseph believe? And those words of the marriage song, once so fitting: would they now mock her? "No flaw in you... a garden locked up... a sealed fountain..."

The calling of the Lord is seldom an unmixed pleasure. Mary was uniquely "blessed" among women. But blessings are not always enjoyable. Sometimes they can be downright unpleasant. Concerning this paradox of blessedness, William Barclay writes: "Nowhere can we see the paradox of blessedness more than in the life of Mary. To Mary was granted the blessedness of being the mother of the Son of God... And yet that very blessedness was to be a sword that pierced her heart. That very glory was to break her heart. She was blessed and that very blessedness meant that some day she would see that son of hers hanging on a cross. To be chosen by God so often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow."⁶

"Oh, to do some great work for God!" Haven't we all said that? But the great works of Scripture often included imprisonment, slavery, torture, or — as with Mary — scandal and gossip. Like Tamar and Rahab, she was destined to experience scandal and gossip to a degree we can scarcely appreciate, living as we do in such a libertine time. Sin is scarcely ever noticed, let alone mentioned. Do we really want to be blessed by God, like Joseph was "blessed" in a foreign prison, or like Jeremiah was "blessed" in a foul pit? Or do we wish to be as Mary, shunned as an unwed mother or as Bathsheba, known as an adulteress?

Such silly, shortsighted people we can be! We want the cheers, but not the tears. We love the spotlight, but not the shadows. We want to wear the crown without carrying the cross. We want to sit with Christ on the mountain while the crowds listen worshipfully, but we do not want to venture into the dark garden where men weep and wrestle with the serpent of self, with the tempting whispers in their own minds.

⁶ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001)

All these things have a place in God's plan. It is written that we must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Even this might not be so difficult if we could choose the time and place of our trials. But that too, is in the hand of God. Each believer must be prepared for a Gethsemane of God's own choosing, suited to him or her alone.

Can we trust in the One who caused the great pain — and still believe that He can bring blessing out of suffering? Whenever and wherever a trial may befall us, there can be only one response, which we have just heard from Mary's lips: "May it be to me as you have said... May your will be done!"

Mary's life was lived for the glory of God, and her children were righteous. Her eldest son learned much from his mother. In the hour of his trial, his prayer was an echo of hers: "Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he preserved Israel!

Mary Goes to Elizabeth

Mary goes to Elizabeth, receiving confirmation of the angel's words:

At that time Mary got ready, and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (Luke 1:39-45)

Mary's song of rejoicing and thanksgiving contained allusions to twenty-five or so Old Testament passages. Here was a young woman (probably only 14 or 15) who nevertheless had extensive knowledge of Scripture. She was an extraordinary young woman, yet in some ways she was quite ordinary.

And there is the exhortation. She did not know she was someone special until that day when Gabriel brought his message, and — like Ruth — she set off on a long journey. For Mary, the journey lasted over 30 years and took her to Judah, to Bethlehem, to Egypt and eventually to Nazareth. Later it took her to a hillside outside Jerusalem, where her heart would be broken. But until that fateful day of the angel's revelation, Mary's life had only been one of waiting.

But her waiting had consisted of reading, meditation, service, worship and prayer. She had laid herself at the throne of God. She had waited. And then, as the Almighty cast about for an instrument to fulfill His purpose, a "vessel" fit for His hand, she was there. She was ready, as best she could make herself, and she was willing to be used. An ordinary girl? Yes, but at the same time a very extraordinary girl. Are we ordinary, or are we special?

There were no kings in Nazareth, no generals, and no great scholars. There were just ordinary people like you and I. God chose them, as He chooses us, investing the ordinary with great holiness, so that no flesh should boast in His presence. He chooses people, not because they *are* special, but rather He chooses people whom He can *make* special! The angel spoke to Mary, but he also speaks to us: "You have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). Almost before we asked, even though we do not deserve it, we have found favor with God. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by God, and we His children, are worth many sparrows (Matt 10:29-31).

To believe that God exists is not difficult. But to believe that He takes personal notice of "little people" — and that He takes time off from balancing the stars of heaven and directing the course of nations so that He can care for every one of us poor, weak, common creatures — and that He guides and protects, and at last rights all "wrongs" — that is sometimes quite hard to comprehend.

The story of Mary should be a gentle reminder that no one is too small or insignificant for God's notice, if he or she has faith.

Joseph Responds to Mary's Pregnancy

Luke tells Mary's story more than Joseph's. But Matthew tells Joseph's story more than Mary's. The two together give us a complete picture: "Now the birth of Jesus took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18).

It sounds as though Mary did not reveal the past events to anyone but Elizabeth and Zechariah until her condition was known. We may suppose her silence to be of equal parts modesty and faith; modesty in speaking of such an intimate matter, and faith that God would reveal His purpose at the appropriate time.

Of note in Matthew 1:18 is the last phrase, "from the Holy Spirit". This phrase does not describe what was known immediately — either by

Mary's parents or by Joseph. This is certain because of what follows in the narrative. The addition of this last phrase is Matthew's explanation, by which the link is made to the foregoing genealogy (especially with v 16) and to the succeeding prophecy (v 23).

So, assuming that Joseph did not know how Mary's pregnancy came about, we would ask, "What should Joseph do now?" Joseph is a "righteous man" (v 19). What does a "righteous" man do when confronted with the "obvious" sin of another? Does he "righteously" rebuke, and punish the sinner to "the full extent of the law"? How often we hear that cry of righteous zeal, or its equivalent, today! A wise man once remarked: "Every man wants justice for others... and mercy for himself."

Sometimes God tests our reactions. Are we too quick to pass judgment? Are we eager to stand up for our rights? Are we as eager to cover a sin? We have all known the brother (maybe we see him in the mirror every morning) who is quick to judge; who relishes the role of "the righteous arm of the Lord" in dispensing His judgment, but who is aghast at the suggestion that he can dispense God's mercy. "God can forgive, but we do not have that prerogative." "We must make this sinner a public example, so others will be discouraged from doing likewise." "God may have mercy on her, but that is for Him to say, not me."

Joseph was not that sort of man; he was — "righteous", with all the qualities of strength, decency, and mercy (but none of the harshness and arrogance) that the word may imply. This description seems an intended contrast with two of Joseph's ancestors who are listed in the genealogy of Matthew 1:

- Judah was all for putting to death his daughter-in-law Tamar for "playing the harlot". His "righteous" zeal was interrupted only by her proof that he had been her consort; that he, in fact, was guilty and she was innocent. He was only lying with a harlot, but she was fulfilling the Mosaic law of succession and inheritance as best as she could (Gen 38:24-26).
- David, a man after God's own heart, was anything but "righteous" in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah, compounding adultery with murder. But later, when told of the theft of a little ewe lamb in Nathan's masterful allegory, he burned with zealous fury: "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" (2 Sam 12:5). How flimsy his "righteousness" really was, when he soon found out to his surprise, *"Thou art*

the man!"

If the lessons of the genealogy are pursued a bit further, Joseph was in fact much more like two other of his ancestors:

- Salmon "covered" the past sins of Rahab the harlot, by marrying her.
- Boaz married Ruth the Moabitess even though she had been rejected by the nearest kinsman.

Casting about for a solution, Joseph — on his own — decided on the easiest and most merciful approach: he will "divorce" Mary quietly, allowing her to go away and —as he imagined (in his ignorance) at that point— marry the father of the child.

The parallels between this incident and that of John 8:1-11 are obvious: a woman discovered in adultery — an "open-and-shut" case; hasty condemnation on the part of some, but tender mercy from the only one in the real position to judge. Joseph would not "throw the first stone", and neither would Jesus.

It is not far-fetched to suppose that the whole matter of the woman taken in adultery may have been contrived by the Lord's enemies to discredit him. John wrote: "This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him" (John 8:6).

It is almost certain that, as Jesus grew in popularity, his enemies made secret investigations into his early life and heard rumors about the peculiar circumstances of his conception.

Suppose that, when confronted with the question as to the woman's fate, Jesus had said, "Yes, she is guilty and should be punished". The retort would have immediately come, "Then what should be done with your mother?", for Mary was a betrothed woman at the time of Jesus' conception. Other such base insinuations in the chapter may be seen in the same light: "Where is your father?" (John 8:19); and "We are not illegitimate children as some are" (v 41).

There was no bond of fleshly descent between Joseph and Jesus. But the actions of both in similar circumstances surely suggests that Joseph was a wise choice to be the human "father" of Jesus, and that something of his character made an impression upon the little Son of God in his earliest years.

Joseph and Mary: Examples of Faith

Both Mary and Joseph were asked by God to accept the disgrace and shame of a couple who have "sinned". Joseph was told to name the child (v 21), an act that would be interpreted by all as an admission of paternity. (This would also be equivalent to an admission that he had lied in previously asserting his innocence, as has been suggested above.)

Consequently, in the eyes of the people, either Joseph was a weak man who could not control his passions or worse yet, a fool tricked into raising another man's son. Because of Mary's three-month sojourn in Judah, the tongue-waggers could make a strong argument for the latter view. Such matters would not be soon forgotten in a close-knit country village.

God could have made life easier for Mary. He could have smoothed the way, but He did not. Mary must now gather her belongings and go quietly to the house of Joseph. She would go with relief, certainly, that her beloved no longer doubted her, and that he was one with her in understanding the marvelous revelation of God. But she would go also under the disdainful eyes of her friends and relatives, and perhaps the sorrow of her parents, which could not be alleviated. For Mary and Joseph there would be no happy wedding, bridesmaids, feasts, laughing children, gifts or good wishes. The cloud of suspicion was made worse because there could be neither repentance nor explanation, only passive endurance:

"How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called" (1 Pet 2:20-21).

God ensured that His own Son was provided with sterling examples of such traits in his childhood. Jesus was "called" to follow the pattern of meek suffering in well doing that Mary and Joseph set for him. The grace under pressure that they showed during an extended trial was the object of his keen discernment. He could not fail, as he grew up, to hear the whispers and the innuendoes; but from his parents, never a complaint. These lessons were taken to heart, and given the perfect reinterpretation in his own life.

In remarkable ways, even before Jesus was born, his Heavenly Father was plowing the "soil", and planting the seed — in the situation that produced trials and the consequent character development of Mary and Joseph. By these, His only-begotten Son would be instructed and prepared for the work he had to do. It is never enough to tell someone: "Resist not evil; turn the other cheek; give kindness for hurt; do not

complain but trust in God for all things..." It is far better, not just to tell, but also to show. The words and sentiments are lovely, but we need, as Jesus himself needed, real-life examples to follow: God gave them, and Jesus found them, in those who gave him life, sustained that life, and raised and taught him.

The "Lamb of God", who was set apart to take away the sin of the world, was prepared in his mother's nursery, and his "father" (Joseph's) workplace, and in the bosom of a small, poor family... who talked of God's wonderful promises, praying together around the table and the fireplace.

Joseph, and Mary grasped the "scarlet cord" of hope — the same "cord" that their ancestors had grasped. Generation to generation was bound together by the wonderful stories of redemption, in their own family of Judah, and by the stories of faith and commitment and sacrifice that filled the Old Testament. Thus, Yahweh made His own Son strong for the work he must do:

"He will be called 'Yahshua', for he will save his people from their sins."

CHAPTER SIX

The Scarlet Thread

Harry Tennant once said, "When you find a golden thread in a Scripture verse, and you pull it a bit, you never know which other verses will 'move'."

It's a lovely thought and a constant reminder to us that, wherever we read the Bible, we ought to be alert for the echoes, the direct quotations, and the marginal references that point us to other parts of God's Word. The Bible is an inspired masterpiece, and those who understand one part are well on their way to understanding other parts. "What does this remind me of?" — is almost always the best question we can ask as we read.

Brother Harry spoke of golden threads, and we have been talking about scarlet threads, or cords, or garments. The principle is the same, of course. More than that even, the two together — golden threads and scarlet ones — remind us of the tabernacle, and then the temples, in Israel. These houses of God, and houses of worship, were equipped with elaborate woven hangings, curtains, and veils. The garments of the priests who ministered there were likewise woven of the finest fabric, and interwoven and embroidered with... among other things... threads of gold, and threads of scarlet!

Exodus 26, 27, 36 and 38 speak of the tabernacle, and Exodus 28 and 39 describe the garments of the High Priest. In both chapters are to be found finely-twisted linen, and threads of scarlet, blue, purple, and even gold (drawn out into the finest wire and interwoven with the fabrics). It is beyond our scope to develop this picture in great detail. However, we may briefly remark upon the plain Scriptural significance of the fabrics, gold and the colors:

1. Fine linen — being white — signifies holiness, purity, and righteousness, as worn by the bride (the sort of garments the young Mary no doubt planned to wear at the celebration of her wedding). In Revelation 19:8, the bride of Christ is "arrayed in fine

linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." And not so much their own righteousness, but more so the righteousness provided them as a garment, or a covering, by the Bridegroom.

2. The color blue calls one's attention to the heavens, and to the God who dwells there. The Jews were supposed to always wear cords or hems of blue on their garments (Num 15:38), so as to easily remember God and His commandments. In the Gospels, the woman with the issue of blood, who could not be healed, took hold of the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed. This recalls the passage in Zechariah 8, where ten men of the nations took hold of the hem of the garment of *the* Jew, asking him for deliverance and salvation. It was the blue hem of such a garment, perhaps augmented with the scarlet of Judah, that Ruth asked Boaz to spread over her, and thereby to claim her as his bride.
3. Scarlet is the color of blood, sin, and sacrifice. God promises Israel: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isa 1:18). Tamar's scarlet cord was the cord of inheritance and royalty, and Rahab's scarlet cord was the cord of sacrifice — the scarlet blood of the Passover lamb.
4. Purple is the combination of equal parts blue (godliness) and scarlet (humanity, sin, and sacrifice). Purple is often associated with kingship.
5. Among other things, gold is a symbol of royalty (the crown of gold), *as well as* a symbol of faith. In 1 Peter 1:7, Peter compares faith with gold, and a tried faith with purified gold.

All this is fascinating. Without pursuing the subject further, we may conclude that God's house, and the coverings for God's priests, were specially prepared for them according to rigid standards.

In Psalm 139:13-16, David addresses the Lord God:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Several words in this passage are commonly used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the knitting together, or the weaving of the fabrics of

the tabernacle, the temple and the priestly garments. (You'll have to use a concordance on that later.) But David applies them to the knitting together of the fetus in the mother's womb: the mysterious but wondrous process by which God miraculously creates each human being. David was thus "woven together" in his mother's womb, as was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Going beyond this point, we recognize that God is working to weave all of us together, in our lives, our experiences, our trials, our "successes" if there are such, and even our "failures" (as those of David and Bathsheba) — for it is in our failures that we may learn most readily to turn to the One who doesn't fail. In our weaknesses we may be drawn to the One who is strong. As the Apostle Paul wrote that the Lord Jesus said to him:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9-10)

First, in the experiences of men like David, of the tribe of Judah, then in the experiences of his descendant, our Lord Jesus Christ, and now in all our own experiences, God has worked, and continues to work today to construct and organize a tabernacle or temple, in which He will dwell. This is what we mean when we talk about the "scarlet thread", or "cord" in the story of the women of Matthew 1. Likewise, I venture to suggest that this is what Brother Tennant meant when he talked of finding, studying, and learning from the golden threads of the Bible.

More than this, the scarlet cord plays an important part in the development of our story. As we recall:

- ☐ A scarlet thread or cord was used by Tamar to mark out her firstborn as a prince in Judah.
- ☐ And another scarlet cord (or the same one?) was used (probably) by Salmon prince of Judah — as a Passover emblem — to denote the house of Rahab, and to save her and her family when God destroyed the city of Jericho.
- ☐ A garment (whether with a scarlet cord, we cannot say for sure) figured prominently in Ruth's claiming her redeemer Boaz: "Spread your garment over me... give me protection." And another prince of Judah resulted from their union: another link

in the genealogy that led from Abraham to Jesus Christ.

- And then, there are the lips of the Shulamite, as "a scarlet thread" (Song 4:3). This signifies that she is distinguished by talking of and thinking about such stories as these.
- The scarlet cord seems to recede in the story of David and Bathsheba, but it is replaced by a sword: "The sword shall not depart from your house." Despite sin, suffering, death and loss, God still works to produce his seed; to continue the royal line that leads at last to his Only-begotten Son.

Shortly after his birth, Jesus was taken to the Temple to be presented to God and redeemed by a special sacrifice. At that time the old man Simeon took the baby in his arms and said to Mary: "And a sword will pierce your own soul also" (Luke 2:25). In this he implied, as plainly as he could, that there would be a "sword" — signifying suffering and death — not only for Mary but also in the life of this little baby.

There is more. We go to the garden of Gethsemane, and there we watch. We see, in the shadows, the Son of God sweating as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). Shortly thereafter, soldiers arrived at the garden, carrying *swords* and clubs, to arrest him. Peter pulled out a hidden *sword*, and wielded it. Jesus warned: "Put your sword away. Must I not drink of the cup prepared for me?"

And finally, a few hours later, we see his captors "put a scarlet robe on him" (Matt 27:28) and mockingly salute him as "the king of the Jews [literally of Judah]".

The sword could not depart from David's house; it cannot depart from our house, for we are all condemned to die, because of our sins. The sword will not depart until the work of Jesus Christ is complete. He must experience the sword; he must wear the scarlet robe; we must be bound to him in those experiences.

We must share in his death, and his sacrifice: we must be touched by his blood. We must crucify ourselves, including our pride, sins and our self-reliance, along with him at Golgotha. We must bow down at the foot of the cross, and say, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner! I grasp the scarlet cord of your garment. I need to be sprinkled with your shed blood. I need healing that only you can offer. I need covering that only you can provide. Redeem me, O Lord."

We have briefly traced the theme of the scarlet thread through the stories of the women of Matthew 1. As we went along, we noticed that

the picture of the scarlet thread (or cord, or garment) seemed to give way to the picture of the sword (and blood and sacrifice and death). Or perhaps it might be said that the scarlet cord *is* the cord of blood!

For a couple of reasons, this makes good sense:

- a) As the scarlet "thread" is traced through our story lines, and we get closer and closer to the culmination, with Jesus Christ, the theme of blood and sacrifice begins to supersede the other. The legacy of the royal line of Judah depends upon the sacrificial death of the one in whom that line of blood concludes. Jesus *is* King because he is, first of all, the perfect sacrifice. He will wear the crown of gold because he first wore the crown of thorns. He will conquer the nations because he first conquered his own "spirit", his own "will" — by making that will the same as his Father's will.
- b) When the scarlet cord appeared in the story of Rahab, plainly, it was the nearest approximation to the blood of the Passover Lamb. When Rahab hung the scarlet cord in the window of her house, it became every likeness — in the eyes of the conquering Israelite army, and in the eyes of the angels that accompanied them — to the blood sprinkled, or smeared, around the doors of the Israelite homes in Egypt. The inhabitants of those houses were the only ones who escaped the final plague, namely, the death of the firstborn of each family. This points plainly to Jesus Christ himself, whom John the Baptist calls, "the [Passover] Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- c) Then there is another scarlet thread in the Bible which we have already referred to earlier. It is the scarlet thread found in the garments of the High Priest and in the curtains, veils and garments associated with the tabernacle and temple. It is the scarlet thread of sacrifice.
- d) The priestly family in Israel was Levi, rather than Judah. However, Jesus belongs to a different priestly order. He is a priest-king combination after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7).

Several passages in the Book of Revelation bring some of these threads together:

- Revelation 5:1-13: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is proclaimed (in heaven? or in the "heavenly place" of the temple of God?) as having triumphed. To him is given the privilege of opening

the Book of Life, and the book of the future. In the scene pictured in Revelation 5, all the hosts around the throne of God wait eagerly for the "Lion" of Judah to appear so that the wonderful book might be opened. However, when the expected one does appear, in verse 6, he appears, amazingly — not as a "Lion" at all — but instead as a "Lamb, looking as if he had been slain!" It is one of the great reversals, and great surprises in the Bible! Imagine the theatrical effect of this scene: ***'We all waited, breathlessly, for the Great Lion to appear! And behold, when he came, he was a lowly lamb, covered with blood and the marks of his being slain!'***.... But in one sense, there is no surprise at all: the "Lion" of Judah, who receives the scepter of the Kingdom of God, could prove his right to the throne only by laying down his life. He had to be a lamb — the Lamb of God — before he could ever think of being a "Lion"!

- In Revelation 7:9-17, the redeemed, "out of every tribe, nation, people, and language", wash their garments and make them white in the blood of the "Lamb" who rests in the center of God's throne!
- And in Revelation 13:8, the Lamb is said to have been slain "from the foundation of the world". In other words, his death was ordained from practically the beginning. So there is every reason to suppose that, from the "foundation of the world" to the end of the world, the "scarlet threads" (the threads of bloodshed, death and sacrifice) would inevitably lead to him. Signs, markers and emblems which are revealed ahead of time are the scarlet threads interwoven into the fabric of God's wonderful book. They all point to the Coming One, the man who came as a Lamb and will rule as a Lion. To believers at least, he may still appear in his most precious role, as the Lamb who had been slain.

Earlier, we have referred to the "scarlet cord" as a cord of hope, binding together one generation to the next, in shared expectations of the One to come. Not surprisingly, *the umbilical cord* — binding the expectant mother to the child in her womb, and carrying nourishment from the mother to the child — is actually a "scarlet cord", or cord of blood.

The spiritual "umbilical cord" is therefore the means by which the mother conveys spiritual nourishment to the child. In giving the first lessons about God to her offspring, she teaches an awareness of the One who is beyond; the one who is intangible; unseen and yet all-

knowing, all powerful and on whom we all utterly depend. The old rabbis said the one who is best taught is the one who is taught by his mother!

Matthew 1 — with its special women — speaks to us of the hopes, the yearnings, the "treasured-up-in-the-heart" desires of righteous mothers for their children. On the surface, men may seem to rule the world, but there is great truth in the old cliché: "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world!"

Lesson

Many of us will have our own memories of the "scarlet cord"... our natural family — parents and grandparents who showed us the way. For others who were not so fortunate as they grew up, there was surely another kind of spiritual family of fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters in the faith, who revealed to us visions of coming glory. Those are the memories we should cherish and pass along to others, to our own natural children, and to our "spiritual" children as well.

I still have copies of books that belonged first to my grandmother, and then were passed along to my mother, and now they are mine. On the front pages are written notes like this: "My darling Ruth, please read this, and read it again. It is your life! The Truth is the most precious thing I can give you."

I have my own memories of a mother who dragged us boys out of bed on Sunday mornings so that we could drive an hour each way — no matter the weather — to attend Sunday school and meeting, practically every Sunday: "No, Mom, I want to sleep in. I'm tired. I don't feel well." "Get up anyway; you can sleep in the car; you'll feel better when you get there. It's the right thing to do!" So off we would go!

Scarlet Cords!

In a documentary concerning the Statue of Liberty, the meaning of freedom and America, Mario Cuomo, then the governor of New York and son of Italian immigrants, talked about his family history. He remembered his father, who had first come to the shores of the New World, and then worked as a ditch-digger to earn enough money to bring over to his wife and one son. Finally she and the boy (Mario's older brother) were able to make the trip from the Old Country. Governor Cuomo — an entertaining storyteller — imagined the scene

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that might have occurred when Mrs. Cuomo and her small son were interviewed by an Ellis Island official. As he had imagined it, they had just come off the ship, in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty...

"So... Mrs. Cuomo, do you have any money?"

"Almost nothing at all."

"Any other family in America?"

"No, sir."

"Do you have any education?"

"Very little."

"What prospects do you have in America?"

"Well, my husband is working — when he can find work — at making trenches."

"Making trenches? Oh, he's a ditch-digger?"

"Yes."

"That's all?"

"Yes, sir."

"So. Let me get this straight. You have no money, no friends, no education, no job, nowhere to live, and one child so far to support. Your husband is a ditch-digger. Why did you come here?"

"Sir, we came because over there, on the mainland, there is work — and we believe there is hope... hope for something better."

"So, Mrs. Cuomo, why should we let you in — since you have brought next to nothing with you? What can *you* give to us?"

"Sir, it is true: I have nothing else to offer, except for one other thing: You see, I have a dream, just a hope, really... that before I die, a son of mine will be the governor of New York."

Now let us imagine another interview. Let us imagine that, when Naomi and Ruth made their way from Moab toward Naomi's homeland of Israel, they were met by an Israeli border patrol, and the conversation goes something like this:

"So, madam, you are Naomi, widow of Elimelech, and you have land and property in Bethlehem. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"We are pleased to have you return to us. Shalom!... But who is this with you?"

"Sir, this is my daughter-in-law, Ruth of Moab, the widow of my son Mahlon."

"And you then, Ruth of Moab... let us see about you. What is your allegiance? Whom do you worship?"

"Sir, I worship the God of Israel. I have learned of Him from my husband and my mother-in-law."

"Oh yes, and so they all say, when they try to sneak into Israel. How do I know this is true?"

"Sir, you have only my word for it."

"Well, we shall see. Let me think: what else? Do you have any money?"

"Almost nothing at all. We are poor widows."

"Do you have any education?"

"Only the little I received in... uh, that other land."

"What skills do you have? It is plain to see that your mother-in-law is too old to be of much use working. How will you support yourself and her?"

"I had thought that I would glean in the fields during harvest time."

"Hah! The last thing we need is one more beggar... And how will you ever manage?"

"We have faith, sir. And I am a hard worker."

"Not many prospects in that, I must say. So, let me summarize... You have no money, no skills, no expectations, and a questionable past — we know you were an idolater, and who knows what else, over there in that dark, ugly land! So why should I open the gate and allow you to enter our special Land of Promise? You seem to have brought absolutely nothing of value."

"Well, sir, there is one other thing: I do bring with me the hope that, if God gives me the right husband, one day a descendant of mine will be the King of Israel... and another will be the Messiah."

So, in the last analysis, what can you and I offer to the LORD of heaven and earth? Nothing really, except our firm grasp of the scarlet cord of

memory, coupled with belief, love and hope. This is the cord of faith that binds us together with his Son and with one another. It entails the hope that one day we, and our sons and daughters, will rule as kings and priests in God's glorious eternal Kingdom. And this will be so, not for any merit we have, nor for any works we have done that lift us above anyone else, but because ***with unfailing resolve we continued to cling to the hem of the garment of the One who died for us. We held on and we never let go:***

Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him." (Mal 3:16-17)

In Jesus then, the "scarlet cord" of family line and inheritance and royalty, and also of sacrifice and redemption, reaches its conclusion.

In every generation, the scarlet cord has a wonderful new beginning for those who are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promises through Christ. "He that was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new!'" (Rev 21:5).

Like Tamar, we say to our Lord (the prince of Judah): "Give me your special cord and insignia, as a pledge!"

Like Rahab, we say to our Lord: "Remember me when you enter the land of promise!"

Like Ruth, we say, "Spread your cloak of protection over me!"

Like Bathsheba, we say, "Lord, remember the oath, the vow, the promise you made to me!"

And like Mary, we say, "Lord, I am your servant. May your will be done with me!"

APPENDIX

The *Gaal*, or “Kinsman-redeemer”

The Hebrew word *gaal*, or *goel*, has been translated as "kinsman" (Num 5:8), "avenger" (Num 35:12), "revenger" (Num 35:19-27), "kinsfolk" (1 Kgs 16:11), "redeemer" (Job 19:25), "near kinsman" (Ruth 2:20; 3:9), and "deliverer" (Psa 119:154).

When God proclaims Himself to be the Redeemer, He announces that He will become "next of kin" to those whom He will save. How did the great Creator become the next of kin to us? By manifesting Himself in the flesh (2 Cor 5:19-21; Rom 8:3), through the birth of a Son who will bear the image and stamp of His character, while at the same time being a man, a human being just like us.

Redemption of a Land Inheritance

The Land belongs to God, and individual Israelites never really owned it (Lev 25:23), even though they were given the exclusive right to it so long as they kept the law. If a man fell into debt, and had to mortgage the land he inherited, it became the duty of the *gaal* to purchase it, so as to retain possession of it in the family (Lev 25:23-27). In the year of Jubilee, however, the land which had passed out of the hands of the inheritor, reverted back to him; and thus was redeemed by God Himself (Lev 25:9,10). Meanwhile, the *gaal* acted on behalf of God.

The Land of Promise, which passed into the hands of strangers when Israel was taken into captivity, shall be redeemed by the true *gaal*, who is God manifested in His Son (Psa 74:2; Isa 52:9).

Redemption of Slaves

If an Israelite, through poverty or any other reason, were sold into slavery to a stranger, the duty of the *gaal* was to redeem him, and thus restore him to freedom (Lev 25:47-53).

Through sin, man finds himself in bondage to the law of sin and death (Rom 7:3; 8:2), and utterly unable to redeem himself (Psa 49:7, 8). But God, the *gaal* of Israel, having manifested Himself in flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, assumes the position of near kinsman, and so the price of redemption is paid (1 Pet 1:18, 19; 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23).

Preserver of the Family

The next of kin also had the duty of preserving the family by marrying the widow of a deceased brother if he had died childless (Deut 25:5-10). Under such a law, the continuity of the family was maintained, even though its continuance may have been threatened by folly or disaster. The duty of the Preserver of the Family is clearly linked with the duty to redeem the land inheritance. Boaz, acting as the *gaal*, made it possible for Ruth the alien to have fellowship with Israel and a covenant relationship with God.

The Lord Jesus, as *gaal*, has done likewise for us who are Gentiles:

- “Therefore remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:11-13)
- “Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus... the boundless riches of Christ.” (Eph 3:6, 8)
- “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (Titus 2:11-14)

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