

# **Studying Bible Narratives**

*Illustrated by the Book of Ruth*

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## Approaches to Bible Study

My good friends, this session is not for the preaching of the word of God. It is a session designed so that one Bible student should share with other Bible students some of his approaches to the study of holy Scripture. The study of Scripture and the approach to it is a vast and detailed topic; forgive me, therefore, if the things that I select to say will appear to you to be somewhat arbitrary.

Secondly, let me say with sincerity, if you find the approaches I shall describe not helpful for your own study, don't let it upset you in any way: just ignore what I have said. Our Lord, by his divine genius, communicates with his people according to the disposition and personality of each. It is simply, as I say, a question of one Bible student sharing with you what he has found helpful, and that you might, from time to time, find helpful too.

I shall be taking a very short narrative book of Scripture. I chose a narrative book for this reason: one of the basic things to be held in mind as we study holy Scripture is that we should attempt to follow the thought-flow of the material. Now, that is not always absolutely easy; but it is comparatively so when it comes to the Epistles that generally proceed by argument from one statement to the next. There is many a 'therefore', 'and so', 'then', 'because', and 'for' marking the logical steps in the progression of the flow of thought, although sometimes the flow of thought can be missed, because a passage is not read in its surrounding context.

### **An example of thought flow in the Epistle to the Galatians**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:28–29)

In their original context, these very famous, and nowadays much discussed, verses had nothing to do with the topic of *the emancipation of slaves* nor, as some people call it, *the emancipation of women*. Important as both those topics are, in the thought flow of Galatians 3, Paul is arguing on what terms we inherit the blessings that were covenanted by God to Abraham.

They were covenanted to Abraham and to his offspring: 'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings", referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring", who is Christ' (v. 16). 'That *seed*' (KJV), says Paul, 'is Christ.' If, therefore, God has covenanted the inheritance to Christ, the covenant terms cannot now be altered. The law which came some hundreds of years afterwards could not add

anything by way of condition, so how can we possibly claim entrance into the benefits of that covenant?

That is the topic, and for the elucidation of that topic is the thought flow of the following verses, where Paul points out that the covenant was made with Abraham's seed, which is Christ. 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (v. 27), like a man would put on a large robe, such as the ancients wore. If you have been baptized into Christ you have put on Christ, and that obliterates for this purpose all other distinctions. In the ancient world, you could tell the difference between a Jew and a Greek, a slave and a free person, and a man and a woman by the clothes they wore. Using that metaphor, Paul remarks that it obliterates all other distinctions.

That is, you all inherit on exactly the same terms. 'For as many of you,' says he, 'as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ' (v. 27). For, says Paul, 'if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise' (v. 29). You are beneficiaries under the covenant, the blessings of which were covenanted to Abraham and his seed, because Christ is the seed, you have been baptized into Christ, and you have put on Christ. For the purpose of the terms of the covenant, you count as Christ, and therefore all the redeemed inherit on exactly the same terms.

That is the thought flow of that particular selection of verses. But, as I say, generally following the thought flow in an epistle is comparatively easy by the nature of the material. When it comes to narrative books that relate a story, and somewhere along the line another story, it is not always so easy to see whether there is any thought flow or not between the stories themselves.

### **Why is it important to see any connection between the stories?**

Because, when we have read the story and mastered the facts of the story, it will still leave us with the question, 'so what?'. How am I to interpret this? What is the significance of the story? And *context* is often a very important indicator of the point of a story.

Let me illustrate that to you by telling you a famous story, which is perfectly true because I made it up myself and it involves a Mr. Smith. I'm going to tell you the story, and then I'm going to put it in three different contexts. Each time the story will be in the same words, but you will see how the context suggests different implications.

*Every weekend Mr. Smith was to be seen riding his bicycle around the leafy lanes of Kentucky.*

So, there's the story; I guarantee its truth. You'll perceive what I have said, but, 'so what?'. What is the significance of this world shattering event that every weekend Mr. Smith was to be seen riding his bicycle around the leafy lanes of Kentucky?

#### *First context*

In the factory where Mr. Smith worked there was an office, and in that office there was an office manager, Mr. Smith himself. There was a bright young lady who was his secretary, and there was the office boy. They announced that they were in poor shape and must take up some exercise. The office boy took up football, the secretary took up badminton, and every weekend

Mr. Smith was to be seen riding his bicycle around the leafy lanes of Kentucky. 'I can see the point of the story,' you say. 'Riding his bicycle was his answer to the need for exercise.'

Yes, so it was.

#### *Second context*

The cycling club to which Mr. Smith belonged offered many trophies for success in its races. On practically every trophy in the glass case you would have seen the name of Mr. Smith, and the secret was that every weekend Mr. Smith was to be seen riding his bicycle around the leafy lanes of Kentucky.

You'll observe that it is exactly the same story; I haven't altered it. Now the significance is different: it shows you how Mr. Smith came to have so many prizes.

#### *Third context*

Mr. Smith's marriage was never all that happy; it grew worse after he took up cycling. His wife pleaded with him to spend at least one weekend a month with her. But no, every weekend Mr. Smith was to be seen riding his bicycle around the leafy lanes of Kentucky.

'Oh,' you say, 'that explains the divorce.'

Now we have three different contexts and they do not contradict each other. If I told you one context, somebody else told the second context, and a third person told you the third context, none of us would be contradicting the other. Even with Mr. Smith, his actions were not just of one significance: the riding of his bicycle had significance in three directions—it was *multi significant*.

If the actions of Mr. Smith were multi significant, how much more, for instance, the actions of our blessed Lord Jesus, which were infinite in their significance? That is why Matthew can take a story about the Lord Jesus and put it in one context, Luke puts that same story in a slightly different context, and Mark in yet a third. They are not 'cooking the books', they are not lessening the historicity of the story; but, by showing it against different contexts, they are bringing out the multi-level significance of the actions of our Lord. Hence the importance of reading the stories in the Gospels, for instance, and carefully watching the context in which they are placed.

## **The story of Ruth**

Now I wish to take a short story from the Old Testament, because in the limited time it will be easy to use it to illustrate certain other things. I have chosen the story of Ruth, and the first idea I wish to remind you of, is the question of the *action* of the story. I do not mean the *activity* of the story. Short though it is, the story contains and tells us of many activities: the return from Moab, Ruth gleaning in the fields, conversations here, a marriage there, and so forth. There are many activities, and when I use the word 'action' I am not referring to the many activities, but using the term 'action' in a technical sense. In a unified and well told story, there will be an action that takes the story from where it begins to where it ends.

### **The action in the story of Ruth is Naomi's emptying and her restoration**

To discover it we read first in chapter 1, to notice the point about *departure* in the story. It tells how this man of Ramathaim-zophim went with his wife and two sons from Bethlehem in Judah in time of famine, and lived for a while in the country of Moab. Then disaster struck the family, and Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; the result was, according to the book, 'and she was left' (v. 3). The situation from which this story will start is the fact of what happened to Naomi: she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite girls, and then Mahlon and Chilion died, both of them, and verse 5 then adds briefly, 'so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.'

Notice the repetition; the stage setting is what happened to Naomi and that is where the action will begin. As chapter 1 comes to its climax, Naomi returns home to Bethlehem-Judah with Ruth.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?' (vv. 19–21)

That's how the historian set the stage for the action to begin. The story is about Naomi and her bereavement; *her being left and being emptied*. As we trace the action through the book we shall come to its final denouement in chapter 4. What is it?

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 you 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, who 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 neighbourhood 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. (vv. 13–17)

'A son has been born to Naomi', not to Ruth. The book of Ruth is not about Ruth; it is about Naomi. And there you have the complete action of the story from the beginning, where Naomi is emptied, bereft, full of bitterness, hopelessness and despair, saying to the two girls, her daughters-in-law, 'I am utterly without hope, bereft of husband, no hope of having another husband; or, even if I did, no hope of any children and no grandchildren. I went out full, the Lord has brought me back empty.'

And then the action is how *Naomi was restored*. Not just back to the land of Israel, but filled and restored. A child was born *to Naomi*, who would be the nourisher of her old age, to give her hope, and to raise up the name of her husband upon the inheritance (see 4:5). If, therefore, you are preaching Ruth, it's open to you to say anything, as long as you keep inside the civil law! But if you're wanting to get the message across that the author of Ruth wanted to get across, your prime concern will be to tell the story of Naomi: *her emptying, and then her fullness*.

## **Aiming to preach what the Holy Spirit is saying**

But you may be disposed to question my analysis. 'If the story is about Naomi, as you say, why is the book entitled *the book of Ruth*?'

That's a very serious question, of course. If you are wondering why we debate such things, I repeat—and especially for Bible class leaders and preachers, our aim should be to preach as best we can the message that the Holy Spirit has designed to be preached. Preach anything else you like afterwards.

The thing that you have to ponder is this. Naomi was emptied under the discipline of God; but far from that being the end of things, and Naomi and her family finished, God had purposes of good for them, for her restoration and her filling. That's the story, and that is the message you will eventually leave with your congregation. It is called the story of Ruth, however, because *Ruth the Gentile proved to be the key to Naomi's final restoration*.

Some of you may object again. 'Come, come, Mr. Preacher, all other preachers, being sensible, have told us that the great hero is not Naomi, and not Ruth, it's Boaz. Surely it's Boaz, the great kinsman redeemer, that the book is about? Why do you say that it's about Naomi, and now Ruth is the key to it? Surely you are aware that Boaz was the key, because he is a prototype of the kinsman redeemer, that is, the Son of God himself?'

I don't dispute the fact that Boaz, the great kinsman redeemer, was a prototype of our blessed Lord Jesus. He was one of his ancestors indeed. But, when you ponder it and you see the two functions which Boaz was called upon to fulfil, you will observe that, as far as Naomi was concerned, Boaz could not have fulfilled these functions had it not been for Ruth.

### *Kinsman redeemer*

The first function was, as a kinsman redeemer, that he should be prepared to buy Naomi's farm. That was the duty of the next of kin. If a member of the extended family could no longer maintain his farm and inheritance and had to sell it, the next of kin who was able to do so could be called upon to buy it, so that the farm and the inheritance did not go out of the extended family and become the property of anyone else.

Boaz was quite willing to buy the farm; but that wouldn't have left Naomi happy, would it? Granted, in her widowhood and virtual bankruptcy, she could not maintain the farm and develop the inheritance as it should have been maintained. But even though a kinsman bought it, just to sell it would, in Naomi's mind, have been a sad, sad concession and admission of failure. The name of her deceased husband and the name of her elder son would have died out from their inheritance, and the inheritance would have gone under the name of some other branch of the family. For Naomi, that was an unthinkable admission of failure.

### *Levirate marriage*

So Boaz was required to fulfil another function, and that is to act in *levirate marriage*, which means the marriage of a woman to her brother-in-law, the brother of her deceased husband. *Levir* in Latin means a brother-in-law. In Israelite society, if a man married and died before he had male offspring, then his widow could call upon her brother-in-law to marry her, so that their first male child would be counted as the son and heir of her dead husband and maintain the line of the firstborn. Only after that would the levirate husband's children begin to count; his first child being counted as the child of his deceased brother.

No one was forced to do it, if they didn't want to, but Boaz, of course, in the end gladly consented. Naomi could not have taken advantage of the system, for, as she remarked to her daughters-in-law, she was too old to get married. Powerful, willing and wealthy though Boaz was, his redemption and restoration of Naomi depended altogether on the Gentile Ruth being willing to marry him.

### **A summary of the story so far**

To press home and authenticate that reading of the topic, the book is not only called Ruth because she is the key to the action; Ruth is a dominant figure in the book, not Naomi.

*Chapter 1.* Naomi, in her helpless despair, is advising her daughters-in-law to go back to Moab and Moab's god. Naomi would have been content if the Gentile Ruth had left her and gone back to Moab and its idols. It was Ruth's persistent faith that lay behind the key to success. Not only her devotion to her mother-in-law and her family, but her conversion to the true God. 'Your people shall be my people, and your God my God' (v. 16).

*Chapter 2.* It wasn't Naomi who took the initiative, it was Ruth. One bright morning she said to Naomi, 'I don't really like sitting here twiddling my thumbs, doing nothing, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour"' (v. 2). Plucky girl, showing initiative. Naomi gave her blessing and off she went; 'and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz' (v. 3), though she didn't know who he was.

And so began the story. Boaz noticed her and encouraged her, and she said, 'Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?' (v. 10).

He said, 'Ah, but it has been told me of your devotion to your mother in law, and how you left your native land and came to the people of the nation of Israel that you didn't know before' (see v. 11). And he encouraged her.

*Chapter 3.* It is Ruth's willingness to marry Boaz that is the key. I'm sorry if at this point I have to rob you of some of the romance of the story; I do wish it were otherwise. When Naomi began to see how things were going between Boaz and Ruth, she hit upon a scheme of how her problem could be solved. If Boaz would marry Ruth, then Naomi could sell the land. Being a good businessman, Boaz would be willing to buy the land, but she would make it the condition that whoever bought the land had to marry Ruth. Then their first son would count as the heir to Ruth's former husband; the line could be carried on and the name of the dead maintained on the inheritance. Clever, wasn't it? She would sell the land, and keep it! It was a fine scheme, and that's what she did. But it all depended on Ruth being willing.

Don't overrate her sacrifice. When she went down to the threshing floor, it was Ruth who put the suggestion to Boaz that he should marry her. His comment was, 'May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. . . . in that you have not gone after young men' (v. 10). I suppose Boaz was a little bit middle aged, and Ruth could have gone for the younger men with all the possibilities. And it wasn't just for his money. Why did she do it? It wasn't romance, exactly; it was her vivid sense of duty to the people of God and to the line of the family into which she had married before.

Naomi is what the story is about, and Ruth is the key to the action in the story.



## Major concepts in the story

To help ourselves further in interpreting a story like this, we must study its major concepts. That is where we will begin to find a story impinging on our theology and our doctrine. We have noticed the two major pivotal concepts and institutions on which the story turns: Boaz, the kinsman redeemer; Boaz, the man who was willing to undertake levirate marriage. Both concepts should be studied at length, and we could do well to trace the ideas of both throughout both Old and New Testaments.

### Inheritance

The term *inheritance* is one of the leading terms of both the Old Testament and the New. That is no accident.

Let me sketch in just briefly the significance in Israel of this concept of inheritance. It goes back to the time of Abraham, when God promised inheritance of the land to Abram and to his offspring (Gen 12:7). More recently it would have gone back to the time when, having subdued the enemy, Joshua allocated the land to the people: the tribes and the individuals (chs. 13–21). And to all seven at least of these tribes the land was allotted by line; and each man got his three acres, half of a cow, with flowers for the bees to make honey, and grass for the milk. He honestly believed that this part of the inheritance was given directly by God, and therefore was to be held in sacred trust. It wasn't the intrinsic value of the land; it was that this bit of inheritance came from God.

So, let's remember the story of Ahab and Naboth later on in history that will illustrate the point (1 Kgs 21). Ahab, king of Israel, having nothing better to do, decided to take up gardening as a hobby. He had the idea of extending the palace gardens and found that there was a little plot of land in the way that belonged to Naboth. So he went to try and persuade Naboth to sell the land to him. Unexpectedly Naboth said, 'No'.

The king said, 'I'll give you a good price for it.'

Naboth said, 'No; money doesn't count.'

'What do you mean, money doesn't count? I'll give you a better piece of ground.'

'That makes no difference either,' said Naboth.

'Why won't you sell?' asked Ahab.

He said, 'You see, Your Majesty, you couldn't put a price on my bit of land. It was given to me and my fathers by God and I hold it in sacred trust' (see v. 3).

What an attitude that is. What we have is sacred; given by God, to be held in trust. It would be a different world if we held that view of life.

You say, 'The Israelites were in that position because they came into the land, pushed out the Canaanites, and then God gave them their inheritance. We Gentiles were never in that position.'

But we also have an inheritance, don't we? The book of Deuteronomy says, 'When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel' (32:8 KJV). So we Gentiles have our inheritance.

We should notice in the later poets and the Psalms that Israelite thinkers are beginning to spiritualize this idea of inheritance. They're thinking now of their inheritance, not in terms of acreage of ground, grass and cows. Listen to the Psalmist: 'The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance' (Ps 16:5-6). It's poetry, of course, but it's based on the metaphor that's based on the conquest.

Can you imagine the original Israelites standing around when it came their turn to be allotted land, and the surveyors with their measuring lines? Zedekiah is watching what he's going to get, and his neighbour is by his side. Is his neighbour going to get that luscious piece of grass, or will it come to Zedekiah? He was praying about it. What if the lines were drawn, and the neighbour got the grass and he got the rocks? Would he say then, 'The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places' and believe that God defines our inheritance? We may not have inheritance in terms of land and cash, but each of us has an inheritance in a deeper sense.

### *Heredity*

We may now extend the idea further. We have a thing called *heredity*. What do you believe about you, and that personality that you have inherited? Is it simply the sum total of a number of mindless accidents and whizzing around of atoms, molecules and things? Or, do you dare to believe that behind your heredity stands God? Oh, if I could believe it; but it's hard sometimes, for our personalities are overgrown with weeds, and for some of us the inheritance has been rocky right from the start.

It's easy for someone born with a silver spoon in their mouth to bless the Lord for his great providences. It's hard, if you should have serious health problems, or are the parent of a child with severe learning difficulties, to say with the Psalmist, 'The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.' Could you say it, my brother, my sister?

Do I believe that it's all a ghastly accident, or can I say yes, and in spite of the ruination of sin, in the providence and by the grace of God, I am what I am, and I wouldn't want to be anybody else?

The idea of inheritance, then, is very important and should be investigated. It is said of Daniel that he would stand in his inheritance, his lot, at the end of the days (see Dan 12:13). Redeemed by Christ, in that great incorruptible inheritance there is a bit allotted for you, and you shall stand in it at the end of the days.

### **Levirate marriage**

The levirate marriage is interesting, and it too points forward to our blessed Lord. As Jew or Gentile we have ruined our inheritance; as sinners we have marred it. We can't make a go of it to God's satisfaction, but we could do like Naomi. In her wisdom, she sold out to Boaz and kept her inheritance. Instead of the names of her husband and son being wiped out as though they had never been, when Boaz married Ruth and begat a son, Boaz was prepared for their names to be raised up upon their inheritance.

What a wonderful story this is. It is pure gospel. We have been ruined by the fall; left to ourselves, our name, be it Mary or George, and all it represents, would in the end perish

eternally. Ah, but the gospel says that we can 'sell out' to Christ, and in him we can be made an inheritance for God's satisfaction. When he takes us over, and we begin to bear fruit for God, he will not obliterate our personalities but redeem them and write our very names in the Lamb's Book of Life.

### **The application of the story**

We must go on to other levels of this story. We have talked about the *action*, about the *key* to the action, and about the *major concepts*. Now, when it comes to *application*, stories like this can be applied at many distinct levels. They can be applied at the straightforward historical, practical level, and here is an outstanding story of conversion. Ruth turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God. Her conversion was shown to be genuine, and when she believed God she was not only loyal to God but loyal to his people. That's a good conversion, isn't it? She was prepared to invest her future with the people of God. Even in the matter of her marriage and prospects, she was prepared to lay it out for God so that it might count for his people and for God's purposes with that people. At that immediate practical level, it has obvious implications.

### **More than one level of meaning**

Now I want to make another point. Biblical stories often have more than one level of meaning—peace be to all those who say otherwise! This story certainly does. Evidence of that is to be found in the remarks that some people made.

Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, 'We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.' (Ruth 4:11–12)

It was a curious remark to make at a wedding breakfast, for the details of the story to which they refer are not normally read in public, for the sake of decency. Why mention it at a wedding breakfast?

#### *Judah and Tamar*

After Joseph had been sold to the Gentiles, there was a time that Judah went down to the Gentiles, and married a Gentile. His sons married Gentiles, and when two sons died he should have given the third son to the Gentile wife, Tamar, to perform levirate marriage for her. But he didn't; he was unconcerned about the line of Judah. Perhaps he hadn't yet realized what a glorious future God had for the line of Judah to bring in the Lion of the tribe of Judah; none other than the Messiah himself. Now here was Judah, unconcerned about his destiny. Was he not the chief of the family? He felt that he was a somebody! Oh, see him with his signet ring and his cord and his staff in his hand. What did he have this exalted position for, if he wasn't going to enjoy himself? Isn't that what being king means?

So, he did; but until the price was paid to the woman concerned (Tamar), she asked for a pledge of his staff of office and his signet ring. He gave them, but when his friend went to redeem them she wasn't there. When it was found that his daughter-in-law was pregnant and Judah threatened to have her burned, she produced the evidence. It's a curious story, but it was a time in history when a Gentile was more concerned about maintaining the line of Judah than Judah was himself.

Then history repeated itself. Elimelech means 'my God is king', and at a time when Israel was without a king he went off among the Gentiles and his family would have been blotted out and his name would have perished forever had it not been for this Gentile, Ruth. She was the key to maintaining the line of the king of the royal house-to-be of Judah.

### **Israel's emptying and restoration**

History repeated itself again after that, didn't it? Let me point out this one final thing, as I close. The nation of Israel, and then the two tribes of Judah, went into exile under Babylon, as the ten tribes had under Syria. After that, some few returned, as you know, but a majority stayed abroad so that by the time of the first century AD, there were Jewish synagogues in most of the major cities of the Roman empire. And a very good job of work they did among the Gentiles, for they preached the one true God, and many Gentiles attended their synagogues. Indeed, if you read the Acts of the Apostles, you will find that many of the first converts were drawn from those Gentiles. Through the testimony of the Jews, they had abandoned their faith in the idols of Paganism and come to believe in the one true God, Israel's God. They hadn't yet become Jews; they weren't circumcised, but they had been converted and they were called God-fearers.

Then came the Christian missionaries, Paul and others, and they preached, not just the one true God; they preached Israel's great kinsman redeemer, Jesus the Christ. While a few Jews believed, it was the Gentiles who believed and discovered the Jewish Messiah. They testified to their Jewish neighbours of this wonderful Messiah — this great man of wealth who had been so gracious and welcomed them as Gentiles — and the nation of Israel as a whole refused. But Paul says that Israel's fall was the enrichment of the Gentiles (see Rom 11:11-12). Just as Naomi's departure to Moab proved to be the enrichment of the Gentile, Ruth.

Ah, but one day, Israel shall be restored, 'For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?' (v. 15). Until that time comes, it's the Gentiles who carry the hope and concern for the line of the King. The vast majority of Jews are not interested in their Messiah; it is left to us Gentiles who have discovered him to witness to God's ancient people. They were the first to teach us that there is but one God, and now they have missed their Messiah.

Let us do like Ruth did when she came home from gleaning in the fields.

Naomi said, 'How did you get on, Ruth?'

And Ruth told her the whole story.

'Oh,' said Naomi, 'he's our kinsman; he might be prepared to redeem us.'

The next day, when Ruth came home from the threshing floor, she said to Naomi, 'It's absolutely true; he is our kinsman. Tomorrow, he'll come to the gate and publicly redeem me and own me as his bride before the whole city.'

In God's providence, what a wonderful story we have to tell Israel. We Gentiles have been received until such times as Israel shall be restored.

God be praised, the story is, after all, about Naomi—her emptying and her restoration.

Shall we give thanks and pray.

Lord, now bless thy word and our attempts to think through the message thou dost give us thereby. We thank thee for these great treasures, worthy of our love, and worthy of all of our intellectual effort. We bless thee for the glory that even now we sense resides in these wonderful stories, both for themselves and the wonderful foreshadowing they give us of thy dealings in grace and thy thoughts of good to us Gentiles now, and to thy people Israel in the time to come. So help us to store these things in our hearts that they might be a source of praise to thee and effective testimony to thine ancient people. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **About the Author**

**DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019) was Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy.** He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.