

Ruth
The Poetic Bible: An Epic Poem
(volume 6)

By

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c 2006

After “the Fall”,
after the flood,
after those ancient days of yore,
after our patriarchal fathers,
the time when giants walked the world,
behemoths, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
then our fathers too went the way of all flesh...

After the age of bondage,
that Egyptian epoch,
conceived in pain,
born in hope.

After the time of the titan,
Moses, the prefigurement
of “The Great Promise” to come,
Moses, temporal savior,
Moses, Old Testament mediator,
Moses, shepherd of the sheep,
Moses, the great captain of
the ship of state,
Moses, prophet likened unto
The One Who was to come.

“Since that time no prophet has risen
in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew
face to face, for all the signs and wonders
which the LORD sent him to perform
in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh,
all his servants, and all his land,
and for all the mighty power
and for all the great terror
which Moses performed

in the sight of all Israel.”

Moses too has gone the way of all flesh...

After Joshua, the son of Nun,
Joshua, Moses' lieutenant
Joshua, anointed by Moses,
Joshua, shepherd of his people,
Joshua, who steered Hebrew ship,
Joshua, whose mighty javelin layed cities low,
then Joshua traveled the way of all flesh...

Leaderless,
a Church, a nation,
a people, a body,
headless,
no visible center.

While the throne of Israel sits vacant,
void of life and power,
lying still, dormant,
awaiting yet its hour.

“Now it came about in the days
when the judges governed,
that there was a famine in the land.”

The body revolting, turning upon itself,
acute hunger, inward violence,
storage space, reserved,
hibernated reservoirs of fat,
all used up.

The famine settles in,
it sinks, down deep,
like a leech that overstays its welcome
sucking fluid out of its host,
stomach swelling, life essence leaking.

Yet, this ravisher does not come alone,
plague, pestilence, disease,
unknown doom, undiscovered dread,
frequently bed down together,
under the same roof of one continent,
one country, one city, one village,
one street, one house, one family.

Familial crisis choosing,
temporary exile, or voluntary death?
strange soil, or the mourner's bench?

Father Elimelech,
mother Naomi,
sons, "Mahlon and Chillion".

Familial crisis choosing,
they choose life.

"...And a certain man of Bethlehem
in Judah went to sojourn in the land
of Moab with his wife and his two sons."

Transients, sojourners,
fleeing familiarity.

"The name of the man was Elimelech,
and the name of his wife, Naomi;
and the names of his two sons were
Mahlon and Chilion."

Then it came,
sometimes it approaches hovering,
sometimes it hangs heavy, haunting,
sometimes it arrives cloaked in strange colors,
sometimes it appears camouflaged, masked,
it is rarely invited.

What does it taste like?
Does it possess a texture?
how heavy is it?
Is it odorless?
Did they see it encroaching?
Did it sneak?
Did it creep?
Were they ready for it?
Can you ever be?

"Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband died;
and she was left there with her two sons."

Elimelech has gone the way of all flesh...

Widowed woman,
yet house still a home,
filled with manly presence,
her sons are fully grown.

Matrimony, matches, mates,
two sons set their wedding dates.

Naomi's joy, returning glow,
as down the aisle her sons did go.

"They took for themselves
Moabite women as wives;
the name of the one was Orpah
and the name of the other Ruth.
and they lived there about ten years."

Familial fabric, bonding strong,
household grace receiving,
Naomi's husband, dead and gone,
now to her household cleaving...

Year followed year,
she sensed its presence,
outside her gate, she heard its footfall,
it hesitated, lifelessly listening,
then it moved on
to another street, another door.

At times, she thought she saw it,
in a mist of shadow,
behind a receding fog.

Just when she thought it was safe
to breathe again,
just when she settled down
into matriarchal domesticity...

It came back

Was it cloaked in strange colors?
Was it camouflaged?
Was it masked?
Did it sneak?
Did it creep?

What did it taste like?
Was it odorless?
How heavy is doubled death,
twain sorrow?
What does household death sound like
the second time around?
The third time around?

“Then both Mahlon and Chilion
also died, and the woman was bereft
of her two children and her husband.”

Her sons have gone the way of all flesh...

All her men have left her,
Elimelech:
husband of Naomi,
father of two sons,
is gone,
Mahlon and Chilion:
sons of a bereaved mother,
sons to a dead father,
are gone.

Naomi's foreign family,
neither nativited nor nurtured,
three widowed women,
wherein lay there future?

And so it was,
the widows rose from their dead.

Providential provision,
famine cease, Canaan's land,
fatted crops from God's own hand.

Naomi's intuition blurred,
discerning a curse, to her unfurled,
unwarranted fear, inward dread,
God's hand of doom upon her head.

Her vital organ, bleating,
peel back the bleeding,
behold a mother's heart, beating,
oh! What a woman.

Climbing up and out,
over the clutter of self doubt,
adopted daughters, stifled cry,
where now lye the bonds that tie?
familial fabric, torn in twain,
domestic duty not disdain,
yet, internally conflicted,
emotionally constricted.

“And Naomi said to her two
daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return
each of you to her mother’s house.
May the LORD deal kindly with you
as you have dealt with the dead
and with me.’”

Commended she her daughters’ care,
to future’s hopeful rest,
husbands fresh, new life to share,
ordained of God and blessed.

Leaping voices, verbal protest,
weeping kisses, her wish contest.

‘one flesh we were, sons of thy womb,
now lying dead, cold in the tomb’,
“no, but we will surely return with you
to your people.”

“Return, my daughters!
Go, for I am too old to have a husband.
If I said I have hope,
if I should even have a husband tonight
and also bear sons...for it is harder
for me than for you, for the hand
of the LORD has gone forth against me.”

Naomi’s intuition blurred,
discerning a curse, to her unfurled,
unwarranted fear, inward dread,
God’s hand of doom upon her head.

“And they lifted up their voices
and wept again; and Orpah kissed
her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

then she said, 'Behold, your sister-in-law
has gone back to her people and her gods;
return after your sister-in-law.'

"But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me
to leave you or turn back from following you;
for where you go, I will go,
and where you lodge, I will lodge.
Your people shall be my people,
and your God, my God.

'Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
Thus may the LORD do to me,
And worse, if anything but death
Parts you and me.'

"When she saw that she was determined
to go with her, she said no more to her."

Loyalty lodging, indwelling Ruth's heart,
A daughter's devotion, never to part.
Beyond familial, beyond birth ties...

Friendship, chosen, voluntary,
honorable women sojourning,
back to Bethlehem,
birthplace of kings,
of David and the One to come,
so the prophet shall sing.

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you One will go forth for Me
to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth
are from long ago, from the days of eternity."

Naomi, back to Bethlehem,
Bethlehem a buzz,
city a stir, 'Is this Naomi?'
'How long has it been?'
'Seven years?' 'At least 10'.

Familiar four fled famine's plight,
foreign soil sought,
yet she returns with foreign flesh,

'cursed of God' they thought.

'Yes, I shall give verbal expression
to thy hidden thought's suggestion.

Who do you seek?
Seekest thou Naomi?
no, seek her not.

The Almighty's hand has borne witness against her,
Great God has afflicted her.

Was it not Naomi,
that most wretched of all women,
who chose life in a foreign land,
her happiness full and fat?
But God had other plans'.

On foreign soil, death struck,
a cobra coiled, it plucked
her life, one by one,
first her husband,
than son by son,
male by male
till all were done.

"I went out full, but the LORD
has brought me back empty.
Why do you call me Naomi,
Since the LORD has witnessed against me
And the Almighty has afflicted me?"

'Mara! Mara!
Bethlehem, behold my wretchedness,
Who do you seek?
Seekest thou Naomi?
No, seek her not,
Naomi doesn't live here anymore.

Bitter! Bitter! is my name,
Thus the LORD has dealt with me'.

Now at this time in Bethlehem,
the birthplace of kings,
lived a very unique man.

Elimelech's relation,
kinsman, Boaz by name,
attainment, wealth and station,
reputation and fame.

“And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi,
‘Please let me go to the field and glean
among the ears of grain after one
in whose sight I may find favor.’
And she said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’”

Foreordained, before the world's foundation,
predetermined, before angels or nation,
fruition's labor, barley field,
reaper's harvest, crops to yield.

Whate're the reapers miss,
whate're compassion leave,
Boaz' portioned field,
be Ruth to track and glean.

Heaven's harvest, earthened space,
benefactor yet unknown,
havened in his field of grace,
relational seeds now sown.

Unseen sovr'n, ne're reproaching,
regional lord approaching.

“Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem
and said to the reapers, ‘May the LORD
be with you.’ And they said to him,
‘May the LORD bless you.’”

Foreign female in his field,
her story heard, but yet unseen,
Oh! Beneficent benefactor,
Providential protection,
Boaz to Ruth,
guidance, connection.

“Then Boaz said to Ruth,
‘Listen carefully, my daughter.
Do not go to glean in another field;
furthermore, do not go on from this one,
but stay here with my maids.

Let your eyes be on the field
which they reap, and go after them.
indeed, I have commanded the servants
not to touch you. When you are thirsty,
go to the water jars and drink
from what the servants draw.”

Foreigner, alien status,
“On her face”, bowing,
overwhelmed, troubled?
Boaz’ grace bestowing.

‘Why me, finding thy favor?
Why me, thy grace to savor?
A foreigner am I,
I’ve nothing to offer,
widowed am I,
poverty proffered.’

‘Thou are truly a woman
worthy of this city.

Thy husband has gone the way of all flesh

Loyalty, fidelity, virtues from God,
though thou be born on foreign soil,
proven true to Naomi,
the city knows thy story.

Leaving the familiar, thou has attached thyself,
fresh mother, fresh kindred, fresh city, fresh God’.

“May the LORD reward your work,
and your wages be full from the LORD,
the God of Israel, under whose wings
you have come to seek refuge.”

‘Comforted favor, thine eyes bestow,
softly spoken, my lord, no grace forego.’

And so it was at mealtime,
Boaz, the sovr’n of the field,
Boaz, regional lord,
bid Ruth to sit at table.

Ruth aside the reapers came,
share their bread, dip the same,
Boaz “served her roasted grain,”
stomach satisfied, replete,
table flowing with remains,
yet, her future incomplete.

Boaz, that sovr'n lord commanding,
his servants charged with understanding,
'her labors productive, triumphant,
my sheaves to reap, your tongues lay silent.'

Beneficent benefactor,
a type of the One to come,
gleaning in his field of grace,
our lives lived in the Son.

Purposeful bundles of grace bestowing,
servants' speech ne're disdain,
a thickened field of grain ere flowing,
Ruth's gleaning not in vain.

Back to Naomi,
Ruth from the field,
grained gifts to mother,
behind Boaz' shield.

“Her mother-in-law then said to her,
'Where did you glean today
and where did you work?
May he who took notice of you be blessed.'
So she told her mother-in-law
with whom she had worked and said,
'The name of the man with whom I worked
today is Boaz.'”

““May he be blessed of the LORD”,
'his kindness, not withdrawn, but giving,
Boaz has blessed us, yes tis true,
he's honored the dead and the living.'

““The man is our relative,
he is one of our closest relatives.””

Steady, safety, Boaz' shield,
throughout the season's barley yield,
Naomi's scheming, security pleading,
but Ruth lay dreaming, romance is breathing.

Ruth's submission, mother's voice,
washing, anointing body,
her finest clothing, choice.

Ruth now journeys "down to the threshing floor",
secrecy veiled, concealing,
'after his supper and drink', she thought,
'in the night, my unveiling'.

"When Boaz had eaten and drunk
and his heart was merry,
he went to lie down
at the end of the heap of grain;
and she came secretly,
and uncovered his feet and lay down."

"He said, 'Who are you?'
and she answered,
'I am Ruth your maid.
So spread your covering over your maid,
for you are a close relative.'"

Distant ages,
diverse romantic stages,
Boaz, autumned season of life,
yet if he accepts,
if the date be set,
Ruth to be an early summered wife.

Graceful tables now have turned,
Boaz' goodness dare not spurn,
sought she not the men of youth,
their coffers filled nor bare,
proposed to be the bride of truth,
Boaz, her sovr'n fair.

God ordained his heart to sway,
submission, fast and free,
by a woman's words and ways,
Ruth, perchance his bride to be?

“Now, my daughter, do not fear.
I will do for you whatever you ask,
For all my people in the city know
That you are a woman of excellence.”

Boaz' clan,
Bethlehem knows,
Ruth's excellencies,
stated and shown.

“Now it is true I am a close relative;
however, there is a relative closer than I.
Remain this night, and when morning comes,
if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you.
But if he does not wish to redeem you,
then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives.
Lie down until morning.”

What a night it must have been.
Did they talk?
Did they dream?
Private dreams?
Shared dreams?

Anticipation

Stunted romance?
Plans, desires thwarted?
Matrimonial limbo,
his chance, her dance,
their hopes and dreams aborted?

Jewish custom, God's law said,
to protect the widow of the dead,
to propagate the dead man's name,
a close relation may stake his claim.

Before the dawning of the day,
before the sun's revealing rays,
while still night's cover, darkness hide,
while still no searching eye could spy.

Honor at stake, escape reproach,

wagging tongues not dare encroach,
Ruth rose to go, but ere her flight,
again his grace to ease her plight.

Barley gift, six full measures,
behold her face, Ruth his pleasure.

From the field she flies,
back to Bethlehem,
the birthplace of kings.

“Then she said, ‘Wait, my daughter,
until you know how the matter turns out;
for the man will not rest
until he has settled it today.’”

The day stretches,
the widows wait...and wait...and wait,
wondering now of future fate.

Ruth is fretting,
but her heart be dreaming,
her mind besetting,
but her love now breathing.

Bethlehem’s city gate,
hub of legal life,
center of civic legislation.

Sitting there,
Boaz’ heart is dreaming,
but his mind is scheming,
their future life,
their future fate,
decided at this city gate.

His manner, and the matter,
all business, no chatter.

“Now Boaz went up to the gate
and sat down there, and behold,
the close relative of whom Boaz spoke
was passing by, so he said,
‘Turn aside, friend, sit down here.’
And he turned aside and sat down”

Hailing elders, total ten,
invitation, sit with them.

'Elimilech's widow, Naomi by name,
in need of selling land,
redemption rights to you,
step up and stake thy claim.

But if you pass, thine option mine,
for after thee, I'm next in line.

Primacy of heart be Ruth,
Boaz makes his play,
'focus on the land', he thinks,
'then I'll have my way'.

“So I thought to inform you, saying,
'Buy it before those who are sitting here,
and before the elders of my people.
If you will redeem it, redeem it;
but if not, tell me that I may know;
for there is no one but you to redeem it,
and I am after you.'” And he said,
'I will redeem it.'”

What must he have felt?
Emotioned flooded heart,
when the answer was dealt,
life asunder, torn apart.

'Oh Ruth!
To be another's wife,
to be another's bride,'
his feelings suppressed,
emotions to hide.

Primacy of heart be Ruth,
her beauty, Boaz' eyes,
yet to the other man,
primacy be land,
Ruth, a burden, no prize.

“Then Boaz said,
'On the day you buy the field
from the hand of Naomi,

you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess,
the widow of the deceased,
in order to raise up the name
of the deceased on his inheritance.'

"The closest relative said,
'I cannot redeem it for myself,
because I would jeopardize
my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself;
you may have my right of redemption,
for I cannot redeem it.'"

Boaz to be her kinsman redeemer,
picture of future day,
Gospel story foretaste told,
The Christ, our purchase to pay.

"So the closest relative said to Boaz,
'Buy it for yourself.'"

Witnesses set in place
before the city gates.

"Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people,
'You are witnesses today that I have bought
from the hand of Naomi all that belonged
to Elimelech and all that belonged to
Chilion and Mahlon.

'Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess,
the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife
in order to raise up the name
of the deceased on his inheritance,
so that the name of the deceased
will not be cut off from his brothers
or from the court of his birth place;
you are witnesses today.'

All the people who were in the court,
and the elders, said, 'We are witnesses.
May the LORD make the woman
who is coming into your home
like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built
the house of Israel; and may you achieve
wealth in Ephrathah and become famous
in Bethlehem.'"

Bethlehem, thou birthplace of kings,
rejoice, and to His glory sing!

Great God designed,
His plan assigned,
Oh LORD,
All the glory and the pow'r Thine!

The LORD did form their union sweet,
matrimonial bliss, complete,
overflowing blessings run,
fruit of her womb, a son.

“Then the women said to Naomi,
'Blessed is the LORD Who has not left you
without a redeemer today,
and may his name become famous in Israel.'”

Naomi, blessed among women,
Naomi, fresh family given.

“‘May he also be a restorer of life
and a sustainer of your old age;
for your daughter-in-law,
who loves you and is better to you
than seven sons, has given birth to him.’”

Then Naomi took the child
and laid him in her lap,
and became his nurse.”

Boaz and Ruth:
these two in Messiah's line,
ancestral lineage,
their stock and privilege,
in Matthew's Gospel find.

Boaz and Ruth:
more than a mere footnote
on history's page,
they're printed on the sacred stage,
they're in the line of kings and sages.

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