

A Detailed History Behind the Book of Ruth

By Jeremy Lucas

Part One: Ten Generations to Redemption

Throughout most of our Biblical journey in research and study, many of us have been forced to ask legitimate questions about the contents of God's Word. Why did God say this? What did God do that?

"Every word of God [is] pure: he [is] a shield unto them that put their trust in him." Proverbs 30:5

Each of us, as Bible students, have placed our trust in His pure and perfect Word, but it remains a part of our rugged design that we should test and approve the things presented to us for their value and purpose.

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent [man] looketh well to his going." Proverbs 14:15

Prudence is always contrasted to foolishness or simple-mindedness. When we see "every word" of God before us in hundreds upon hundreds of pages compiled over thousands of years, what reason would we have to not "looketh well" into where we are going? What exactly do we have in our possession? Why is this written? Why was that said?

One of the more popular passages we've probably all heard before is when Matthew quotes Christ as saying that nothing of the law shall pass away.

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matthew 5:18

Indeed we see it again in Luke.

"And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Luke 16:17

Did anyone ever have a parent use the phrase, "Not one I-ota!" in their home? My father used it, but it took me quite some time before it meant anything. What he was saying was, "Not one word!" And the word "Iota" is the Greek for "jot."

Christ makes claim to the Books of the Law saying that absolutely no mark, no word, and no claim will pass away from them until all of it is fulfilled. All of it. The trouble is, don't we usually associate fulfillment with prophecy? With something that is a foretelling of the future? How can there be fulfillment of the things written in Law when they are merely declarations of fact?

It is for these questions that I'd like to take you on a journey that will lead us to the Book of Ruth in a way that you may not have expected. For the question might reasonably be asked, "Why do we have the

Book of Ruth? What's the significance?" Indeed we will answer this question quite extensively as we pass through a more pressing matter that sets the stage.

As we begin to view the Old Testament picture and Christ's mention, it's incredibly important to note that when He speaks about these "jots and tittles," he is speaking most directly about the first five books of the Bible: the Pentateuch (meaning five books) or the Torah (meaning law).

Deuteronomy was the culmination of those books. And in it, we find the following claim about all that had been written to that point.

"Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." Deuteronomy 31:26

The Book of the Law was set aside as most precious for it told of creation, the fall, and spent its greater portion laying out the roadmap for redemption to mankind. If man has fallen, how can they be redeemed? If they have lost land, how can they get it back? If they are of an impure bloodline, when will they be pure again and through whom? What will make them clean again when they have sinned?

Among the many passages in the Torah, we're going to focus in on just one of them for reasons of this study. Deuteronomy 23.

"He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD. A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD." Deuteronomy 23:1-2

There are several groups that God regards as having no present access to the congregation of the Lord. And we must recognize that the "congregation of the Lord" is contrasted with the "congregation of Israel" to indicate those who are princes, elders, and leaders in the community. The "congregation of the Lord" are the prescribed royalty of Israel (Numbers 16:2-3).

The first group mentioned as being unable to enter the royal line of Israel is he that is "wounded in the stones" or "hath his privy member cut off." No need to go into great detail on this other than to say that the royal line of God's people, as we've always seen, should be pure and without defilement. If a man is marred, distorted, cut up, beaten, or maimed in some way, then he is not welcome to the royal house or congregation. In essence, we can think of this in terms of sin (imperfection) not being welcome in the presence of God. He won't look upon it. In this, a man cannot himself enter the congregation because it is him alone that has been defiled.

So what happens when the defilement goes beyond the single generation of a man? Let's go back to the sin of Adam. How long was it from Adam's fall to the time when the world was purified once again through a new man and his family line? 10 Generations. Through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world. Through Noah, sin did not leave the world, but man's lineage was able to start pure again. 10 Generations from a great sin.

Returning to Deuteronomy 23,

"A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD." Deuteronomy 23:2

Here a "bastard" is very specific. In our modern thinking, we associate this with anyone born out of wedlock, but to be fair in the Scripture, it means something much more immoral. A "bastard" is one born out of incestual relations. A father and his daughter. A sister and brother. Take a look at one of these relationships with me.

"And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father [is] old, and [there is] not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yester night with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, [and] lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father." Genesis 19:30-36

That's awful, right? Horrible. Disgusting. Sexually demoralizing. But what is the result?

Both daughters are with child. Out of Lot would come two lines. And what were those lines?

"And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same [is] the father of the Moabites unto this day. And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same [is] the father of the children of Ammon unto this day." Genesis 19:37-38

Lot would be the father of the Moabites and the Ammonites. People born out of incest. Bastard children, if you will. As we found in Deuteronomy 23:2, a bastard cannot enter the congregation of the Lord through to the tenth generation. Who is a bastard child in Genesis 19? Moab.

Many often joke about the insignificance of generations and ages between men, but I insist that you follow closely now and watch the generations from Abraham.

Abraham to Isaac (1st Generation)

Isaac to Jacob (2nd Generation)

Jacob to Judah (3rd Generation)

Judah to Pharez (4th Generation)

Pharez to Esrom (5th Generation)

Esrom to Aram (6th Generation)

Aram to Aminadab (7th Generation)

Aminadab to Naasson (8th Generation)

Naasson to Salmon (9th Generation)

Salmon to Boaz (10th Generation)

Boaz to Obed (11th Generation)

Obed to Jesse (12th Generation)

Jesse to David (13th Generation)

David to Solomon (14th Generation)

These are as we have them recorded fully in the Book of Matthew, Chapter One.

Lot belonged to the house of Haran, Abraham's brother. Meaning what? Lot was a nephew, belonging to the second generation (Isaac to Jacob) of God's noted record. It is during the 11th Generation from Abraham that Boaz meets Ruth, the Moabite woman who returns with her mother-in-law, Naomi. 11 Generations from Abraham. 10 Generations from Lot and the incestual relationship. Obed, in the 12th generation from Abraham, is the 10th Generation out from the Lot's son Moab (born of incest). A perfect roadmap of fulfillment.

Interestingly enough, the story continues in Deuteronomy 23 to further enhance what we've just discovered.

"An Ammonite or Moabite (from the daughters of Lot) shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:"
Deuteronomy 23:3

One might reasonably ask without this information why God would choose to share the story of Ruth. Why would it matter?

Ten generations of ancestors polluted by a relationship of incest. And out of that tenth generation comes a Moabite woman named Ruth, just as the Book of the Law said she would. This alone should be enough to raise an eyebrow. And we haven't even entered the Book of Ruth yet.

Keep all of the above in mind as we now engage some of the bits and pieces (jots and tittles) of this fulfillment.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man [was] Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there." Ruth 1:1-2

Throughout Scripture, a famine is usually associated with a curse on the land by God Himself. And as a result, those living in the land must "sojourn" or "move away" for some time to another land that is not so destitute. In this case, a man from Bethlehem (yes, it's the same one you're thinking about) goes to Moab across the great Salt Sea with his wife and two sons.

"And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one [was] Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years." Ruth 1:3-4

So not long after arriving, the man who led his family to safety in Moab dies. This leaves his wife and their two sons alone in a foreign land for almost 10 years. While there, the two sons marry Moabite wives named Orpah and Ruth.

"And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah." Ruth 1:5-7

Now the two sons die. Naomi, the father's wife, is left only with two daughter-in-laws that are not of her own kin. They are not her flesh and blood. So she prepares to leave and return to her homeland of Judah, in the city of Bethlehem.

"And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each [of you] in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Ruth 1:8-10

On the way back, Naomi insists that these two women go grieve for their dead and return home to Moab. Why come with her? They have a home in Moab and she has a home in Judah. They are from two different worlds essentially. But the daughters press on.

"And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? [are] there yet [any more] sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go [your way]; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, [if] I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.." Ruth 1:11-15

Once again, Naomi gives them every excuse to turn around and go home. Orpah kisses her mother-in-law and returns home, but Ruth cleaves unto Naomi. Further insisting a third time that she return home, you can almost imagine the emotional coldness that Naomi had to this young woman, Ruth.

Go home.

Go HOME.

GO HOME!

And yet...

"Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, [or] to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people [shall be] my people, and thy God my God:"
Ruth 1:16

Where you go, I will go. Where you sleep, I will sleep. Your people shall be my people. And your God shall be my God.

Wow. If you can imagine the Jewish mother that Naomi was, she already had plenty of concerns about her sons having married foreigners against the law of Moses. Why would she want them to come back with her? After enough insistence and a pretty persuasive argument, Naomi continues on down the road with this Moabite woman who has absolutely no reason to declare what she has said. What reason does she have to say that "thy God will be my God?"

Little does she know that it is her generation that would be purified and redeemed according to Deuteronomy 23.

"So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, [Is] this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why [then] call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest." Ruth 1:19-22

Here we discover that Naomi once had a fair share of land and fullness. When she and her husband and the two boys left Bethlehem, they had everything. Now, in return, Naomi is seen by the people in surprise asking, "Can this really be the same woman?" She asks them not to call her by name, but in a sarcastic tone you might imagine, she says, "Call me bitter." For she had left with everything and come back with nothing.

They have no immediate family and no land.

"And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name [was] Boaz." Ruth 2:1

Boaz was in the family of Naomi. This was one of her husband's kin. He was a mighty man of wealth in the city of Bethlehem.

If I may, what readers may find interesting is that Matthew's Genealogical account makes note of four women. And each of these women noted has a story written about them. One of the women was Rahab.

When Joshua was about to enter the promised land, he sent two spies into Jericho and Rahab is the harlot who allows them shelter in her home. As a result of her provisions, she is given equivalent shelter among the Hebrews when they take over the land that God has promised them (the same land that she is presently in). Having once BEEN a harlot, she now marries into the Hebrew nation and mothers Boaz to a Hebrew named Salmon, of the line of Judah.

He was thus born to a foreign mother and a Hebrew father. They name him Boaz, which means, "In Him There is Strength." Several years later, his great-great-great-great grandson, King Solomon would name two pillars in the entrance to the temple Jachin (which means "Established") and Boaz (which means "Strength").

So here is this man, Boaz, a man of wealth in the city of Bethlehem, born of a harlot mother and a Hebrew father... and named with the indication that "In Him there is Strength." And all of this, akin to Naomi.

"And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after [him] in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter." Ruth 2:2

For those of us who are always amazed at the search for grace, this ought to ring quite memorable. A woman who has nothing to speak of, no knowledge of the people she's with, and no immediately family to depend upon... speaks about grace with the eloquence of a woman who knows that she needs what she does not deserve.

"And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field [belonging] unto Boaz, who [was] of the kindred of Elimelech." Ruth 2:3

Scripture here says that her "hap" was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz. What's fascinating is that she would have seen this as chance, perhaps a run of good luck. "It just happened." Yet, with Scripture, every "jot and tittle" is reckoned as significant. She does indeed "hap" upon Boaz' field, but little does she know that it is his field or what that would mean to the people.

"And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD [be] with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel [is] this?" Ruth 2:4-5

First to consider is that the field we're speaking about was not IN Bethlehem, but on the outskirts of it. Remember that for later.

Boaz returns to the field to see how things are going. He greets some of the people in the field even though he is the owner that you'd imagine wants nothing to do with getting his hands dirty. As he says hello to the reapers, he catches the eye of Ruth and asks who she is.

"And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It [is] the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.:" Ruth 2:6-7

Ruth has been very respectful of the reapers who are from Judah. She knows that she is an outsider and asks permission to do anything at all that she has done in reaping the field. She even rested a little bit in the house.

Hearing this of his reapers, Boaz says one of the most profoundly moving things that could be said to a foreigner working in his field.

"Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearst thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: [Let] thine eyes [be] on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of [that] which the young men have drawn." Ruth 2:8-9

Having absolutely no precedent for this, Boaz basically says three things to Ruth.

1. Not only are you welcome here, but don't go anywhere else.
2. Move about freely and no man shall touch you on my order.
3. If you are thirsty, please have all that you want to drink.

"Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I [am] a stranger?" Ruth 2:10

This passage often causes my eyes to well up. For it is in this that I can identify to a claim by the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace that has redeemed me. Why have I found grace in your eyes, Lord? Why should You even notice me and have knowledge of who I am? Am I not just a stranger in Your greater goals? Who am I that the Lord of all should care to know my name?

And he answered...

"And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and [how] thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knowest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Ruth 2:11-12

Interesting word is this "nativity." For in it we see pictures of Bethlehem, but rarely do we consider that the traditional Christmas story never mentions "nativity." So why use it? What does it mean when it comes up in other areas of Scripture? In the story of Ruth, we see the only mention of Nativity with Bethlehem. And in it, Boaz mentions that the land of Ruth's Nativity she has left to be in Judah. Thus,

she has left her own people (kinsmen = nativity) to find herself here. Having left one nativity, she has encountered the Nativity of Boaz in Bethlehem.

This effort she has made to come to a people that she does not know... "The Lord will recompense." Equally meaning that "The Lord will make a covenant." For what reason? Why should God go so far as to make a covenant just because she has left the Moabites and come to Judah?

Because for 10 Generations, she and all of her family before her were never welcome into the Congregation of the Lord, this royalty of princes, elders, and wealthy men in the land of Israel. Making a covenant would involve restoring the purity of her name.

As we discover in Ruth, chapter 4, Boaz is in a position above his other kinsmen and above the elders. Seemingly, this position he has would make him even a prince of the land where judges rule. And for what we've studied so far, a Moabite has no precedent or right to the land according to the final book of the Law. Neither should she even be reaping in the field.

Yet, the ten generations to Ruth have passed and what happens? A "Kinsman Redeemer" gives her grace.

Hosea speaks about the manner in which much of Scripture is written.

"I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets." Hosea 12:10

Similitudes are those things which are likened to something other than themselves.

"I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top." Psalm 102:6-7

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether." Song of Songs 2:17

"This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters [of grapes]." Song of Songs 7:7

"Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say unto him, Thou art like a young lion of the nations, and thou [art] as a whale in the seas: and thou camest forth with thy rivers, and troubledst the waters with thy feet, and fouledst their rivers." Ezekiel 32:2

We often think of similitudes as "types" or "models" of things to come. Boaz, the Kinsman Redeemer of a foreign woman who had no place and of the land to which her mother had lost... for these things he became a model in many forms.

Much, much more could be written on the relevance of Ruth's story to the greater picture of God's handiwork in 66 books, yet it is sufficient to close here having provided a picture of necessity for the four chapters contained in those pages.

Ruth, the Moabite woman born to a lineage of incest and a bastard child, was not to be welcomed into the royal congregation of the Lord in Israel until 10 generations had passed. Not knowing who she was in this context, she loses her husband and father-in-law to death in the land of her Nativity. She returns with her mother-in-law to Bethlehem in this 10th generation and finds grace in the love of a kinsman redeemer. Mind you, not a grace that is about love and infatuation (Boaz was not so absent of integrity), but a grace that is about giving someone what they do not deserve... an inheritance that was not in theirs to begin with.

All of this and more does Ruth receive by the grace of Boaz, the Kinsman Redeemer.

Boaz being the "similitude" of Christ our Redeemer, we learn about grace from a historical standpoint in one of the most beloved stories of Old Testament Scripture. In keeping with the theme of unmerited grace, we see Paul speak of redemption as well.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" Ephesians 1:7

"Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Ephesians 1:14

"And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins:" Colossians 1:14

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:14

The One who "gave Himself for us" for redemption's sake was born in the city of David, the city of Bethlehem, the city which first was ruled in royalty under Boaz and Ruth in the 10th Generation away from Lot and Isaac.

"Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye [are] witnesses this day. And all the people that [were] in the gate, and the elders, said, [We are] witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:" Ruth 4:10-11

They were famous in Bethlehem indeed. For it was here of all places that the Lord set in mind to begin an eternal redemption likened to the one we read in the Book of Ruth.

Part Two: Princes, Captains, and the House of Boaz

When we read the story of Ruth, almost every reader is inclined to view Boaz as the hero, the kinsman redeemer, and the one who saves the day in a love story of tremendous grace. But we often read it without any consideration for how Boaz became the man that he became. Though he is viewed as a "type" of Christ, we know that he was indeed quite human. So where did he come from? Who was his father? Who was his grandfather? Why is Boaz able to command elders at the gate of the city? How did he achieve such a level and rank in the house of Israel?

In order to more soundly lay out the house of Boaz where Ruth "happened" to find herself (Ruth 2:3), it's important that we discover the historical characters that played into his life. To begin this journey, you may recall from the previous study on Ruth ("Ten Generations to Redemption") that the "congregation of the Lord" was a reference to the princes of Israel. It is on this point that we will begin to play out another aspect of the story in Ruth that you may well not be aware.

We begin at the entrance to the Book of Numbers.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first [day] of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of [their] names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies."
Numbers 1:1-3

The Torah teaches us everything we could ever want to know about the foundation of Israel and how it is to function. Genesis tells the story of where it began. Exodus tells the story of how it became free of slavery and subject to God. Leviticus tells of the political nature through which must deal with each other. Deuteronomy tells of their foreign policy. And Numbers, one of the most overlooked books of the Bible, tells of their census and organization.

If anyone has ever done a "connect the dots" exercise as a child, the result of your connecting always ends up in an illustrative picture. Such is the Book of Numbers. For the one who takes the time to do so, there is much to discover about the connected dots and pictures so beautifully put together by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. One example can be found in the archived article Numbers of the Cross.

But setting aside illustrations for a moment, chapter one of Numbers lays out the leadership of Israel and the armies that will be led. We read in verse two that Moses is to take from each of the twelve tribes the count of all who are 20 years and older. What we discover is an interesting truth of absolute protection over God's people that most would miss.

"Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty." Numbers 1:46

603,550 men over the age of 20. Yet, we read just seven months earlier...

"A bekah for every man, [that is], half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty [men]." Exodus 38:26

603,550 men over the age of 20. Seven months have passed. The number is to the dot exact.

The above point is irrelevant to where we're going, but an observable one, nonetheless.

"And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers." Numbers 1:4

In order to achieve the task of counting out each man over 20, Moses and Aaron are asked to begin with the "one head" over every "house of his father." Essentially, the person at the top or the man most closely linked to his ancestor.

The listed tribes with their "heads," according to verses 5-15 are as follows:

1. The tribe of Reuben, led by Elizur the son of Shedeur
2. The tribe of Simeon, led by Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai
3. The tribe of Judah, led by Nahshon the son of Amminadab
4. The tribe of Issachar, led by Nethaneel the son of Zuar
5. The tribe of Zebulun, led by Eliab the son of Helon
6. The tribe of Ephraim, led by Elishama the son of Ammihud
7. The tribe of Manasseh, led by Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur
8. The tribe of Benjamin, led by Abidan the son of Gideoni
9. The tribe of Dan, led by Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai
10. The tribe of Asher, led by Pagiel the son of Ocran
11. The tribe of Gad, led by Eliasaph the son of Deuel
12. The tribe of Naphtali, led by Ahira the son of Enan

Before focusing in on any of the 12 men listed, I'd like to more importantly provide the type of life that these 12 men were associated with. Not merely that they were heads of the home, but that they were much more.

Firstly, when this list is compiled, we read the following:

“These [were] the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel.” Numbers 1:16

“These [are] those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, [being] twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers.” Number 1:44

In the New Testament, one of the styles of leadership we see defined is that of Roman centurions (Acts 10) who led "centuries," or 100 men. Numbers 1 tells that these heads were not only princes, but they were "renowned of the congregation" and led "thousands." Verses 12-43 tell us just how many men and soldiers that the princes were placed in charge of among the congregation of Israel.

"And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:" Numbers 16:2

As the numbers grew over the years from the original twelve, the definition of "renown" is expanded to say that they were "famous" princes throughout the camp. By chapter 16, the number has grown from 12 to 250.

“And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:” Numbers 36:1

Princes were also known as the “chief fathers” of the children of Israel.

“And his brethren, men of valor, [were] two thousand and seven hundred chief fathers, whom king David made rulers over the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, for every matter pertaining to God, and affairs of the king.” I Chronicles 26:32

By the time of David, there were at least 2700 princes over individual houses and with specific affairs to the king.

“And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar.” Number 7:10

Princes were given the task of offering a dedication for their tribe once the tabernacle was completed and anointed. Each one was to bring it before the Levite priest on behalf of their people.

“And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, [by] the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,” Number 27:2

“And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp.” Numbers 31:13

Generally speaking, we can be fairly certain that the princes and the priests were the only ones permitted to near the tabernacle of the congregation. Levites could enter the holy of holies, but instead

of having thousands upon thousands come with offerings, these "chief fathers" would bring the offering on behalf of the whole.

"And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes." Joshua 9:18

At times, these members of the congregation of the Lord would make decisions that were unpopular among the people (not that much has changed in government).

"And with him ten princes, of each chief house a prince throughout all the tribes of Israel; and each one [was] an head of the house of their fathers among the thousands of Israel." Joshua 22:14

Each prince was head of a "chief house" in the home of his father.

"Now the children of Israel after their number, [to wit], the chief fathers and captains of thousands and hundreds, and their officers that served the king in any matter of the courses, which came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, of every course [were] twenty and four thousand." I Chronicles 27:1

"Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly," I Chronicles 29:6

Thus far, we've seen these men of Numbers 1 growing in size and having several names among the people. They've been known as heads of the house, chief fathers, and princes. In Chronicles, we see that they are also called "captains." For they were not merely in charge of several thousand people, they were in charge of the men who would be capable of going to battle. They were captains because they would lead their men into war when time called upon them to do so.

"Then Solomon spake unto all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every governor in all Israel, the chief of the fathers." II Chronicles 1:2

In a group of 603,550, it's quite reasonable to imagine that the title of governor, prince, judge, and chief father would be synonymous. Our president has several titles himself from Commander-in-Chief to Head of State and Executive Officer.

Before losing too much ground, the definition of these twelve men should be fairly clear by now.

1. The tribe of Reuben, led by Elizur the son of Shedeur
2. The tribe of Simeon, led by Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai
3. The tribe of Judah, led by Nahshon the son of Amminadab
4. The tribe of Issachar, led by Nethaneel the son of Zuar
5. The tribe of Zebulun, led by Eliab the son of Helon

6. The tribe of Ephraim, led by Elishama the son of Ammihud
7. The tribe of Manasseh, led by Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur
8. The tribe of Benjamin, led by Abidan the son of Gideoni
9. The tribe of Dan, led by Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai
10. The tribe of Asher, led by Pagiel the son of Ocran
11. The tribe of Gad, led by Eliasaph the son of Deuel
12. The tribe of Naphtali, led by Ahira the son of Enan

As some of you will recall from "Ten Generations to Redemption," a 14 year geneology was laid out in Matthew regarding the time between Abraham and King David. For reference sake, I'd like to provide it here as well.

Abraham to Isaac (1st Generation)

Isaac to Jacob (2nd Generation)

Jacob to Judah (3rd Generation)

Judah to Pharez (4th Generation)

Pharez to Esrom (5th Generation)

Esrom to Aram (6th Generation)

Aram to Aminadab (7th Generation)

Aminadab to Naasson (8th Generation)

Naasson to Salmon (9th Generation)

Salmon to Boaz (10th Generation)

Boaz to Obed (11th Generation)

Obed to Jesse (12th Generation)

Jesse to David (13th Generation)

David to Solomon (14th Generation)

Of the twelve tribes listed, there is only one tribe to whom the "sceptre" or "authority" shall never leave.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be]." Genesis 49:10

Keeping this in mind along with the 14 generations listed above, let's focus in on Judah and the third name provided in the Numbers 1 account.

"And these [are] the names of the men that shall stand with you...Of Judah; Nahshon the son of Amminadab." Numbers 1:5-7

Amminadab, the father of Nahshon, had several children beyond the one mentioned here. One of his daughters, named Elisheba, married Aaron the priest in Exodus 6.

"And Aaron took him Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Naashon, to wife; and she bare him Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar." Exodus 6:23

So as the story unfolds with regard to Judah, Amminadab becomes linked to a couple of important lines. Firstly, his grandson Eleazar, through Aaron and Elisheba, is still the high priest after Aaron has passed away when we read of the account in Numbers 20. By Numbers 26, it is Moses and Eleazar who are speaking together. And of all places, they find themselves speaking in the "plains of Moab."

"And Moses and Eleazar the priest spake with them in the plains of Moab by Jordan [near] Jericho, saying," Numbers 26:3

For most reading, it's important to keep in mind (not forgetting the eventual story of Ruth being a resident of Moab) that the country line of Moab was where Moses would also end his own journey. For it was on the mountain of Nebo that Moses was allowed to look across the water and see the promised land.

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that [is] over against Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the LORD said unto him, This [is] the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see [it] with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." Deuteronomy 34:1-6

Just before crossing into the promised land, Moses himself is buried on a mountaintop in Moab. Eleazar would be in the position of "high priest" all the way through Joshua 24.

By definition, Naahshon, the son of Amminadab, was Eleazar's uncle. And who was Nahshon?

"And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab [shall be] captain of the children of Judah." Numbers 2:3

Nahshon was "captain of the children of Judah." And the number of his men were what?

"Those that were numbered of them, [even] of the tribe of Judah, [were] threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred." Numbers 1:27

314,600. More than any other camp.

"And Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon, prince of the children of Judah;" I Chronicles 2:10

Nahshon was not only captain of Judah, but he was the prince of the largest tribe of men in the camp of Israel.

His legacy was passed on to the next two generations.

"And Nahshon begat Salma, and Salma begat Boaz," I Chronicles 2:11

It would be incredibly easy to jump ship over Salma because it seems he is insignificant, but lest we set aside one of the most important pieces of Boaz' heritage.

"Salma the father of Bethlehem, Hareph the father of Bethgader." I Chronicles 2:51

Father of the great city to which we all know.

Amminadab passed on the inheritance of a great name to both his son, Naahshon, and his daughter, Elisheba.

Naahshon passed on the inheritance of "captain of Judah" to his son, Salma.

Salma passed on the inheritance of an entire city, Bethlehem, to his son, Boaz.

And Boaz passed on the grace of his fathers to a Moabite woman ten generations from the age of her ancestor's incest (Lot).

Equally interesting to consider is that Amminadab's line places several things into perspective.

Amminadab fathers Elisheba and Naahshon (8th Generation from Abraham)

Aaron fathers Eleazar [by Elisheba] and Naahson fathers Salma (9th Generation)

Eleazar fathers Phineas and Salma fathers Boaz (10th Generation)

Phineas is then the chief priest over all the land while Boaz is the chief father of Judah alone... living in the land given him by his father... the city of Bethlehem, the eventual city of David and birthplace of our Savior.

Both men came from a likened bloodline and through each came a strength of authority.

"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down."
Ruth 4:1-2

Only a man of his stature and inherited authority could stand so tall as to command the elders to sit down. He spoke and they listened. For he was the captain of Judah... the prince of the people. The only man who stood higher in the land was Phineas, a distant cousin and chief priest of the land.

Part Three: Famine in the House of Bread

In our last two studies, we looked at the history of two leading characters in the Book of Ruth. We learned of Boaz and his family heritage, a line of princes and captains in Judah. We learned of Ruth and the timing of her redemption in the grace of Boaz (that she was ten generations from Lot's incest). In this third section, we're going to deal with the backdrop of their location. What was Bethlehem? What made it significant?

To begin, let's turn our attention to a journey between two cities. The story of a woman with child and the man who loves her dearly. Two people on their way to a small town by the instruction of God. The woman only pregnant because God opened her womb.

Picturing Joseph and Mary? Try again.

"And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel. And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour." Genesis 35:15-16

Jacob and Rachel. Remember them?

"And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter." Genesis 29:18

Jacob would serve 7 years to earn the favor of Rachel's father. But Rachel also had a sister, the firstborn. Neither of them were yet married. It was not a custom for Laban, Rachel's father, to give away the younger of two daughters first, so Jacob works seven years for Rachel only to receive Leah, the older daughter.

"And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it [was] Leah: and he said to Laban, What [is] this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years." Genesis 29:25-27

Just to get the woman he loved, Jacob worked 7 years + 7 more years.

"And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also." Genesis 29:28

(This is one of several verses where we learn about the placement of a "week" as 7 years.)

After 14 years, Jacob has two wives. Rachel's womb is closed.

"And when the LORD saw that Leah [was] hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel [was] barren." Genesis 29:31

With all the love Jacob has for Rachel, Leah is the one who begins having children.

"And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I [was] hated, he hath therefore given me this [son] also: and she called his name Simeon. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing." Genesis 29:32-35

Leah's Firstborn is Reuben.

Leah's Second is Simeon.

Leah's Third is Levi.

Leah's Fourth is Judah.

Four children to Leah.

"And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, [Am] I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her." Genesis 30:1-4

Rachel's envy for her sister's ability to have children puts her into a heated argument with Jacob. At this point, she seems nearly suicidal and suggests Jacob take her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife. He accepts the offer and Bilhah becomes pregnant twice.

"And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan. And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali." Genesis 30:5-8

Bilah's Firstborn is Dan.

Bilah's Second is Naphtali.

Not long after, she gives Jacob another handmaid, Zilpah, as a wife. He accepts again and Zilpah conceives.

"When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad. And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son. And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher." Genesis 30:10-13

Zilpah's Firstborn is Gad.

Zilpah's Second is Asher.

"And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son. And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. And Leah said, God hath endued me [with] a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun." Genesis 30:17-20

Leah now has two more children.

Her fifth son is Issachar.

Her sixth son is Zebulun.

Altogether, there are ten descendants of Jacob. Absolutely none from the womb of Rachel, whom we read about in the opening story of Genesis 35. So what happens?

"And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb." Genesis 30:22

By His mercies, her womb is opened and she conceives.

"And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son." Genesis 30:23-24

Joseph and the promise of another son.

Between the birth of Joseph and the birth of this last son, quite a number of years pass in which the family has endured many things. In fact, so many years have passed, that another child would quite literally be "the baby" of the bunch. And here we return to Genesis 35.

"And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour." Genesis 35:16

Anytime you see "Beth" in the Old Testament Scriptures, it indicates a "city of" whatever follows. In this case, "Beth" and "el" refers to the "City of God."

And just a few verses earlier, Jacob was renamed "Israel."

"And God said unto him, Thy name [is] Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel." Genesis 35:10

The picture we're given is a man, Israel, traveling from the City of God to Ephrath, known as the Place of Plenty or the Place of Increase. On the way, his most beloved wife, Rachel, goes into a very troubling labor.

"And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also." Genesis 35:17

Hard labor indeed. Enough that there was fear the child might not be born safely. The midwife assures her that the baby will be born.

"And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin." Genesis 35:16

On her way out, she names the child Benoni, the "son of my sorrow." But Israel, the child's father, names him Benjamin, the "son of the right hand." And before much time passes, Rachel dies giving birth.

"And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which [is] Bethlehem." Genesis 35:17

She is buried in the way near Ephrath, which is also known as Bethlehem. Ephrath is the "Place of Plenty" and Bethlehem would more gradually become its known title. Bethlehem means, "City of Bread," and it stems from the former location known as the "Place of Plenty." For it was here, in the nearby fields, that they held some of the most significant wheat and barley harvests of the land, among many other agricultural crops that came in abundance (vineyards, olive orchards, grazing land for sheep).

Bethlehem of Ephrathah was very much like Jerusalem in that those who lived in its parameters were "up" in the hills. You see, Bethlehem is nearly 2500 feet above sea level. This is emphasized when Boaz goes to meet the elders in chapter 4.

"Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down." Ruth 4:1

Boaz had to go "up" to the gate of the city, for the valleys he owned and operated were below the higher elevation of Bethlehem itself.

Perhaps you may find this interesting, but Jerusalem has an equivalent sea level tower. The success of these two cities depends upon the valleys and fields that surround them on all sides.

"Lo, we heard of it at Ephrathah: we found it in the fields of the wood." Psalm 132:6

If you can imagine a small town on a hill 2500 feet above normal sea level with surrounding valleys filled with trees, plains, fields for grazing, and crops galore... that is Bethlehem in its most valuable historical picture. Not a place of bustling life and social gatherings... just a peaceful place where residents worked hard at a variety of agricultural projects.

And this, my friends, was where famine broke the peace for the ten years that Naomi was in Moab losing her husband and sons. And this was the place where Naomi returned with her daughter-in-law to begin work in the Barley and Wheat fields restoring natural resources.

Part Four: In the Days of Empowered Women

If you've come with me this far in the study of Ruth, then I encourage you to stick it out through just one more section. For it is here that we answer the most common historical question that comes out of the book... when did it happen in the rest of Scripture? Just as we might wonder when Micah prophesied or who Isaiah served in his ministry, many have asked, "Where does the Book of Ruth fall in the story?" Hence, we begin our final section back in the beginning of the book.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled..." Ruth 1:1

Clearly Ruth's story was in the period of the judges, but during which administrations? The nation of Israel had twelve judges (likened to the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones). Let's get a picture of the generations of 12 judges before we continue.

Judge #1 (40 years): Judge Othniel (Judges 3:9-11)

Judge #2 (80 years): Judge Ehud (Judges 3:15-30)

Judge #3 (1-20 years): Judge Shamgar (Judges 3:31)

Judge #4 (40 years): Judge Deborah & Barak (Judges 4:4-5:31)

Judge #5 (40 years): Judge Gideon (Judges 6:7-8:35)

Judge #6 (23 years): Judge Tola (Judges 10:1-2)

Judge #7 (22 years): Judge Jair (Judges 10:3-5)

Judge #8 (6 years): Judge Jephthah (Judges 11:1-12:7)

Judge #9 (7 years): Judge Ibzan (Judges 12:8-10)

Judge #10 (10 years): Judge Elon (Judges 12:11-12)

Judge #11 (8 years): Judge Abdon (Judges 12:13-15)

Judge #12 (20 years): Judge Samson (Judges 13:2-16:31)

A student of generational and verse-by-verse history must do a little digging to figure out how these all fit together on a timeline. But in our case, there isn't a need to map it out. For reference sake, hopefully you can follow along to see where our famous couple (Boaz and Ruth) fit in.

The ninth judge, Ibzan, was from Bethlehem. He had 30 daughters, 30 sons, and 30 daughter-in-laws.

"And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, [whom] he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years." Judges 12:8-9

Ibzan was the only judge to have a seven-year reign, the Biblical number of perfection. Being from the productive city of Bethlehem, one can understand why his children were plenty and his rule was perfect.

"And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel." Numbers 10:29

Moses, the patriarch who led the Hebrews out of Egypt, has a conversation with Hobab, his brother-in-law from Midian.

Thus, beginning with Moses/Aaron, we have the following generation pictured:

Generation #1: Moses/Aaron & Hobab (the Midianite)

"Now Heber the Kenite, [which was] of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which [is] by Kedesh." Judges 4:11

One of the children of Hobab was Heber.

Generation #2: High Priest Eleazer (Son of Aaron from Part II) & Captain Heber (the Kenite).

"Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for [there was] peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite." Judges 4:17

Heber's wife is Jael, a woman we'll come back to a little later.

"In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. [The inhabitants of] the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel." Judges 5:6-7

Judge Shamgar, Israel's third judge who ruled for an undefined period, was in place during the "days of Jael." These years showed that "the highways were unoccupied and the travellers walked through byways." If highways are unoccupied, this would indicate people who have fled the land for reasons of destitution. There isn't any reason to be there or travelling. No one is living in the villages.

More importantly, Shamgar is ruling during the generation of Eleazer, the High Priest, who we discovered in Part II was living in the generation of Salmon, the father of Boaz. Thus, Shamgar's rule would be taking place primarily during the first few verses of the Book of Ruth, several years before Boaz shows up.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons." Ruth 1:1

A man that we know to have been somewhat wealthy (from earlier studies) leaves Bethlehem, the "City of Bread," because there isn't any bread (essentially no barley or wheat in plenty supply). He and his family (wife, Naomi and two sons) go to live in the land of Moab for a time. How long?

"...and they dwelled there about ten years." Ruth 1:4b

After ten years, Naomi, who is part of the generation of Eleazer (from Part II), is also in the generation of Heber and his wife Jael. Likewise, we can then conclude that Naomi and her family were in the land of Moab during the reign of the third judge, Shamgar, who reigned for somewhere between 1 and 20 years. While we don't know the exact years of his rule, we know that his rule resembles an Israel that Naomi and her husband had to leave.

It's important now that we don't perceive Judge Shamgar as a presiding leader of ignorance who couldn't keep food in the land. Generally speaking, when we think of someone like President Herbert Hoover, we consider a good humanitarian who inherited bad times. Was it Hoover's fault that the United States led the world into a Great Depression? Could his decisions alone change the downward spiral? Of course not. Yet, he is blamed with and associated with one of the lowest points in our history.

Likewise, Judge Shamgar appears to have inherited the "evil" that the people did after Ehud died. He, on the other hand, was quite the hero of his day when reading of his own brief story.

"Now these [are] the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, [even] as many [of Israel] as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; [Namely], five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath." Judges 3:1-3

Through these remaining nations in the promised land, God would "prove" Israel via war. One of these nations, consisting of "five lords" (v.3) took a brutal hit.

"And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel." Judges 3:31

Shamgar's leadership was that of a warrior. Though his name means "sword," his slaughter of 600 Philistines came by a wooden stick much like the construction of a spear. An "ox goad" was something used to poke and prod oxen in their labor. Generally they're between 5 and 10 feet long. Picture Paul Newman with an ox goad in one hand and several dead men draped over his other arm.

So why famine under a good judge?

"And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead." Judges 4:1

The second great judge (Ehud, who reigned the longest at 80 years) was dead. And after so many years of integrity, they "again did evil" in the sight of the Lord. In payment, the Hebrews receive oppression.

"And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host [was] Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles. And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel." Judges 4:2-3

Twenty years of oppression, to be exact. What happens to a developing nation when it is oppressed? Foods become more scarce and production slows tremendously. People have less and less work that they're able to find. Famine. Absence of bread in the most likely place that one would find it.

What we do not see in this God-sent oppression is an obvious break between judges. Oppression doesn't mean that there is no one in charge. Rather, it means that during such times, those in charge must deal with it on a regular basis until the threat is overcome or it crushes them completely. This leads me to believe that Shamgar (3rd) ruled for the entire twenty years between Ehud (2nd) and Deborah (4th).

We should note that when Ehud died, the rule of Shamgar was filled with oppression and Deborah (4th judge) becomes responsible for ending the troubled times. Her reign is 40 years (Judges 5:31) of peace, so it can be a fair notation that between Ehud's death and Deborah's attempt to crush the Canaanite oppression, these were the twenty years of oppression on the land for "doing evil" in the sight of the Lord. Some or all of those years belonged to the leadership of the great warrior Shamgar.

Now that we've arrived at this point, it's easy to move forward and piece together the timing of this love story for Ruth and Boaz. Who was the judge when Naomi left Bethlehem? Shamgar. Who was the judge when Naomi returned with Ruth 10 years later? Deborah.

"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." Judges 4:4

"Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread." Ruth 1:6

Naomi hears that things are back to normal in Judah, so she prepares to return. Deborah has taken the reigns of leadership and the Lord has once again "given them bread."

During the leadership of Deborah, the "days of Jael" really became legend. This was the story of a woman who provided shelter to the captain of her enemy (Captain Sisera of Canaan), then killed him in his sleep thrusting tent nails into the temples of his head (Judges 4). Her name was praised by Judge Deborah as a woman who "put her hand to the nail." In essence, a woman who was enough of a workman that the captain of an army would fall at her feet.

Connecting the timeline dots, Deborah would have followed Shamgar, who reigned during the ten years that Naomi was in Moab. Upon their return, Deborah had taken control of the land and restored its plentiful nature by destroying the nation that was oppressing them. And in the end, Ruth would undoubtedly hear the "water cooler" stories about the great female judge and the heroine who killed their enemy.

The Book of Ruth introduces us to a fascinating picture of two women that are bold and fearless (Naomi and Ruth). The context of their timeline introduces us to two more women who were just as bold (Deborah and Jael). If the women who pass down legendary strength and leadership are the talk of the towns (The Judge and a Captain's Wife), especially one as agricultural and busy as Bethlehem, can you just imagine how empowered Ruth must have felt "happing" upon an environment like the field of Boaz?

On the surface, Ruth was a foreigner in a strange land who seemingly didn't deserve favor and grace from the prince of Bethlehem. Yet, we recognize from Deuteronomy 23 (Part I) that it was her perfect time to be given such grace. We also learn that the military and political leaders in Israel when she arrived were those that encouraged the boldness of women, not so much in word, but in action.

Perhaps you never asked yourself why Ruth was relevant to the Scripture.

Perhaps you never asked yourself the significance of Boaz.

Perhaps you never asked yourself what made Bethlehem important.

And perhaps you never asked yourself where Ruth's love story fit into the timeline of Biblical events.

But the next time you go to read of her story, hopefully you'll have a greater backdrop for understanding the most precious story of grace in the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth.