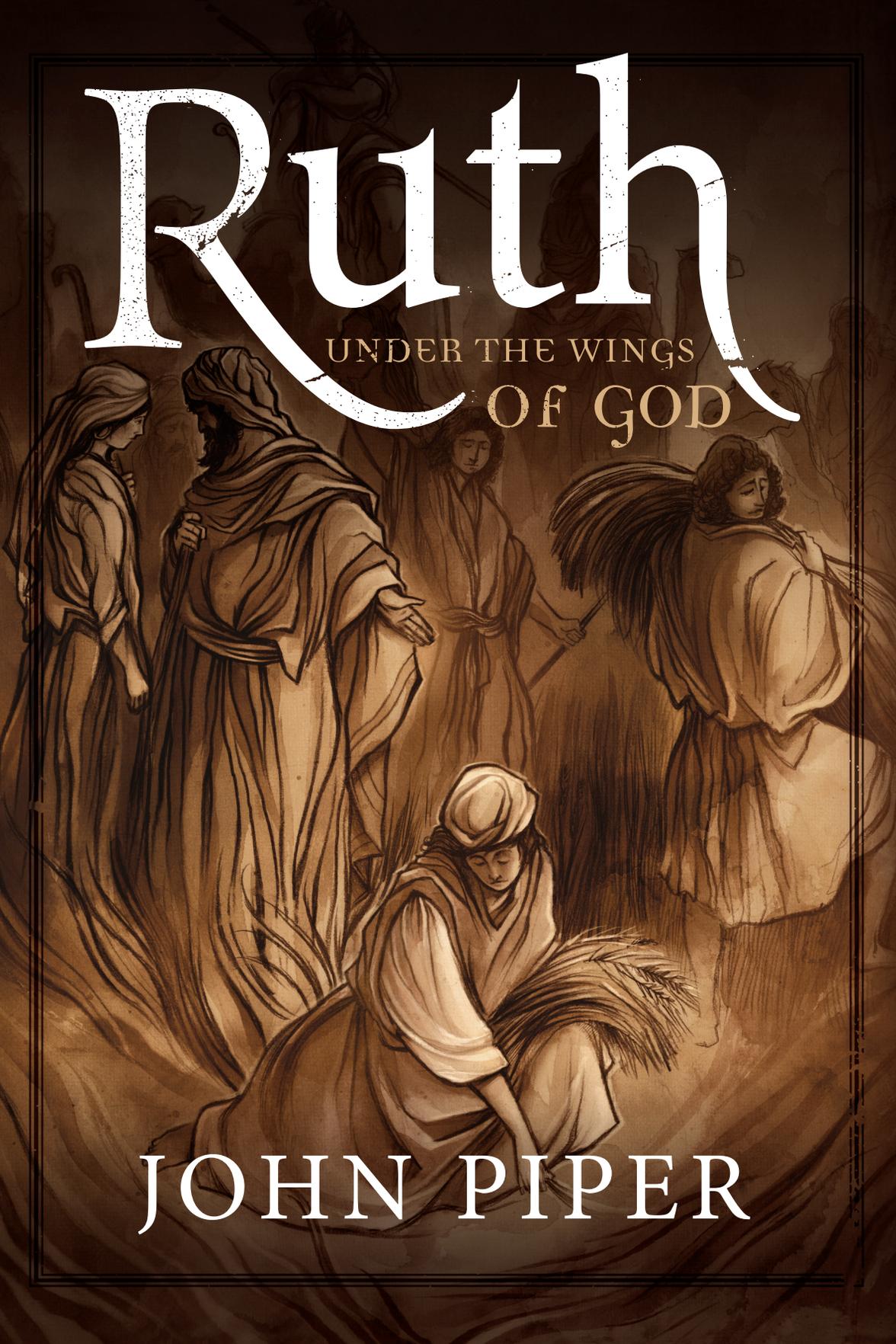


Ruth

UNDER THE WINGS
OF GOD



JOHN PIPER

Ruth

UNDER THE WINGS
OF GOD

Other Books by John Piper

A Sweet and Bitter Providence

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This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence

Spectacular Sins

When the Darkness Will Not Lift

What Jesus Demands from the World

The Prodigal's Sister

The Innkeeper

The Misery of Job and the Mercy of God

For a complete listing of books by John Piper, see page 92.

Ruth

UNDER THE WINGS
OF GOD

JOHN PIPER

Illustrated by
Cory Godbey

■ ■ CROSSWAY

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

RUTH *Part I*



“My daddy lets me watch three sheep
Beside the mill; and if I keep
Them safe, and make them fat, he said
That next year I’d get five instead.
‘If you can keep your three in line,
Then you can handle five at nine.’
My daddy’s always making rhymes.
But they’re not very good — sometimes.”
His grampa laughed. “You’re pretty sharp
For being eight. And how’s your harp
These days? I’d like to hear you play
Sometime. I heard your daddy say
You’ve gotten really good. Let’s go
Sit down beside the sheep, and show
Me what you’ve learned.” So David took

His grampa down beside the brook
And mill, beneath the carob tree,
And cradled, like a lamb, the C-
Shaped kinnor in his lap and played
A ballad Jews had sung and prayed
For centuries. The old man laid
His head back on the tree and swayed,
As if the music made the tree
A ship mast on the rolling sea.
Then David noticed Obed's eyes
Were closed. "It better satisfies
The ear to close the eye," he once
Had heard his teacher say. "It blunts
The beauty of a thing to feel
A rival pleasure make appeal."

But when he saw on Obed's face
The tears, he stopped. "Grampa, in case
You'd like to hear a happier tune
I know one called 'The Red Raccoon.'
I'm sorry that you're sad. What's wrong?"
"My mother used to play that song."
"You mean Great-grandma Ruth, Grampa?"
"That's right. She was a great grandma
In more ways than you know, young man."
"Grampa, I'd love it, if you can,
To have you tell me all about
Great-grandma Ruth. Can you stay out
With me and tell me how she came
To live in Bethlehem? Her name
Still makes the people smile and sing



Down by the barley fields. They ring
A bell at harvesttime, and all
The grown-ups go down every fall
To watch some actors do a play
About Great-grandma Ruth. But they
Won't let the kids go down. It's got
Some parts that Daddy says are not
For kids. Grampa, I am a youth,
But tell me 'bout Great-grandma Ruth."

"The story starts with God, as all
True stories do. As I recall,
Almost a hundred years ago
God stopped the rain and broke the flow
Of blessing in the fruitful land

Of Ephratha. By his command
There was a famine from the shores
Of Lebanon south to the doors
Of Hebron and beyond. And none
Could stay his hand or make undone
The deed of God. He had his aims,
And one of these was Ruth. God names
Whom he will have and moves the earth
To bring them to himself. By birth
She was a Moabite, outside
The Law, and Israel, the bride
Of God, cut off from sacrifice
And priest and covenant. No price
Paid to her gods of wood and stone
Could ever cleanse her heart, atone

For sin, or satisfy the just
And holy claims of God. Sheer dust
Upon the scales, all this, to weigh
Against idolatry each day.
And yet God had a plan to bring
Her out of darkness, make her cling
To him, and give her royal seed.”

“Grampa, what’s royal seed?” “A breed
Of children, David, who will be
Like kings. I don’t know how. But she
Was sure of it and prophesied. We need
It too. But let’s go back. What deed
Delivered her out of the hand
Of Chemosh, brought her to the land

Of Israel, and put her name
In songs and gave her godly fame?
It was a famine, David. God
Closed up the clouds and laid his rod
Against the back of Israel.’

“But, Grampa, how did famine tell
Great-grandma Ruth to leave her land
And come to Bethlehem?” “The hand
Of God is very roundabout,
And there is time and room to doubt
At every turn, my son. A man
Of Bethlehem was in the plan.
His name: Elimelech. He took
His wife Naomi and forsook

The land of God. It was an act
Of unbelief. Naomi packed,
But every movement was a grief.
She knew that God would bring relief
If they would stay in Israel,
If they would seek his face and dwell
Among the righteous few who cleave
To future grace. 'But that's naive,'
Elimelech replied. 'There's grain
In Kedemoth, but only pain
In Bethlehem.' And so they went,
Unknowingly, to judgment sent,
But also on an errand of
Amazing grace and sovereign love."

“You mean, Grampa, because they’d find
Great-grandma Ruth?” “That’s right. But mind
You, David, this was all of God.
None saw the wielding of the rod
To save the tail and strike the head.
Within a year Elimelech was dead.
And then the rebel sons, to break
Naomi’s heart, began to take
In Moab girls.” “What do you mean,
Grampa?” “I mean, young man, that clean
And upright boys will never sleep
With girls until the day they keep
One woman for a wife. Beware,
Young man, no commoners should dare,
Nor even kings, to break this law.

Naomi trembled at the raw
And lustful sins of Chilion.
And Mahlon would carouse till dawn.
'No more!' she cried. 'I meant for you
To have two virgin wives. And do
You plan to put me in the grave
Beneath this soil, or in a cave
Cut for a Moabite?' And so
To mock their mother's faith, as though
To grant her wish, they sought
Two virgin Moabites, and bought
Them with the birthright of their dad."

"Wow, Grampa, they were really bad."

"But, David, do you know who those

Wives were whom these blind rebels chose?

One's name was Orpah, here's the truth:

The other was Great-grandma Ruth."

"But, Grampa, that sounds terrible."

"Oh, no, my lad, incredible

Is what it was. The rescue of

The century: relentless love

Is what it was. The broken saint

Just took them in without complaint,

And from her lips and from her way

They met her God and learned to pray.

And then one day, as quickly as

Their dad, her sons were dead. It has

The ring of judgment, David. Do

You see? They drowned while swimming through
The Arnon River just to spite
The bragging of a Moabite.
Naomi wept till she could weep
No more, and then she said, 'I sweep
My place today, tomorrow I
Will leave it clean, and by and by,
God helping me, I'll put my feet
In Bethlehem, and there complete
My years with bitter memories.
Go back and find your families.
I have no sons to offer now,
Nor any man to keep his vow.
The Lord be with you in the house
Where you grew up, and may your spouse



Be better than the last.' And so
She kissed Orpah farewell. 'Now go.'

But when she turned to Ruth, she saw
A different face. As if the Law
Of God, with every promised hope
And all of its eternal scope
Were written on her very soul
Unrolling like an endless scroll.
And thus she spoke: 'Entreat me not,
Naomi, to return, or take my lot
Again among the Moabites
With wooden gods and pagan rites.
Turn me not back to these, but let
Me go with you. Whatever threat

Or hope you have, I will embrace.

I have no other dream or place

To live. Where you stay, I will stay.

The path you take will be my way.

And where you die, there I will die,

And bury me beneath the sky

Of Israel. There is a call

Upon my life, Naomi. All

That you've endured these ten long years

Has been for me and you. And tears

Cannot conceal that generations yet

To come through us will not forget

To praise the bitter providence

Of God that wrought for us immense

And precious mercies in this place
And lavished me with painful grace.
A rod of famine was the price
For me that opened paradise.
I am Moabite to you,
But more than that, your daughter too.
Come, let us leave this place, I cleave
To you, Naomi. I believe,
Beneath this sweet and bitter rod,
That your great God will be my God.”

“Grampa, how did you memorize
All that?” “It came with lullabies
And ballads that she sang to me,
Just like the one you played. Could be,



My good grandson, that you will sing
Like that and put the truth on wing
With harp and psalm and song. She would
Be pleased. Perhaps, then, if you should,
Your son, when you are gone someday,
Will sing it in a whole new way.”

*And so with faithful Ruth we pray
That bitter providence today
Tomorrow will taste very sweet,
And every famine that we meet
And every broken staff of bread
In death, will bring us life instead.*





RUTH *Part II*



“Grampa, when I put my three sheep
Down in the fold tonight to sleep,
Can you stay here and tell me more
About Great-grandma Ruth before
I go to bed? Naomi said,
Because Elimelech was dead,
And both her sons, that when
She came to Bethlehem again,
There would be bitter memories
And nothing more. Are these
The only things, Grampa, that she
Could see? Just grief? It seems to me
That God was doing more.” “Indeed
He was. But, David, sometimes creed
Can’t keep up with the speed of pain



And has to make the meaning plain
When suffering slows down. Do you
Know what I mean?" "I think it's too
Complex, Grampa." "I mean that what
Naomi knew of God was not
Rejected when she wept her way
Back home to Bethlehem. The day
Would come when tortoise faith would catch
The bounding hare of pain and match
His power, not his pace, and win.
Judge not from how the two begin.
Does that make sense?" "I think it does.
But, Grampa, tell me what it was
That turned it all around and made
Naomi glad again."

“She prayed.

And, David, when she prayed, God did

A hundred miracles and bid

A barley field become a place

Of quiet power; and there the race

Of faith was won. My dad, your great-

Grandfather, Boaz, conquered hate

And loved a Moabite beneath

The wings of God and did bequeath

Naomi, thus, more faith than she

Had ever known or thought could be.”

“Oh, Grampa, that’s the part that most

Of all I’d like to hear. I’ll post

The gate and put the sheep away

And you can eat with us, okay?”



“I have a better plan. You get
Permission from your dad to let
You spend the night with me, and we
Will go down to my house and see
The very place, the barley field,
Where, seven decades past, God sealed
A kind of love that’s known by few:
Between a Moabite and Jew.
And, David, did you know that your
Great-grampa Boaz has a pure
And faithful memory of what
It cost him then? And there’s a lot
Of love still left, though he turns ninety-nine
This year and cannot see or walk. But line
On line, he knows the story of



His Ruth and how they came to love
Each other when the barley yield
Was ripe and they met in the field.
I think you're old enough to go
And visit him. But he won't know
Your name or who you are. So bring
Your harp, and maybe we can sing
Our way into his mind and set
Some memory on wing, and get
The treasure of his heart up to
His lips."

At dusk the east wind blew,
And as the sun was going down,
The two approached the little town

Of Bethlehem and made their way
Around the soft and splashing bay
Of blowing barley waves. The house
Was small, for neither had a spouse.
“A servant in the loft and two old men
Can manage with a fox’s den,”
Old Obed used to say when folks
Would pester him and try to coax
The two of them to live at home
With Jesse’s family. “I roam
The local hills at my own pace,”
He said, “and come back to my place.”

Tonight Boaz was by the fire
And wrapped in blankets for attire.

Young David stood in awe that here
Was his own flesh who, in a year,
Would have a century of life
On earth and one whose wife
Was his Great-grandma Ruth. He took
His harp and cradled in the crook
Of his small arm the music of
A fam'ly's century of love.

When Boaz heard the song that he
And Ruth had sung for sixty-three
Unbroken years, he blinked his blind
And glassy eyes. And in his face a kind
Of deep and strong and gentle joy
Began to shine. "Come here, my boy,"

He whispered. David stopped and sat
Down at the old man's feet. "Is that
A story you would like to know?"
He asked. "How Boaz, long ago,
Became the husband of a maid
From Moab, even though he swayed
A city with his wealth?" "Yes, sir,
I would. Why did you marry her?"

"It wasn't easy, child, at least
For some. A woman from the east,
And not a Jew, was barely good
Enough to be a slave and would
Not enter any mind to be
A wife. My father couldn't see

What I could see. I still recall
His speech: 'Boaz, the gall,
To bring this on our family!
The girl's a Moabite, and she
Has got no name. She was a slave,
And Chilion a rebel knave
To buy her as a virgin just
To pique his mother and his lust.
And don't you know, Boaz, the way
Her people got their start? Don't say
It was a noble thing that Lot
Was drunk and lay down on his cot
With his own daughter. She deceived
Her grieving father and conceived
A child by incest. And his name?

Moab! A people born in shame.

And, Boaz, will you sacrifice

Your name and, by that price,

Raise up a seed to Chilion

So there is nothing when I'm gone?

And while I live will you disgrace

My silver head and go abase

Yourself to marry such a thing?

And even use your mother's ring?"

He paused, as if the sting were yet

Alive. "I never will forget

Those words." "Great-grampa, how did you

Reply?" "I said to him, 'It's true

That she's a Moabite and that

Her husband was apostate at
The core and that she was a slave
And has no high-born name to save
From stigma and contempt. And should
The sin of Lot destroy the good
For every generation, then
There is no good in any men.
I bid you, father, think with care,
Lest you forget the evil pair,
Five generations past, that bore
Our father Perez at the door
Of harlotry. Incest is not
Unique to Moabites. We got
Our life from Tamar's little trick
To get the seed of Judah. Pick

Your people, tongue, or tribe, for none
Is pure from disrepute, not one.
But, Father, have you thought about
What Ruth is like inside? I doubt
That in a thousand Israelites
One has embraced our God with heights
Of faith one-half as free and great
As she. Do you desire a mate
For me with Jewish nose and skin,
Or sacred Jewish faith within?
And is there not more fruit in her
Than can be hidden with a slur?
For those who care about the truth
There is none fairer than my Ruth.
They all can see her love for God,

How she has borne the biting rod,
And loved Naomi without pay,
And worked throughout the blis'ring day,
And gathered only where the poor
May glean, and kept her garments pure
Among the men. This woman lives
Beneath the wings of God. It gives
Me more delight to share the shame
Of faith and love than save my name.
I love you, Father, and I pray,
Please look at her another way.”

“Grampa, I mean, Great-grampa, sir . . .”

“Yes, son?” “I’m glad you married her.”

“Me too. I think I better sleep

Now, son. I'm sure the rest will keep
Until tomorrow. So despite
How much more I could say, good night.”

*And meanwhile in the darkness here,
Where tribes and races hate and fear,
O Lord, grant that we now ignite
A flame of truth, and let us fight
With love and joy to make it plain
That fam'ly links are not a chain,
And origins do not control,
Half-images are not the whole,
Nor true, and take a rending toll,
Beneath the skin there is a soul.
And may we lift this light and truth
For Boaz and for every Ruth.*





RUTH *Part III*



When David woke, he was surprised
To see old Boaz energized,
And waiting for the boy to wake.
The old man couldn't see or make
His feet tread where his mind said, Go.
But he could recollect, and, Oh,
How he did love to tell the tale
Of how the God of Israel
Turned famine into wedding feast,
And formed the greatest from the least,
And wakened love when it had died,
And brought a Moabitess bride
Into his life, and made a field
Of barley, barren once, to yield
Such seed as he had never dreamed.

He heard the boy awake and beamed,
“Young man, my son tells me that you
Are David, Jesse’s son.” “That’s true,
And you’re my great-grampa.” “Last night
I didn’t know, without my sight,
That it was you. Come here and let
Me touch your face. There is a debt
To parentage that one can feel.
My wrinkled fingers can reveal
More memories of Ruth than both
My eyes. Yes, there, a little growth,
And that will be her nose, and this,
Her cheek, where once I placed my kiss.

Obed!" "Yes, Father?" "Take me and
The boy down by the gleaning stand.
You know the one." So Obed took
His father in his arms. A look
Told David to make wide the door.
He set him on a cart before
The cottage plot, and then the three
Of them, at dawn, rode happily
Down to the gleaning stand. The face
Of Boaz beamed as if the place
Were like a home, and he had been
Away for years. And Obed's grin
Burst into laughter once or twice,
As if he drove to paradise.



It was a bright and lucid dawn,
And both of these old men were drawn
Not just by this well-seasoned mare,
But by a memory out there
Beyond the edge of Bethlehem,
Where bitter providence for them
Had been reversed, and God had turned
A famine into feast. It burned
Inside their hearts with hope,
And as they rode the final slope
Down to the gleaning stand, the two
Of them, one blind and due
In heaven thirty years ago,
The other one with hair like snow,
Broke into song.





“O barley field! O barley field!
When you were bent with heads,
I feasted on your ample yield
And ate your simple breads.

O barley field! O barley field!
All scorched with desert breath,
You starved the one I would have healed
And stole my love in death.

O barley field! O barley field!
A paradise in truth,
You kept for me a better yield
And brought to me my Ruth.”

“Great-grampa, you
Made up that song. But tell me who
You mean — the one you would have healed
But lost in death.” The wagon wheeled
Down to the gleaning stand and stopped.
The morning sun warmed all, and topped
The half-grown grain with tiny crowns
Of gold, and wrapped the trees in gowns
Of yellow green. “Yes, David, I
Will answer you. But first now, try
To put yourself back eighty years.
Your grampa isn’t born. Great fears
Grip all of Judah. Drought has left
The barley field unsown, bereft
Of even root and stem. I’m not

Quite nineteen years of age. This spot,
One year ago at seventeen,
I married Mara.” “Do you mean,
Great-grampa, you were married once
Before?” “I was, for fourteen months.

Eight weeks before she died, again
Here at the gleaning stand, the men
Persuaded me to leave and go
With them to Moab. I should show,
They said, my bride more love and take
Her to a place where there is cake
And wine. But when I told her of
The plan, she said, ‘Boaz, such love,
You know full well, will not endear

Me to your soul. In this I hear
The counsel of Elimelech,
Your uncle. And I will not trek
To Moab in his godless train.
It is not love to trade for grain
Your God. I will not suck with these
The breast of foreign deities.
I'd rather starve beneath the wings
Of God than live with foreign kings.'
And so we stayed. Eight weeks, and she
Was dead — too weak and thin to see
The fever through. And as she died
She said, 'Our God is on your side,
Boaz, and do not doubt that this
Is best. I know there is more bliss

In dying underneath the wings
Of God than living by the springs
Of Chemosh. Boaz . . . 'Yes, I'm here.'
'Boaz, I don't want you to fear.
I had a priceless dream last night.
I dreamed that God would show his might
And take your bitter providence
And by this famine here dispense
For you a feast — a wedding feast —
And make the greatest of the least,
And waken love when it has died,
And bring an unfamiliar bride
Into your life, and make this field
Of barley, barren once, to yield
Such seed as you have never dreamed.

And that he will be born esteemed
In this our little town, so small
Among the clans, and God will call
Him out of ancient days to sway
The nations with his rod. Don't say
That you were wrong. This very hour
God makes the sin of man, with power,
To serve your faithfulness. In ten
Short years you will be healed. And then . . . ?

'Oh, Mara, what of you?' 'My task
Is done. The Lord did only ask
That I should serve to keep you here,
Lest out of mingled love and fear
You flee to Moab and make void

The mercy of your God. Employed
For such a God-like work, your bride
Is now content to step aside.’

And ten years later, David, there,
Just over there beside the stand, as fair
As any in the world, stood Ruth.
She rested in the gleaners’ booth.
Ten years to turn the mutiny
Of sin into the ecstasy
Of faith. I knew that it was she
I watched her, breathless, steadily.
I still can see her tawny neck.
The daughter of Elimelech!
Do you see, David, why we sing?

O barley field! O barley field!

A paradise in truth

You kept for me a better yield

And brought to me my Ruth.

I'd rather live beneath the wing

Of God, or die there if I must,

Than try to save my life by trust

In my own plans. Oh, David, do

You understand? O son, how few

There are who wait for God to act!

How few who trust the solid pact

That God has made, that he will work

For those who wait for him, nor shirk

One moment in a ten-year plan,

Or more. Perhaps he wills to span
A thousand years before the space
Of time is full for him to place
His final king upon the throne.
And when he does, it shall be known
That here in Bethlehem we played
A part.

If you are not afraid,
Tonight, God willing, we will ride
Down here again, and I will guide
You to the place that I love best
And sightless show you all the rest.

*So waiting is a holy work
Of faith in God. Nor does there lurk
Beneath the timing of his ways
Some secret malice that displays
Itself in holding back the flow
Of future grace. God does not go
From here to there by shortest routes;
He makes a place for faith and doubts.
Nor does he hasten on his way,
But comes when it is best, today,
Or maybe twenty years from now,
Or more. With Boaz we will bow
To God, and there embrace the truth:
Some serve like Mara, others Ruth.*





RUTH *Part IV*



Blind and lame, the old man drew
The blanket close and clutched the shoe
That he held in his lap and sat
Beside his faithful son. And at
The back the boy rode bumping down
The same hill from the quiet town
Of Bethlehem. The wooden cart
Was witness to the master art
Of Obed's craft. When he was ten
He built it for the poorest men
And women who would glean the sheaves
That every godly farmer leaves
In Judah for the ones who own
No land. His mother, Ruth, had shown
Him how she used to gather grain



And beat it out, and what a strain
It was to take the winnowed seed
And walk it up the hill. "They need
A cart," she said. "Don't you believe,
My son, that Moses meant to weave
Together with his law that we
Leave something for the poor, a plea
That, if we can, we help them bear
It up the hill and take it where
They need to go? It seems to me
The holy Torah ought to be
Interpreted to see as much
Compassion as we can. The touch
Of love from this great Book
Once wakened me from death and shook

Me to the bottom of my soul.
Why not make something that can roll,
And let the gleaners use it when
They're tired?" And so the boy, at ten,
Built them a cart. He thought, "Perhaps
My cart, made out of love and scraps,
Will help the poor to see the hand
Of God and trust in what he's planned."

Now sixty years have passed. Tonight
The aged craftsman drives his bright
And eager grandson and his blind
And failing father down to find
The place he promised David they
Would go when it was dark. The gray

Of twilight turned to night. The boy
Could see on Boaz's face a joy
That broadened to a wrinkled smile.
He knew the ruts of every mile,
Especially the final two
Around the fields, that led down through
The hollow where he used to sift
The barley seed at night and lift
The spirits of his workers there.
He used to sing a song, and wear
The same clothes as the working men,
And rake and toss his share. And when
The other owners asked him why,
He said, "The Torah says that I
Should love my neighbor just the way

I love myself. Would you not say
That if you labored for a boss,
It would be good to see him toss
The barley every now and then?
We ought to read the Torah, men,
To see as much compassion as
We can. Go read, and find it has
More mercy than you think.” But these
Were not the only memories
That made the old man smile tonight.

“Stop here, Obed,” he said. “The light.
How much is there tonight? Is there
A moon? And are there stars?” “It’s fair,
My father, and the moon is full.”

“That’s good,” he said, “Obed, let’s pull
The cart down to the cedar at
The end.” “Great-grampa, isn’t that
The one where all the people go
To watch the play?” He laughed. “You know
About the play?” “I don’t know much.
They say it’s all about the touch
Between you and Great-grandma Ruth.”

“This is my favorite spot,” the old
Man said, “And now you shall be told
About that touch and where it led.
Here seventy short years have sped
Away since that great night. Because
The heat was great by day, I was

Down winnowing at dark. And when
The work was done, I told the men
To fetch the food and wine so we
Could eat and rest. I couldn't see
What God was just about to do.
When I was full and tired, I threw
This blanket over me and lay
Down underneath that tree. Today
It must be twice as big. I fell
Asleep and dreamed about my belle.”
“You mean Great-grandma Ruth?” “I do.
And, David, then my dream came true.

At midnight something stirred beneath
My blanket at my feet. My teeth



Clamped like a vise. I carefully
Unsheathed my knife and tried to see
Where I could strike the beast to kill,
Lest I should miss the head, and still
Be bitten by some snake or worse,
I knew not what. It is a curse,
I thought, for dreaming of my Ruth.
And as I raised the knife, the truth
Rose like a hand against my wrist.
I looked and thought, 'This moonlit twist
Beneath the blanket at my feet
Is not a snake. Nor will it eat
My leg. This is a human form.
A child in search of being warm
Perhaps. Or worse, some woman of

The street who hopes to sell me love?

I whispered, so as not to wake

The men, 'Who are you? Do not make

A sudden move or you will die.

If you're a child and cannot buy,

You shall be fed. But if a wench,

You will find nothing here, nor quench

Your hunger in my bed. I would

Not touch a woman, be she good

Or great, outside a covenant,

Though there is one I truly want?

I pulled the blanket gently back

And there, as still as night, the black

And piercing eyes of Ruth. 'My name
Is Ruth,' she said. 'Your servant came
Because Naomi told me I
Should lie down at your feet and by
This action say you are a kin
To her, in hope that she may win
Your willingness to raise up seed
To Mahlon, if you are agreed.'
'These are Naomi's words, I hear.
I know her mind, but not, I fear,
Her daughter's heart. This too I would
Be pleased to learn. I hope you could,
Besides this well-taught speech, reveal
Your own designs and how you feel
About the prospect in her mind.

Or have you no emotions unassigned?

She lay there motionless, then said,

‘My heart’s desire is that you spread

Your holy wing and cover me.’”

“Great-grampa Boaz, I don’t see

What all this means.” “Well, David, now

You know why they do not allow

The kids to come down to the play

Each year.” “But listen, here’s the way

It ends. My heart was beating in

My throat, and crouching there was sin,

Awaiting one misstep. I spoke

The hardest words and almost broke:

‘There is another kinsman still

More close to you than I. He will
Be given legal right to take
You if he will. Tomorrow make
Your prayer, and I will settle this
With elders in the gate.' No kiss
That night. But when she left, still dark,
She took my hand and drew an arc
And said, 'The God of Exodus
And flood at dawn will fight for us.'
That was our only touch.

And so
As soon as light shone on the low
Gate leading into Bethlehem
I gathered elders and to them



Laid out my case, and to the head
Whose right preceded mine I said,
'Naomi's land is yours. The claim?
You marry Ruth, and keep the name
Of Mahlon in your line. Declare
Your will, for I am next, and swear
That I will take her if you can't.'
I wondered how the Lord would grant
The longing of my heart and by
Another providence comply
With Ruth's appeal and my desire.

And then I learned. He said, 'Acquire
It for yourself. The land I would
Have had, for it is very good.



But Ruth? She is a Moabite,
And we are Jews. It isn't right.
The land is yours, and Mahlon's name
For what it's worth. And Ruth. And shame.
He took his shoe and gave it to
Me in the gate. I turned and threw
It out to Ruth among the crowd.
She caught it like a wreath and bowed.
I quieted the shouts and cried,
'What do you think of this, my bride?'
And she replied, 'I think the Lord
Has fought today and with his sword
Has stuck a sin up on the gate
And hung on it our wedding date.
As for the badge of shame, you tell:

The line of Judah bears it well,
And will for generations yet
To come. The book of Moses set
Me free. There is a mercy in
The law of God beyond my skin:
By faith God makes a person right,
Be she a Jew or Moabite.”

*O God, she was a rock of truth;
Ignite in us the faith of Ruth.*



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This beautifully illustrated cycle of poems by John Piper tells the story of God's care for Naomi and the romance between Ruth and Boaz through the eyes of their son, an aged Obed, as he narrates the account to his 8-year-old grandson David, the future king of Israel.

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