

THE CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS

of the Kingdom of God

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Special Issue THE WOMEN OF MATTHEW 1

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

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The Women of Matthew 1

(1) Introduction

We begin with what might seem a rather difficult (and unpromising) section of Scripture. “Difficult” it is surely... what brother, doing a Sunday morning reading, wants to be assigned the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17?

But “unpromising”? *Never*. It is, as we shall see, one of the most “*promising*” portions of the Bible.

Are genealogies important? Well, they are to me if they are mine. And they are to you if they are yours. And *all* Bible genealogies are important because they deal with God’s people, and their families. And families are terribly important because it is, most often, through them that truths and hopes and values are passed along from one generation to the next.

Genealogies are also important because they serve to establish rights of inheritance. Land, and property, and other assets are passed along from parents to children and grandchildren.

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

Matthew 1:1: “A record of the genealogy...” (NIV), or... (KJV): “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham...”: Literally, in the Greek, this is “biblos” (Bible) of the “genesis”. A new Genesis, a new beginning, a new “book”: all pointing to a new “creation”, a spiritual creation, that culminates in Jesus Christ!

One of the most marvelous verses in the whole Bible is Matthew 1:1: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

Think about it for a minute. There it sits, at the very beginning of the New Testament. Anybody can find it. Anybody can remember where it is. No searching the memory banks for a “good verse” to use. No flipping through pages, muttering, “Now where *was* that verse?”

When you think about it, this *is* pretty much *the* beginning for almost everyone except Christadelphians: “I don’t bother much with the Old Testament, of course,” they say. “Too much dull history, and lists of names. The New Testament is all I need.”

“Fine,” we say, “Let’s go there.”

And now that one has begun at the so-called “beginning”, the message of this single verse — at the very crossroads of the Bible, the bridge between Old and New — is breathtakingly simple: Here, at the very beginning, the jumping-off place, of the New Testament, the reader is actually directed to look back at the Old: *‘Halt!’*

Proceed no further until you look back and understand *why* it is important that Jesus Christ *is* the son of Abraham and the son of David.

And right away, the reader can be introduced to the promises — resurrection and eternal life on the earth, the Kingdom of God, and the throne of David, and the Second Coming. Some of the most positive, and fundamental, teachings of the Bible.

And, if you have a memory like a sieve, or can't remember a single thing under pressure, how do you get to those promises? No problem. Alongside Matthew 1:1 in your Bible margin, simply write: (a) Abraham: Gen 12 and 13 (and Gal 3:16,27-29 if you want to be adventurous); and (b) David: 2Sa 7 (and maybe Isa 9:6,7 and Luke 1:31-33).

Now you are off and running!

Overview

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

Both David and Abraham received the promises of God with faith and joy (Matt 22:43; John 8:56). As Bro. Harry Whittaker wrote in *Enjoying the Bible*: "How *they* would have rejoiced to read this 'dull' chapter!"

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

Here in Matthew 1 is a lengthy list of names, a list that can make for very dull reading. But if we make it personal, it comes alive! Read the genealogy as though it were your own family history...

(...And it is: for "if you belong to Christ, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promises": Gal 3:16,27-29.)

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

There are 42 generations in the list of Matthew 1 — three groups of 14 each.

It is actually an artificial, or contrived, number. Several generations are omitted to arrive at the total of 42 (check out the marginal references at v 8, for example: three generations are skipped there alone).

So the first question is: Why 42?

- (a) There were 42 stations/camps in the wilderness (Num 33), pointing to a complete journey from “Egypt” (the land of darkness) to “Israel” (the land of promise).
- (b) Prophetically, there are 42 periods of tribulation and affliction (time, times, and half a time equals 12 months plus 24 months plus 6 months, or 42 months) (Rev 11:2; 12:6,14; 13:5; and cp. Dan 12:7,11,12), leading up to the coming of the Kingdom!

So it looks as though 42 represents a full and complete cycle, from death to life, from exile to the kingdom, from darkness to light, and in this case especially from the first great promise to the final, wonderful fulfillment of that promise:

“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad!” (John 8:56).

Second question: Why three groups of 14?

- (a) First of all, and simply, 14 days doubled was the lunar cycle, the waxing and waning (the growth and the decline of the moon’s light). So 42 days would be 1 1/2 cycles, thus: (1) the first 14 “days” (waxing, to fullness): up to David, the Kingdom of God given; then (2) the next 14 (waning, decline): from David to Jeconiah, the Kingdom of God taken away; and finally (3) from Jeconiah to Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God restored, and increased to its fullness again.
- (b) One other significant 14: On the 14th day of the first month, the Passover was slain (Exod 12:6). The last and greatest king of Israel, Jesus himself, must first be the Passover lamb, slain on the 14th day.

Another point: Even though there are supposed to be 42 generations in this list, they simply cannot be found.

Let us take a look: Start with v 2, and count. If Abraham is #1, then we begin to count: Isaac #2, Jacob #3, etc. Then David (at the end of the first cycle) is #14. So far, so good.

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

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

I’m fairly certain I (we) didn’t make a mistake. We didn’t leave anyone out, nor did we count extraneous names, or count anyone twice. Apparently there are only 41 generations. What do we make of this?

So, how does Matthew (the inspired writer of this gospel) arrive at 42? A couple of possible answers:

(1) Jesus is 41st, and Christ is 42nd, being “born” twice, the second time being his “birth” from the tomb.

Or, even better...

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

Thus “All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **And if** you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [Matt 1:1,2], and heirs according to the promise!” (Gal 3:27-29). This is your genealogy too!

How can this be that we all are a part of Jesus’ genealogy — and heirs to all the promises that were fulfilled through him?

The answer is also here, in Matthew 1, this time vv 20,21 — where an angel of the LORD tells Joseph in a dream: “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus [Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means “He who will save”!] because... **he will save his people from their sins.**”

This profound statement comes at the end of the genealogy, very significantly. We have seen a brief list of “his people”. We are being reminded that (whatever their sins, and they were many!) **they**, Jesus’ ancestors (men **and women**) will be saved from **their** sins. And they will be saved through the sacrifice of their descendant.

This redemptive work of Jesus Christ would be efficacious (effective, and powerful) for those who come after, those who are baptized into his name, thus becoming the greater spiritual “seed of Abraham”. This redemption is so powerful that its influence will reach back into time, to the very beginning, to all those men and women (ancestors and otherwise) who looked forward in faith to the One who was to come, the Messiah. They believed that, when he finally came, he would be one of them, of the human race. Essentially, he would be one with **all mankind**, but especially he would belong to Israel and the royal line of Judah. Through him, and their faith in him, and the God who had promised them such wonderful blessings, they would be saved from their vile bodies, from their grossest sins, from their lives of falling short. They would be made, or remade, fresh and new, and perfect and immortal. For they were **“his people”**! Because of their faith, they belonged to him, and thus to his God and Father.

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

What makes them special? Or, to put it another way (and since Mary is quite obviously necessary for the story itself), why these first four particularly? And

why not Sarah or Rebekah or Leah? (Surely they — if no others — were more important to the line of Abraham than the ones who *are* mentioned?) Some points worth noting:

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

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

“For [God] hath made [Jesus] to be sin for us, who [the antecedent refers to Jesus, of course] knew no sin; so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21).

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

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

And this is also part of our story...

(2) Tamar (Genesis 38)

Matthew 1:3: “Judah [became] the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was TAMAR.”

Genesis 38:1: By contrast to the righteous Joseph (Gen 37; 39), Judah voluntarily leaves his family, and then goes to live with the Canaanites. Unlike Joseph, he *chooses* association with the “world”, and this is the beginning of all his problems.

V 2: Then he marries a Canaanite, just as his uncle Esau had done. Like Esau, he seemingly despises his “birthright”. (Notice: there is no conversion story for his wife, she apparently remains outside the Abrahamic covenant.)

V 6: Now Tamar enters the story. She is married to Judah’s son Er. She certainly seems to be a Canaanite also (since these were the people Judah was living among: vv 1,2).

Vv 7-9: The wicked Er dies. Then his brother Onan lies with Tamar to raise up seed to his dead brother. Here is the Levirate law: Deuteronomy 25:5-10, the first time it’s invoked (*see Appendix: The “Gaal”, or “kinsman-redeemer”*). He avoids giving her the “seed” by which she could conceive. He disregards his father, his brother, and Tamar (treating her as an object for his lust, and nothing else).

V 10: Onan also dies, the object of God’s wrath.

For Tamar, there is the sorrow of bereavement twice, at an early age, but it seems that her character is developed through trials.

Then she realizes that she is being neglected, or ignored, by Judah her father-in-law: ‘Why has he forgotten me?’

V 11: Judah is now afraid to give his third son (Shelah) to Tamar, according to the Law. Sending her to her father’s house for a long time (“until my son grows up”) seems to be equivalent to dismissing her altogether: ‘I want nothing to do with you at all!’ Thus Judah neglected the need to perpetuate Abraham’s “seed”.

Here is a key to understanding: *Tamar the Canaanitess is much more concerned about the covenant-seed (and thus, evidently, about the covenant promises) than is Judah the son of Jacob!*

V 12: “After a long time Judah’s wife... died.” The “long time” means Judah has no intention of giving his third son to Tamar, and now his wife has died (so it seems there are no more children either).

Vv 13-15: In a second case of “hidden identity” in the family history of Abraham (cp. the Leah-Rachel switch in Gen 29), Tamar “plays the part of a harlot”. It is not in her nature to do such a thing; she forces herself. Nevertheless, she risks being treated as a prostitute (and thus she puts her own life on the line) in order, secretly, to perpetuate the family line of the Promised Seed.

Tamar takes upon herself the shame of presumed sin. What an example for us.

And, especially, what an example for Jesus too, when he looks back to contemplate the stories of his ancestors.

V 16a: What a contrast! Judah seeks to satisfy himself in sin; but Tamar is seeking a promised seed.

Vv 16b-18a: Tamar has the foresight to ask for a pledge (a means of identifying herself, and Judah, later). The pledge consists of a signet ring, a bracelet (“cord”: NIV), and a staff. These would be the ancient Mideast equivalent of all a person’s identification and major credit cards.

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

In giving up his “identity” to the “prostitute”, Judah is like Esau, who sold his birthright for a meager supper (a porridge of lentils, according to tradition).

V 18b: “So Judah slept with her, and she became pregnant by him.”

Vv 19-23: Right after this, the woman disappears. Let us call it “The Mystery of the Vanishing Prostitute”.

V 24: Several months later, when Judah finds out that Tamar is pregnant, he (now, it would seem, all “righteous”) wants to see her killed for disgracing his family.

Vv 25,26: *Who is righteous, and who isn’t?* Tamar uses Judah’s own property to prove he is the father of her children. Judah’s sin is unmasked, and her righteous (if rather unorthodox) plan — to preserve and perpetuate the royal lineage of Abraham through Judah — is revealed. Judah can only confess, “She is more righteous than I.”

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

Here are the first mentions of “the scarlet thread” of the house of Judah. It will be seen again, and hinted at again and again, as we continue through the story of this family of Jesus. It seems to signify the legitimacy of one’s ancestry, and one’s claim to property and other rights of inheritance. It is even possible that, like a Scottish clan tartan, the pattern and scarlet color became part of a fabric, a flag or ensign, or a special garment. These would mark out the family of Judah ever after. This is not the last we shall see of the “scarlet thread” of Judah...

Though the story is brief, Tamar comes across as a righteous and far-sighted woman. Even though a Gentile, she sees the promises afar off, is persuaded by

them, and embraces them (Heb 11:13). She does whatever it takes to associate herself with them. By her faith in action she shares in Judah's inheritance, although he concedes it rather reluctantly at first. Here, the Gentile is clearly seen to have greater faith than the Jew.

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

This incident seems to change Judah's attitude and conduct toward his brother Joseph. Where earlier Judah had been foremost in selling Joseph into slavery (Gen 37:26-28), he now begins to see that Joseph (as well as Tamar) is more righteous than he. In his later dealings with Joseph, Judah seems to take the lead again, but this time in confessing and seeking Joseph's forgiveness for himself and for his brothers (Gen 44:14-16).

Also, it may be that Tamar is the means by which Judah is reminded of the wonderful inheritance *he* has in the promises to Abraham! And so he is prepared to repent and seek for protection from Joseph, who becomes *his* "kinsman-redeemer"!

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

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

Gentiles we may be — and women (many of us) — but like Tamar (and like this other Canaanite woman) we know that even the "bread crumbs" of Abraham's inheritance are worth more, to Jew and Gentile, male and female, than the greatest banquet the "world" can provide.

(3) Rahab (Joshua 2; 6)

Matthew 1:5: "Salmon [became] the father of Boaz, whose mother was RAHAB."

Joshua 2:1: The two Israelite spies went to Jericho and entered the house of Rahab the "prostitute" ("zanah", the same word as used of Tamar: Gen 38:15,24) — it is the ordinary Hebrew word for "harlot").

There should be no question about this word. However, a number of writers (including Josephus, the rabbis and certain Christian commentators) have taken pains trying to show that Rahab was an innkeeper and not a harlot. The well-respected Bible commentator Arthur Pink, in his desire to mitigate the stigma attaching to the word, states that Rahab was an “ex-harlot” and that, at the time of the visit of the spies, she had reformed. (His actual words are: “...not that she was still plying her evil trade, but that formerly she had been a woman of ill fame, the stigma of which still clung to her.”)

However, there is no verse in Scripture to support such a statement. Rahab is referred to as a prostitute, or harlot, in the New Testament also, in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 (the Greek is “porne”, from which is derived our “pornography”).

The question for us is: Why should anyone bother hiding the fact of Rahab’s “profession”, or “cleaning up” the story? If our tendency is in that direction, then we should perhaps remember the Pharisees, who judged always by outward appearance and would not come close to anyone whom they considered to be a “sinner”. Unfortunately for them, this set up a barrier between them and the man Jesus, for Jesus was not afraid of those who came from “the wrong side of the tracks”. One old expositor writes of Rahab:

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

Probably the two spies meet her at a well outside the city walls, entering the city gate in her company (as many others had done) so as not to arouse suspicion. Only later would they discover that she, of all Jericho, had faith in the God of Israel.

Joshua 2:2: But others suspect these men of being Jews, or are at any rate suspicious of any strangers in the area, perhaps because of the nearness of the people of Israel. Rahab determines to “save” them, even if it means telling a dangerous “lie” to the king of Jericho himself.

Was Rahab wrong to tell such a lie?

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

Nevertheless, it may also be said there seem to be some exceptions, in very limited circumstances, to the general rule that lying is sinful:

- (a) The Jewish midwives lie about the delivery times of Jewish mothers, so as to save the lives of some babies from Pharaoh's soldiers (Exod 1).
- (b) During war the Jewish army pretends to retreat from Ai, but sets an ambush to attack the fighting men of Ai when they come out of the city to pursue the fleeing army (Josh 8).
- (c) Hushai's profession of allegiance to Absalom (2Sa 16) was a lie too, but apparently allowable because a state of war existed.
- (d) In fact, even the spies themselves were telling a sort of lie by pretending to be what they were not!

Only later do the spies discover that Rahab believes in the God of Israel:

V 9: She demonstrates faith that God will fulfill His promises.

V 10: "We have heard...": But this had been 40 years before. Probably Rahab wasn't even 40 years old. From whom had she heard? Her parents? And so she begs for their lives to be spared also (vv 12,13).

V 11: Repentance, fear, respect. "Our courage failed"; "Our hearts melted": a complete disavowal of natural self.

"For the Lord your God *is* God in heaven above, and on earth below." An absolute profession of faith in the One True God, the God of Israel.

Such a confession is, apparently, made by the family of Rahab only, out of all the families of Jericho. In cultures, and among peoples, that believe in a multitude of "little gods", their profession, of one unique and great God, is a most significant statement of faith!

Question: Why do *we* believe? Because of what the One True God has done with and for His people Israel.

Vv 12,13: And now she begs for mercy, when the Israelites come (as they surely will) into their own Promised Land: "Remember *me*, and my family!" Her plea is pathetically like that of the "thief on the cross" (Luke 23): "Lord, remember *me* when you come into your Kingdom!"

In fact, *her* whole confession of faith is very much like *his*, although she is a prostitute, and he is a thief (and perhaps a murderer).

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

There have been others whose sins, though great, were forgiven, and other "murderers" who found mercy in time of need. Some of them are also among the Lord Jesus Christ's "own people", here in the genealogy of Matthew 1, and also among

us today. May we never close the door, or turn a cold shoulder, to some seeker of God because we don't care for his past life, or the way she dresses, or the way he talks. "Whom God *can* cleanse, you must not call common or unclean!"

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

Vv 15,16: Rahab lowers the spies down from the window by a rope, and tells them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you." This would be to the west, the opposite direction from the camp of Israel. Presumably they were to hide there until their pursuers went off in the wrong direction.

"The Mystery of the Scarlet Cord"

Vv 17,18: Unraveling a mystery, step to step. Where have we seen a scarlet cord (or thread) before?

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

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

"Ha Tiqvah" ("The Hope") is the national anthem of the State of Israel. Today, the Israelis sing...

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

For us, who are the spiritual "Israel" of God, our hope is not lost either, so long

as our eyes look eastward, toward Zion, and look upward, expectantly, for the Coming One, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

“Tiqvah” is from a root meaning to twist, to bend, and thus to tie together. To have hope in another is to tie oneself to that person. To have hope in God is to tie oneself to Him, to trust in Him, no matter what happens.

“Tiqvah” expresses a shared hope in the fulfillment of God’s special promises, fulfilled in and by the Messiah of the tribe of Judah. This “tiqvah” binds together husbands and wives, and parents and children.

The “scarlet cord” of Judah, like a clan tartan or a royal crest, marks out the family as special. Its possession, its use in one’s garments, or on a flag or ensign flown from a house, marks out the bearer or holder as *belonging* to the royal family. It demonstrates legitimacy, property rights, and ultimate inheritance.

Such an emblem, or family crest, is never cherished so much as when the royalty to which it points is unrecognized, and as yet unrealized, in the eyes of the world. Then it is a very special hope indeed.

This was the “scarlet cord” of Judah.

And finally, we also have...

“The Mystery of the Hidden Lovers”

Here, we suggest, is one of the great hidden “love stories” of the Bible. It requires some sleuthing, some detective work, to bring to light...

First of all, what do we know for sure?

- (a) One of the two spies (who are unnamed in the narrative) gives Rahab a “scarlet cord”.
- (b) This scarlet cord was clearly visible from outside the city walls of Jericho, was easily recognizable by the Israelites, and, like the Passover blood on the doorposts in Egypt, guaranteed protection to the householders.
- (c) When the great trumpets of war sounded (cp. the seven days of trumpets at Jericho with the seven last trumpets of Revelation 8:2,6), and the walls of the great city fell down. Joshua sent the two spies back to rescue Rahab and her whole family (Josh 6:20-25).
- (d) “And [Rahab] lives among the Israelites to this day” (Josh 6:25).
- (e) And finally, (Matt 1:5) Rahab marries Salmon, the prince of the house of Judah.

That’s what we do know. Here’s what we don’t know for sure, but how reasonable it is. Put in the form of questions:

- (1) **Was Salmon one of the spies?** Possible answer: The earlier (twelve) spies sent into the Land, at the beginning of the 40 years, were the princes of the tribes (Num 13:2,3). So, was a similar method used at this later time? But which tribal princes would be sent this time? Since Judah’s prince (Caleb) and Ephraim’s prince (Joshua) were the only two to bring back a good report at that earlier time, why shouldn’t these two later spies come from the same tribes? And if

so, then the prince of the tribe of Judah was almost certainly Salmon!

- (2) **Did Salmon (the great-great-great-grandson of Judah and Tamar) carry with him the ancestral garment (with the scarlet cord) that marked him as the heir and leader of the tribe of Judah?** Answer: Why not?
- (3) **Was this, then, the scarlet cord he gave to Rahab, to protect her life?** Answer: Again, why not?

After the victory was won, and the Land was liberated, then the prince Salmon married the woman he'd fallen in love with, Rahab! Thus the former prostitute became the princess of the tribe of Judah, and an ancestress of the royal line. She left her old way of life, came in faith to the God of Israel, and grasped the scarlet cord offered by the prince of Judah. That cord, taken in faith, became her "Pass-over", her "covering blood" — binding her forever to the Hope of Israel. [Some of the foregoing was suggested in a talk by Bro. Ken Wubbels.]

Here is our hidden love story, with a wonderful ending. Harlot no longer, her sins are forgiven. Like Tamar, another "Gentile", Rahab (of Jericho) becomes a "Jewess" by faith in the promises, and a bride and a mother in Israel. She and her children are bound up in the scarlet cord of shared hopes, from one generation to the next.

Lessons

- **Acts 10:34,35:** "God does not show favoritism but accepts men [and women] from every nation who fear him and do what is right."
- **Hebrews 11:31:** "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." In the great "faith chapter", the harlot Rahab occupies a place of honor, right next to Moses (see Heb 11:23-29). She is justified by her **FAITH!**
- **James 2:25:** "In the same way [as Abraham: v 23], was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" In James' letter, the harlot Rahab occupies another place of honor, right after Abraham (Jam 2:21-24), the man of faith and the friend of God! And here, she is justified by her **WORKS! What company she keeps!**
- **Prostitutes:** Tamar (by a one-time circumstance, and by appearances) and Rahab (by a longstanding lifestyle) were "prostitutes". They also symbolize the nation of Israel. They were like Israel was (Ezek 16), and like Israel is today also; they were seeking after other "lovers" (such as material advantages or political alliances) rather than the true God. But repentance, and faith demonstrated by works, set right all wrongs. "These are *my* people," says the Lord Jesus. "I will save them from their sins." And he will say it yet again, when he returns.
- **John 4:** Is this an echo of Rahab's story? Here was a Samaritan woman, a sinner, whom Jesus, the prince of the tribe of Judah, met by a well outside a city. Her life was far from pure and holy: she had had five husbands, and the man she was with then was not her husband! But this woman, suspicious, jaded, calloused by sin, was intrigued, challenged, convicted, taught, won over, and

converted by a Jewish Savior. In listening to him, she came to understand that “salvation is [only] from the Jews” (John 4:22). She drank, from him, the spring of water welling up to eternal life. Her life was changed forever.

- **Was this trip necessary?:** Was the spies’ visit to Jericho necessary? Evidently God had already planned that the walls of the city would fall down, and Israel would overwhelm the city. So why *did* the spies need to go there? The answer is plain: for the sole purpose of finding Rahab and her family. The royal family of Judah depended on their visit. The lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ would not have been complete without Rahab. The worst of sinners, the most degraded of persons, may be a living “stone”, essential to the building of God’s holy eternal temple. Do we believe this?
- **Judging:** Let us be careful how we “judge” others. Can we ever assume any particular person is not quite the type God wants? (Or do we sometimes decide that a particular person is not quite the sort *we* want?) Who are we to discriminate? Who are we to judge another man’s servant?
- **“Show kindness to me!”:** Like Rahab, each one of us will need, one time or another, to plead: “Show kindness to me.” We may never have kept a house of prostitution. We may never even have entered such a house. But in the hidden rooms of our “hearts” we have played out wicked thoughts, and committed terrible sins. “Lord, deal kindly with each of us.” “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.”
- **Hebrews 13:2:** “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” The two spies were “angels”, or “messengers”, sent from Joshua (and God) to find the woman Rahab. In this context, cp. Hebrews 13:4: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” Rahab’s bed was anything but pure, and there was every reason to expect that she would be judged, and condemned, along with a city destined to be destroyed utterly. But the God of Israel sees beyond the surface. The “sexually immoral” may be forgiven. And their marriage beds may be made “honorable”. From such beds came the ancestors of the Messiah. From such beds, even today, come future “kings and priests” and “a holy nation”.

We are, all of us, anything but “holy” and “honorable” and “pure”. But Jesus Christ our “husband” loved us so much that he laid down his life, and shed his scarlet blood, and tied us to him by a cord of blood and suffering and sacrifice. He bought us from Sin, and bound us to himself by the nails that bound him to the cross. ‘I don’t care where you came from, or what you did. I care only that you love me! Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of my hands. You are my signet ring, you are my treasured possession, you belong to me! Follow me!’

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

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

(4) Ruth

Matthew 1:5: “Boaz [became] the father of Obed, whose mother was RUTH.”

Ruth 1:1: The story is set “in the days when the judges ruled”, and “there was no king in Israel” (Jdg 17:6). There are two possible meanings here: (1) that there was no human king, at this early stage, as we know; and also (2) that GOD, who should have been considered king nonetheless, was not respected as king.

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

The story of Ruth presents an ideal example of individual faith, in the midst of a society in which prevailed equal parts indifference and wickedness.

In contrast to most of the stories of the Judges, this is a story of ordinary people going about private lives, in a quiet corner of history. Yet they were, some by birth, and others by character, the unrecognized royalty of Israel.

V 2: In a time of great trial (a famine in the Land), Elimelech and Naomi left the Land of Promise. It was a step toward falling away, with sad consequences. It began a downward spiral: they went to Moab for a while (i.e., to sojourn), then they decided to remain there, and finally their sons married Moabite women.

Vv 3-5: “Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.”

Moab was a land of idolatry, a land close in miles (30 miles away), but remote in mind.

The irony is that they went to Moab to prosper, and be safe. But in Moab all the men died, and the women were reduced to poverty.

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

V 6: “When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.” There is “famine” in Moab, but there is life in Israel, and “bread” in Bethlehem (the name signifies “the house of bread”). Naomi has endured much hardship, and terrible loss, but she still believes in the God of Israel.

There is a thin line between despair and faith, between death and life, between anger with a God who causes (or allows) suffering, and trusting in a God who chastens His children. Naomi stood on that line and looked both ways, and she

chose to return home, the “prodigal daughter”: ‘In my father’s house there is food in abundance; why do I remain here in the land of the Gentiles?’

Vv 7-14: Naomi offered her daughters-in-law the chance to stay in Moab, or to go on to the new land of Israel.

(Vv 11,12: “If I should say, I have hope [Heb. “tiqvah”: the same word as “cord”, the hope of children] — i.e., to have other sons, who might marry you — would you wait for them?” (It was clearly out of the question.)

[Here is a passing allusion to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, and the Levirate law, of raising up seed to the dead brother. This will be important later in the story of Ruth.]

V 14: “Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.” The depth of our conviction must be measured not just by what we grasp (‘She **knows** the Truth’), but also by what we are prepared to let go of! Orpah had been willing to go, but not to “let go”. Bethlehem was in her eye, but Moab was still in her heart.

And (as with Lot’s wife and Sodom) Orpah’s heart pulled her body back to Moab. When offered the choice, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and returned, to Moab, the land of false gods and false hopes, and (ultimately) death.

V 15: “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.” Like Naomi and Orpah, Ruth also stood at a cross-roads, looking both ways. What would she choose? The rest of her life hung in the balance.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: “We have come to a turning point in the road. If we turn to the right mayhap our children and our children’s children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to His Word.”

Vv 16,17: But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”

She chose Naomi’s life and Naomi’s God. She chose an unseen Land and an unseen God!

“Your people will be my people, and your God my God!”: It was an echo of the great Abrahamic promise, perhaps the greatest of promises: “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan... I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:7,8).

Ruth would know that even Abraham, the father of all the faithful, had been an “alien” coming to a strange land, as she was about to be. The God who offered **him** an everlasting possession of that Land would offer it to **her** as well! Ruth sold all

that she had to “buy” these promises, and thereby she showed that, despite her Moabitish roots, she was a “daughter” of Abraham.

“Where you die, there I will die... and there I will be buried”: She might well have added: ‘And there I will be raised up again!’

With this compare the words of Jesus. He had been multiplying the loaves and fishes and feeding the multitudes, and many were following him, and listening to his teachings. But then, in John 6, he began to tell them some very hard sayings. After that, gradually and then in increasing numbers, his followers began to leave him. So, with his closest disciples near him, he asked them: “Will you go away?” [*Like Orpah did?*] But, along with Peter, they reply: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!” (John 6:66-68). Is there any real choice, no matter how hard the road?

Along with Naomi, Ruth now set out on the last leg of her journey: Abraham had been called to leave:

- (a) his country,
- (b) his people, and
- (c) his father’s house (Gen 12:1).

Ruth had already left: (c) her father’s house (when she married Mahlon),
(b) her people (by converting to the God of Israel?), and
now she leaves: (a) her country (Moab) to go to a new country.

An important question is suggested by Deuteronomy 23:3: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.”

Was this a problem? Consider the possible explanations:

- (1) Ruth, being a “convert”, was now no longer a Moabite.
- (2) The restriction of the Law applied only to males.
- (3) Ruth was the 11th generation from Moses. — *a real stretch, and a rather artificial and legalistic answer.*

Or (by the way, I like this one best!)...

- (4) ***The Lord God of Israel was (and is?) prepared to make an exception even to His own Law for one who truly believes in Him. The Law of faith is greater than the Law of exclusion. Are there other Bible examples of this? Do WE believe God can do this? Is it wrong to believe that God can do this?***

Later, the specter of Deuteronomy 23:3 (and some of these related questions) may have occupied the minds of the people of Bethlehem, and Boaz, and the unnamed near-kinsman, as we shall see. (‘Do we really want someone like this in Israel?’ ‘I’m afraid she’s just not our sort.’)

Vv 19-23: Several days journey would have brought them home to Bethlehem. The women asked: “Is this the Naomi we once knew?” There had been a great change, due to her sufferings and her bereavements in the land of Moab.

Naomi (signifying “pleasant”) said, “Call me Mara” — bitter! But she had *not* abandoned her faith. And life is full of startling developments. Out of her sorrow and bitterness there would come, surprisingly soon, new beauty and joy and life. It is as though the narrator pauses while a still, small voice whispers in our ear, “Just wait and see what happens next...”

“I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty” (Ruth 1:21). “There is a marvelous dramatic irony about this, for, had she but known it, Naomi returned more full than when she went out. How could she realize that every word of God’s glorious promises to Abraham was going to be fulfilled through this helpless but devoted stranger returning with her from Moab?” (Harry Whittaker).

Think of the Jews who stand on the seashore, between the “devil and the deep blue (red?) sea”! God tells Moses, and Moses tells them: “Stand still! And see the salvation of the LORD!” Sometimes all we can do is stand still and wait. In the fullness of time, God will act on behalf of His people, who believe in Him.

Ruth 2:1: “Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.”

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

V 2: And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” There was poverty in the household, two widows with no visible means of support. Ruth, the daughter of a hated race, and only a proselyte at best, shows a wonderful knowledge of and dependence upon the Law, which allows special privileges for widows: i.e., to glean in the fields during harvest. She represents the anxious person in search of truth; forsaking her old companions and her “gods”, she leaves all, and is not ashamed to put on the apron of the “gleaner”.

Ruth did not need to keep her poverty a secret; and it was that very poverty, and how she dealt with it, that brought her to the attention of her rich kinsman.

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

For the second time in these chapters, we are reminded of the Canaanite woman who approaches Jesus. A member of a hated Gentile race, she still needs his help.

Being “unclean”, she doesn’t mind likening herself to the unclean dogs that eat crumbs falling from the children’s table. Like the dogs, she is a “gleaner” too, taking what scraps are available to her. Even the bits of bread that fall from the Master’s table are a blessing. And Jesus commends the great faith of the Gentile woman. For didn’t he count such Gentile women among his “grandmothers”?

V 3: “So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.”

“As it turned out...”: i.e., apparently, by chance. But was it really chance? Or was it the overruling providence of God, God working in mysterious ways, to perform His wonders?

How strange it is, but what a revelation for us. The entire redemptive purpose of God in Christ seems to hang on such an apparently trivial circumstance. In the life of the believer, the dividing line between random chance and God’s design is so thin that it can scarcely be drawn or discerned. In short, we might ask: what *isn’t* according to the design of God?

Vv 4-8: And in the fields of Boaz, Ruth came to the attention of her rich kinsman, and met him and talked with him.

V 9: “Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars the men have filled.” To us also, our “Boaz”, our “strong man”, says, “Abide in my fields”; don’t stray away. “Remain with me” (John 15:4).

V 10: At this, Ruth bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me, a foreigner?”

There is such a charming modesty here. Ruth doesn’t realize how attractive she is...
how noble is her devotion to an old woman...
how exalted is her choice of an unseen God...
how impressive is her diligence in gleaning...
how touching is her intelligent meekness and sincere thankfulness.

There is no false pride in Ruth. One has the feeling that she isn’t the sort to spend hours in front of a mirror, or fretting about clothes and makeup, or scheming how to attract attention to herself. Rather, she’s the sort you’ll find in the study, or the kitchen, or the garden, or teaching the children.

It is interesting to note that nowhere is Ruth called “beautiful”, like some others in the Bible. But the good man Boaz, a rich man who might have commanded the attention of all sorts of beautiful young women (and their families), noticed her right away. He was impressed, not by her outward beauty (though, for all we know, she *may* have been quite beautiful). Instead he told Ruth (v 11), “I’ve been told all about what you have **done**.” Compare Christ’s words to the ecclesias: “I know your **works**.”

Ruth was the perfection of the “virtuous woman”! Later Boaz called her just that, a “virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11).

V 12: Ruth had come to the Land of Promise, to seek refuge under the wings of Almighty God. This is an allusion to the cherubim in tabernacle and (later) in Temple. Many of David's psalms would echo this language (Psa 17:8,9; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; etc). And David's greater son would speak of his yearning to take Jerusalem under his wings, as a mother bird protects her chicks. Here especially, "wings" signify the arms of a husband and protector, as he overshadows his beloved under his arms and in the folds of his garment. (This language will recur again in the next chapter also.)

Vv 15-17: Ruth proved to be the most diligent of gleaners. She was not only intensely grateful for what she was given, but she labored long and hard to make the most of the gift.

Vv 19,20: Now, through her daughter-in-law Ruth, Naomi once again saw God's providence: There *was* a "near-kinsman" (Deut 25 again), a "redeemer", to redeem their property, to marry Ruth, to care for Naomi, and to raise up "seed" for Naomi, her family, and (what turns out to be) the royal line of Judah.

Vv 21-23: Her advice to Ruth: "Stay close to the One who is blessing you. Be patient. Don't stray or wander away from him" — *like I did from God!*

Ruth 3 outlines Naomi's plan.

Vv 1-4: One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

All this suggests the preparation of a bride (Psa 45:10-14), and/or the purification of a Gentile woman (Deut 21:10-14). In the New Testament, washing and new garments also symbolize baptism and conversion. All this is essential to the story of redemption. "The bride has made herself ready."

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

Some background might help here. By custom, Boaz would sleep (fully clothed) at the threshing-floor during the harvest, the better to guard his crops. Also by custom, a servant might sleep nearby, at his feet.

Vv 5-9: "Spread the corner of your garment over me!" (Literally, it is the same word as "wing" of 2:12.) Coming from Ruth, this was a request for protection, a marriage proposal.

Moreover, these are echoes of the past. Where have we seen this before — a special garment, a special fabric, a special emblem belonging to a great prince of the tribe of Judah? Perhaps this is not so obvious here, as in the earlier stories of Tamar (with Judah), and Rahab (with Salmon?), but it is quite possible under the circumstances.

‘Take me under your wing, under your care. Make me a part of the ongoing redemption story of your people and your tribe. May the scarlet thread, the thread of faith and blood, bind me to you, and both of us to the people of faith, generation by generation. May your God be my God. I will live and die with you, and our seed will bind us with the “cord of hope” to the promises of the past and the glorious expectation of the future.’

V 10: “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.”

Boaz was not young at all. He showed dignity and restraint under these circumstances.

V 11: “And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.”

“A woman of noble character” (NIV), “a virtuous woman” (KJV). These words suggest force of character, and strength of faith. In the Old Testament, this phrase is applied to Ruth and to no one else.

Thus, “Don’t be afraid”: Virtuous women may sometimes be found in situations, through no fault of their own, which might naturally expose them to suspicion (like Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor). If their former behavior has been uniformly virtuous, then they have every right to be absolved of any suspicion. It is true: all sins may be forgiven. But the blessing (freedom from suspicion) is more than forgiveness; it is the continuing value of a virtuous life.

Vv 12-14: “Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.” So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

Many a faithful Gentile “Ruth” lies asleep at the feet of Jesus (the “Boaz”, or “mighty man” of the Jews), awaiting the “morning” of resurrection, when he will stand in the “gate” of the great city and proclaim her for his very own.

Vv 15-18: Boaz also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter,

until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

Thanks be to God that His Son (our “Boaz”, or strong redeemer) did not rest until the matter of our redemption was settled. Relieved and happy are we when we hand over our worries and anxieties to the Lord, in the certainty that he will bear the burdens for us: “Cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you.”

Ruth 4: As outlined in Leviticus 25, the “Gaal” or “kinsman-redeemer” did three things:

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

[For more detail, see the Appendix: The “Gaal”, or “kinsman-redeemer”.]

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

- 1) Jesus as King of Israel will bring back God’s land from the Gentile, and establish it as the basis of God’s Kingdom for ever.
- 2) He will redeem his brethren, Jew and Gentile, out of bondage to sin and the poverty of death. By his life and death, he paid the price of redemption for all who believe in him.
- 3) As the Lamb of God, and the bridegroom, he will “marry” his bride, those who through faith in him will bring forth fruit to God in His Kingdom.

Notice that God’s plan of salvation involves:

- 1) His Land: There is no eternal life apart from God’s land (as Abraham understood perfectly: Gen 13:15-17).
- 2) His people: “I will be their God and they will be my people!”
- 3) His “bride”: Nothing else, in this world or the world to come, so perfectly expresses the Love of God as the love of a husband for his cherished wife. All of God’s work, since the beginning, has been to prepare a special “companion” for Himself, for all eternity. “They will be my jewels, my special and precious possession,” He says.

In carrying through to the end of the story, one obstacle remains in Ruth 4: the unnamed nearest-kinsman. He must be offered the opportunity to “redeem” the land, the family, and the woman Ruth. Boaz does this, and the nearest kinsman refuses his obligation.

Why?

- a. Is he prejudiced against Moabites? Is he afraid of the Law (Deut 23:3) that excludes them from God's congregation? (*But God has cleansed; so who are we to call common or unclean?*) **Boaz is not prejudiced. How could he be, since he is himself the descendant of the harlot Rahab?**
- b. Is he not prepared to risk his own inheritance (v 6)? (*But where is that inheritance now? Vanished.*)
- c. Is he afraid of God's "curse" that seemed to have fallen on the family of Elimelech? (*But Boaz is not afraid. And neither is Christ, to bear the "curse" of being our kinsman-redeemer. "He will save his people from their sins."*)
- d. Does he lack faith to see **her** faith, and act upon it? (*If so, he disappears from Israel, still without a name, in contrast to v 10.*)

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

Ruth 4:5: Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

Please consider this alongside Christ's little parable in Matthew 13:44, the treasure hidden in the field:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."

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

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

V 12: "May your family be like that of Perez, whom **Tamar** bore to Judah." This is a remembrance of Tamar, the earlier Gentile bound into the royal family of Judah. May her fruitfulness (both naturally and spiritually) be yours!

V 13: Ruth, who had been childless for years, now (immediately?) conceived and gave birth to a son, Obed, who would perpetuate the line of the tribe of Judah.

Vv 18-22: The little genealogy at the end of the Book gives the real reason for the inclusion of this lovely story in the Bible. It connects the Book of Ruth with the

great king David, and with the special genealogy that leads, at last, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Scarlet threads, threads of blood bind together portions of Scripture, promises with fulfillments, and generation with generation in hope and love.

Lessons:

- Elimelech and Naomi left the Land of Promise and went to Moab. But God can overrule for good even the bad decisions of His children, if they have faith in Him. After all, God became, through His Son, *our* “Kinsman-Redeemer”.
- Ruth makes a hard choice, a long journey, and demonstrates faith in adversity. She desires the spiritual crumbs that fall from the Lord’s table, and she gleanes in the fields of the Lord. She is, in short, a Gentile who becomes a Jew in faith, a faith enlivened by works.
- ‘Where is God anyway?’ The unseen providential Hand of God guides, protects, chastens, and blesses at the last. God is active even in ordinary lives of ordinary people. After all, no one can really be considered ordinary who is destined to rule in the kingdom with the Messiah of Israel.
- Malachi 3:16,17: “Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. ‘They will be mine,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.’ ”
- Boaz (signifying strength) is the provider, the kinsman, the redeemer, the Lord of the harvest, and (finally) the Bridegroom, who spreads his arm/wing/garment of protection over the Gentile bride who comes to him in faith.
- Imagine, for just a moment (and it can only be our imaginations, because we can’t tell for sure if it really happened), we see an old woman in Bethlehem:

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

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

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

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

Matthew 1:6: “David [became] the father of Solomon, whose mother had been URIAHS WIFE.”

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

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

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

The woman in the case

Bathsheba was the granddaughter of Ahithophel, David’s close and trusted counselor, and the (much younger: 2Sa 12:1-3?) wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David’s mighty warriors (2Sa 23:34,39). Although a Gentile, Uriah (signifying “the light of Yahweh”) was evidently a devout convert to the hope of Israel (cp. 11:11).

Question: How “innocent” is Bathsheba?

Was she deliberately exposing herself in the courtyard of her house, in order to seduce the king? **Or** was David “spying” (in a quite improper way) upon an innocent event?

If it were the former, then David could have sent a warning to Bathsheba of the dangers of such an activity. Instead, he sent to “find out about her” (v 3).

V 3: The servant asks, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” as if to say, ‘Don’t you know she’s a married woman? You should leave her alone.’

V 4: Probably David hoped to learn that she was unmarried. But the knowledge that she was married did not stop him. Even the punishment for the sin of adultery was put out of his mind; he **had to** have her!

“She came to him.” She must have known what his invitation meant. Couldn’t she have refused? Even if she didn’t understand his intention until she got to his private chambers, couldn’t she have resisted, and protested most strenuously?

An interesting comparison: consider how the righteous woman Abigail turned aside the temper and the anger of David by kind, carefully-chosen words when he contemplated, not adultery that time, but murder? The account is in 1 Samuel 25:21-35. Knowing that David was coming with his soldiers to kill Nabal, Abigail got together food and, with her servants, went to meet David. Bowing down before him, and presenting him with the food, she reminded him of his God and his anointing, and of the type of man, righteous and kind, that he was known to be:

“Please forgive your servant’s offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD’s battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant” (1Sa 25:28-31).

And David gratefully said to Abigail, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands” (vv 32,33).

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

David was an honorable and honest and good man: his faults were rooted in an emotional, impulsive nature. Bathsheba could have made an appeal to his well-known and beloved character: ‘You are a man after God’s own heart. Surely you must realize how wrong this is. Think about what you are doing.’ Such an appeal would surely have turned him aside (as it had when Abigail made it in the earlier case) from a terrible sin undertaken in the impulse of emotion. If Bathsheba had made such an appeal successfully, then afterward she would have won the same gratitude as David showed toward Abigail on that earlier occasion.

On the other hand, Bathsheba is characterized by the prophet Nathan, in his parable, as a “little ewe lamb” (2Sa 12:3). The “lamb” did not, after all, “cook” and “eat” the rich man, but the other way around! So, while there seems to be blame on both sides, where is most of the blame? On David’s side? But by what proportion? In the last analysis, does it really matter exactly how much guilt is assessed here, and how much there? *We should be grateful that we don’t have to judge.*

“A man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot [and many were to come upon David], and his shame will never be wiped away” (Prov 6:32,33b).

Question: Did the sight of the woman **cause** David to sin? Such an assessment is easy to make (‘He/she **made** me do it!’ ‘I just can’t control myself. There’s something about him when he comes into the room...’)

Such excuses are not much different, really, from the silly parody that points out the false doctrine: “The devil **made** me do it.” But of course **he** didn’t. **We** cause ourselves to sin.

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

Although it may *suggest* the idea, no external temptation or outside stimulus can really *cause* a man to commit sin. His own lust is the true cause.

2 Samuel 11:4: Then “she went back home.” Now everything would be forgotten, except...

V 5: ... “*I am pregnant.*” Such complications! Was *this* simple chance, or was it by God’s design? As Moses told the children of Israel on one occasion: “You may be sure that your sin will find you out!” (Num 32:23). Fig leaves couldn’t hide the sin of our first parents, and no “fig leaves” of our own contriving can truly hide our sins either. It is so foolish to try.

Vv 6-8: Now (for those familiar with modern politics) there follows a cover-up of the first magnitude. Quite often, as we have seen, the cover-up is worse than the original crime. The sin must be concealed, even (as it turns out) at the expense of even more heinous sins. This is the first step down the slippery slope. What a tangled web we weave...

V 9: *But Uriah* (hearing the palace gossip? and what was the point of his being called back on such short notice anyway?) *does not go home.*

Vv 10,11: When David was told, “Uriah did not go home,” he asked him, “Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?” Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”

What a reproof and a reproach it was to a man like David. But his guilt tied his tongue from responding.

Vv 12,13: Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. In the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

A second attempt to cover up also proves futile. Was it because Uriah made sure it didn’t work? Did he *know*?

Vv 14,15: In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”

David takes the last and ugliest step down into the swamp of sin. The ill-considered but *momentary* sin of passion leads inexorably into the *cold-blooded, calculating* sin of murder. Now even more people (and especially Joab) will know of David’s scheme. How many times will David pay for this in years to come? (Did Joab keep

the letter for purposes of blackmail?)

Vv 16-25: The risky plan actually “works” (if that’s the right term), but at what a price! Other innocent men die as well (v 24).

Vv 26,27: “When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife, bearing him a son, but the thing David had done displeased the LORD.”

The mourning for Uriah could have lasted as little as seven days (cp. 1Sa 31:13; John 11:17,31). Then would come the hasty marriage of David and Bathsheba. (Very hasty it was, but not quick enough, of course. People can always count, and servants can talk. By now, many people would know, or strongly suspect, what had actually happened.)

Now for Bathsheba, and the other side of the ledger:

Like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth (but with decidedly different motives on *her* part), Bathsheba is now initiated into the royal line of Judah. *Why her, and not some “more righteous” wife of David, like Abigail, for example?*

Bathsheba plays a part in both Matthew’s genealogy, through Solomon, and in Luke’s, through Nathan, another son of hers (1Ch 3:5). She is thus the mother of *both* the sons of David found in the genealogies of the Lord.

The first three women in Matthew 1 were treated by many as outcasts, “sinners”, but they were justified by their extraordinary faith. Her situation is somewhat different, and her sin serious and beyond question, but may not Bathsheba have been justified also, by a great faith?

Some considerable time passes, not just a few months, but more than several years. How do we know? Right after the “child” in question (i.e., the first child, the one conceived in the adultery) dies (a punishment to David and Bathsheba), God gives them another son, Solomon (2Sa 12:24,25). But we know also (from 1Ch 3:5, so it would seem), that Solomon is not the *second* son born to David and Bathsheba, but the *fourth*. [As for the “seventh day” of 2Sa 12:18, on which the child died, this will be dealt with in just a moment.]

This “small” point helps us to see that the grief, illness, and other consequences of his hidden sin (described by David in some of his psalms: 6, 32, 38, and 51) were not short-lived. They lasted as much as several years, and took a terrible toll on him. The ensuing repentance, outlined in 2 Samuel 12 (and described by David in Psa 32), was not a simple and easy fix! Reading this Bible narrative quickly, as we sometimes do, may convey the first impression that everything happened much quicker and easier than it really did.

Perhaps several years later, we come to...

2 Samuel 12:1-4: Like some of Christ's parables, Nathan's parable was a suitable way of conveying unpleasant truths to closed ears, and unwilling minds. By his parable Nathan used subtlety to 'take the barricades', that is, to breach the mental defenses men build up carefully around themselves, to shield themselves from contemplating the consequences of their sins. *Even David built up such defenses.*

An interesting side-note: Archeologists have shown how David and Joab must have used the hidden, secret passageway from the Gihon Spring up into the city, to capture Jebus or Jerusalem (2Sa 5:6-8). In the same way the parable of Nathan, like a "thief in the night", sneaks into the heart unexpectedly and accomplishes its purpose.

V 4: "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

The phrase "a traveler" suggests that such lust was not the constant companion of David. It was just a passing thought, that should have been sent packing immediately, but instead was allowed to hang around.

Vv 5,6: David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

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

V 7: Now Nathan springs the trap: "You are the man!" And there comes to David the sudden, lightning-bolt realization: "I **am** the man!" Such a paradigm shift, or attitude adjustment, must come to each of us from time to time when reading the Bible, when it suddenly dawns upon us that a lesson hidden to our eyes and hearts for perhaps years, has been brought home with powerful effect: "**It IS I!**"

I ought to say, "If that never happens to you, then my guess is you're not really paying attention. Why bother reading, in the first place, if the warnings, parables, and examples of the Bible never have anything to say to you? And so one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves as we read the Bible is, "Lord, is it I?" And sometimes, the answer we each "hear" is, "Yes, you are the man", or "the woman"! We can count on it.

Vv 7b-9: 'I made you king over all Israel. Knowing your weakness for women, I gave you many wives. It was not enough! Now the enemies of the LORD gloat over this vile sin, blaspheming the name of the God you pretend to serve.' *Nathan was a prophet, and his prophecy is still true today.* (In what other nation could a religious man speak thus to a king?)

V 13a: David's nobility and honesty of character reassert themselves. "*I have sinned.*" Now he makes no excuses, and no pathetic pleas for mercy. There is just a plain humble admission of the awful truth.

A remarkable thing happened as soon as the words left his lips.

V 13b: "The LORD has taken away your sin!" Although possible years had passed in the darkness of unrepented sin, and illness and worry and fear had followed David, *it is just as simple as that! There IS mercy with the Most High!*

Nevertheless there are limits to what God's mercy can do.

V 14: "The child will die": Which child? The child of the adulterous union, now probably several years old. (Remember: some considerable time has passed, as we discussed earlier. This means the "seventh day" of verse 18 is not the seventh day of the baby's life, but probably the seventh day since the parable and the pronouncement of Nathan.)

Lesson: Sins may be forgiven, and still have terrible and far-reaching consequences. This was only the beginning: "The sword will never depart from your house!" (v 10): David would pay fourfold (cp. v 6):

1. Bathsheba's son...

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

2. Amnon,
3. Absalom, and
4. Adonijah.

These last three would die (victims of lust and greed and hunger for power), in part because of the subsequent events David's adultery, like a pebble tossed in a still pond, set in motion.

As we think back on the genealogy and the lessons of Matthew 1, we remember 2 Samuel 12:10 again: "The sword will never depart from your house": It would reach all the way to Golgotha. See the words of the prophet Simeon to Mary and Joseph in the Temple: Luke 2:28-35 (v 35 esp: "A sword shall pierce your own soul also").

The "scarlet thread" of sin and suffering (and the consequent need for a true sacrifice for sins) would stretch down the ages, from mother to child, and mother to child again, generation after generation. It would continue until it reached the cross, and there it would all be wrapped up and done away with.

We think once again of Matthew 1:21: "He shall save his people from their sins." Jesus would take upon himself the burden of the sins of others, even those of his own family.

V 24: Theirs had been a particularly terrible sin (and sins, plural). But once it was forgiven, the book of account on David and Bathsheba (at least for this incident) could be closed, and blessings could come, such as the perpetuation of the royal line

of the Messiah through two adulterers. For God chose one of Bathsheba's sons to sit on His throne, and to build His temple. Even more extraordinary, another of her descendants will sit on God's throne forever, and build His eternal temple.

Now notice a special comparison, among all four of the women of Matthew 1:

- a. Tamar had two husbands. Both died, and she was still childless. Instead, a prince of the tribe (Judah himself) raised up a godly seed to continue what would become the royal line of Judah.
- b. Rahab had had many “husbands”, fornicators and idolaters, but no child. Again, a prince of Judah (Salmon) married her and raised up a godly seed in the royal line of Judah.
- c. Ruth had a first husband who died, leaving her no children. Once more, a prince of Judah (Boaz) married her and raised up a godly seed to continue the line of Judah.
- d. Now Bathsheba, married to Uriah but childless, marries David the king of Israel, and even after their adultery becomes the mother of the next king, and a progenitor of the royal line of Judah.

So those who *seem* to have been barren women are all given seed, after their first “husbands” die, by a prince of Judah!

The final chapter in Bathsheba's history: 1 Kings 1

Here we reflect on the later character of Bathsheba. At a time of crisis for the throne of Israel, she showed great faith in the promise of God to her son Solomon. When David was on his deathbed, and the succession was uncertain, it was Bathsheba who went to the aged king:

“My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: ‘Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne’ ”
(v 17).

Then, vv 29-31: “May my lord King David live forever!” What a marvelous hope is bound up in this wish! “Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were *dead* in transgressions — it is by grace you have been *saved*” (Eph 2:4,5).

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

Bathsheba made sure that the right son of David would be chosen.

Finally, Proverbs 31. There is a tradition that King “Lemuel” (signifying “belonging to God”) is simply another name for Solomon, and therefore that the “king's mother” in that verse is Bathsheba. If this is so, then consider the weight of her words in **Proverbs 31:1-5**, especially:

V 2: “Son of my vows”, i.e., the promised son, dedicated to God. As if to say, ‘Since you have forgiven my sin, I dedicate my son, this Solomon, to you.’

V 3: “Do not spend your strength on women”: Bathsheba’s motherly counsel was born out of her own bitter experiences. (Sadly, it appears Solomon did not heed her warnings.)

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

The rest of us, conscious of our own sins (even if less spectacular), and disregarding any (presumed) “righteous works” (could such works make up for our sins?), may say, “Thank God it is so.”

The one who saves “his people” from their sins will save us from our sins because we, you and I, are “his people” too!

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

Matthew 1:16: “Joseph [became — not the father of Jesus, but...] the husband of MARY... of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

First, in Luke 1, we begin by reading “between the lines”.

To paraphrase an old rabbinical saying:

People marry for four reasons: for passion, for wealth, for honor, or for the glory of God. If they marry for passion, their children will be given over to their own passions, and will grow up stubborn and rebellious. If they marry for wealth, their children will learn to be greedy. If they marry for honor, their children will one day become proud, ambitious, and ruthless. But if they marry for the glory of God, then their children will be righteous, and they will preserve Israel.

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

When the Sabbath came, all activity ceased, and families dressed in their best clothes and gathered at the old stone synagogue. There the grandfatherly rabbi read, with carefully measured phrasing, from the Holy Scriptures, and offered his simple exhortation for the week. He was not an eloquent speaker. Nor was he

a subtle expounder of legal details, like the teachers from Jerusalem who passed through occasionally on their way to some place more important. But he was well respected, even loved, for his honesty and kindness. He was faithful and diligent in teaching the boys of Nazareth, preparing them to assume their positions as men in the congregation of Israel.

A special announcement

This particular Sabbath he had a special announcement, a little something extra to enliven the proceedings. It was not a total surprise to his listeners, but then, in a village like Nazareth, very few things were secret: *‘Joseph, son of Jacob the carpenter, having brought a satisfactory dowry, desires the hand of Mary, daughter of Heli, both being of the house of David. May God bless their union.’*

The following week was a time of joyful celebration. It was a time for older folks to relive their youth, and for the very young to dream of the future. The old songs of love and marriage were sung again. That most romantic of the scrolls, “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s”, would be remembered and read, and listeners would thrill to the rich exotic poetry of love, sensual yet spiritual, truly a mystery. The loving eyes of family and friends would see Joseph in the young shepherd, and Mary in the beautiful Shullamite: *“How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful!... Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon [part of the “scarlet thread” of our story]; your mouth is lovely... there is no flaw in you... You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice!”* (Song 4:1,3,7,9,10).

“No flaw in you”

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

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

There were yet months and months until the marriage could be finalized, but Mary could close her eyes and see it all: the procession as the bridegroom comes to the house of the bride, to carry her away to his own home; the virgins or “bride’s maids” with their lamps to light the way. Then would come the joyous marriage

feast, the special wedding garments, the wine of joy. It would all come true for her and her beloved. God had indeed richly blessed them.

Before consummation of the marriage, there must come the months of waiting, preparation, and anticipation. In the meantime, ever present as a reminder, was the memory of that pledge of purity already taken: to have and to hold, to forsake all others, to cleave only to her husband, to be “a garden locked up, a fountain sealed” (Song 4:12).

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

An unexpected visitor

Luke 1:26-28: No greater honor had ever been bestowed upon a woman than was Mary’s lot, but it was an honor that carried an awesome responsibility. It would mean the shattering of other cherished dreams and desires. Her life would never be as simple and pleasant as she had had reason to expect a short while before.

When she saw the angel, Mary began to “wonder” or “consider” (v 29, RSV) in her mind what sort of greeting this was. It was of course a trifle disconcerting, even frightening, to be visited by an angel in the midst of an ordinary day. Mary’s fear was overridden by her curiosity and quiet reflection.

No matter what happened to Mary, she paused to consider, to ponder, to reflect. She is one of the great “spectators” in the Bible. We thank God for Mary and her example. When she stops to consider, then we are compelled to do the same. When she stands still to see the salvation of the Lord, we too halt in our headlong rush through overcrowded lives, and pause for a moment with her. We catch a little of the infinite wonder in the calm, clear eyes of this young woman, an attitude molded by careful Bible study and frequent prayer. Like her, we learn to treasure in our hearts the sayings we hear (Luke 2:51). Like her, we “ponder” them (2:19) in the stillness of the night so that, when the storms of life beat upon us, like her we will be strong in faith.

Vv 30,31: “The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.’” To find favor implies a request answered, and we could conclude that this young, pure Jewish woman may have been praying, though never really expecting a favorable answer: ‘May I be the mother of the Messiah.’ This would be in keeping with one traditional Jewish view of Isaiah 7:14: that a virgin would marry and then conceive (by natural means) a son who would become the Messiah, but not literally the Son of God. Since Mary and Joseph both belonged to the house of David, perhaps such thoughts had come to her.

Up to this point the Holy Spirit had not been mentioned. Mary might reasonably have concluded that this special child would also be the son of Joseph.

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

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

The language of Gabriel calls to mind the words of Genesis describing the creation itself. The Spirit of God “overshadowed”, or moved upon, the face of the waters to bring forth life, as a mother hen brooding over her eggs and then her chicks. It is a picture of vast creative power, coupled with the sweetest tenderness and love. It is a picture of a God who sustains all things by His omnipotence, who acts as and when He chooses, and no man can understand, much less question, His prerogative. It is also a picture of a God who is a Father, who pities His children, who lavishes mercies unnumbered upon those who can never hope to repay Him. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us.”

This view of the Messiah’s conception, which we as Christians take for granted today, was by no means as certain to the faithful Jews of Mary’s day. But the message she received would also give additional weight to Isaiah 9:6,7, the companion passage to Isaiah 7:14. Now, in light of Gabriel’s announcement, it might be read: “To us a child is born; to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called... ‘Wonderful in counsel is the Mighty God, **who is the everlasting Father** of the Prince of Peace.’ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.” (Evidently, this passage has been read this way by some learned rabbis: see *Tidings*, June 2008, pp. 241-242.)

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

A veil is now modestly drawn over the scene. Of the actual conception Luke tells us nothing, and we must conclude that such knowledge is too sacred for mortals. How was this miracle accomplished? In the language of modern science, what was the “genetic code” begotten of such a union? Prudence, and some sense of the Divine majesty, counsel us to explore no further along these lines than Scripture expressly warrants. Perhaps Psalm 139 gives us an insight into this greatest of all

mysteries. God manifest in the flesh. David (and, prophetically, Jesus) says:

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

Blessed among women?

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

The calling of the Lord is seldom an unmixed pleasure. Mary was uniquely “blessed” among women, but blessings are not always enjoyable. Sometimes they can be downright unpleasant.

“Oh, to do some great work for God!” Haven’t we all said that? However, the great works described in the Bible often included imprisonment, slavery, torture, or (as with Mary) scandal and gossip (like Tamar and Rahab), which she was destined to experience to a degree which we can scarcely appreciate, living as we do in such libertine times (where sin is scarcely ever noticed or mentioned). Do we really want to be blessed by God, like the first Joseph was “blessed” in a foreign prison, or like Jeremiah was “blessed” in a foul pit, or like Mary was “blessed” to be shunned as an “unwed mother”, or an “adulteress” (like Bathsheba)?

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

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

Can we trust in the One who caused the great pain and still believe that He can bring blessing out of suffering?

Whenever and wherever the trial comes, there can be only one response, the one we have just heard from Mary's lips: "May it be to me as you have said." "Thy will be done."

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

Mary married, and lived, for the glory of God. As the old rabbis said, her son was righteous. Her son preserved Israel.

Luke 1:39-45: Mary went to Elizabeth, receiving confirmation of the angel's words.

Vv 46-55: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Mary's song of rejoicing and thanksgiving contains allusions to about 25 Old Testament passages. Here was a young woman (probably only 14 or 15) who nevertheless had extensive knowledge of Scripture. She was no ordinary young woman, yet in some ways she was ordinary.

There is the exhortation. She did not know she was someone special until that day Gabriel brought his message, and like Ruth she set off on a long journey. For Mary it was a journey to Judah and back, to Bethlehem and Egypt, to Nazareth yet again, and finally over 30 years later to a hill outside Jerusalem, where her heart would break. But until that fateful day of the angel's revelation, Mary's life had only been one of waiting.

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

There were no "kings" in Nazareth, no generals, no great scholars, just ordinary people like you and me. God chose them, as He chooses us, investing the ordinary with great holiness, so that no flesh should boast in His presence. He chooses

people, but not because they *are* special. Rather, He chooses people whom He can *make* special.

The angel spoke to Mary, but he also speaks to us: “You have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). Almost before we asked, even though we do not deserve it, we have found favor with God. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by God, and we, His children, we are worth many sparrows (Matt 10:29,31).

It is not difficult to believe that God exists, but sometimes it is difficult to believe that He takes personal notice of “little people”. Nevertheless, He takes time off from balancing the stars of heaven and directing the courses of nations to care for every one of us poor, weak, common creatures. He guides and protects them, and at last He rights all wrongs. The story of Mary should be a gentle reminder that no one is too small or insignificant for God’s notice, if he or she has faith.

Luke tells Mary’s story more than Joseph’s, but Matthew tells Joseph’s story more than Mary’s. The two together give us a complete picture.

Matthew 1:18: “She was found to be with child.” It sounds as though Mary did not reveal the past events to any but Elizabeth and Zechariah until her condition was known. Her silence was the result (we may suppose) of equal parts modesty and faith; modesty in speaking of such an intimate matter, and faith that God would reveal His purpose when He chose, and to whom He chose.

It must be pointed out that the last phrase of Matthew 1:18 (“through the Holy Spirit”) does not describe what was known immediately, either by Mary’s parents or by Joseph. This is certain because of what follows in the narrative. The addition of this last phrase is Matthew’s explanation, by which the link is made to the foregoing genealogy (especially with v 16) and to the succeeding prophecy (v 23).

What should Joseph do now? Joseph is a “righteous man” (v 19). What does a “righteous” man do when confronted with the “obvious” sin of another? Does he “righteously” rebuke, and punish the sinner? “To the full extent of the law!” How often we hear that cry of righteous zeal, or its equivalent, today! A wise man once remarked: “Every man wants justice for others, and mercy for himself.”

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

Joseph was not that sort of man; he was “righteous”, with all the qualities of strength, decency, and mercy (but none of the harshness and arrogance) that the word may imply.

This description seems an intended contrast with two of Joseph's ancestors who are listed in the genealogy of Matthew 1:

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

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

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

V 19b: Joseph "did not want to expose her to public disgrace... he had in mind to divorce her quietly." Casting about for a solution, Joseph, on his own, decided on the easiest and most merciful approach: he would "divorce" Mary quietly, allowing her to go away and, as he imagined (in his ignorance) at this point, marry the father of the child.

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

It is not too far-fetched, indeed, to suppose that the whole matter of the woman taken in adultery may have been contrived by the Lord's enemies to discredit him. It is almost certain that, as Jesus grew in popularity, his enemies made secret investigations into his early life and heard rumors about the peculiar circumstances of his conception.

Suppose that, when confronted with the question as to the woman's fate, Jesus had said, 'Yes, let her be stoned.' The retort would have immediately come, 'Then what should be done with your mother?' For Mary was a betrothed woman at the time of Jesus' conception.

Other such base insinuations in the chapter may be seen in the same light: "Where is your father?" (John 8:19); and "We are not illegitimate children [as some are]" (v 41).

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

V 20: After he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

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

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

God could have made it easier. He could have smoothed the way, but He did not. Mary must now gather her belongings and go quietly to the house of Joseph. She would go with relief, certainly, that her beloved no longer doubted her, and that he was one with her in understanding the marvelous revelation of God. But she would go also under the disdainful eyes of her friends and relatives, and perhaps the sorrow of her parents, which she could do nothing to alleviate. For Mary and Joseph there would be no happy wedding, no bridesmaids, no feasts, no laughing children, no gifts and good wishes. The cloud of suspicion was made worse because there could be neither repentance nor explanation, only passive endurance: “But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called” (1Pe 2:20,21).

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

In remarkable ways, even before Jesus was born, his Heavenly Father was plowing the “soil”, and planting the seed that produced trials and the consequent character development of Mary and Joseph. By these, His only-begotten Son would be instructed and prepared for the work he had to do. It is never enough to tell someone: “Resist not evil; turn the other cheek; give kindness for hurt; do not complain but trust in God for all things...” It is far better, not just to tell, but also to show them. The words and sentiments are lovely, but we need (as Jesus himself needed) real-life examples to follow: God gave them, and Jesus found them, in those who gave him life, sustained that life, and raised and taught him.

The “Lamb of God”, set apart to take away the sin of the world, was prepared in his mother’s nursery, and in the workshop of his “father” Joseph, and in the

bosom of a small, poor family, who talked of God's wonderful promises, praying together around the table and the fireplace.

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

"He will be called 'Yahshua', for he will save his people from their sins"
(Matt 1:21).

(7) The Scarlet Thread

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

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

Bro. Harry spoke of golden threads, and we have been talking about scarlet threads, or cords, or garments. The principle is the same, of course.

Even more than that, the two together — golden threads and scarlet ones — remind us of the tabernacle, and then the temples, in Israel. These houses of God, and houses of worship, were equipped with elaborate woven hangings, curtains, and veils. The garments of the priests who ministered there were likewise woven of the finest fabric, and interwoven and embroidered with, among other things, threads of gold, and threads of scarlet!

Exodus 26, 27, 36, and 38 speak of the tabernacle, and Exodus 28 and 39 of the ceremonial garments of the High Priest. In these were to be found finely-twisted linen, and threads of scarlet, and blue, and purple, and even gold itself, drawn out into the finest wire and interwoven with the fabrics.

It is beyond our scope, and our time, to develop this picture in great detail. But we satisfy ourselves here by remarking on the plain Scriptural significance of the fabrics and the gold and the colors:

1. Fine linen, being white, signifies holiness, purity, and righteousness, as found in the bride (the sort of garments the young Mary no doubt planned to wear at the celebration of her wedding). In Revelation 19:8, the bride of Christ is "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." (And not so much their own righteousness, but more so the righteousness provided them as a garment, or a covering, by the Bridegroom.)

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

All this is fascinating. Without going deeper, it suggests that God's house, and the coverings for God's priests, were specially prepared for them according to rigid standards.

In Psalm 139:13-16 (NIV), David sings to God: *"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

Several words in this passage are commonly used elsewhere in the Bible to describe the knitting together, and the weaving, of the fabrics of tabernacle and temple and priestly garments (you'll have to use a concordance on that later). David applies them to the knitting together of the fetus in the mother's womb, the mysterious process by which God miraculously creates each human being. David was thus "woven together" in his mother's womb, as was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even beyond this point, we recognize that God is working to weave all of us together, in our lives, our experiences, our trials, our "successes" (if there are such) and even our "failures" (as those of David and Bathsheba). It is in our failures that we may learn most readily to turn to the One who doesn't fail. In our weaknesses we may be drawn to the One who is strong!

God has worked,

- (a) first in the experiences of men like David, of the tribe of Judah, then
- (b) in the experiences of his descendant, our Lord Jesus Christ, and now
- (c) in all our own experiences.

God continues to work today to construct and organize a tabernacle, or temple, in which He will dwell. This is what we mean when we talk about the “scarlet thread, or cord” in the story of the women of Matthew 1 (and, I venture to suggest, what Bro. Harry Tennant meant when he talked of finding, studying, and learning from the golden threads of the Bible).

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

- a. A scarlet thread or cord was used by Tamar to mark out her firstborn as a prince in Judah.
- b. And another scarlet cord (or the same one?) was used (probably) by Salmon prince of Judah as a Passover emblem to denote the house of Rahab, and to save her and her family when God destroyed the city of Jericho.
- c. A garment (whether with a scarlet cord, we cannot say for sure) figured prominently in Ruth’s claiming her redeemer Boaz: “Spread your garment over me... give me protection.” And another prince of Judah resulted from their union, another link in the genealogy that led from Abraham to Jesus Christ.
- d. And then, there are the lips of the Shullamite, as “a scarlet thread” (Song 4:3). This signifies that she is distinguished by talking about, and thinking of, these stories.
- e. The scarlet cord seems to recede in the story of David and Bathsheba, but it is replaced by a sword: “The sword shall not depart from your house.” Because of sin, there is suffering, and death, and loss, but in all of this, and despite it, God still works to produce His seed, to continue the royal line, that leads at last to His only-begotten Son.

When Jesus was born, he was taken shortly thereafter to the Temple to be presented to God, and redeemed by a special sacrifice. There the old man Simeon took the baby in his arms, and then said to Mary: “And a sword will pierce your own soul also” (Luke 2:35). In this he implied, as plainly as he could, that there would be a “sword” (suffering, and death) in the life of this little baby.

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

Finally, a few hours later, we see his captors “put a **scarlet robe** on him” (Matt 27:28) and mockingly saluted him as “the **king** of the Jews [literally, the king of **Judah**]”.

The sword could not depart from David’s house; it cannot depart from our house either. We are all condemned to die because of our sins. The sword **will not depart...** until the work of Jesus Christ has run its full course. He must experience the sword, he must wear the scarlet robe, and we must be bound to him in those

experiences. We must share in his death, and his sacrifice: we must be touched by his blood. We must crucify ourselves, and our pride and our sins and our self-reliance, along with him at Golgotha.

We must bow down at the foot of the cross, and say, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner! I grasp the scarlet cord of your garment. I need to be sprinkled with your shed blood. I need healing that only you can provide. I need covering that only you can provide. Redeem me, O Lord.'

We have traced the theme of the scarlet thread through the stories of the women of Matthew 1. As we went along, we noticed that the picture of the scarlet thread (or cord, or garment) seemed to give way to the picture of the sword (and blood and sacrifice and death). Alternately, it might perhaps be said that the scarlet cord *has become* the cord of blood! For several reasons, this makes quite a good deal of sense:

- (a) As the scarlet "thread" is traced through our story lines, and we get closer and closer to the culmination, with Jesus Christ, the theme of blood and sacrifice begins to supersede the other. That is, it becomes more obvious that the inheritance of the royal line of Judah *depends upon* a sacrificial death of the One in whom the line concludes! Jesus *IS* the King because he is first the perfect sacrifice. He will wear the crown of gold because he first wore the crown of thorns. He will conquer the nations because he first conquered his own "spirit", his own "will", by making that will the same as his Father's will.
- (b) When the scarlet cord appears in the story of Rahab, it is plain that it is the nearest approximation to the blood of the Passover Lamb. When Rahab hung the scarlet cord in the window of her house, it would, to Jewish soldiers and angels alike, resemble the blood sprinkled, or smeared, around the doors of the Israelite homes in Egypt. The inhabitants of those houses were the only ones who escaped the final plague, the death of the firstborn of each family. This points plainly to Jesus Christ himself, whom John the Baptist calls "the [Passover] Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- (c) Then there is *another* scarlet thread in the Bible, already mentioned. It is the scarlet thread found in the garments of the High Priest, and in curtains and veils and garments associated with the tabernacle and temple. It is the scarlet thread of sacrifice.
- (d) Even though Levi (and not Judah) was the priestly family in Israel, Jesus is plainly a different order of priest. He is a priest, not of Levi, but after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 7): a king-priest combination. So there is reason to see two scarlet threads in the Bible: one kingly and one priestly; and also to find them coming together in the person of our Lord.

Certain passages in the Book of Revelation bring these threads together:

- (1) Revelation 5:1-13: The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is proclaimed (in heaven? or in the temple of God?) as having triumphed. To him is given the privilege of opening the Book of Life and the book of the future. In the scene pictured

in Revelation 5, all the hosts around the throne of God wait eagerly for the “Lion” of Judah to appear so that the wonderful book might be opened. However, when he does appear, in v 6, he appears, amazingly, not as a “Lion” at all, but instead as a “Lamb, looking as if he had been slain”! It is one of the great dramatic reversals, and great surprises, in the Bible, if we can imagine the theatrical effect of this scene. [*‘We all waited, breathlessly, for the Great Lion to appear! And behold, when he came, he was a lowly lamb, covered with blood and the marks of having been slain!’*] However, in one sense it is no surprise at all: the “Lion” of Judah who receives the scepter of the Kingdom of God could prove his right to the throne only by laying down his life. He had to be a lamb, *the Lamb of God*, before he could ever think of being the “Lion of Judah”!

- (2) In Revelation 7:9-17, the redeemed “out of every tribe, nation, people, and language” wash their garments and make them white in the blood of the “Lamb”, the Lamb who rests in the center of God’s throne.
- (3) And in Revelation 13:8, the Lamb is said to have been slain “from the foundation of the world”. In other words, his death was ordained from the beginning. So there is every reason to suppose that, from the “foundation of the world” to the end of the world, the “scarlet threads” (the threads of bloodshed and death and sacrifice) would, if pulled a bit, lead inevitably to him. Signs and markers and emblems left ahead of time, little scarlet threads interwoven into the fabric of God’s wonderful Book, all point to the Coming One. He is a Man who became a Lamb, and then became a Lion (though he still may appear, to believers, at least, in his most precious role, as the Lamb who had been slain.).

We have talked earlier, also, about the “scarlet cord” as a cord of hope, binding together one generation to the next, in shared expectations of the One to come.

It is no surprise, then, that *the umbilical cord* binding the expectant mother to the child in her womb, and carrying nourishment from the one to the other is actually a “scarlet cord” and a cord of blood.

The spiritual “umbilical cord” is the means by which the mother conveys spiritual nourishment to the child, giving him or her the first lessons about God. Such lessons inculcate an awareness of the One who is beyond, intangible, unseen, yet all-knowing and all-powerful, and on Him we all depend utterly. The old rabbis said the one who is best taught is the one who is taught by his mother.

Matthew 1 — with its special women — speaks to us of the hopes, the yearnings, the “treasured-up-in-the-heart” desires of righteous mothers for their children. It may seem, sometimes, as though men rule the world, but there is great truth in the old saying. The saying is a cliché, but it is still true: *“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”*

We all should have our own memories of the “scarlet cord” of family — for many of us a natural family, father and mother, grandparents. For all of us, surely, there are memories of a spiritual family, of “fathers” and “mothers” in the faith, who gave us visions of coming glory. Those are the memories we should cherish and pass along to others, to our own natural children, and to our “spiritual” children as well.

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

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

In a documentary about the Statue of Liberty, and the meaning of freedom and America, Mario Cuomo, the son of Italian immigrants and at that time the governor of New York, talked about his family history.

He remembered his father, who had first come to the shores of the New World, and then worked as a ditch-digger to earn enough money to bring over his wife and one son. Finally she and the boy (Mario’s older brother) were able to make the trip from the Old Country.

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

‘So... Mrs. Cuomo, do you have any money?’

‘Almost nothing at all.’

‘Any other family in America?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Do you have any education?’

‘Very little.’

‘What prospects do you have in America?’

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

‘Making trenches? Oh, he’s a ditch-digger?’

‘Yes.’

‘That’s all?’

‘Yes, sir.’

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

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

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

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

Let us then imagine another interview. Let us imagine that, when Naomi and Ruth made their way from Moab toward Naomi’s homeland of Israel, they were met by an Israeli border guard:

‘So, ma’am, you are Naomi widow of Elimelech, and you have land and property in Bethlehem. Is that right?’

‘Yes, sir.’

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

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

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

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

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

‘Sir, you have only my word for it.’

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

‘Almost nothing at all. We are poor widows.’

‘Do you have any education?’

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

‘What skills do you have? Your mother-in-law is too old to be of much use working? How will you support yourself and her?’

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

‘Hah! One more of those... And how will you ever manage?’

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

‘No great prospects in that, I must say. So, let me summarize: you have no money, no skills, no expectations, and a questionable past. We know you were an idolater, and who knows what else, over there in that dark, ugly land. So why should I open the gate and allow you to enter our special Land of Promise? You seem to have brought absolutely nothing of value.’

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

So, in the last analysis, what can you and I offer to the LORD of heaven and earth? Nothing, really. Except our firm grasp of the scarlet cord of memory and belief and love and hope, the cord of faith that binds us together with His Son, and with one another. The hope that one day we, and our sons and daughters, will rule as kings and priests in God’s glorious eternal Kingdom. This will be so not for any merit we have, nor for any works we have done that lift us above anyone else, but because ***with unfailing resolve we continued to cling to the hem of the garment of the One who died for us. We held on and we never let go.***

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

In Jesus, then, the “scarlet cord” of family line and inheritance and royalty, and also of sacrifice and redemption, reaches its end. Each of us, belongs to Christ, and is through him Abraham’s seed and an heir of the promises. For us the “scarlet cord” has, in every generation, a wonderful new beginning. “Behold, I make all things new!”

- Like Tamar, we say to our Lord (the prince of Judah): “Give me your special cord and insignia, as a pledge!”
- Like Rahab, we say: “Remember me when you enter the promised land!”
- Like Ruth, we say, “Spread your cloak of protection over me!”
- Like Bathsheba, “Lord, remember the oath, the promise you made to me!”
- And, like Mary, “Lord, I am your servant. May your will be done with me!”

Appendix: The “Gaal”, or “kinsman-redeemer”

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

When God proclaims Himself to be the Redeemer, He announces that He will become “next of kin” to those whom He will save. How did the great Creator become near of kin to us? By manifesting Himself in the flesh (2Co 5:19-21; Rom 8:3), through

the birth of a Son who will bear the image and stamp of His character, while at the same time being a man.

Redemption of a land inheritance

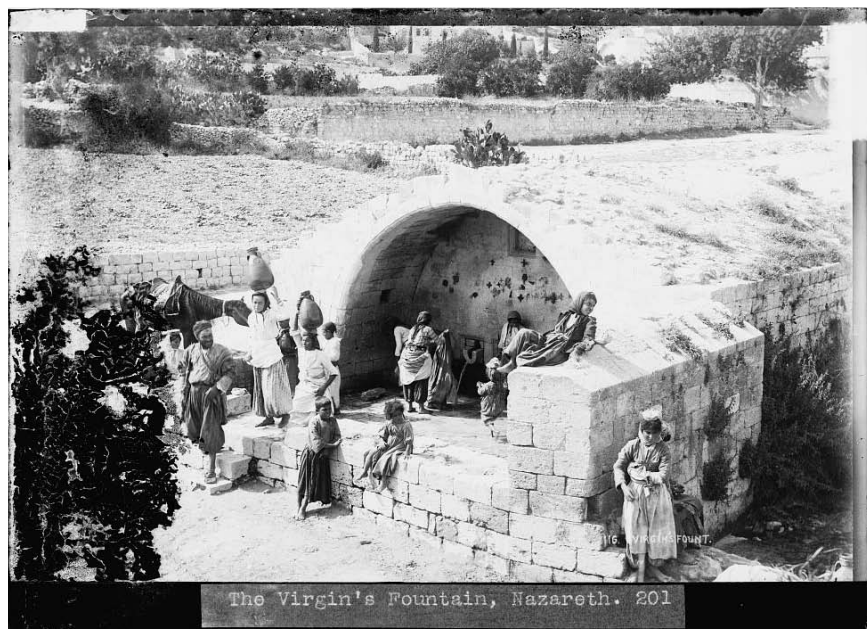
The Land belongs to God, and even in Old Testament times the individual Israelites never really owned it (Lev 25:23), though they were given the exclusive right to it so long as they kept the law. If a man fell into debt, and had to mortgage the land he inherited, it became the duty of the Gaal to purchase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

The Land of Promise passed into the hands of strangers when Israel was taken into captivity. Yet that very Land will be redeemed by the true "Gaal": God manifested in His Son (Psa 74:2; Isa 52:9).

Redemption of slaves

If an Israelite, through poverty or any other reason, were sold into slavery to a stranger, then the Gaal had a duty to buy him back, to redeem him, and thus to restore him to freedom (Lev 25:47-53).

Through sin, man finds himself in bondage to the law of sin and death (Rom 7:3; 8:2), and utterly unable to redeem himself (Psa 49:7,8). But God, the Gaal of Israel,



The Virgin's Fountain, Nazareth. 201

The Virgin's Fountain in Nazareth (Library of Congress, M32-D-201)

having manifested Himself in flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, assumes the position of near kinsman, and so the price of redemption is paid (1Pe 1:18,19; 1Co 6:20; 7:23).

Preserver of the family

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

The Lord Jesus, as Gaal, has done likewise for us who are Gentiles (Eph 2:11-13; 3:6).

*“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great... Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to **redeem** us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Tit 2:11-14).*

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