

Ruth • The Need for a Redeemer

Introduction

NOTE: This is a much longer study than usual, but don't let that prevent you from reaping the huge rewards of studying this 4-chapter book as a whole

In Leviticus 25 in particular, and supported elsewhere in the Mosaic Law, a legal mechanism for “redemption” was set forth by God. Ruth is actually a practical application of that portion of God's Law to teach us not just how the Old Testament institution of redemption was supposed to work, but of the divine working of redemption throughout all of Scripture. It's no coincidence that a key event in this story concerns a woman giving birth to a redeemer in Bethlehem, something with many parallels to yet another woman who will give birth to **THE** Redeemer in Bethlehem.

¹Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. ³Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. ⁵Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

[Read 1:1-5]

Q: Other than the tragedy of personal loss, what is the significance of Naomi being left without a husband nor sons nor even grandsons?

A: In the short-term this left Naomi without anyone to support her in her old age as would normally happen in the presence of an extended family. In the long-term, this was viewed as an even greater tragedy that a family line came to an end. The whole system of inheritance and the passing of the land was predicated on passing it along to children to sustain the family name and overall tribal unity. From a Jewish perspective, this wasn't just about the loss of loved ones or land, but annihilation of an entire family forever going forward.

Q: Why might it be significant that Mahlon and Chilion are identified as “Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah”?

A: “Ephratha”—the root for “Ephrathite”—was the original name of Bethlehem going back to the time of Abraham. It has a powerful place in Jewish history even before becoming part of Israel proper and would in turn emphasize to Jewish readers the extraordinary depth of this tragedy in losing so precious a heritage as this family had brought for centuries until this abrupt ending. This is not just **any** family, but one of the founding families and therefore especially tragic.

Q: Wasn't it against the Law for these Jewish men to take Gentile wives?

A: There is no mention in the Bible that it was wrong and the acceptance of everyone of Ruth as a legitimate family member resulting from the marriage seems to go contrary to Old Testament Law. However, the prevailing interpretation is that taking a Gentile wife was prohibited only while residing in Israel, and that it was probably technically legal since it took place outside of Israel while they lived in Moab. But even if it were wrong, biblical law would accept Ruth because the sin would not have been hers but the husband's.

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. ⁷So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

¹⁰And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.”

¹¹But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ¹²Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ¹³would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me.”

¹⁴And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

¹⁶But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.”

¹⁸When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

[Read 1:6-18]

Q: What is the phrase in v.8 that describes the relationship between these women?

A: “May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” The root word for every variation of “kindness” or “kindly” used throughout Ruth is “hesed”, a Hebrew word often translated as “lovingkindness”. It is the most common Old Testament equivalent of “grace”.

Q: What might Naomi’s entreaty for God’s grace in return for the grace shown to her by her Gentile daughters-in-law teach?

A: Naomi sees God at work over **all** people, not just the Jews exclusively. She recognizes that God judges all people and in turn rewards accordingly to their deeds.

Point: We are seeing how God’s grace works on His behalf through people **TO** people and the greater accountability of each individual to the One True God.

Q: Is there a spiritual parallel or deeper teaching in the examples of the two Gentile women Orpah and Ruth?

A: They could represent 2 kinds of people that come to God and continue at different levels of faithfulness. Ruth is like those that come and, being permanently changed, remain forever faithful; Orpah is like those who follow faithfully for awhile, but eventually introduce false beliefs/teaching/worship from their old life, effectively returning to their gods.

Q: Are there parallels to other biblical teachings concerning brides?

A: Joseph had to take another bride (Leah) before he could get the bride he wanted (Rachel). This teaching replicates itself throughout Scripture to provide the basis for Christ who would have to take another bride (the Gentiles) before being ultimately accepted and able to possess the original bride (Israel).

Q: What about Naomi’s actions in leaving and then returning to Israel? How might this parallel greater teachings concerning Israel and Jews as a whole?

A: It represents the dispersion of Jews from Israel—living in Moab in this case—and their subsequent return upon hearing that things are going well in Israel. There are many parallels to why Jews are returning to Israel. But just like Naomi, the work of their return is incomplete until combined with the recognition and acceptance of the Redeemer to restore them spiritually. It’s not enough to just return physically.

The point of these things is that Ruth is a pattern that continues to be repeated even to this day.

Q: List each of Ruth’s points in v.17-18 and describe how they illustrate the visible work of salvation in one’s life.

1. “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you”. It’s not a one-time commitment but a way of life going forward forever.
2. “...where you go, I will go...” No longer seeking one’s own path but God’s alone.
3. “...where you lodge, I will lodge...” No longer living the old life but leaving it behind for new life in Him.
4. “Your people shall be my people...” Accepting a whole new family in the

body of Christ.

5. "...your God, my God..." Putting away all other gods and interests to worship the One True God wholly and exclusively.
6. "Where you die, I will die..." Not a temporary whim or commitment but a decision for life up until the very last breath.

Q; What is the difference between the women's treatment of Naomi in v.14?

A: Orpah was polite and even loving towards Naomi, but went her own way; Ruth clung to Naomi and would not let go.

Application: How does this speak of our own spiritual commitment? What are the parallels in your own walk with Orpah as opposed to Ruth?

[Read 1:19-22]

¹⁹So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

²⁰She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

²²So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

¹Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor."

And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

³So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

⁴Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the Lord be with you."

And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you."

⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

⁶The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. ⁷And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until

Q: Why the change of names? What is actually being communicated?

A: "Naomi" means "pleasant" while "Mara" means "bitter". Naomi is communicating the spiritual defeat she feels at the hand of God.

Point: Naomi is not happy with the results of God's sovereignty over her life, but still acknowledges God as Ruler and Author of same. She recognizes that her life's physical struggles parallel things going on in terms of her spiritual struggles. She is not going to recover hope for this life without provision of renewed spiritual hope.

[Read 2:1-3]

Point: These verses are provided to place into the proper context God's supernatural working on the behalf of Naomi, even though she wasn't aware of it yet. This establishes that although Ruth did not know where she should go or whose field to glean, that divine leading would bring her in contact with a close relative of Naomi; in fact, the one through whom God would ultimately restore Naomi physically and spiritually.

[Read 2:4-16]

Q: In chapter 1 we observed the working of hesed—that is, "grace"—in the relationships between Naomi and her daughters-in-law. How does this reoccur again here?

A: In Boaz's response of why he is extending kindness (hesed/grace) to Ruth.

Q: What are the things that Boaz lists in v.11 as having been done by Ruth?

1. "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband".
2. "...how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth..."
3. "...how you...came to a people that you did not previously know."

All of these combine to form a picture of the work of salvation: Forsaking

now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while.”

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. ⁹Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw.”

¹⁰Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

¹¹Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. ¹²May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.”

¹³Then she said, “I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.”

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left.

¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. ¹⁶Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.”

the old life, loving and being devoted to the One True God alone, and loving others as one's self. It's a summary of the fulfillment of the whole Law in the practical application of Ruth's life.

Q: What does Boaz expound in v.12 as the proper reward for Ruth's actions? What is the greater teaching to which this speaks?

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

In recognizing great spiritual sacrifices, Boaz wishes for Ruth great spiritual reward. Boaz is speaking more like God might speak, recognizing and praising spiritual achievement. It's a teaching about where truly lies our treasure, there is our reward.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Q: What does Ruth acknowledge in v.13 that she has received? How does it fit in with the theme of hesed/grace so far discussed?

A: Ruth acknowledges that kindness (hesed/grace) has been returned to her in Boaz's deeds and words. It continues to reinforce the work of God's kindness (hesed/grace) in and through others to produce physical relief which parallels spiritual healing.

Q: How does Boaz's instructions to his staff in v.15-16 mirror God's grace to us?

A: The requirements of the Law were to allow others to glean from the corners of the fields and after all harvesting was done; simply following the workers through the field while they were working was not actually a legal right. Not only does Boaz allow this higher level of activity, but even instructs that an extra amount be purposely left for her which would normally not be found among “gleanings”. It's a teaching about how God's grace far exceeds our mere needs as He expresses His love for us here and now.

Application: *Do we encourage others by reinforcing the spiritual principles at work in their actions? Do we look deeper than just the surface circumstances to try and see what God is actually doing? Do we consider that as God's “hands of grace” that it's our enjoyable duty to not just meet, but exceed, meeting others' needs?*

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law then said to her, “Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.”

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.”

²⁰Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead.” Again Naomi said to her, “The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives.”

²¹Then Ruth the Moabitess said, “Furthermore, he said to me, ‘You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.’”

²²Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field.”

²³So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

¹Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? ²Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. ³Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.”

⁵She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

⁶So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay

[Read 2:17-23]

Q: Naomi states in v.20, “May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead”. In what ways might Naomi be considered “dead”?

A: For the remainder of her life she has no sons to care for her in her old age, something that would ordinarily decrease one’s overall life span as they would have to work to survive at a level very difficult for the aged. But as pointed out previously, the lack of heirs which means the end of the family name and heritage was a form of death that in many respects was even more unbearable.

Q: How do we know that Naomi is beginning to see that God is still perhaps working on her behalf and may not have abandoned her completely?

A: By the fact that in v.21 she identifies Boaz by what many Bible translations call her “kinsman-redeemer”.

Q: What is a “kinsman-redeemer”?

A: This is actually a legal term spelled out in Old Testament Law whereby a family member can:

1. Avenge the death of a relative
2. Seek restitution due a deceased relative for a wrong committed against him
3. Assist relatives in obtaining justice
4. Redeem a relative’s property/inheritance sold to another
5. Redeem a relative who has sold themselves into servitude

In other words, an earthly kinsman-redeemer can effect redemption and restoration in life situations in the same way our Great Kinsman-Redeemer can so accomplish.

[Read 3:1-18]

Q: In 2:12 Boaz states, “the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge”. How is this connected with Ruth’s request in 3:9, “So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative”?

A: The words for “wings” and “garment corner” are the same. Ruth is essentially asking Boaz to answer his own prayer! Just as he wishes for the Great Kinsman-Redeemer’s protection for Ruth, so Ruth elicits the protection of her immediate kinsman-redeemer.

Q: What might Boaz giving the abundance of barley to Ruth in advance of completing his promise indicate as a greater teaching of God’s grace to us?

A: That God has promised to accomplish in eternity a great and lasting work in bringing us great joy and comfort and security in paradise, but a kind of down payment on that promise in the abundance of His kindnesses in this present life.

down. ⁸It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. ⁹He said, “Who are you?”

And she answered, “I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.”

¹⁰Then he said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. ¹²Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. ¹³Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning.”

¹⁴So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” ¹⁵Again he said, “Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.”

So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city.

¹⁶When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did it go, my daughter?”

And she told her all that the man had done for her. ¹⁷She said, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, ‘Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

¹⁸Then she said, “Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.”

¹Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. ²He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. ³Then he said to the closest relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. ⁴So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it,

[Read 4:1-10]

Q: So how do we know from these verses that land isn't the sole important consideration in terms of the biblical laws of inheritance?

A: Because it was not just an obligation in order to keep the land within the tribe, but to ensure that each family's name within the tribe was carried on. In this case, the obligation was not merely to pay money to Naomi for the land, but to take Ruth as a wife to father children as an assurance that Naomi's family line would continue.

Q: How do we now know for sure that Mahlon's marriage to Ruth—a Gentile—was accepted as legitimate?

A: It was not questioned in the least that a requirement of redeeming the land in Naomi's possession was tied to taking her daughter-in-law Ruth

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redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.”

And he said, “I will redeem it.”

⁵Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.”

⁶The closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.”

⁷Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. ⁸So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal.

⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today.”

¹¹All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. ¹²Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. ¹⁵May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is

as wife to continue the family name.

Q: The Old Testament institution of the kinsman-redeemer—in Hebrew called go’el—provided for a way to recover something or someone that was lost. How does this practical application of redemption go further to establish a greater work?

A: It not only recovered a family name and property, but saved them from annihilation. Or as Boaz states in v.10, “to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place”. The kinsman-redeemer has not just saved property but life.

[Read 4:11-22]

Q: Ruth is mentioned alongside the names of Rachel, Leah and Tamar. What do all 4 women have in common?

A: They are all Gentiles. It’s a teaching that God’s plans have always been to include everyone and that when someone of Jewish birth doesn’t live up to His expectations, those that do will be used by Him to bridge the gaps.

Q: What is the confirmation for us that all of these events were driven and controlled by God to produce this outcome, that this isn’t simply a story of “chance” or “fate” or “good luck” that it turned out for the good?

A: Because according to v.13, “the LORD enabled her to conceive”. Human efforts to date had been not merely unsuccessful, but disastrous, bringing them to the brink of annihilation. God’s redemption effected restoration where none was thought possible.

Q: How do we know that the redeemer spoken of here is not limited to just the birth of Obed?

A: The genealogy indicates that David would be born a grandson of Obed, and through David would come **THE** Redeemer—the Messiah.

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better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse.

¹⁷The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi!” So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸Now these are the generations of Perez:

to Perez was born Hezron,

¹⁹and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab,

²⁰and to Amminadab was born Nahshon,

and to Nahshon, Salmon,

²¹and to Salmon was born Boaz,

and to Boaz, Obed,

²²and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

Q: What are the qualities of the redeemer provided in v.14-15?

1. He is provided by God. “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today”
2. He is not a secret, but highly visible and publicly acclaimed. “May his name become famous in Israel”.
3. He restores where no one thought it possible. “May he also be to you a restorer of life”.
4. He provides and meets every need. “...and a sustainer of your old age”.

Q: What does Naomi now have which at the beginning of this book she had no hope of attaining?

- Someone to provide for her in her old age.
- Someone to carry on the family name, to prevent it from being entirely wiped out.
- The coming of **THE** Redeemer who would do for her eternally what has been accomplished in this present life.

Overall Application

- *How do you see yourself in the earthly role of a redeemer in the application of “love your neighbor as yourself”? Do you see your obligations limited to meeting a temporary, immediate need? What are the boundaries of our responsibilities?*
- *In the course of working with others, how aware are you of the greater spiritual work taking place? Do you see that God may be doing something greater in the background than circumstances reveal?*
- *Do you see the whole work of Christ, our Redeemer not just for the needs of this life but for the next?*

Epilogue

Re-read Ruth and take the following into consideration:

“The book of Ruth is read in the Jewish Synagogue at the feast of Pentecost, which is the first day, as it were, of the Gentile church. It tells the story of a rich, powerful Jewish man who takes a Gentile bride and exalts her, the way that Jesus, on the day of Pentecost, raised up the Gentile church as the bride of Christ.”

-- Jacob Prasch