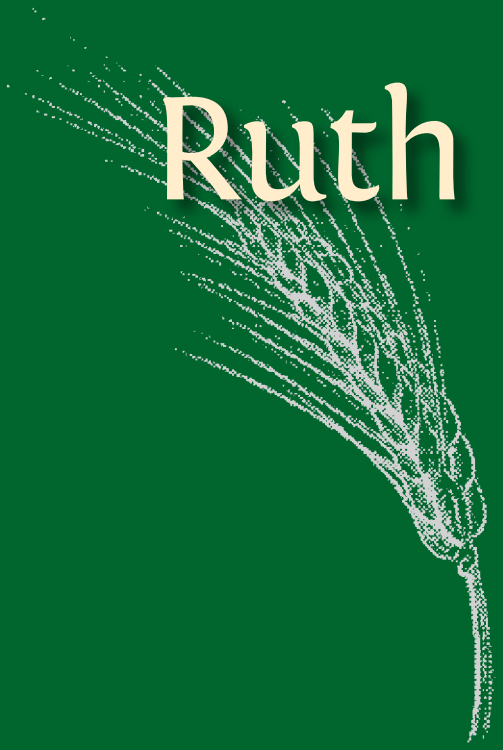
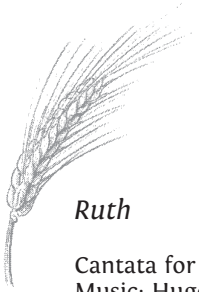
Ruth



Ruth



Ruth

Cantata for choir, soloists and small ensemble
Music: Hugo de Jong, 1992/2024
Lyrics: taken from the Bible book Ruth and various other Biblical texts, mostly from the ESV, NIV and NLT, sometimes adapted to fit the musical rhythm.

Original illustration (the barley ear): Sjon Heijenga

Dedicated to Christians who go to areas where the gospel of Jesus Christ has not been preached yet.

The Book of Ruth – A Brief Commentary

Character studies

The question who is the main character of the book of *Ruth* is not easy to answer. Is it Naomi, Ruth, or Boaz? Unlike the books of Joshua and Judges, in *Ruth* God does not appear in a direct way. Yet He is there unmistakably, and one can even argue that the main character of this little gem of a book is God Himself. The end of the story reveals its purpose, which is God's provision of a king; and not only that – a king from the lineage of Judah, according to the prophecies. So the reader (or audience) is immediately plunged into deep theology: the sovereign JHWH working towards the fulfilment of His purposes, using simple people, though not just using them as if they were mere puppets, but by His goodness winning them over to become His co-workers. In doing so, God shows His faithfulness to His promises and to His covenant with the people of Israel. Yet, the way in which God shows His faithfulness is fascinating. He does not tick off contract conditions boxes, but in subtle ways He both reveals His character and foreshadows His ultimate goal of the redemption of mankind.

The observation that God reveals His character should caution the reader not to make too much of the other characters. Of course, Ruth's radical decision to follow Naomi is extraordinary. Yes, Ruth is 'a woman of noble character'. Yes, she is hard working, faithful, loyal, humble, grateful and she does not let herself be tempted by young men, in spite of her rather hopeless situation. But God's goodness seems to overrule all this, as if Ruth's goodness is worked in her by God's goodness. Another, even more important thing about Ruth is that she is a Moabite woman – Ruth from the country of Moab. What the reader should have in mind is that he or she is not exhorted to be like Ruth or imitate some of her features, as to expect God to react to that in a positive way. True, this is not the first time in biblical history that there is a difference between two siblings and that God continues His plan of redemption with one of the two. This phenomena occurs again in the story when the nearer kinsman does not want to take the risk of impairing his own inheritance, while Boaz has already determined, 'as the LORD lives', to redeem Ruth.

Boaz is a noble, God-fearing person. He is generous and he is a good manager who looks after his workers. Naomi knows him as somebody who takes the bull by the horns. Again, readers, especially (church) leaders, should not expect God to act on taking him as an example and copying his behaviour. The message is that God *provided* such a good man and that it is God who arranges the scenes. It is clear that the whole atmosphere in Judah has changed after God ended the famine; JHWH has returned in the hearts of the people and in every day life and speech. And now that God is back in the heart of society He can move ahead. The story of redemption continues, all within the boundaries of His covenant; indeed, His laws help the redemption story to continue – the gleaning, the caring for the poor and foreigners and the kinsman redemption itself.

As far as character features are concerned, little can be said about Naomi and Elimelech. Was it a wrong decision for them to move to Moab? And if it was, what about Ruth? Was Ruth God's 'plan-B', to eventually let the Saviour of the world be born in Bethlehem? Ruth seems to be God's deliberate choice, countering any nationalistic or patriotic claims by the Jewish people that they are special, and underscoring His sovereignty and His far-reaching mercy and compassion, which even seem to be contradictory to His own law. But His compassion does not go against His law, but is thoroughly according to *the spirit* of the Mosaic law, which goes beyond the letter (cf. Matt. 23:23). The story conveys God's message of resurrection, to bring glory out of a hopeless situation, life out of death, the Messiah out of a Moabite widow, a gleaner.

The meaning of the name Elimelech – my God is King – may have something to say, as the story's purpose is about God providing a king. The name may have the purpose of irony, just as the name Bethlehem has – house of bread; famine in the house of bread and 'my God is King' leaving the country of JHWH to find shelter in the idol worshipping country of Moab. If the author had this in mind, God is a master plot writer indeed! For in that case we ought to believe that God planned this restoration project when Elimelech was born. This is not an altogether strange idea, as we can think of the

story of Noah and the meaning of his name – rest, thoughtfully chosen by his father (Gen. 5:29) – and Moses, whose name is not only reflecting what happened to himself, but is also prophetic for the crossing through the Red Sea by the people of Israel. Naomi herself suggests her name is ironic, 'my delight'; she would rather be called Mara, bitterness. Some suggest she stands for the whole people of Israel and that her journey to Moab and return are a kind of miniature exile (see Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 2002). All that can be said about these names, is that their meanings do play a role in painting the situation, but they do not have any allegorical or spiritual implication.

Multilayered

The book of *Ruth* shows the beautiful combination of God's sovereignty and mercy. Naomi calls Him 'the Almighty', yet He is the Provider and Restorer. Ordinary people, even less than ordinary, find shelter under His wings and become ancestors of the Saviour of the universe. This makes it impossible to read the book only as a historical document. It is a literary work of a very high standard, with many layers. And because of its multilayered character – and of course because it is inspired Scripture – it may not answer all our questions about God and His dealings with man, but will kindle curiosity to want to know more about Him. The Almighty is not far away, but very near, in a very personal way.

We may consider whether God causes Boaz to – shall we say – be impressed by Ruth, making it a love story. However, feelings for her are not decisive for the outcome. Yet, a smile of recognition is not inappropriate here. Which self-respecting Jew would ever choose to marry a Moabite widow? According to the law, the nearer kinsman needs to be asked to redeem Elimelech's inheritance. A plot of land is very nice, but to marry Ruth the Moabite widow, oh no! We cannot escape the impression that Boaz is expecting his relative to react in that way. And then there is Naomi's advice to Ruth about how to approach him and in fact propose to him. And notice her confidence that he would settle the matter straight away. Is this spiritual insight or common matchmaking? Motherly instinct? Or maybe a bit of both? It would not do

justice to the story to romanticize it. We are clearly dealing with more serious matters than 'butterflies'. It is about love in action and behaviour, within the context of God's covenant laws. But it does look like a love competition. Who loves the most? Boaz calls Ruth's nocturnal threshing floor adventure 'an act of kindness'. And he explains why: up till now Ruth has clearly ignored young men. And the fact that in her proposal Ruth reminds him of his position as kinsman-redeemer immediately reveals her noble motivation. Moreover, Boaz has already come to know Ruth as somebody who has chosen to leave her country and find refuge under the wings of JHWH rather than go an easier way and have a higher chance of happiness (under the gods of Moab), naturally speaking. Boaz has a quick mind, obviously, and draws the right conclusions. The reader is supposed to understand that it is because of his devotion to God that Boaz does not misinterpret Ruth's action. He immediately and implicitly understands that in her proposal Ruth is honouring her deceased husband and the family name of Elimelech and pleading for the recovery of the family inheritance and in doing so, acting for the sake of the recovery of Naomi's honour, who had left Bethlehem full, but had returned – shamefully – empty.

Themes – Providence and Love

The reader will notice that God's providence is central in the story and that this providence is closely linked with His covenant with Israel. The fact that Ruth *happened* to find work in the fields that belonged to Boaz is a subtle reminder of this, just as phrases like, 'And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem' and 'And behold, the redeemer passed by'. The famine and the death of Elimelech and his sons show that this divine covenant faithfulness stands in stark contrast with the religious madness that prevailed in Judea in the days of Jeremiah, in which the temple, Jerusalem and even the name of the God of Israel were a kind of mascot, national emblems that guaranteed protection and prosperity, in spite of idolatry and injustice. God's covenantal providence also rules out claims of God's blessings of health and wealth on the ground of human dedication and devotion. In his *Letter to the Romans* Paul explains the faithfulness of God and adds that 'if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order

that we may also be glorified with him'. His kindness is not based on man's righteousness, rather, 'God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance' (2:4). And this is the atmosphere in the book of *Ruth*.

Apart from providence the book of *Ruth* teaches a lot about love. Love takes risks, love trusts, love is righteous living, love is pure, love is sacrifice, love is loyal. The story is an object lesson of the supreme commandment to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.

Themes – a King

In the Tanakh the book of *Ruth* is placed among 'the Writings', as part of the Five *Megillot* (*Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes,* and *Esther*). That implies that in the Jewish tradition the book was not really considered a historical document. For Bible readers this is important to keep in mind. However, the place the Bible compilers would give it eventually does help the reader to focus on God's history of redemption, especially regarding the theme of 'the king' and 'the kingdom'. The book of *Judges* ends with, 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.' (21:25, see also 17:6, 18:1, 19:1) The book of *Ruth* starts with Elimelech, 'my God is King' and ends with David. And in *1 Samuel* we find the elders of Israel asking Samuel (himself being the result of another 'resurrection' story) to 'appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations' (8:1-9). But the request displeased Samuel. The LORD tells Samuel to do what they want and says, 'They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.' Considering this later issue, the importance of the king-theme in *Ruth* cannot be overlooked. Righteous living from the heart, that goes beyond the letter of the Mosaic law, stands high on the list of themes in the book, but the call for a king who upholds the law and enforces order under God's authority, draws attention as well. The days of the judges were characterized by continuous spiritual decline, followed by a foreign invasion, a cry to the LORD for help and God providing a new ruler; a period of peace would come and then the people would drift away from God again. How can this vicious circle be broken? The book of *Ruth* shows that it is possible to have a community of people who remain faithful to God in

the midst of apostasy, as a kind of spiritual oasis. In other words, the message is, 'Do not look around, but take your spiritual responsibility, whatever the cost may be. God will take care of the consequences.' It is a theme that runs through the Prophets as well; it is the warning that God looks at the heart. It implies that one may be an Israelite by birth, but still not truly belong to the people of God. It is the theme of 'the remnant of Israel'. It is a warning, but a comfort at the same time. God will see to it that there will always be a faithful remnant of the people of Israel. And this remnant will be representative of the whole of Israel among those who will inherit the Kingdom of God, from every tribe, even the Moabites. Therefore the mention of David in the book of *Ruth* should give hope to the reader. Perez is mentioned twice at the end of the story, born from Tamar, who was in a similar hopeless situation as Ruth. Somehow the line towards the promised king had to continue from Judah (see Gen. 49:8-12). In ancient Middle East culture, a king represented divine authority and that was the thing that was missing in Israel in the days of the judges, a king who would be the role model amongst the faithful ones.

The writer of the *Chronicles* picks up this theme of the Kingdom of God, the hope that is connected with it and the gracious sovereignty with which God works towards the fulfilment of His promises (even by a heathen king, if necessary). The chronicler realises that the Davidic dynasty and the law of Moses are not goals in itself, but a means to serve a higher purpose, which is to secure the place that God has chosen as the representation of His dwelling place, so that He can be present among His people and be worshipped in a proper way – 'that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days' (Luke 1:74-75). A dark period of more than four hundred years of occupation follows, but the promise stands, 'until Shiloh comes' (Gen. 49:10; all interpreters agree this is a reference to the Messiah), the one to whom all tribute belongs from the people of all nations.

The chronicler makes it very clear that, although Israel had utterly failed in its mission to be the bearer and transmitter of God's promise to Abraham, He has not made a mistake in choosing them. Now His mercy to mankind

would become all the more evident when He would give His Messiah, so that we would exclaim with Paul, '… how unsearchable are His judgements, how inscrutable His ways!'

Themes – hope and rest

Hope is indeed an important theme in Ruth, although the word hope is only used once (1:12). Naomi says she is too old to have hope, by which she means hope to have children. And even if she would have children, it would take too long for them to grow up and become potential husbands for Ruth and Orpah (with an allusion to the story of Tamar). Naomi adds, 'May the LORD grant you rest.' Rest means to get married and have a family of their own, assurance for livelihood and the potential continuation of the family name and inheritance. It represents the rest and inheritance on a higher level.

Themes – redemption

We may wonder why the Septuagint translators chose a different word for *gōʾēl* [גֹּאֵל] – 'redeemer' – in Job 19:25 (ὁ ἐκλύειν) than in *Ruth* (ἀγχιστεὺς). Did they feel it odd to refer to JHWH as kinsman-redeemer, or did they think the redeemer concept in *Job* is different from the one in *Ruth*? The Septuagint rendering of 'Redeemer' in the famous verse in the book of *Job* means 'the one to redeem' (infinitive), probably chosen for the fact that in the Hebrew text a participle is used, 'the redeeming one' (as it is in *Ruth*). And the Hebrew verb for 'to redeem' can have a broader meaning than 'to act as kinsman-redeemer'. It can also mean to deliver from (slavery) bondage, like in Exodus 15:13, which comes close to the New Testament meaning of 'to redeem' (there are two different words for it in the Greek, by the way). According to Francis Andersen (TOTC, 1976) in *Job* 'redeemer' has a forensic connotation and expresses Job's assurance that God will act as his vindicator in court.

In other words, we are making big theological and semantic leaps from the redemption of Ruth, to Job, to the New Testament. But we cannot be very wrong when we say that Jesus covers it all. Boaz may not stand directly for a type of the Messiah, nevertheless, his baby Obed is called 'redeemer', as well as 'a restorer of life' for Naomi. In this case, *gōʾēl* is not used in the technical

sense it has earlier in the chapter, but in a more social-economical way. The women of Bethlehem expect his name to become 'renowned in Israel'. The author must have had the intention to bring messianic hope to the forefront, something that goes beyond the restoration of the ruined life of Naomi. It may be comparable with Jesus resurrecting a widow's only child. It means glorious restoration for the widow, but the significance of the miracle goes beyond that; it is a sign that the Kingdom of God has come.

The word 'redeemer' as a noun or participle derived from either (ἀπο)λυτρόω (to ransom, redeem) or ἀγοράζω (to go to market, purchase, redeem) is not used in the New Testament. It might be a bit strange, indeed, to see Jesus as kinsman-redeemer, although we may think of Him as the Son of God who was not ashamed to call us brothers (see Heb. 2 and 3). He became our equal to deliver us from slavery, the fear of death, to know what it is to be human and obey God and thus to become our faithful and compassionate High Priest (see also Heb. 4 and 5). Furthermore, Paul writes that though He was rich, He became poor for our sake, so that by His poverty we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9), and 'You are not your own, for you were bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). Implicit in this kind of redemption is the price Jesus paid when He died on the cross; the price being His very life, or more specifically, His blood. But, especially in the case of the metaphor of the slave market, we have to be careful not to drive the imagery too far (as if Jesus paid Satan something to purchase us!). Here the emphasis lies on the condition from which we have been ransomed, that is from the dominion of sin. When we consider to whom Jesus paid the price, we enter a different realm and have to use terms like reconciliation and propitiation. It is the price for our guilt paid to pacify God's heart and avert His wrath.

All in all, what Jesus has done in redeeming us is to undo our separation from the presence of God and open up the way into His holy presence. This happens when we receive the Holy Spirit on trusting Jesus to be our Saviour and Lord. And thus, as believers together, we become a representation of the Kingdom of God, which will be fully established when Christ returns. At that moment redemption is completed, when even our bodies, and consequently

the whole of creation, will be redeemed from corruption (see Rom. 8). This is the Christian hope, tremendous indeed.

Themes – the Moab motif

The reader cannot miss the constant drumbeat of 'Moab', and 'Moabite' in the story. It conveys a multi-layered message, God's mercy being one of them. It functions as a divisive element, so that Naomi's closest relative refuses to marry Ruth and Boaz seizes the opportunity to 'spread his wings' over her. He had witnessed how she had sought and found refuge under JHWH's wings and it seems clear that Boaz's attitude towards Ruth is strongly connected with that. It is something the nearer kinsman missed.

Another layer – already mentioned – is the revelation of God as the universal God, in spite of His covenant with Israel. In this respect *Ruth* is a rather painful story for the Jewish reader. The famine, effecting – with some irony – Bethlehem, the 'house of bread', was undoubtedly due to God's judgement on the judges because of their bad leadership and on the people who followed their example, as the book of *Judges* shows. Here comes a hopeless Moabite widow who dedicates her life to the care of her Jewish mother-in-law and becomes the great-grandmother of David! It is an extra reminder to the people of Israel to never think God chose them to be His people because they are special in any way.

Jesus Himself picks up this theme, in this case not mentioning Ruth, but the widow from Zarephath in the land of Sidon and Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:26-27). And about the centurion whose servant was healed, Jesus says, 'Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Mat 8:11). He could have mentioned Caleb as well, one of the only two people who had left Egypt and entered the promised land, a man with Edomite roots, or Rahab from Jericho. Other examples are the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the story of the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7). These facts undo all national pride, but at the same time they show God's sovereignty and great mercy, which should comfort and en-

courage the receptive Jewish heart. In his *Letter to the Romans*, Paul points to God's unfathomable wisdom with which He showed mercy to the Gentiles by accepting them as His people on the ground of their faith in Jesus, so that the Jews who notice this would become jealous and turn to Jesus themselves and be saved, so that God does not violate His promises to Israel but rather shows His faithfulness by fulfilling them in Christ! And for the Gentile believer this implies great caution not to become overconfident or to look down on Jewish people. It makes their responsibility to live a God-fearing, Christlike life even greater.

Structure

The story is written as a play in four acts, with an introduction and a conclusion.

Introduction	1:1-5	The situation, the judges rule; famine in Judah, Elimelech and Naomi move to Moab, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah widowed
Act I	1:6-22	Ruth's loyalty to Naomi
Act II	2:1-23	Ruth meets Boaz
Act III	3:1-18	On the threshing floor
Act IV	4:1-17	Ruth and Boaz marry and have a son, Obed
Conclusion	4:18-22	Obed is the grandfather of king David

Ruth – A Cantata

Style

The piece is written in the style of a narrative with recitatives, arias and choir, with allusions to various Biblical texts that serve both as theological background and evangelism.

The musical style is a mixture of styles, from baroque choral to classical romantic to gospel pop.

The composition

The musical composition is rather simple, with a choice of a few main themes and motifs that reoccur throughout the piece. These do not function as Leitmotivs, but are meant to follow and express the lyrics. The trio of Naomi, Ruth and Orpah is typical. It tries to express the struggle of the difficult decision Ruth has to make. It ends with a dramatic mixture of the two themes in a key that is distant from the original key, but closes in an atmosphere of resignation, in the original key.

For the original occasion a tenor recorder was the only instrument available for the tenor section and there were no bass instruments, so it is advisable to add a cello and double bass section, as well as a bassoon, horns or Euphonium.

The composition is rather compact and may sound a bit hasty as a whole. This is due to the occasion for which it was written originally. Although some extensions have been written since, the composer decided to keep its compact character, with hardly any repetitions. Although the Biblical story contains four distinct acts (with an introduction and a conclusion), the cantata should be played without any intervals, so that it can be performed as one part of a more varied concert. An additional advantage of its 'hurry' is that it may reflect Boaz's character to want to settle matters straight away. Hopefully the listener who has not decided to follow Jesus yet, will be encouraged to settle the all-important matter of his or her eternal destiny without postponing it, as the choir sings from Paul's *Second letter to the Corinthians*, 'Behold, now is the day of salvation!' and the verses from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, 'Today, if you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart, as in the rebellion.'

Drama

Eventually the piece can be performed as a semi-drama with different scenes. What cannot be left out is the actual leaving of Orpah from the podium, Ruth clinging to Naomi and the kinsman taking off his sandal and giving it to Boaz.

Ruth

I Recitative and Chorus – Famine in Bethlehem

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
In the days when the judges ruled it came to pass that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man, a man from Bethlehem – Bethlehem in Judah – went to dwell in Moab: Elimelech and his wife Naomi, and their two sons. Their names were Mahlon and Chilion.

CHOIR
Famine in Bethlehem! Famine in Bethlehem!

TENOR SOLO – I am the bread of life (the Messiah; John 6:35)
I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst, never thirst, shall never, never thirst.

CHOIR
… shall never thirst, shall never, never thirst, shall never, never thirst.

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
But Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died and she was left with her sons in Moab. And they married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died. So Naomi was left without them, in Moab.

II Chorus – The LORD has Visited His People

The LORD has visited His people, by giving them bread, the LORD has visited His people, by giving them bread: bread in Bethlehem, bread in Bethlehem.

III Recitative

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So she set out from the place where she was with her daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, she said:

IV Trio – Naomi Returns to Judea with Orpah and Ruth

SOPRANO (Naomi)

Go, return to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest. Go, return, that the LORD may grant you rest.

ALTO DUET (Orpah and Ruth)

No, we'll return with you, to your people; we'll return with you, we'll return with you! No, we will return, we will return with you!

(Naomi)

Go, my daughters go your way. Why, oh why will you go back with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? Go your way, turn back, my daughters, for I am too old to have hope.

(Orpah leaves, but Ruth stays with Naomi)

(Naomi)

See, your sister-in-law has gone back, …

(Ruth)

Yes, my sister-in-law has gone back, …

(Naomi)

… to her people and to her gods; …

(Ruth)

… to her people and to her gods.

(Naomi)

… return after her.

(Ruth)

Please, do not urge me to leave you. Where you go I will go, where you lodge I will lodge. Your people is my people, your God is my God.

V Chorus – The Christ Calls to Follow Him

TENOR SOLO (the Messiah; Mark. 8:34):

Come, and follow Me, and deny yourself, and take up your cross Come, and follow Me! Come, follow me! Come, follow me! Come, follow me! Come, follow me! Come, follow me! Come, take up your cross.

CHOIR (alluding to Rev. 14:4 and Mark. 8:34)

Go, follow the Lamb, go, wherever He goes! Come! Come take up your cross, go, wherever He goes! Go! Go, follow the Lamb! Come, take up your cross.

VI Recitative

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)

So the two of them went on, went on, until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived there the whole town was stirred, was stirred.

VII Chorus and Aria – Is This Naomi?

FEMALE CHOIR

Is this Naomi, Na-a-o-ho-homi, Naomi?

SOPRANO SOLO (Naomi)

Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty, has dealt very bitterly, bitterly with me. Full I went away and empty has the LORD brought me back. Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara.

VIII Recitative (SOLO BARITONE AND CHOIR)

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)

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

CHOIR

Naomi returned with Ruth. With Ruth she returned from Moab, to Bethlehem.

IX Recitative, Duet and Chorus – Ruth Gleans on Boaz's Fields; Boaz Arrives; Blessing of Boaz and the Reapers

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)

Now Naomi had a relative, a man from her husband's side, a worthy, wealthy man, from the clan of Elimelech. Boaz was his name. And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi:

DUET ALTO AND SOPRANO (Ruth and Naomi)
(Ruth)
Let me go to the fields to glean the grain, after him in whose eyes I find favour.
(Naomi)
Go, my daughter, go.

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So she set out and went and gleaned in a field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, behold, Boaz came, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers:

BASS SOLO (Boaz):
The LORD be with you!

MALE CHOIR (the reapers)
The LORD bless you, the LORD bless you, the LORD bless you! …

X Duets and Chorus – Boaz Meets Ruth on the Field; Under the Wings of God

DUET BASS AND TENOR (Boaz and the servant who was in charge of the reapers)
(Boaz)
Whose young woman is this?
(the servant)
She is the young woman from Moab, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She has been busy from morning until now, except for a little rest.

DUET BASS AND ALTO (Boaz and Ruth)
(Boaz)
Listen, my daughter, do not glean in another field and do not leave this field. Keep close to the women Let your eyes be on this field. Have I not charged

the young men not to touch you? When you're thirsty go to the vessels and drink what they have drawn.
(Ruth)
Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?
(Boaz)
All that you have done for your mother-in-law has been fully told to me, how you left your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.
The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to take refuge, under Whose wings you have come to take refuge. Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine. – the Lord, the God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come to take refuge, under Whose wings you have come to take refuge.
(Ruth)
I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, for you have comforted me, for you have comforted me.

CHOIR
Under the wings of God you have come to take refuge, of the Lord God, the wings of the Lord.

XI Recitative
SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
When she sat beside the reapers Boaz offered her some roasted grain. She ate was satisfied, and had some left over.

XII Aria – Boaz Commissions the Reapers to Treat Ruth Well
BASS SOLO (Boaz)
Let her glean, even among the sheaves and don't, no don't reproach her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and let her glean it. And don't, no don't rebuke her.

XIII Chorus – You Open Your Hand and Satisfy (Ps. 145:14-17)
The LORD is faithful in all His words and kind in all His works.
The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who bow down.
The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season.
You open Your hand; You satisfy the desire of every living thing.
The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works.

XIV Recitative
SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
When Naomi saw what Ruth had gleaned and received what food she'd left over after being satisfied, she said to her:

XV Duet – Naomi and Ruth Bless Boaz
DUET SOPRANO AND ALTO (Naomi and Ruth)
(Naomi)
Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.
(Ruth)
His name is Boaz.
(Together)
May he be blessed by the LORD!
(Naomi)
He is a relative, one of our redeemers.
(Together)
May he be blessed by the LORD! May he be blessed by the LORD!

XVI Recitative
SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So she worked alongside the women in Boaz's fields, gleaning until the end of the harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

XVII Duet – Naomi's Advice
DUET SOPRANO AND ALTO (Naomi and Ruth)
(Naomi)

My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, who was so kind to let you work for him? See, he is winnowing barley at the threshing-floor tonight. Wash therefore, anoint yourself and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing-floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go, uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.
(Ruth)
All that you say I will do, all that you say I will do, I will do all that you say.

XVIII Recitative
SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So she went down to the threshing-floor and did as she was told. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. And Boaz fell asleep.

XIX Duet – Nocturne I; Boaz and Ruth on the Threshing-floor
DUET BASS AND ALTO (Boaz and Ruth)
(Boaz)
Who are you?!
(Ruth)
I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer, a redeemer.
(Boaz)
May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. Your last act of kindness has exceeded the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.
Now then, my daughter, be not afraid. All that you ask I will do for you, for you I will do all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know you are a virtuous woman, virtuous indeed!

XX Chorus – A Virtuous Wife (Prov. 31:10,30)
CHOIR
A virtuous wife, who can find? She is more precious, more precious than

jewels. Deceitful is charm, and vain is beauty but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

XXI Chorus – You Know the Time (Rom. 13:11, Eph. 5:14,8,18, Phil. 5:4)

SOLO BARITONE AND CHOIR (the apostle Paul and the Church of Christ)
You know the time,
(the Church)
You know the time!
(the apostle Paul)
the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone;
(the Church)
The night is far gone!
(the apostle Paul)
the day is at hand. So let us cast off the works of darkness; let us put on the armour of light:
(the Church)
The Lord Jesus Christ!
Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Be filled with the Spirit, walk as children of light The Lord is at hand!

XXII Recitative – Nocturne II; Boaz Explains About Another Redeemer

BASS SOLO (Boaz)
And now, it is true, I am a redeemer, Yet there is a redeemer closer than I. Stay where you are, tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.

XXIII Recitative

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So she lay at his feet till the morning, but she arose before they could recognize each other. He gave her six measures of barley. Then she went into the city.

XXIV Aria (TENOR) – Morning Prayer (Ps. 143:8)

TENOR SOLO

Let me hear in the morning of Your steadfast love, for in You I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul, for to You I lift up my soul.

XXV Recitative

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)

And when she came to her mother-in-law, and told her all that the man had done to her, Naomi replied, she replied:

XXVI Aria – Naomi's Confidence

SOPRANO SOLO (Naomi)

Wait, my daughter, wait until you know how the matter turns out, for this man shall not rest, he shall not rest until the matter is settled today, today.

XXVII Recitative and Duet – Boaz Receives the Right of Redemption

BARITONE, BASS AND TENOR (narrator, Boaz and the redeemer)

(narrator)

Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said:

(Boaz)

Turn aside, friend, and sit down in the gate.

(narrator)

Then he took ten men of the elders. And they sat down in the gate. Then he said to the redeemer:

(Boaz)

Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab is selling the piece of land that belonged to Elimelech. So buy it, in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.

(the redeemer)

I will redeem it.

(Boaz)
The day you buy the field from Naomi's hand you also acquire Ruth, the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.
(the redeemer)
I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it. Redeem!

XXVIII Chorus – The Witnesses of Redemption; Today is the Day of Salvation

BASS SOLO (Boaz)
You are witnesses this day.

CHOIR
We are witnesses this day, this day … we are witnesses this day!

(2 Cor. 6:2) Behold, now is the day of salvation! Behold, now is the day of salvation! Behold, now is the day!
(Heb. 3:7b-8a) Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.
TENOR SOLO (the voice of God)
(Heb. 3:11) As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'
CHOIR
Wrath, no rest.

TENOR SOLO (the Messiah; Matt. 11:28-30)
Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

CHOIR
Come to Jesus. He'll give you rest. … gentle, lowly in heart. … rest for your souls, … 'My burden is light'.

(Rev. 22:17) The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' Come! Come! And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who desires take the free gift of the water of life.

XXIX Finale, Recitative and Chorus – Boaz Marries Ruth

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
So Boaz took Ruth; she became his wife. And the LORD enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi:

FEMALE CHOIR
Blessed be the LORD, Who has not left you this day without a redeemer and restorer! A son was born to Naomi. We name him Obed, …

SOLO BARITONE (narrator)
… the father of Jesse, father of David, and from David's offspring was born the Christ!

FULL CHOIR
… the Christ!

SOPRANO SOLO (Naomi, alluding to Job 19:25)
I know my Redeemer lives! He lives, my Redeemer from Bethlehem! He has come to give life and life abundantly! I know my Redeemer lives, He lives, my Redeemer lives, He lives, He lives! Jesus lives!
He lives!

FULL CHOIR
My Redeemer lives, Jesus lives … eternal life! I know my Redeemer lives! He has come to give life, and life abundantly! Our Redeemer lives! He paid the price with His life, to save sinners, and rose again!
He lives!

Ruth

Cantata on the Bible book Ruth

for choir, soloists and small ensemble

Music: Hugo de Jong, 1992/2024

Originally written for a Dutch wedding party, with almost a whole local church involved as far as singers, instrumentalists, rehearsal organisers and technicians were concerned, the cantata was meant to reflect the harmony of a Christian couple, the unity of the Church of Christ (teamwork!) and at the same time point to the great Bridegroom of the people of God, Jesus Christ. He is the Redeemer from Bethlehem.

In a time of spiritual decline of the people of Israel, after they had settled in Canaan, a famine strikes the land. Elimelech and Naomi decide to move from their home town Bethlehem to Moab, with their two sons. Unfortunately, not only Elimelech dies there, but the sons, who have married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, also die. When news comes that JHWH has shown mercy to Israel and restored the land, Naomi decides to return to Judah with her daughters-in-law. But after they have set out on the journey she thinks it better for them to return to Moab. Orpah returns, but Ruth 'clings' to Naomi. Shortly after their arrival in Bethlehem Ruth finds work on a barley field, which *happens* to belong to a rich relative of Elimelech, Boaz. When he hears about Naomi and observes Ruth, he is willing to redeem the inheritance of Elimelech, in spite of, or more likely because of the fact that it includes Ruth. They marry and their great-grandchild would be king David. And from David's offspring the Christ, Jesus, the Saviour of mankind, would be born – in Bethlehem …

Exegetically it is incorrect to see Boaz as a messianic type. Old Covenant redemption by a near kinsman is fundamentally different from redemption under the New Covenant. However, there are similarities too, which the composer thinks may justify the link he makes between them in the cantata (and which G.F. Händel employed in the aria 'I Know that My Redeemer Liveth' from his oratorio *The Messiah*). Both principles convey hope for the hopeless and recovery of lost inheritance. Moreover, the book of Ruth clearly anticipates the coming of the Messiah.

For those who believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died to take the penalty for their sins on Himself and rose again from the dead, there will be an inheritance, the Kingdom of God, eternal life in God's holy presence, as co-heirs with Christ; a change from spiritual famine and death into unspeakable joy and eternal glory, portrayed in the book of Revelation as 'the marriage of the Lamb'.