

Introduction

Sun Tzu was a military general in ancient China, about 500BC. He is known for writing a manual on military strategy. This work, called “The Art of War”, is brief—just a little longer in word count than two of my sermons. Despite its brevity, it has had a tremendous impact on military strategy ever since.

You don’t need to be a military genius to understand much of it. For example, a central tenet to the art of war is to know both yourself and your army’s capabilities and the capabilities of your enemy. That seems rather obvious. If you know what you can do and you know what the other army can do, you can then come up with a strategy that maximizes your strengths and minimizes your weaknesses and does the opposite for the other side. That’s true in war and in football and in basketball and even in politics.

What’s really interesting is it is less about actual strategy and much more about the psychology of war and planning. This is why he makes the stunning claim that the best victory is the one achieved without fighting. Whether you are a shrewd negotiator or use subversion and trickery to convince the other army to not fight, the best war is the one you don’t fight.

This requires, of course, a tremendous amount of planning. The strategy necessary to win a war without actually fighting can take decades of planning. This could come about by tricking the enemy into thinking your army is much larger than it is, whether through strategic troop movements or simply setting up far more tents than your soldiers actually need. If you can trick the enemy into fleeing the battlefield altogether, you can win a battle with minimal—if any—fighting. You just have to be a master strategist.

When we read through the Scriptures, what we’re reading is God’s strategy played out over the course of human history. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, it was in “the fullness of time” that God brought forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem his people. That is, when God had orchestrated human history to arrive at just the perfect time, he sent his Son, but not to engage in an armed conflict. His strategy for winning involved not fighting. Actually, it involved losing, and not merely losing, his victory would come by *dying*.

What we’ve been seeing in the book of Judges and the book of Ruth is this, God’s long-term strategy played out over many, many years. There are points of significant progress, as we will see, but also long periods in which the shadow of the King was barely visible. We’re in Ruth 4 as we finish our series today.

Ruth 4:13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who

loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron,¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab,²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon,²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed,²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Ruth 4:13–22

Naomi

Having removed a hurdle blocking him from marrying Ruth, Boaz marries her immediately. This took place at the city gate, in the presence of ten elders of the city and all the people who gathered as witnesses. Boaz formally declared he would redeem the land belonging to Naomi, that it might remain in her late husband’s clan, and he declared he was marrying Ruth. Our text picks up right there.

Boaz and Ruth marry and fairly quickly she had a son. In chapter 1 when we first met Naomi, she and her husband Elimelech had taken their sons and moved to Moab. There was a famine in and around Bethlehem so they moved to Moab where there was food. Then Elimelech died. Her sons married Moabite women and before either had children, they also died.

Orpah chose to return to her people in order to remarry while Ruth chose to remain with Naomi. When Naomi learned the Lord was once again blessing his people with abundant crops she decided to return home. The women of Bethlehem were surprised to see her. She had changed in those ten years. Those were hard years, having lost her husband and both sons.

Her name—Naomi—means “Pleasant”. When she first arrived back in Bethlehem she told the women they should not call her Pleasant, for life had not been pleasant. Instead, they should call her Mara—“Bitter”. Life had, in fact, been bitter to her. As we saw, the narrator moved right past that, writing, “So Naomi...” and continued with the story. What she did not know at the time was the Lord had not forgotten her. Yes, life had been hard. It had been bitter. The Lord had given her a difficult road to walk. And yes, the Lord could have intervened at any point, but what she had to learn is the Lord would bring about his purposes in *his* time, not hers.

When we trust in the Lord’s timing, everything is always better. Time and time again we learn that waiting for the Lord is always better than grasping for something on our own. This usually means waiting, for God’s sense of time is most certainly not our sense of time. A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and sometimes suffering can feel that long.

Things have changed for Naomi. It’s interesting the narrator seems to skip over Ruth at this point. Boaz was less interested in acquiring the land, though the land would be profitable. His goal in all this was two-fold: first, to provide for Naomi, the widow of his relative; second, to marry Ruth. She was the real prize, so to speak, for everyone recognized she was a worthy woman.

When we first met Naomi, she wanted to be called Bitter. The Lord rejected this name change, however. When Ruth gives birth to a son, the women bless the Lord for Naomi, for the Lord has given her a redeemer. Her late husband's land will not be sold to a stranger, but will remain in her family.

She has no biological connection to the child. In Levirate marriage, if a son died, his brother would marry his widow and their first-born son would be the legal heir of the dead son. There would be a genetic connection to the offspring. Ruth is not her daughter and Boaz is not her son, yet their first-born son will inherit the land that belonged to Elimelech. This is because the covenant blessings and the offspring promised to Abraham were never limited to a person's DNA.

Though Ruth is not her biological daughter, she has become Naomi's daughter in every other way. The bonds that hold them together are far stronger than a shared ancestry. The love and commitment and loyalty she has shown Naomi has been profound. God has given her a redeemer, one who would purchase her late husband's land, and whose offspring would continue the covenant blessings to future generations.

The women say the redeemer God has given her will be "a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age". Why? "For your daughter-in-law *who loves you*, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him". Thus the son born to Boaz and Ruth will be the true redeemer for Naomi, and will receive the inheritance from Elimelech to his sons Chilion and Mahlon, all of whom have already died. Then, strangely, the women name the son: Obed.

The book of Ruth was clearly written after king David, for we're told Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. There was no reason to point out *which* David, for the reader would know.

Boaz

The narrator gives another, more complete genealogy. Obed was the father of Jesse and Jesse was the father of David, but he chooses to go back even further. He begins with Perez. We saw this name invoked at the city gate when the witnesses and the elders called for patriarchal blessings upon Boaz and Ruth. First they called upon the Lord to make Ruth like Rachel and Leah, the ancestors of all Israel. Then they invoke the name Perez.

Perez was the son of Tamar and the son of Judah. Boaz is from the tribe of Judah, and the clan of Ephrath. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law and her husband died. Rather than his brother marrying her and giving her a son, he refused to do so. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute when Judah came by and she had a son by him. The son was Perez.

Often when we read a genealogy in Scripture we tend to skim it. There's a bunch of names we're not all that familiar with and so we tend to breeze right by them. The names are foreign to us. Perez had Hezron. Hezron had a son named Ram. Ram had a son named Amminadab. Amminadab had a son named Nahshon, etc. Why is this important? Yes, it's how we get David, but David won't be born for a couple more generations. Why are these names listed for us, especially after already being told Obed had Jesse and Jesse had David?

Given the origin story of Perez, the rest of the genealogy is quite interesting as it shows God's hand at work. Again, these names don't really mean much to us but if you know the story of Israel's history some names should stand out. Those in Boaz's day would recognize these names and so they are saying something extraordinary to them.

Some years before this when Israel was in the wilderness, God made a covenant with them. The entire point of the exodus from Egypt and the covenant given at Mount Sinai was the tabernacle. Through the tabernacle God would dwell among his people—just as he had done in the garden prior to Adam’s rebellion. This was always the intended purpose of his promises—including his original promise to Adam and Eve concerning an offspring who would destroy the serpent. It was always a promise for God to dwell among his people.

While in the wilderness each tribe was instructed to collect an offering for the tabernacle and its furnishings. The priesthood of Israel would serve at the tabernacle and around the land of Israel without having its own allotment of land. Therefore all Israel was to provide for the priests. When Israel left Egypt they received reparations for their time in slavery and they left extremely wealthy. The book of Exodus says they “plundered” Egypt. Out of the abundance God himself had given them, they were to give generously to support the tabernacle. We read about this offering in Numbers 7. There each tribal chief was to appear before the tabernacle with his tribe’s offering.

The tribes would present their offerings in a specific order, and it wasn’t the birth order of Jacob’s sons—except for the first one. Reuben was Jacob’s firstborn and then came Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Reuben and Simeon lost the birthright because they had wrongly attacked the men of Shechem. Levi did not receive an inheritance because the tribe received the priesthood. Judah, though the fourth son, was given the birthright so Judah presented the tribe’s offering first.

Then the tribes gave according to their order in the camp, not according to their birth order. They were divided into four groups and since Issachar was the second tribe in Judah’s camp, Issachar presented its offerings second. Judah, however, presented first because Judah received the birthright and was therefore the most prominent tribe in Israel. Then we read about the actual presentation of the offering, remembering the tribal chiefs presented them.

Num 7:12 He who offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah.
Numbers 7:12

Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, was the tribal chief of all Judah. That is, apart from Moses himself and later Joshua, he was the most prominent man in all Israel. He was the father of Salmon. Salmon, then, was the son of Israel’s greatest tribal chief. When Salmon was ready to marry, he would have been seen as Israel’s most eligible bachelor. Salmon was Boaz’s father. Here we see why Boaz is so highly regarded in Bethlehem: his grandfather had been the greatest tribal chief in Israel.

This explains his wealth and his influence. When a guy like Boaz tells you to sit down at the city gate, you sit down without further explanation. When a guy like Boaz calls together ten elders, you show up when and where he tells you. Everyone would have known the name of Boaz!

This tells us something about Boaz, but there’s still a missing piece. Who was his mother? Who did Salmon marry? For that we have to turn to another genealogy.

Mt 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

~~And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,~~
Matthew 1:1–6

His mother was Rahab, the former Canaanite prostitute! When Joshua led Israel into the land, the first fortress they came to was at Jericho. Rahab told the spies they had heard of the God of Israel during Israel's wandering in the wilderness. She told them they were all filled with fear because—quote!—"the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath".

Because of her faith in the God of Israel she and her entire family were spared. Joshua doesn't tell us what happened to her but Matthew does: she married the son of Judah's tribal chief! She and Salmon later had Boaz. Now we see why Boaz was so concerned for Ruth's reputation when she came to him at the threshing floor. Now we see why Boaz was so concerned for Naomi, a poor widow with no one to protect her. His own mother had once been exploited. Boaz was not about to continue that sort of exploitation. Boaz was not at all concerned about the ethnicity of Ruth, for his own mother was a Canaanite.

The Shadow of the King

What we're seeing in Judges and Ruth is God's hand as it has been throughout human history. God has been at work from the beginning to bring about his purposes. This purpose culminates in the coming of Jesus. Paul referred to this in his letter to the Galatians.

Gal 4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,
Galatians 4:4

When the fullness of time came, Christ came. In his letter to the Corinthians he spoke of the things that happened centuries earlier and "said they were written down for our instruction, *on whom the end of the ages has come*" (1 Cor 10:11). In Ephesians he said God sent Jesus "as a plan for the fullness of time" (Eph 1:10). Mark tells us when Jesus began his public ministry he declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Quite simply, God had orchestrated human history to this very point, that he himself might come to earth in the form of a human to fulfill all his purposes for his world. This had—literally—taken all of human history up to that point!

This work began in the garden of Eden! God had a strategy in place all along! In Genesis 3 we read of "God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8), that he might walk with Adam and Eve. Can you imagine seeing God's shadow? In the garden it would have been an actual shadow as the Lord appeared in physical form to them. In Genesis 3,

however, all is not well, for Adam had rebelled against God and he and Eve hid themselves from his presence.

God was not content with this. Keep in mind who this is. John tells us in John 1 no one has seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side has shown us the Father. If Adam saw God and no one has seen the Father, it wasn't God the Father in the garden. The Holy Spirit is, well, *spirit*, and so the Person of the Trinity who is walking with Adam in the garden is the Son of God before he took on the form of a human. Because God was not content to allow Adam and Eve—and their offspring—to remain trapped in sin and death, he had to intervene. We're told he made animals skins to cover their nakedness. That is, the Son of God shed the blood of animals as the first sacrifice, to cover their sin.

Some time after this humanity began to multiply. There was great wickedness, and men and women began to commit great evil. God was not content to let them remain trapped in sin and death so he intervened. He determined to destroy the world and start over. We're told in Genesis 6:8, "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord". God saved Noah and his family and from them started over with humanity. The new start would not last long.

Within several generations men and women began worshiping idols again. There was a particular family living in ancient Ur. Though humanity had pursued outright rebellion once again, God was not satisfied with them being trapped in sin and death so he intervened. This intervention would be very different for to intervene, God would make a promise.

God appeared to a man named Abram and called him to leave his father's house to go to a land God would show him. God promised to make his name great and then said, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed". In Abraham and his offspring all the families of the earth would be *blessed*.

Here we begin to see God's default disposition toward the world he created. God desires to bless, not curse. When he showed up in Eden, it was to bless Adam and Eve with his presence. When he showed up in Noah's day, yes, there was judgment, but God was pursuing blessing for the world. Here he issues an incredible promise to a man named Abram, a promise that would not—could not—depend on Abram. You see, when God appeared to him, he was one of those who worshiped *idols*.

Joshua 24 tells us Terah was the father of Abraham and Nahor and then tells us "*they* served other gods" but God took Abraham out of there and led him to the land of Canaan and made his offspring multiply. God had made a promise, and God began to keep that promise.

That promise centered around blessing all the nations on earth. God's plan for his world always included the nations. His people were never supposed to be a monoethnic people. Many years after making this promise to Abraham, Abraham's descendants had grown to about 70 people who ended up in Egypt. In time they grew and were enslaved. Because of God's promise to Abraham, he intervened once again and rescued Israel from Egypt. His promise, however, was for the *nations*.

Ex 12:37 And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

Exodus 12:37–38

In addition to the 600,000 men descended from Abraham were “a mixed multitude” who joined the Israelites in the exodus. They had witnessed what the God of Israel could do and chose to cast their lot with his people. What is truly remarkable about that text is its context: the plundering of Egypt. At the time Egypt was a world power and international trade was prominent. Part of what gave Egypt its wealth was its wealth of people—men and women from all over the world who had come to Egypt to live and work.

When Israel left, the Egyptians gave them gold and silver and jewelry and clothing—this was Israel’s plunder of Egypt. However, in a wonderful article Old Testament scholar Aaron Sherwood argues that while Israel’s plunder was gold and silver, YHWH’s plunder was far more valuable!

Thus, the significance of the mixed multitude in Exodus 12:38 is that at the moment of their deliverance, God’s people comprises Israelites and non-Israelites (*i.e.*, the representatives of “the nations”), who are his spoils won from Egypt.

Aaron Sherwood, *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34 (2012) 139–154

Israel plundered gold and silver; God plundered *people*. Together they journeyed to Mount Sinai with Moses and the people. While at Mount Sinai God gave them—all of them, Israel and the mixed multitude—a covenant. He told them at Mount Sinai if they would obey his voice and keep his covenant they would be his treasured possession among all nations.

They, together—all of them, Israelite and mixed multitude—became the people of God. If they would obey his voice and keep his covenant, they would be his treasured possession. They would be God’s holy nation. Thus we see, from the very beginning, God’s love for the nations. His promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth was always in view, even in the exodus and the formation of the nation of Israel.

This is why we see men and women like Caleb and Othniel and Rahab and Achsah and Moses’ wife and Eleazar’s wife. They were not native Israelites yet were counted among the people of Israel by faith. From the beginning God’s hand, his presence—his *shadow*—has been seen throughout human history, guiding it to his ultimate aim.

Preserving a Remnant

After the conquest of the land of Canaan the people of Israel did not obey God’s voice. As we’ve seen, during the time of the judges they worshiped other gods and bowed down to them. God disciplined his people yet they would quickly turn back again and become even worse in their idolatry. Remember how the book of Judges ends:

Jdgs 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21:25

What an ominous ending to what is, at least on its surface, a depressing book. We all felt it as we worked our way through it. Throughout the book we saw glimpses that God was at work even though his people were, for the most part, unfaithful. Then we came to the book of Ruth, which is set early in the time of the judges. In the generation that entered

the land was a Canaanite woman named Rahab who came to recognize the God of Israel as the true God. She married Salmon, the son of Judah's tribal chief, and they had a son named Boaz, a faithful and righteous Israelite.

Let's place this in the story of Judges more precisely. Rahab was part of the generation of the conquest, the generation that remained faithful, well, faithful-*ish*, to the Lord. The elders who outlived Joshua also remained faithful. That would be Salmon's generation. After that arose a new generation who did not know the Lord and worshiped other gods. That's Boaz's generation. Boaz remained faithful to the Lord in a day in which the overwhelming majority of Israel turned away from the Lord altogether.

Here again we see God's hand at work. His shadow is moving among his people, preserving a remnant. His shadow is the hidden presence and activity of God. Just because you cannot see *him* doesn't mean he is not there. His shadow is always there.

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes—except for that faithful remnant. God was preserving a faithful remnant because while Israel had forgotten God's covenant, God could never forget his covenant. He made a promise to Abraham to bless all the nations of the earth and even if *Israel* would not fulfill it, God would. This is why the author tells us Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered *David*.

Ruth is the only book of the Bible to end with a name, indicating David's importance to the story not only of Ruth, but of the entire Bible. Just as God made a covenant with Abraham and then began to fulfill that covenant with his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, so God would make a covenant with David.

2 Sam 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:12–16

While the initial fulfillment of this covenant was Solomon—including God's discipline when Solomon's kingdom was torn in two after he died—there is a far greater fulfillment of this covenant. We've already read about it from Matthew's Gospel. His Gospel is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, *the son of David, the son of Abraham*. That is, Jesus is *the* Offspring promised to Abraham, the very Offspring who would bless all the families of the earth. He is *the* Offspring promised to David, the very Offspring who would sit on an eternal throne and though he would not sin, he would bear the weight of the sins of his people.

Application

The apostle Paul makes an astonishing claim in his letter to the Corinthians. Keep in mind God's promise to Adam and Eve that their Offspring would one day destroy the serpent and

end the very sin and death Adam allowed into God's good world, and the promise to Noah that he would create a new humanity, and the promise to Abraham that he would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's Offspring, and the promise to Israel that they would be to him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and the promise to David that his Offspring would sit on an eternal throne. Paul said this about God's promises:

2 Cor 1:20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.
2 Corinthians 1:20

How many promises find their Yes in him? *All of them.* Remember the very purpose of the exodus was the tabernacle. Everything God has been doing through human history was so that God could dwell among his people. This is why Isaiah prophesied a virgin would conceive and bear a son and he would be called Immanuel—*God with us*. God has been working out his plan, his *strategy*, from the very beginning, culminating with his intended outcome: God with us.

To win at anything, whether war or checkers or football, you must have a strategy. Strategy only works if you have a specific goal that you want to achieve. No one goes to war simply to go to war; there is always an intended goal, whether riches or land or power. It may even be to keep soldiers sharp, with no other defined outcome. That would determine how one fights. You don't fight to the last man on a *training exercise*.

In a very real sense, God is the original author of the art of war. From the beginning of human history—from creation—God had a strategic plan in place, and this plan is to bless the world. His strategy involved going to war against the principalities of this world—the spiritual forces of evil that are arrayed against us. He has orchestrated the events and circumstances necessary to fulfill his mission, culminating in the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The incredible thing is this is what he's doing in each of our lives! When Naomi was widowed and then lost her sons, she had no way of knowing how life could be anything but bitter. Rahab was trapped in a life of shame and was used and abused by others; she had no way of knowing that one of her close descendants would soon be king.

Remember the words of John Piper: God is always doing 10,000 things in your life; you may be aware of three of them. If God could handle the countless details necessary to bring human history to the birth of Jesus, born at just the right time with a universal language and a system of roads built by a foreign power and relative security and freedom to travel, and born to a young woman who was a descendant of David himself who would marry a man who was also a descendant of David though he was not his father, if he can handle *all those details*, surely he can be trusted to handle the 10,000 things in your life. What's 10,000 things compared to all of human history?

As I mentioned at the beginning, God's strategy for total victory was to die. In order to die he first became human. He became human so that he might live the life you and I were supposed to live, and then die the death we were supposed to die. Thus his resurrection is the very thing that finally and completely defeated the true enemy: sin and death.

Even in this, his unjust and cruel death, he was no victim. He had presented himself as the offering for sin, ensuring all who would trust in him would be saved. His victory was achieved when they nailed him to the cross, and it was absolute when he walked out of his tomb on the third day.

This is why you and I can trust him with our lives, with every single detail of it, including the details we don't even know about. So often we cannot see him working. So often it seems he's focusing on the 9,997 things we don't know about and therefore we assume he's not working.

The message of Judges and Ruth is that even in the worst of times, God's shadow looms large across your life. He is involved in every detail, working out his purposes and plans. Even in the things we cannot comprehend, God is ever present, working out his plans and his purposes for you and for your life. The outcome of this is as simple as it is profound: God with us.

After spending the last eleven months in the books of Judges and Ruth, my perspective has changed. What I initially thought—along with many of you—was that it was a discouraging and mostly depressing study we had to endure. You see, it is quite easy for us to believe that God is with us in the good times. Of course he is! When the church is growing, when your job is productive, when your family is thriving, when church unity seems to come about on autopilot, when your health is excellent, you know—when times are good, of course God is with us.

It is so much easier to forget his promises when a relationship shatters, or your health begins to fail, or money is suddenly tight, or your job becomes stressful. If we're able to see, as we have in Judges and Ruth, that God is just as active during these times as he is in the good times, then knowing God is at work even when you cannot see the evidence, this knowledge should soothe the storms in our souls.

These two books urge us to look for God's handiwork when times are difficult. We may only catch glimpses of his shadow, but his shadow proves his presence.