

Ruth

INTRODUCTION

Title

The book is named after one of its main characters, a young woman of Moab, the great-grandmother of David and an ancestress of Jesus (Mt 1:1,5). The only other Biblical book bearing the name of a woman is Esther.

Background

The story is set in the time of the judges, a time characterized in the book of Judges as a period of religious and moral degeneracy, national disunity and frequent foreign oppression. The book of Ruth reflects a time of peace between Israel and Moab (contrast Jdg 3:12–30). Like 1Sa 1—2, it gives a series of intimate glimpses into the private lives of the members of an Israelite family. It also presents a delightful account of the remnant of true faith and piety in the period of the judges, relieving an otherwise wholly dark picture of that era.

Author and Date of Writing

The author is unknown. Jewish tradition points to Samuel, but it is unlikely that he is the author because the mention of David (4:17,22) implies a later date. Further, the literary style of Hebrew used in Ruth suggests that it was written during the period of the monarchy.

Theme and Theology

The importance of faithful love in human relationships among God's kingdom people is powerfully underscored. The author focuses on Ruth's unswerving and selfless devotion to desolate Naomi (1:16–17; 2:11–12; 3:10; 4:15) and on Boaz's kindness to these two widows (chs. 2—4). He presents striking examples of lives that embody in their daily affairs the self-giving love that fulfills God's law (Lev 19:18; cf. Ro 13:10). Such love also reflects God's love, in a marvelous joining of human and divine actions (compare 2:12 with 3:9). In God's benevolence such lives are blessed and are made a blessing.

It may seem surprising that one who reflects God's love so clearly is a Moabitess (see map, p. 0000). Yet her complete loyalty to the Israelite family into which she has been received by marriage and her total devotion to her desolate mother-in-law mark her as a true daughter of Israel and a worthy ancestress of David. She strikingly exemplifies the truth that participation in the coming kingdom of God is decided, not by blood and birth, but by the conformity of one's life to the will of God through the "obedience that comes from faith" (Ro 1:5). Her place in the ancestry of David signifies that all nations will be represented in the kingdom of David's greater Son.

As an episode in the ancestry of David, the book of Ruth sheds light on his role in the history of redemption. Redemption is a key concept throughout the account; the Hebrew word in its various forms occurs 23 times. The book is primarily a story of Naomi's transformation from despair to happiness through the selfless, God-blessed acts of Ruth and Boaz. She moves from emptiness to fullness (1:21; 3:17; see notes on 1:1,3,5–6,12,21–22; 3:17; 4:15), from destitution (1:1–5) to security and hope (4:13–17). Similarly, Israel was transformed from national desperation at the death of Eli (1Sa 4:18) to peace and prosperity in the early days of Solomon (1Ki 4:20–34; 5:4) through the selfless devotion of David, a true descendant of Ruth and Boaz. The author thus reminded Israel that the reign of the house of David, as the means of God's benevolent rule in Israel, held the prospect of God's promised peace and rest. But this rest would continue only so long as those who participated in the kingdom—prince and people alike—reflected in their daily lives the

selfless love exemplified by Ruth and Boaz. In Jesus, the great “son of David” (Mt 1:1), and his redemptive work, the promised blessings of the kingdom of God find their fulfillment.

Literary Features

The book of Ruth is a Hebrew short story, told with consummate skill. Among historical narratives in Scripture it is unexcelled in its compactness, vividness, warmth, beauty and dramatic effectiveness—an exquisitely wrought jewel of Hebrew narrative art.

Marvelously symmetrical throughout (see Outline), the action moves from a briefly sketched account of distress (1:1–5; 71 words in Hebrew) through four episodes to a concluding account of relief and hope that is drawn with equal brevity (4:13–17; 71 words in Hebrew). The crucial turning point occurs exactly midway (see note on 2:20). The opening line of each of the four episodes signals its main development (1:6, the return; 2:1, the meeting with Boaz; 3:1, finding a home for Ruth; 4:1, the decisive event at the gate), while the closing line of each episode facilitates transition to what follows (see notes on 1:22; 2:23; 3:18; 4:12). Contrast is also used to good effect: pleasant (the meaning of “Naomi”) and bitter (1:20), full and empty (1:21), and the living and the dead (2:20). Most striking is the contrast between two of the main characters, Ruth and Boaz: The one is a young, alien, destitute widow, while the other is a middle-aged, well-to-do Israelite securely established in his home community. For each there is a corresponding character whose actions highlight, by contrast, his or her selfless acts: Ruth—Orpah, Boaz—the unnamed kinsman.

When movements in space, time and circumstance all correspond in some way, a harmony results that both satisfies the reader’s artistic sense and helps open doors to understanding. The author of Ruth keeps his readers from being distracted from the central story—Naomi’s passage from emptiness to fullness through the selfless acts of Ruth and Boaz (see Theme and Theology). That passage, or restoration, first takes place in connection with her return from Moab to the promised land and to Bethlehem (“house of food”; see note on 1:1). It then progresses with the harvest season, when the fullness of the land is gathered in. All aspects of the story keep the reader’s attention focused on the central issue. Consideration of these and other literary devices (mentioned throughout the notes) will aid understanding of the book of Ruth.

Outline

- I. Introduction: Naomi Emptied (1:1–5)
- II. Naomi Returns from Moab (1:6–22)
 - A. Ruth Clings to Naomi (1:6–18)
 - B. Ruth and Naomi Return to Bethlehem (1:19–22)
- III. Ruth and Boaz Meet in the Harvest Fields (ch. 2)
 - A. Ruth Begins Work (2:1–7)
 - B. Boaz Shows Kindness to Ruth (2:8–16)
 - C. Ruth Returns to Naomi (2:17–23)
- IV. Naomi Sends Ruth to Boaz’s Threshing Floor (ch. 3)
 - A. Naomi Instructs Ruth (3:1–5)
 - B. Boaz Pledges to Secure Redemption (3:6–15)
 - C. Ruth Returns to Naomi (3:16–18)
- V. Boaz Arranges to Fulfill His Pledge (4:1–12)
 - A. Boaz Confronts the Unnamed Kinsman (4:1–8)
 - B. Boaz Buys Naomi’s Property and Announces His Marriage to Ruth (4:9–12)
- VI. Conclusion: Naomi Filled (4:13–17)
- VII. Epilogue: Genealogy of David (4:18–22)

Naomi and Ruth

1 In the days when the judges ruled,^a there was a famine in the land,^b and a man from Bethlehem in Judah,^c together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while^d in the country of Moab.^e 2The man's name was Elimelech,^f his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.^g They were Ephrathites^h from Bethlehem,ⁱ Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4They married Moabite women,^j one named Orpah and the other Ruth.^k After they had lived there about ten years, 5both Mahlon and Kilion^l also died,^m

1:1 ^aJdg 2:16-18
^bS Ge 12:10;
2Ki 6:25;
Ps 105:16;
Hag 1:11
^cS Ge 35:19
^dGe 47:4
^eS Ge 36:35
1:2 / ver 3;
Ru 2:1; 4:3
^fver 5; Ru 4:9
^gS Ge 35:16
^hGe 35:19;
1Sa 16:18
1:4 / 1Ki 11:1;
2Ch 24:26;
Ezr 9:2; Ne 13:23
^kver 14; Ru 4:13;
Mt 1:5
1:5 / S ver 2
^mver 8; Ru 2:11

1:6 ⁿS Ge 36:35
^oS Ge 50:24;
Ex 4:31;
Jer 29:10;

and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6When she heard in Moabⁿ that the LORD had come to the aid of his people^o by providing food^p for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law^q prepared to return home from there. 7With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.^r May the LORD show kindness^s to you, as you have

^a 1 Traditionally *judged*

Zep 2:7 ^pPs 132:15; Mt 6:11 ^qS Ge 11:31; S 38:16 1:8 ^rGe 38:11
^sS Ge 19:19; 2Ti 1:16

1:1 *when the judges ruled.* Probably from c. 1380 to c. 1050 B.C. (see Introduction to Judges: Background). By mentioning the judges, the author calls to mind that period of Israel's apostasy, moral degradation and oppression. *famine.* Not mentioned in Judges. *Bethlehem in Judah.* David's hometown (1Sa 16:18). Bethlehem (the name suggests "house of food") is empty.

1:2 *Elimelech.* Means "(My) God is King" (see note on Jdg 8:23). *Naomi.* See NIV text note on v. 20. *Ephrathites.* Ephrathah was a name for the area around Bethlehem (see 4:11; Ge 35:19; 1Sa 17:12; Mic 5:2).

1:3 *Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died.* Naomi's emptying begins (see v. 21).

1:4 *They married.* The prospect of continuing the family line remained. *Moabite women.* See Ge 19:36-37. Marriage with Moabite women was not forbidden, though no Moabite—or his sons to the tenth generation—was allowed to "enter the assembly of the LORD" (Dt 23:3). *Ruth.* The name sounds like the Hebrew for "friendship." Ruth is one of four

women in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. The others are Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba (Mt 1:3,5-6).

1:5 *Mahlon.* Ruth's husband (4:10), whose name probably means "weaking." *Naomi was left.* Naomi's emptiness is complete: She has neither husband nor sons. She has only two young daughters-in-law, both of them foreigners and childless.

1:6-22 Act I in the drama: Naomi's sense of desolation is exposed.

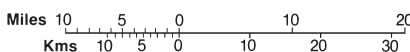
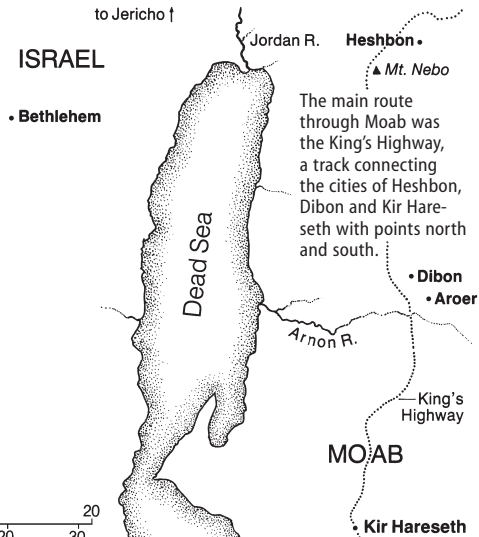
1:6 *the LORD had come to the aid of his people.* At several points in the account, God's sovereign control of events is acknowledged (here; vv. 13,21; 2:20; 4:12-15). *food.* Bethlehem ("house of food") again has food. *prepared to return home.* Empty Naomi returns to the newly filled land of promise.

1:8 *Go back.* Desolate Naomi repeatedly urges her daughters-in-law to return to their original homes in Moab (here; vv. 11-12,15); she has nothing to offer them.

The Book of Ruth

Set in the dark and bloody days of the judges, the story of Ruth is silent about the underlying hostility and suspicion the two peoples—Judahites and Moabites—felt for each other. The original onslaught of the invading Israelite tribes against towns that were once Moabite had never been forgotten or forgiven, while the Hebrew prophets denounced Moab's pride and arrogance for trying to bewitch, seduce and oppress Israel from the time of Balaam on. The Mesha Stele (c. 830 B.C.) boasts of the massacre of entire Israelite towns.

Moab encompassed the expansive, grain-filled plateau between the Dead Sea and the eastern desert on both sides of the enormous rift of the Arnon River gorge. Much of eastern Moab was steppeland—semi-arid wastes not profitable for cultivation, but excellent for grazing flocks of sheep and goats. The tribute Moab paid to Israel in the days of Ahab was 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams (see 2Ki 3:4 and note).



shown to your dead^t and to me. ⁹May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest^u in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed^v them and they wept aloud^w ¹⁰and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

¹¹But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?^x

¹²Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—¹³would you wait until they grew up?^y Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter^z for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has gone out against me!^a”

¹⁴At this they wept^b again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law^c goodbye,^d but Ruth clung to her.^e

¹⁵“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law^f is going back to her people and her gods.^g Go back with her.”

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

1:8^t S ver 5
1:9^w Ru 3:1
vS Ge 27:27;
S 29:11
wS Ge 27:38;
S Nu 25:6
1:11^x Ge 38:11;
Dt 25:5
1:13^y Ge 38:11
z ver 20; Ex 1:14;
15:23; 1Sa 30:6
aS Jdg 2:15;
S Job 4:5
1:14^b ver 9
c Ru 2:11; 3:1;
Mic 7:6
dS Ge 31:28
eS Dt 10:20
1:15^f Dt 25:7
gS Jos 24:14
1:16^h 2Ki 2:2
h Ge 24:58
iPs 45:10
kS Jos 24:15
1:17ⁱ 1Sa 3:17;
14:44; 20:13;
25:22; 2Sa 3:9,35;
2Sa 19:13;
1Ki 2:23; 19:2;
20:10; 2Ki 6:31

m 2Sa 15:21
1:18ⁿ Ac 21:14
1:19^o S Jdg 17:7
p Mt 21:10
1:20^q S Ge 15:1;
S 17:1; Ps 91:1
rS ver 13
1:21^s Job 1:21
s Job 30:11;
Ps 88:7; Isa 53:4
1:22^t v Ru 2:2,6,
21; 4:5,10
vS Ge 11:31
wS Ex 9:31;
S Lev 19:9

death separates you and me.”^m ¹⁸When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.ⁿ

¹⁹So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.^o When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred^p because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

²⁰“Don’t call me Naomi,^b” she told them. “Call me Mara,^c because the Almighty^d has made my life very bitter.^r ²¹I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.^s Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted^e me;^t the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

²²So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess,^u her daughter-in-law,^v arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest^w was beginning.^x

Ruth Meets Boaz

2 Now Naomi had a relative^y on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elim-elech,^z a man of standing,^a whose name was Boaz.^b

²And Ruth the Moabitess^c said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up

^b20 Naomi means *pleasant*; also in verse 21.
^c20 Mara means *bitter*. ^d20 Hebrew *Shaddai*;
also in verse 21 ^e21 Or has testified against



^x2Sa 21:9 ²1 v Ru 3:2; Pr 7:4 ^s Ru 1:2 ^o 1Sa 9:1; 1Ki 11:28 ^b Ru 4:21;
1Ch 2:12; Mt 1:5; Lk 3:32 ²2 ^c Ru 1:22



1:11 sons, who could become your husbands. Naomi alludes to the Israelite law (Dt 25:5–6) regarding levirate marriage (see notes on Ge 38:8; Dt 25:5–10; see also Mk 12:18–23), which was given to protect the widow and guarantee continuance of the family line.

1:12 I am too old. Naomi can have no more sons; even her womb is empty.

1:13 the LORD’s hand ... against me. See notes on vv. 5–6; see also vv. 20–21.

1:14 Orpah’s departure highlights the loyalty and selfless devotion of Ruth to her desolate mother-in-law.

1:15 her gods. The chief god of the Moabites was Chemosh.   1:16 This classic expression of loyalty and love discloses Ruth’s true character. Her commitment to Naomi is complete, even though it holds no prospect for her except to share in Naomi’s desolation. For a similar declaration of devotion see 2Sa 15:21.

  1:17 May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely. See note on 1Sa 3:17. Ruth, a non-Israelite, swears her commitment to Naomi in the name of Israel’s God, thus acknowledging him as her God (see v. 16).

1:20 Naomi ... Mara. See NIV text notes. In the ancient Near East a person’s name was often descriptive. Naomi’s choice of name and her explanation for it provide the most poignant disclosure of her sense of desolation—even her God is against her. *Almighty*. See note on Ge 17:1.

1:21 full ... empty. These words highlight the central theme of the story—how the empty Naomi becomes full again.

1:22 Ruth the Moabitess. Several times the author reminds the reader that Ruth is a foreigner from a despised people (2:2,6, 21; 4:5,10; see 2:10). *harvest*. Harvesting grain in ancient Canaan took place in April and May (barley first, wheat a few

weeks later; see 2:23). It involved the following steps: (1) cutting the ripened standing grain with hand sickles (Dt 16:9; 23:25; Jer 50:16; Joel 3:13)—usually done by men; (2) binding the grain into sheaves—usually done by women; (3) gleaning, i.e., gathering stalks of grain left behind (2:7); (4) transporting the sheaves to the threshing floor—often by donkey, sometimes by cart (Am 2:13); (5) threshing, i.e., loosening the grain from the straw—usually done by the treading of cattle (Dt 25:4; Hos 10:11), but sometimes by toothed threshing sledges (Isa 41:15; Am 1:3) or the wheels of carts (Isa 28:28); (6) winnowing—done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks (Jer 15:7) so that the wind, which usually came up for a few hours in the afternoon, blew away the straw and chaff (Ps 1:4), leaving the grain at the winner’s feet; (7) sifting the grain (Am 9:9) to remove any residual foreign matter; (8) bagging for transportation and storage (Ge 42–44). Threshing floors, where both threshing and winnowing occurred, were hard, smooth, open places, prepared on either rock or clay and carefully chosen for favorable exposure to the prevailing winds. They were usually on the east side—i.e., downwind—of the village. *was beginning*. Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem just as the renewed fullness of the land is beginning to be harvested—an early hint that Naomi will be full again. Reference to the barley harvest also prepares the reader for the next major scene in the harvest fields (see Introduction: Literary Features).

2:1–23 Act II in the drama: What was done by Ruth and Boaz awakens hope in Naomi’s heart.

2:1 relative. A sign of hope (see note on v. 20). *Boaz*. Probably means “In him is strength.” Boaz is included in both genealogies of Jesus (Mt 1:5; Lk 3:32).

2:2 Let me go. Although Ruth is a foreigner and, as a young

the leftover grain^d behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.^e”

Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.”³ So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters.^f As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.^g

⁴Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The LORD be with you!”^h”

“The LORD bless you!” they called back.

⁵Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?”

⁶The foreman replied, “She is the Moabitessⁱ who came back from Moab with Naomi.”⁷ She said, “Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves^k behind the harvesters.” She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest^l in the shelter.”

⁸So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls.⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground.^m She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice meⁿ—a foreigner?^o”

¹¹Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law^p since the death of your husband^q—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know^r

2:2 ^dS Lev 19:9; S 23:22
^eS Ge 6:8; S 18:3
 2:3 ^fver 14;
 2KI 4:18; Jer 9:22; Am 9:13 ^gver 1
 2:4 ^hS Jdg 6:12; Lk 1:28; 2Th 3:16
ⁱS Ge 28:3; S Nu 6:24
 2:6 ^jS Ru 1:22
 2:7 ^kS Ge 37:7; S Lev 19:9
^l2Sa 4:5
 2:10 ^mS Ge 19:1; S 1Sa 20:41
ⁿver 19; Ps 41:1
^oS Ge 31:15; S Dt 15:3
 2:11 ^pS Ru 1:14
^qS Ru 1:5
^r1Sa 55:5

before.^s ¹²May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD,^t the God of Israel,^u under whose wings^v you have come to take refuge.^w”

¹³“May I continue to find favor in your eyes,^x my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.”

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread^y and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters,^z he offered her some roasted grain.^a She ate all she wanted and had some left over.^b ¹⁵As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Even if she gathers among the sheaves,^c don’t embarrass her. ¹⁶Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke^d her.”

¹⁷So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed^e the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah.^f ¹⁸She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over^g after she had eaten enough.

¹⁹Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”^h”


Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.


²⁰“The LORD bless him!” Naomi said

^sRu 1:16-17
 2:12 ^t1Sa 24:19; 26:23,25;
 Ps 18:20; Pr 25:22;
 Jer 31:16
^uS Jos 24:15
^vPs 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4 ^wPs 71:1
 2:13 ^xS Ge 18:3
 2:14 ^yS Ge 3:19
^zS ver 3
^aS Lev 23:14
^bver 18
 2:15 ^cS Ge 37:7; S Lev 19:9
 2:16 ^dS Ge 37:10
 2:17 ^eS Jdg 6:11
^fS Lev 19:36
 2:18 ^gver 14
 2:19 ^hS ver 10
 2:20 ⁱS Jdg 17:2; S 1Sa 23:21


^f17 That is, probably about 3/5 bushel (about 22 liters)

woman alone, obviously quite vulnerable in the harvest fields, she undertakes to provide for her mother-in-law. In 3:1 Naomi undertakes to provide for Ruth. *pick up the leftover grain.* The law of Moses instructed landowners to leave what the harvesters missed so that the poor, the foreigner, the widow and the fatherless could glean for their needs (Lev 19:9; 23:22; Dt 24:19).

 **2:3** *As it turned out.* Divine providence is at work (vv. 19–20).

 **2:4** The exchange of greetings between Boaz and his laborers characterizes Boaz as a godly man with a kind spirit.

2:9 *follow along after the girls.* It was customary for the men to cut the grain and for the female servants to go behind them to bind the grain into sheaves. Then Ruth could glean what they had left behind (see note on 1:22). *not to touch you.* This little word from Boaz indicates the risk Ruth had taken and discloses the measure of Boaz’s care for her.


 **2:11** *what you have done for your mother-in-law.* Ruth’s commitment to care for her desolate mother-in-law remains the center of attention throughout the book.

2:12 *under whose wings.* A figure of a bird protecting her

young under her wings (see Mt 23:37; see also note on 3:9). **2:13** *your servant.* A polite reference to herself.

2:15 *gave orders to his men.* Boaz goes beyond the requirement of the law in making sure that Ruth’s labors are abundantly productive (see 3:15).

2:17 *threshed.* See note on 1:22. In Ruth’s case, as in that of Gideon (Jdg 6:11), the amount was small and could be threshed by hand simply by beating it with a club or stick. *ephah.* See NIV text note; an unusually large amount for one day’s gleaning.

 **2:20** *He has not stopped showing his kindness.* In 3:10 Boaz credits Ruth with demonstrating this same virtue. *kinsman-redeemers.* Redemption is a key concept in Ruth (see Introduction: Theme and Theology). The kinsman-redeemer was responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family—e.g., to provide an heir for a brother who had died (Dt 25:5–10), to redeem land that a poor relative had sold outside the family (Lev 25:25–28), to redeem a relative who had been sold into slavery (Lev 25:47–49) and to avenge the killing of a relative (Nu 35:19–21; “avenger” and “kinsman-redeemer” are translations of the same Hebrew word). When Naomi hears about the day’s

to her daughter-in-law.^j “He has not stopped showing his kindness^k to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative;^l he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.^m”

²¹Then Ruth the Moabitessⁿ said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”

²²Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with his girls, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

²³So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley^o and wheat harvests^p were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

3 One day Naomi her mother-in-law^q said to her, “My daughter, should I not try to find a home^{8r} for you, where you will be well provided for? ²Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman^s of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor.^t ³Wash^u and perfume yourself,^v and put on your best clothes.^w Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking.^x ⁴When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

⁵“I will do whatever you say,”^y Ruth answered. ⁶So she went down to the threshing floor^z and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

2:20 /S Ge 11:31
 K S Ge 19:19
 /S Lev 25:25
 m Ru 3:9,12; 4:1, 14
2:21 n S Ru 1:22
2:23 o S Ex 9:31
 p S Ge 30:14;
 S 1Sa 6:13
3:1 q Ru 1:14
 r Ru 1:9
3:2 s S Ru 2:1
 /S Lev 2:14;
 S Nu 18:27;
 S Jdg 6:11
3:3 v 2Sa 12:20;
 2Ki 5:10; Ps 26:6;
 51:2; Isa 1:16;
 Jer 4:14; Eze 16:9
 v 2Sa 14:2;
 Isa 61:3
 w S Ge 41:14
 x S Ex 32:6;
 S Ecc 2:3;
 S Jer 15:17
3:5 y Eph 6:1;
 Col 3:20
3:6 z S Nu 18:27

3:7 a Jdg 19:6,9,
 22; 1Sa 25:36;
 2Sa 13:28;
 1Ki 21:7; Est 1:10
 b 2Ch 31:6;
 SS 7:2; Jer 50:26;
 Hag 2:16
3:9 c Eze 16:8
 d S Ru 2:20
3:10 e S Jdg 17:2
 /S Jos 2:12
3:11 g Pr 12:4;
 14:1; 31:10
3:12 h S Ru 2:20
 /Ru 4:1
3:13 /Dt 25:5;
 Ru 4:5; Mt 22:24
 k S Nu 14:21;
 Hos 4:15 /Ru 4:6
3:14
 m S Nu 18:27
 n Ro 14:16;
 2Co 8:21
3:15 o Isa 3:22

⁷When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits,⁹ he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile.^b Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.^{8l} In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment^c over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.^d”

¹⁰“The LORD bless you,^e my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier:^f You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.^g ¹²Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer^h nearer thanⁱ I. ¹³Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem,^j good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives^k I will do it.^l Lie here until morning.”

¹⁴So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.^m”ⁿ

¹⁵He also said, “Bring me the shawl^o you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures

^{8l} Hebrew *find rest* (see Ruth 1:9)

events, she takes courage. This moment of her awakened hope is the crucial turning point of the story (see Introduction: Literary Features).

2:23 *until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.* This phrase rounds out the harvest episode and prepares for the next major scene on the threshing floor (see Introduction: Literary Features).

3:1–18 Act III in the drama: Hopeful Naomi takes the initiative.

3:2 *Tonight he will be winnowing.* See note on 1:22. In the threshing season it was customary for the landowner and his men to spend the night near the threshing floor to protect his grain from theft.

3:3 Ruth is instructed to prepare herself like a bride (see Eze 16:9–12). *go down to the threshing floor.* At winnowing time the threshing floor was a place for male camaraderie and revelry (v. 14). *eating and drinking.* Harvest was a time of festivity (Isa 9:3; 16:9–10; Jer 48:33).

3:4 *uncover his feet and lie down.* Although Naomi’s instructions may appear forward, the moral integrity of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz is never in doubt (see v. 11). Naomi’s advice to Ruth is clearly for the purpose of appealing to Boaz’s kinsman obligation. Ruth’s actions were a request for marriage. Tamar, the mother of Perez (4:12), had also laid claim to the provision of the levirate (or kinsman-redeemer) law (Ge 38:13–30).

3:9 *Spread the corner of your garment over me.* A request for marriage (see Eze 16:8); a similar custom is still practiced in

some parts of the Middle East today. With a striking play on words Ruth confronts Boaz with his moral obligations. In the harvest field he had wished her well at the hands of the Lord “under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (2:12). Now on the threshing floor Ruth asks him to spread the “wings” (i.e., the corners) of his garment over her. Boaz is vividly reminded that he must serve as the Lord’s protective wings over Ruth.

3:10 *kindness . . . you showed earlier.* See 2:11–12; see also note on 2:20.

3:11 *woman of noble character.* See Pr 31:10, the only other place where this phrase occurs in the OT. The Hebrew for “noble character” is the same as that used to describe Boaz in 2:1; thus the author maintains a balance between his descriptions of Ruth and Boaz.

3:12 *a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I.* How Boaz was related to Ruth’s former husband (Mahlon) is unknown, but the closest male relative had the primary responsibility to marry a widow. Naomi instructed Ruth to approach Boaz because he had already shown himself willing to be Ruth’s protector. Boaz, however, would not bypass the directives of the law, which clearly gave priority to the nearest relative.

3:13 *as surely as the LORD lives.* Boaz commits himself by oath (cf. 1:17) to redeem the family property and to arrange Ruth’s honorable marriage.

3:15 Boaz goes beyond the requirement of the law in supplying Ruth with grain from the threshing floor (see 2:15).

of barley and put it on her. Then he^h went back to town.

¹⁶When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?”

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

¹⁸Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”^p

Boaz Marries Ruth

4 Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate^q and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer^r he had mentioned^s came along, Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down.

²Boaz took ten of the elders^t of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so.^u ³Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech.^v ⁴I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if youⁱ will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you,^w and I am next in line.”

“I will redeem it,” he said.

3:18 ^pPs 37:3-5
4:1 ^qS Ge 18:1;
^s23:10
^rS Ru 2:20
^tRu 3:12
4:2 ^sS Ex 3:16
^uS Dt 25:7
4:3 ^vS Lev 25:25;
^wS Ru 1:2
4:4
^wS Lev 25:25;
Jer 32:7-8

⁵Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess,^x you acquire^j the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”^y

⁶At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem^z it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”^a

⁷(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption^b and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal^c and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions^d in Israel.)^e

⁸So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.^f

⁹Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses^g that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess,^h Mahlon’s widow, as my wife,ⁱ in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records.^j Today you are witnesses!^k”

¹¹Then the elders and all those at the gate^l said, “We are witnesses.^m May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah,ⁿ

^h ¹⁵ Most Hebrew manuscripts; many Hebrew manuscripts, Vulgate and Syriac *she* ¹⁴ Many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac; most Hebrew manuscripts ¹⁵ Hebrew; Vulgate and Syriac *Naomi, you acquire Ruth the Moabitess,*

3:17 *empty-handed.* Again the empty-full motif (see note on 1:21).

3:18 *Wait.* The Hebrew underlying this word is translated “sat” in 4:1. Thus the author prepares the reader for the next major scene, in which Boaz sits at the town gate to see the matter through.

4:1–12 Act IV in the drama: Boaz arranges to fulfill his pledge to Ruth.

4:1 *town gate.* The “town hall” of ancient Israel, the normal place for business and legal transactions, where witnesses were readily available (vv. 9–12; see note on Ge 19:1). *my friend.* The other kinsman remains unnamed.


4:2 *ten of the elders.* A full court for legal proceedings.

4:3 *selling the piece of land.* See note on 2:20. Two interpretations are possible: 1. Naomi owns the land but is so destitute that she is forced to sell. It was the duty of the kinsman-redeemer to buy any land in danger of being sold outside the family. 2. Naomi does not own the land—it had been sold by Elimelech before the family left for Moab—but by law she retains the right of redemption to buy the land back. Lacking funds to do so herself, she is dependent on a kinsman-redeemer to do it for her. It is the right of redemption that Naomi is “selling.” *brother.* Used in the broader sense of “relative.”

4:5 *you acquire the dead man’s widow.* Now Boaz reveals the other half of the obligation—the acquisition of Ruth. Levirate law (Dt 25:5–6) provided that Ruth’s firstborn son would keep Mahlon’s name alive and retain ownership of the family inheri-

tance.

4:6 *I cannot redeem it.* Possibly he fears that, if he has a son by her and if that son is his only surviving heir, his own property will transfer to the family of Elimelech (see note on Ge 38:9). In that case his risk was no greater than that assumed by Boaz. This kinsman’s refusal to assume the kinsman-redeemer’s role highlights the kindness and generosity of Boaz toward the two widows—just as Orpah’s return to her family highlights Ruth’s selfless devotion and loyalty to Naomi.

 **4:7** *one party took off his sandal.* The process of renouncing one’s property rights and passing them to another was publicly attested by taking off a sandal and transferring it to the new owner (cf. Am 2:6; 8:6). The Nuzi documents (see chart, p. 0000) refer to a similar custom.

4:9 *witnesses.* The role of public witnesses was to attest to all legal transactions and other binding agreements.

4:10 *name of the dead.* See Dt 25:6.

4:11 *Rachel and Leah ... built up the house of Israel.* Cf. Dt 25:9. The Israelite readers of Ruth would have associated the house of Jacob (Israel), built up by Rachel and Leah, with the house of Israel, rebuilt by David, the descendant of Ruth and Boaz, after it had been threatened with extinction (1Sa 4). They also knew that the Lord had covenanted to “build” the house of David as an enduring dynasty, through which Israel’s blessed destiny would be assured (see 2Sa 7:27–29). *Ephra- thah.* See note on 1:2.

who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah^o and be famous in Bethlehem.^p ¹²Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez,^q whom Tamar^r bore to Judah.”

The Genealogy of David

4:18–22pp — 1Ch 2:5–15; Mt 1:3–6; Lk 3:31–33

¹³So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive,^s and she gave birth to a son.^t ¹⁴The women^u said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD,^v who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer.^w May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law,^x who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons,^y has given him birth.”

4:11 ^oS Ge 35:16
^pRu 1:19
 4:12 ^qS Ge 38:29
^rGe 38:6,24
 4:13 ^sS Ge 8:1;
 5 29:31
^tS Ge 29:32;
 5 30:6; Lk 1:57
 4:14 ^uLk 1:58
^vS Ge 24:27
^wS Ru 2:20
 4:15 ^xS Ge 11:31
^y1Sa 1:8; 2:5;
 Job 1:2

4:17 ^zver 22;
 1Sa 16:1,18;
 17:12,17,58;
 1Ch 2:12,13;
 Ps 72:20
^a1Sa 16:13;
 1Ch 2:15
 4:18 ^bS Ge 38:29
^cNu 26:21
 4:19 ^dS Ex 6:23
 4:20 ^eS Nu 7:12
 4:21 ^fS Ru 2:1

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷The women living there said, “Naomi has a son.” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse,^z the father of David.^a

¹⁸This, then, is the family line of Perez^b:

Perez was the father of Hezron,^c

¹⁹Hezron the father of Ram,

Ram the father of Amminadab,^d

²⁰Amminadab the father of Nahshon,^e

Nahshon the father of Salmon,^k

²¹Salmon the father of Boaz,^f

Boaz the father of Obed,

²²Obed the father of Jesse,
 and Jesse the father of David.

^k20 A few Hebrew manuscripts, some Septuagint manuscripts and Vulgate (see also verse 21 and Septuagint of 1 Chron. 2:11); most Hebrew manuscripts *Salma*

4:12 *Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.* Perez was Boaz’s ancestor (vv. 18–21; Mt 1:3; Lk 3:33). His birth to Judah was from a union based on the levirate practice (Ge 38:27–30; see note on 1:11). Perez was therefore an appropriate model within Boaz’s ancestry for the blessing the elders gave to Boaz. Moreover, the descendants of Perez had raised the tribe of Judah to a prominent place in Israel. So the blessing of the elders—that, through the offspring Ruth would bear to Boaz, his family would be like that of Perez—was fully realized in David and his dynasty. Thus also v. 12 prepares the reader for the events briefly narrated in the conclusion.

4:13–17 The conclusion of the story balances the introduction (1:1–5): (1) In the Hebrew both have the same number of words; (2) both compress much into a short space; (3) both focus on Naomi; (4) the introduction emphasizes Naomi’s emptiness, and the conclusion portrays her fullness.

4:13 *the LORD enabled her to conceive.* See note on 1:6.

4:14 *kinsman-redeemer.* The child Obed, as vv. 15–17 make clear. *May he become famous.* This same wish is expressed concerning Boaz in v. 11.

4:15 *better to you than seven sons.* See 1Sa 1:8. Since seven was considered a number of completeness, to have seven sons was the epitome of all family blessings in Israel (see 1Sa 2:5;

Job 1:2; 42:13). Ruth’s selfless devotion to Naomi receives its climactic acknowledgment.

4:16 *laid him in her lap.* Possibly symbolizing adoption (see note on Ge 30:3).

4:17 *Naomi has a son.* Through Ruth, aged Naomi, who can no longer bear children, obtains an heir in place of Mahlon. *Obed.* The name means “servant,” in its full form possibly “servant of the LORD.”

4:18–22 See 1Ch 2:5–15; Mt 1:3–6; Lk 3:31–33. Like the genealogies of Ge 5:3–32; 11:10–26, this genealogy has ten names (see note on Ge 5:5). It brings to mind the reign of David, during which, in contrast to the turbulent period of the judges recalled in 1:1, Israel finally entered into rest in the promised land (see 1Ki 5:4). It signifies that, just as Naomi was brought from emptiness to fullness through the selfless love of Ruth and Boaz, so the Lord brought Israel from unrest to rest through their descendant David, who selflessly gave himself to fight Israel’s battles on the Lord’s behalf. The ultimate end of this genealogy is Jesus Christ, the great “son of David” (Mt 1:1), who fulfills prophecy and will bring the Lord’s people into final rest (see Introduction to Joshua: Title and Theological Theme; see also Heb. 3:7—4:11 and notes).