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## רוּת § RUTH

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In the Hebrew Bible, the *Book of Ruth* figures among the ‘Writings’ (between Proverbs and The Song of Songs). It is one of the five *Megillot*, or ‘scrolls’, read on the principal feasts – Ruth being used at Pentecost. The *Septuagint* is responsible for placing the book between Judges and 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, as in the *Vulgate* and modern Christian Bibles. However, locating the book there disrupts the sequence of the Deuteronomic History that begins with Joshua and ends with 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings; furthermore, there is no evidence of any Deuteronomic editing. The editors of the *Septuagint* presumably placed the book here because they considered it to reflect events during the time of the Judges (1:1); more likely, it is a short story whose setting is the period before the monarchy.

In contrast to the story of the Israelite tribes in Joshua and Judges, the *Book of Ruth* focuses on a single family. It tells the story of Ruth the Moabite who, after the death of her husband, a man from Bethlehem who had emigrated to Moab, returns to Judah with her mother-in-law Naomi and marries Boaz, a relative of her husband, by application of the law of levirate; of this marriage is born Obed, grandfather of David. An addition (4:18–22) gives a genealogy of David, parallel to the one in 1Ch 2:5–15. The story underscores the loyalty and fidelity that bind the family together. The book is highly entertaining because it skilfully moves winsome characters through an engaging plot. The mysterious ways of God are an important part of this story, which illustrates how God is at work in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. These individuals serve as models of faithful commitment to the God of Israel.

Like Jonah and Isaiah 40–55, the *Book of Ruth* affirms that the concern of Yahweh extends beyond the people of Israel to people of every nation. It is an edifying tale, the principal aim of which is to show the reward to be reaped from putting one’s trust in God, whose compassion extends even to a foreign woman (2:12). Faith in Providence and this sense of universalism are the abiding teachings of the story. The fact that Ruth was acknowledged as great-grandmother of David set particular value on the book, and Matthew includes her in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:5).

### AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

It is difficult to be certain about a date for this book, yet ascertaining the dating is central to determining the reason for its composition; it has been attributed to every period from David and Solomon to Nehemiah. A date before the Exile leads to the view that the book intended to establish David’s ancestry, to affirm the practice of levirate marriage (see Dt 25:5–10), or to commend the virtues of the book’s protagonists to ancient Israel. A date after the Exile supports the conviction that the author wished to show that a non-Israelite could become a faithful worshipper of Yahweh. This would counter the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, both of which consider intermarriage wrong (see Ezr 9–10 and Ne 10:30). Nevertheless, arguments for a late date, based on the book’s position in the Hebrew canon, language, family customs, teaching, are not decisive and the book, concluding verses apart, could have been written during the monarchical period.

## רות פרק א

## RUTH 1

א וַיְהִי בַיָּמִי שֶׁפָּט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ יִלְדָּה  
אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוֹר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא  
וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו: ב וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִמֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם  
אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֹמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי בָנָיו מַחְלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים  
מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי-מוֹאָב וַיְהִיו-שָׁם:  
ג וַיָּמָת אֱלִמֶלֶךְ אִישׁ נְעֹמִי וַתִּשָּׂאָר הִיא וּשְׁנֵי  
בָנֶיהָ: ד וַיֵּשְׂאוּ לָהֶם נָשִׁים מֵאֲבוֹת שֵׁם הָאֶחָת  
עֹרְפָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית רֹת וַיָּשְׁבוּ שָׁם כְּעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים:

<sup>1</sup> In the days of the Judges, famine came to the land and a certain man from Bethlehem of Judah went – he, his wife and his two sons – to live in the country of Moab. <sup>2</sup> The name of the man was Elimelech, his wife Naomi and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. They came to the country of Moab and settled there. <sup>3</sup> Then, Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> These married Moabite women: the name of one was Orpah and the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup> Then

### **RUTH 1**

The two principle characters of the story are Naomi (נְעֹמִי), an Israelite woman, and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth (רֹת). 'Bethlehem' (בֵּית לֶחֶם – meaning 'House of Bread') of Judah is 8 Km south of Jerusalem; it was the home of David's family (1S 16:1–5). 'Moab' (מוֹאָב) occupied the territory east of the Dead Sea and south of the River Arnon; the Israelites believed that the Moabites were related to them through Lot (Gn 19:37), the nephew of Abraham. Conflicting claims to the same territory had led to enmity between the two peoples (cf. Dt 23:4).

- <sup>1</sup> 'In the days of the judges' follows the Peshitta; the MT has 'in the days of the judging of the judges' and the LXX has 'when the judges judged' (ἐν τῷ κρίναι τοὺς κριτὰς).
- <sup>2</sup> The names may be fictitious and chosen for their meaning: 'Elimelech' means 'my God is king', 'Naomi' means 'my sweetness', 'Mahlon' is 'sickness' and 'Chilion' 'pining away'. Infant mortality was so high during the Iron Age that parents typically did not name children until they survived infancy. Ephrathah is a small village (Ps 132:6) near Bethlehem (Gn 35:16), so close in fact that it is often identified with the larger town; here, however, the term 'Ephrathites' more probably means that they were from the clan of Ephrath (cf. 1Ch 4:4), which lived in the vicinity of Bethlehem.
- <sup>3</sup> Alternative readings for the opening 'then' (וַיָּמָת) are 'sometime later' and 'however'; the *vav* acts in a consecutive sense but the time frame is not explicitly stated. The LXX uses the generic conjunction, *καὶ* (literally, 'and'), but which can also mean 'then'.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Orpah' means 'she who turns away' and 'Ruth' means 'the beloved'.
- <sup>5</sup> The term (יִלְדָּה, 'children') is used only here of married men: with this unusual usage, the author is drawing attention to Naomi's loss and sets up a link with the story's conclusion (cf. 4:16).

וַיָּמָתוּ גַם־שְׁנֵיהֶם מַחֲלוֹן וְכִלְיוֹן וַתִּשָּׂאֵל הָאִשָּׁה  
מִשְׁנֵי יְלָדֶיהָ וּמֵאִישָׁהּ:

וַתָּקֶם הִיא וְכָל־תִּיהָ וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה  
בְּשָׂדֵה מוֹאָב כִּי־פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת־עַמּוֹ לַתָּת לָהֶם  
לֶחֶם: וַתֵּצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה־שָׁמָּה וּשְׁתֵּי  
כַלּוֹתֶיהָ עִמָּה וַתֵּלְכֶנָּה בַּדֶּרֶךְ לָשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ  
יְהוּדָה: וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְשְׁתֵּי כַלּוֹתֶיהָ לִכְנֹה שְׁבָנָה  
אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה יַעֲשֶׂה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד  
כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי: יִתֵּן יְהוָה  
לָכֶם וּמַצָּאֵן מְנוּחָה אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִישָׁה וַתִּשָּׂק לָהֶן  
וַתִּשָּׂאנָה קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּינָה: וַתֹּאמְרָנָה־לָּהּ כִּי־אֲתִידָ  
נָשׁוּב לְעַמִּי: וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי שְׁבָנָה בְּנָתִי לָמָּה  
תֵּלְכֶנָּה עִמִּי הָעוֹד־לִי בָנִים בְּמַעֲי וְהָיוּ לָכֶם  
לְאִנְשִׁים: שְׁבָנָה בְּנָתִי לִכְן כִּי זָקַנְתִּי מֵהָיֹת

both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and of her husband.

<sup>6</sup> Then she began to return from the plains of Moab with her daughters-in-law, for she had heard in the plains of Moab that Yahweh had visited his people and given them food. <sup>7</sup> So, with her two daughters-in-law, she came away from the place where she was living and they took to the road, to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you to her mother’s house. May Yahweh show you faithful love, as you have done to the dead and to me. <sup>9</sup> Yahweh grant that you find rest, each of you, in the house of a husband.” Then she kissed them; but they wept aloud. <sup>10</sup> They said to her, “No, we will go back with you to your people.” <sup>11</sup> “Return my daughters: go, for I am too old now to marry again. Even if I said there is still hope for me, even if I were to have a husband tonight and bear sons,” <sup>12</sup> Naomi said, “you

<sup>6</sup> The term (פָּקַד, ‘visited’) can mean a variety of things: the NRSV translates it as ‘considered’ and others (such as the NIV) as ‘come to the aid of’. Clearly, the visitation is an act of divine favour, not of judgement (see #Ex 3:16).

<sup>7</sup> The NJB lacks ‘two’, here following the MT and NRSV.

<sup>8</sup> The opening of the second sentence (‘May Yahweh...’) follows the Qere, using the jussive form of the verb (יַעֲשֶׂה); the Kethib has the longer, imperfect form (יַעֲשֶׂה, ‘Yahweh will...’). The NJB includes this sentence in v. 9; here, we follow the MT and NRSV.

<sup>9</sup> The word מְנוּחָה, here translated in its basic form as ‘rest’ (following NJB), can also be read in a metonymical (cause/effect) sense as ‘security’ (as in the NRSV) or in a referential sense as ‘home’.

<sup>10</sup> The particle כִּי here has the force of, ‘no – on the contrary’. An alternative reading for ‘we will go’ is ‘we want to go’, if the imperfect is understood in the modal sense, indicating desire.

<sup>11</sup> The literal translation of ‘return’ is ‘why would you want to go with me’: the rhetorical question anticipates a negative answer.

<sup>12</sup> In accordance with levirate law, the husband’s brother takes the widow as his own wife (Dt 26:5–10).

לְאִישׁ כִּי אִמְרַתִּי יִשְׁלִי תִקְוָה גַם הֵייתִי הַלֵּילָה  
 לְאִישׁ וְגַם יִלְדֹתַי בָּנִים: <sup>יג</sup> הֲלֹהֶן תִּשְׁבְּרֶנָּה עַד  
 אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ הֲלֹהֶן תַּעֲגֹנָה לְבַלְתִּי הֵיזֹת לְאִישׁ אֶל  
 בָּנָתִי כִי־מֵרֶלִי מְאֹד מִכֶּם כִּי־יֵצֵאָה בִּי יַד־יְהוָה:  
<sup>יד</sup> וְתִשְׁנֶה קוֹלָן וְתִבְכִּינָה עוֹד וְתִשָּׁק עֲרָפָהּ  
 לַחֲמוּתָהּ וְרוֹת דְּבָקָה בָּהּ:

<sup>טו</sup> וְתֹאמֶר הִנֵּה שָׁבָה יְבֻמְתִּךָ אֶל־עַמָּהּ וְאֶל־  
 אֱלֹהֶיהָ שׁוּבִי אַחֲרַי יְבֻמְתִּךָ: <sup>טז</sup> וְתֹאמֶר רוֹת אֶל־  
 תִּפְגְּעִי־בִי לְעֻזְבֶּךָ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרֶיךָ

כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלַיךְ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיְנִי אֵלַיִן  
 עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי:

<sup>יז</sup> בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אֲמוֹתַי וְשֵׁם אֶקְבֹּר  
 כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יוֹסִיף  
 כִּי הַמָּוֶת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ:

must return, my daughters; why come with me? Have I yet sons in my womb to make husbands for you? <sup>13</sup> Would you wait until they grow up, and refuse to marry for this? No, my daughters, I should then be deeply grieved for you, for the hand of Yahweh has been raised against me.” <sup>14</sup> Then, once more, they started to weep aloud. Orpah kissed her mother in-law; but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup> Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You must return too; follow your sister-in-law.” <sup>16</sup> Ruth said, “Don’t press me to leave, to turn back from your company; for:

“Where you go, I will go; where you live, I will live.

Your people shall be my people and your God my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried.

Let Yahweh bring unnameable ills on me and worse ills too, if anything but death should come between us!”

<sup>13</sup> The literal translation of the opening question is, “Would you hold yourselves back for them so as not to be for a man.”

<sup>14</sup> After ‘mother-in-law’, the NJB inserts the clause ‘and went back to her people’ (following the LXX – *καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν λαὸν αὐτῆς*); this is not present in either the MT or NRSV. Most dismiss this as a clarification added under the influence of v. 15, but it is possible that a copyist inadvertently skipped the words.

<sup>15</sup> Most translations use the singular in place of ‘her gods’; it is likely that Naomi, speaking from Orpah’s Moabite perspective, uses the plural of majesty for Chemosh (cf. 1K 11:33).

<sup>16</sup> Whereas Orpah returns to Moab and its god Chemosh, Ruth, on entering Yahweh’s territory and joining his people, will have no other God but him.

<sup>17</sup> From, “Let Yahweh,” this verse follows the formula for an imprecatory oath (see 1S 3:17; 14:44, 20:13, 25:22; 2S 3:9, 35; 19:14; 1K 2:23; 2K 6:31).

י"ח וַתֵּרָא כִּי־מֵתְאַמֶּצֶת הִיא לָלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ וַתַּחֲדֹל  
לְדַבֵּר אֵלֶיהָ:

י"ט וַתֵּלְכֶנָּה שְׁתֵּיהֶם עַד־בִּזְאוֹנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַיְהִי  
כְּבֹאוֹנָה בֵּית לָחֶם וַתִּהְיֶה כָּל־הָעִיר עָלֶיהָ  
וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה הַזֹּאת נַעֲמִי: כ' וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶן

אֶל־תִּקְרָאנִי לִי נַעֲמִי  
קְרָאנִי לִי מָרָא כִּי־הִמָּר שְׁדִי לִי מָאֵד:  
כ"א אֲנִי מְלָאָה הִלַּכְתִּי וְרִיקָם הֵשִׁיבֵנִי יְהוָה לָמָּה  
תִּקְרָאנִי לִי נַעֲמִי  
וַיְהִי עֲנָה בִּי  
וְשְׁדִי הָרַע לִי:

כ"ב וַתָּשָׁב נַעֲמִי וְרוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה כָּל־תָּהָּ עִמָּה הַשָּׁבָה  
מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לָחֶם בְּתַחֲלֹת קַצִּיר  
שְׁעָרִים:

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

19 The two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. On their arrival, the whole town was astir because of them, and the women said, "Can this be Naomi?" 20 She said to them:

"Do not call me Naomi;  
call me Marah, for Shaddai has marred me bitterly.

21 I went out full and Yahweh brought me back empty.  
Why call me Naomi, then,  
since Yahweh has pronounced against me  
and Shaddai has made me wretched?"

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

18 In place of 'Naomi' and 'Ruth' (here named for clarity), the MT has the pronoun 'she'.

19 The suffix 'them' appears to masculine, but it is probably an archaic dual form. The temporal indicator (וַיְהִי) here introduces a new scene.

20 'Marah' (מָרָא) means 'bitter' or, amending to מָרִי ('Mari', 'my bitterness', thus balancing 'Naomi', 'my sweetness').

21 An alternative reading for the last line (from the NRSV) is: "... since Yahweh has dealt harshly with me."

22 The last sentence, introduced with a disjunctive structure (*vav* + subject + *vav*), provides closure for the previous scene while at the same time making a transition to the next, which takes place in the barley field. The reference to the harvest also reminds the reader that God has been merciful to his people by replacing the famine with fertility. In the flow of the narrative the question is now, "Will he do the same for Naomi and Ruth?"



## RUTH 2

## רות פרק ב

<sup>א</sup> וְלִנְעָמִי מִידַע מוֹדַע לְאִישָׁהּ אִישׁ גְּבוֹר חֵיל מְשַׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וּשְׁמוֹ בֹּעַז: <sup>ב</sup> וְתֹאמַר רֹות הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל־נְעָמִי אֲלֹכֶה־נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֶלְקָטָה בְּשִׂבְלִים אַחֵר אֲשֶׁר אֲמַצֶּא־חֵן בְּעֵינָיו וְתֹאמַר לָהּ לְכִי בְתִי: <sup>ג</sup> וְתִלָּךְ וּתְבוֹא וּתִלְקֹט בַּשָּׂדֶה אַחֲרֵי הַקְצֵרִים וַיָּקֶר מִקְרָהּ חֲלֶקֶת הַשָּׂדֶה לְבֹעַז אֲשֶׁר מְשַׁפַּחַת אֱלִימֶלֶךְ: <sup>ד</sup> וְהָיָה־בֹּעַז בָּא מִבֵּית לֶחֶם וַיֹּאמֶר לְקוֹצְרִים יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה: <sup>ה</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר בֹּעַז לְנַעֲרָה הַנֹּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים לְמִי הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת: <sup>ו</sup> וַיַּעַן הַנַּעֲרָה הַנֹּצֵב עַל־הַקּוֹצְרִים וַיֹּאמֶר נַעֲרָה מּוֹאֲבִיָּה הִיא הַשֹּׁבָה עִם־נְעָמִי מִשְׁדֵּי מוֹאָב: <sup>ז</sup> וְתֹאמַר אֶלְקָטָה־נָּא וְאֶסְפַּתִּי בַעֲמָרִים

<sup>1</sup> Now, Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, well to do and of Elimelech's clan. His name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup> Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi: "Let me go into the fields and glean among the ears of corn after some man who will look on me with favour." She said, "Go, my daughter." <sup>3</sup> So, she set out and went to glean in the fields after the reapers; and it chanced that she came to that part of the fields that belonged to Boaz of Elimelech's clan. <sup>4</sup> Now, Boaz had just come from Bethlehem; "Yahweh be with you!" he said to the reapers. "Yahweh bless you!" they replied. <sup>5</sup> Boaz said to his servant in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" <sup>6</sup> The servant replied, "The girl is a Moabite, the one who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." <sup>7</sup> She said, "Please let me glean and gather the ears of corn after the reapers." Thus,

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- <sup>1</sup> 'Kinsman' (מוֹדַע) follows the *Qere*; the *Kethib* has 'friend' (מִידַע). In place of 'well to do' (following the *NJB*), the *NRSV* has 'a prominent rich man' and the *LXX* has 'the man was mighty in strength' (ἀνὴρ δυνατὸς ἰσχύϊ). Boaz belonged to the family of Naomi's deceased husband.
- <sup>2</sup> According to the Law, the poor had this right but it depended on the goodwill of the owner of the property (Lv 19:9–10, 23:22, Dt 24:19–22).
- <sup>3</sup> The text is written from Ruth's limited perspective: as far as she was concerned, she randomly picked a spot in the field, but God was providentially at work and led her to the part of the field belonging to Boaz (בֹּעַז) who, as a close relative of Elimelech, was a potential benefactor.
- <sup>4</sup> The literal translation of 'now' is 'look': the narrator invites the audience into the story and describes Boaz's arrival as if they are present.
- <sup>5</sup> In the ancient east, every woman 'belonged' to someone: father, husband, brother, or master.
- <sup>6</sup> The literal translation of 'servant' is 'young man'; after this word, the *MT* repeats 'in charge of the reapers'.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Without even resting for a moment' follows the *LXX* (... οὐ κατέπαυσεν ἐν τῷ ἀργῷ μαιρόν); the *MT* (זֶה שְׁבִתָּהּ הַבֵּית, מְעַט), literally 'this her sitting in the house a little' is corrupt (*NJPS* has 'save that she tarried a little in the house').

אַחֲרֵי הַקּוֹצְרִים וַתָּבֹא וַתַּעֲמֹד מֵאֹז הַבֹּקֶר וְעַד-  
עֹתָה זֶה שְׁבִתָּה הַבַּיִת מְעֻט:

ח וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעֵז אֶל-רוֹת הֲלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בָּתִּי אֶל-תַּלְכִּי  
לִלְקֹט בְּשָׂדֶה אֲחֵר וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוּרִי מִזֶּה וְכֹה  
תִּדְבָּקִין עִם-נַעֲרָתִי: ט עֵינֶיךָ בְּשָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר-יִקְצְרוּן  
וְהִלַּכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הֲלוֹא צִוִּיתִי אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים לִבְלֹתִי  
נִגְעֶךָ וְצָמְתָּ וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל-הַכְּלִים וְשָׁתִיתָ מֵאֲשֶׁר  
יִשְׁאַבּוּן הַנְּעָרִים: י וַתִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנֶיהָ וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרֶצָה  
וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִדּוּעַ מֵצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְהַכִּירָנִי  
וְאַנְכִי נִכְרִיָּה: יא וַיַּעַן בָּעֵז וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הֲגֵד הֲגֵד לִי  
כָּל אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-חֲמוּתְךָ אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אִישֶׁךָ  
וַתַּעֲזִבִי אֲבִיךָ וְאִמְךָ וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתְּךָ וַתֵּלְכִי אֶל-עַם  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ תְּמוּל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם:

יב יִשְׁלַם יְהוָה פְּעֻלָּךְ וַתְּהִי מִשְׁכַּרְתְּךָ שְׁלָמָה מֵעַם  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-בָּאת לְחַסּוֹת תַּחַת-  
כְּנָפָיו: יג וַתֹּאמֶר אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲדֹנָי כִּי

she came and has been on her feet from morning until now, without even resting for a moment.”

<sup>8</sup> Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my daughter, and understand this. You are not to glean in any other field. Do not leave here but stay with my servants. <sup>9</sup> “Keep your eyes on the part of the field they are reaping and follow behind. I have forbidden my servants to molest you; and if you are thirsty, go to the pitchers and drink what the servants have drawn.” <sup>10</sup> She fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said, “How have I so earned your favour for you to notice me, though I am a foreigner?” <sup>11</sup> Boaz answered her, “I have been told all you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband’s death, and how you left your own father and mother and the land where you were born to come among a people about whom you knew nothing beforehand.

<sup>12</sup> “May Yahweh reward you for what you have done, and may you be richly rewarded by Yahweh, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” <sup>13</sup> Then she said, “Let me find favour in your

<sup>8</sup> The literal translation of ‘listen carefully’ is ‘have you not heard’: the idiomatic, negated rhetorical question is equivalent to an affirmation.

<sup>9</sup> The verb ‘are reaping’ is in the masculine plural form, indicating that the male workers are the subject here.

<sup>10</sup> The similarly spelled terms כִּיר (‘to notice’) and נִכְרִי (‘foreigner’) in this verse form a homonymic wordplay, highlighting the unexpected attentiveness and concern Boaz show for Ruth.

<sup>11</sup> In place of ‘before you came’, the LXX has ‘yesterday and the third (day before)’ (ἐχθὲς καὶ τρίτης).

<sup>12</sup> In ‘may Yahweh reward you’ (יִשְׁלַם יְהוָה), the prefixed verbal form is understood as a jussive of prayer (note the jussive in the next clause).

<sup>13</sup> Ruth here uses the word שִׁפְחָתְךָ, which describes the lowest level of a female servant (cf. 1S 25:41); in 3:9, she uses the term אִמָּתְךָ, indicating a higher class of servant.

נִחַמְתָּנִי וְכִי דִבַּרְתָּ עָלַי לֵב שִׁפְחָתְךָ וְאַנְכִי לֹא  
אֶהְיֶה כְּאֶחָת שִׁפְחֹתֶיךָ:

י' וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בָּעֵז לֶעֱת הָאֵכֶל גְּשִׁי הַלֶּם וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן־  
הַלֶּחֶם וְטִבַּלְתְּ פִתְּךָ בַחֲמֶזַן וַתֵּשֶׁב מִצַּד הַקְצָרִים  
וַיַּצְבֹּט־לָהּ קִלְי וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּשְׂבַּע וַתֵּתֶר: טו' וַתֵּקֶם  
לִלְקֹט וַיֵּצֵא בָּעֵז אֶת־נַעֲרֶיו לֵאמֹר גַּם בֵּין הָעֲמָרִים  
תִּלְקֹט וְלֹא תִכְלִימוּהָ: טז' וְגַם שׁוֹלֵת־שָׁלוּ לָהּ מִן־  
הָעֲבֹתִים וַעֲזֹבֹתֶם וְלִקְטָהּ וְלֹא תִגְעֲרוּ־בָהּ:

יז' וַתִּלְקֹט בַשָּׂדֶה עַד־הָעֶרֶב וַתַּחבֹּט אֶת אֲשֶׁר־  
לִקְטָהּ וַיְהִי כְּאַיִפָּה שְׁעָרִים: יח' וַתֵּשֶׂא וַתָּבֹא הָעִיר  
וַתֵּרָא חֲמוּתָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־לִקְטָהּ וַתּוֹצֵא וַתִּתֵּן־לָהּ  
אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הֻתְּרָה מִשְׂבַּעָהּ: יט' וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ

sight, my lord, since you have given me courage and spoken kindly to me, so I shall be one of your maidservants."

<sup>14</sup> At meal time, Boaz said to her, "Come here, eat some bread and dip your piece in the vinegar." So, she sat beside the reapers and they passed her roasted grain; she ate until she was satisfied and left. <sup>15</sup> When she got up to glean, Boaz ordered his servants: "Let her glean among the sheaves, and do not check her. <sup>16</sup> Also, pull some out from the bundles and let them fall. Let her glean and do not scold her."

<sup>17</sup> She gleaned in the fields until evening; then she beat out what she had gleaned and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup> She carried it back to the town; her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned and gave her the food that remained after she had her fill. <sup>19</sup> Her mother-in-law asked,

<sup>14</sup> The 'vinegar' (actually a mixture of vinegar, water, wine, and some sort of fermented liquor) was forbidden to the Nazirites (Nb 6:3).

<sup>15</sup> The literal translation of 'check' is 'humiliate'; this probably refers to a verbal rebuke, which would single her out and embarrass her (see v. 16). The Law allowed the poor to glean anything that fell from the sheaves as the harvesters carried them away (Lv 19:19, 23:22, Dt 24:19), but to be allowed to glean while the sheaves were still in place was an unusual favour.

<sup>16</sup> These repeated instructions show that, despite the legality of gleaning, harvesters were often harsh with those who tried to glean.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth probably used a stick to separate the kernels of grain from the husks, as was the custom in Iron Age Israel. An 'ephah' was about 1½ Kg, a huge amount of barley for a single woman to gather in one day.

<sup>18</sup> The MT points וַתֵּרָא as the *Qal* verb ('and she saw'), consequently of 'her mother-in-law' as subject and 'what she gathered' as the direct object: 'her mother-in-law saw what she gathered', but some medieval *Hebrew MSS* (also reflected in the *Peshitta* and *Vg*) have the *Hiphil* verb וַתִּרְא ('and she showed'), taking 'her mother-in-law' as the direct object and 'what she gathered' as the double direct object: 'she showed her mother-in-law what she had gathered'. Although this has the advantage of making Ruth the subject of all the verbs in this verse, it is syntactically difficult. For, one would expect the accusative sign before 'her mother-in-law' if it were the direct object of a verb in a sentence with a double direct object introduced by the accusative sign, for example: "to show your servant your greatness" (Dt 3:24). Thus, the MT reading is preferred.

<sup>19</sup> Naomi is taken back by the amount of barley brought home by Ruth; such a quantity (40 litres) could only be due to someone's generosity.



אֵיפֹה לִקְטֹת הַיּוֹם וְאַנָּה עָשִׂיתָ יְהִי מִכִּירְךָ בָּרוּךְ  
וְתִגַּד לַחֲמוּתָהּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתָ עִמּוֹ וְתֹאמַר שֵׁם  
הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בְּעֹז:

כ וְתֹאמַר נַעֲמִי לְכַלְתָּה בָּרוּךְ הוּא לִיהוָה אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא־עָזַב חֲסִדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים וְתֹאמַר  
לָהּ נַעֲמִי קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגֵּאֲלָנוּ הוּא: כא וְתֹאמַר  
רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה גַם כִּי־אָמַר אֵלַי עַם־הַנָּעָרִים  
אֲשֶׁר־לִי תִדְבָּקִין עַד אִם־כָּלוּ אֶת כָּל־הַקֹּצִיר  
אֲשֶׁר־לִי: כב וְתֹאמַר נַעֲמִי אֶל־רוּת כָּל־תָּהּ טוֹב בְּתִי  
כִּי תֵצֵאֵל עִם־נַעֲרוֹתָיו וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ־בָךְ בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר:  
כג וְתִדְבָּק בְּנַעֲרוֹת בְּעֹז לְלֶקֶט עַד־כָּלוֹת קֹצִיר־  
הַשָּׂעִרִים וּקְצִיר הַחֲטִים וְתָשָׁב אֶת־חֲמוּתָהּ:

“Where did you glean today and where did you work? Blessed be he who took notice of you!” Ruth told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked: “The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by Yahweh who does not withhold his kindness from living or dead!” Naomi added, “This man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.” <sup>21</sup> Then Ruth the Moabite said, “He also said to me, “Stay close to my servants, until they have gathered in all my harvest.”” <sup>22</sup> Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is better for you, my daughter, to go with his servants, otherwise you might be molested in another field.” <sup>23</sup> So, she stayed with the servants of Boaz to glean until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

<sup>20</sup> The NJB ends the verse with “This man is a relative of ours. He is one of those who has the right of redemption over us.” Here, we follow the NRSV and MT. Throughout this book, the NJB uses ‘the one with the right of redemption’ in place of ‘a near kinsman’ (or similar phrases, here following the NRSV, which includes the former as an alternative translation).

<sup>21</sup> The word תִּדְבָּק (servants) is masculine plural. After ‘the Moabite said’, the NJB adds ‘to her mother-in-law’, following the LXX (πρὸς τὴν πενθερὰν αὐτῆς).

<sup>22</sup> Naomi uses the feminine form of the word ‘servant’ (as Boaz did earlier, see v. 8), in contrast to Ruth’s use of the masculine form in the preceding verse. Since she is concerned for Ruth’s safety, she may be subtly reminding Ruth to stay with the female workers and not get too close to the men.

<sup>23</sup> Some LXX MSS include ‘and she lived with her mother-in-law’ (καὶ ἐκάθισεν μετὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς) as part of 3:1. Some interpret this to mean that she lived with her mother-in-law while working in the harvest. In other words, she worked by day and then came home to Naomi each evening. Others understand this to mean that, following the harvest, she stayed at home each day with Naomi and no longer went out looking for work; some even propose that she lived away from home during this period, but this seems unlikely. A few Hebrew MSS (and the Vg) support this view by reading, ‘and she returned to her mother-in-law’.

## RUTH 3

## רות פרק ג

א וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֶבְקֶשְׁלָךְ  
מִנוּחַ אֲשֶׁר יִיטֵב לָךְ: ב וַעֲתָה הֲלֹא בָעוּ מִדַּעְתָּנוּ  
אֲשֶׁר הָיִית אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתַי הַנֶּה־הוּא זֶרָה אֶת־גֶּרְן  
הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלַּיְלָה: ג וְרַחֲצִתָּ וְסָכַתָּ וְשָׁמַתָּ מִלְּתֶךָ  
שְׂמֹלְתֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ וִירַדְתִּי וִירַדְתָּ הַגֶּרְן אֶל־תּוֹדְעִי  
לְאִישׁ עַד כָּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשָׁתוֹת: ד וְיִהי בְּשָׁכְבוֹ  
וְיִדְעָתָ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וְגִלְית  
מִרְגְּלָתּוֹ וּשְׁכַבְתִּי וְשָׁכַבְתָּ וְהוּא יַגִּיד לָךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר  
תַּעֲשִׂין: ה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כָּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי [אֵלַי]  
אֶעֱשֶׂה:

ו וַתֵּרֶד הַגֶּרְן וַתַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְתָהּ חֲמוּתָהּ:  
ז וַיֹּאכַל בָּעוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ וַיִּיטֵב לָבּוֹ וַיֵּבֵא לְשָׁכַב בִּקְצֵה  
הָעֶרְמָה וַתָּבֵא בִלֹּט וַתִּגַּל מִרְגְּלָתּוֹ וַתִּשְׁכַּב: ח וַיִּהי

1 Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “My daughter, is it not my duty to see you happily settled? 2 “Is not Boaz, with whose maids you have been working, our kinsman? Now, tonight he is winnowing the barley at the threshing-floor. 3 “Come, wash, anoint and dress yourself in your best clothes; then go to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he finishes eating and drinking. 4 When he settles down to sleep, take careful note of the place where he lies, then go and turn back the covering at his feet and there lie down. He will tell you what to do.” 5 She said to her, “All you have said to me I will do.”

6 So, she went down to the threshing-floor and did all her mother-in-law told her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk, he was happy and lay down by the barley; then she came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay there.

## RUTH 3

- 1 The idiomatic, negated rhetorical question is the equivalent of an affirmation (see also 2:8).
- 2 Naomi wants to help Ruth in finding a husband and considers Boaz the obvious choice.
- 3 The consecutive, perfect tense verbs with a prefixed *vav* (וַ) (וְרַחֲצִתָּ וְסָכַתָּ, וְשָׁמַתָּ) indicate a series of instructions. In place of שְׂמֹלְתֶיךָ ('your best clothes'), here following the *Qere*, the *Kethib* has the singular form שְׂמֹלְתֶךָ, which has also been read as 'your outer garment'. The phrase, 'Then (you) go down' (וִירַדְתָּ) follows the *Qere*; the *Kethib* has 'I will go down' (וִירַדְתִּי); possibly, the latter preserves an archaic spelling of the 2FS form.
- 4 The translation, '(you) lie down' follows the *Qere* (וְשָׁכַבְתָּ); the *Kethib* (וְשָׁכַבְתִּי) has 'I will lie down'. In place of 'until he finishes', the NJB & NRSV have 'before he has finished'.
- 5 The *Kethib* lacks the preposition, אֵלַי ('to me'), here following the *Qere* and many mediaeval Hebrew MSS.
- 6 This verse is a summary statement, while vv. 7-15 give the particulars.
- 7 Ruth must have waited until Boaz was asleep, for he did not notice when she 'uncovered his feet' and lay beside him.

בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּחְרַד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת וַהֲנֵה אִשָּׁה  
שֹׁכֶבֶת מִרגְלָתוֹ: <sup>ט</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתְּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי  
רוּת אֹמֶתְךָ וּפְרִשְׁתָּ כְנָפְךָ עַל־אֹמֶתְךָ כִּי גֹאֵל  
אַתָּה: <sup>י</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בְּתִי הַיְטִבְתָּ  
חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבִלְתִּי־לָכֶת אַחֲרֵי  
הַבְּחוּרִים אֲסִדֵּל וְאֲסִעֶשִׁיר: <sup>יא</sup> וַעֲתָה בְּתִי אֵל־  
תִּירְאִי כָל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לְךָ כִּי יוֹדַע כָּל־  
שְׂעַר עַמִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּ חִיל אַתְּ: <sup>יב</sup> וַעֲתָה כִּי אֲמַנֶּם  
כִּי (אִם) גֹּאֵל אֲנֹכִי וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קְרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי:  
<sup>יג</sup> לִינִי | הַלַּיְלָה וְהִיא בִבְקָר אֲסִיגְאֶלְךָ טוֹב יִגְאֹל

<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the night, the man stirred and looked about him; and lying at his feet was a woman. <sup>9</sup> He said, “Who are you?” She replied, “I am Ruth, your maidservant; spread your cloak over your handmaid, for you are next of kin.” <sup>10</sup> “May Yahweh bless you, my daughter,” said Boaz, “for this latest act of kindness of yours is greater than the first, since you have not gone after young men, poor or rich. <sup>11</sup> “Have no fear, my daughter; I will do whatever you ask, for all my people know that you are a virtuous woman. <sup>12</sup> “But, though it is true that I am a kinsman, you have a kinsman closer than I. <sup>13</sup> “Stay here tonight, and in the morning if he wishes to exercise his right, then let him redeem you; but,

<sup>8</sup> The word here translated as ‘looked about’ (לִפְתָּ) occurs only here, Job 6:18 and Jg 16:29 (where it seems to mean ‘grab hold of’). There is an overtone of sexual intimacy in this passage, since ‘feet’ (vv. 4, 8) in Hebrew can be a euphemism for ‘genitals’. That the relationship between Ruth and Boaz is honourable according to the standards of their time, however, is shown by subsequent events.

<sup>9</sup> Here, Ruth uses a more elevated word for ‘your maidservant’ (אֹמֶתְךָ) than in 2:13, because she is now aware of his responsibility as next of kin. The NJB (see #2:20) ends this verse with, “... for you have the right of redemption over me;” here, we follow the NRSV and JPS. Ruth is asking Boaz to take her as his wife. Because it is her purpose to have a son who will be the legal descendant of her father-in-law Elimelech, this request is called ‘an act of kindness’, or filial piety. To ‘spread one’s cloak (wing) over’ a woman means to take her for one’s wife.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth has not only stayed with her mother-in-law (2:11) but is also willing to perpetuate the family by agreeing to marry Boaz.

<sup>11</sup> The literal translation of ‘all my people’ is ‘all the gate of the town’. The NJB ends this verse with, “... for the people of Bethlehem all know your worth;” here, we follow the NRSV and JPS. In place of ‘virtuous woman’, the LXX has ‘woman of ability’ (γυνή δυνάμεως).

<sup>12</sup> Boaz tells Ruth there is another male relative who has a prior claim that must be respected. The word sequence here translated as ‘though it is true’ (following the NJB) – בִּי אֲמַנֶּם כִּי אִם, following the Kethib – occurs only here in the OT, as does the sequence, כִּי אֲמַנֶּם כִּי (following the Qere); it is possible that the אִם כִּי is a dittography and that both the אֲמַנֶּם and the כִּי have an (otherwise unattested) emphatic function (‘yes, it is true’).

<sup>13</sup> In this verse, Boaz twice uses the word גֹּאֵל, here translated in its literal, general sense of ‘redeem,’ when he actually means the more particular sense of ‘marry’. Note that the ג in לִינִי is presented as an enlarged latter, just as it appears in almost all Hebrew MSS.

וְאִם־לֹא יַחְפֹּץ לְגַאֲלֶךָ וְגִאֲלֶיךָ אֲנִכִּי חַי־הוּא  
שָׁכְבִי עַד־הַבֹּקֶר:

if he does not wish to do so, then as Yahweh lives, I will redeem you.  
Lie here until morning.”

י<sup>ד</sup> וַתִּשְׁכַּב מִרגְלוֹתָיו עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וַתָּקָם בַּטְרוֹם  
בְּטַרְם יֶכִּיר אִישׁ אֶת־רַעְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־יוֹדֵעַ כִּי־  
בָּאָה הָאִשָּׁה הַגֵּרָוּ: טו וַיֹּאמֶר הָבִי הַמֶּטֶפַח אֲשֶׁר־  
עָלֶיךָ וְאַחֲזִיבָה וַתֹּאחֲזוּ בָּהּ וַיִּמַּד שֵׁש־שְׁעָרִים  
וַיֵּשֶׁת עָלֶיהָ וַיָּבֹא הָעִיר: טז וַתָּבֹא אֶל־חֲמוּתָהּ  
וַתֹּאמֶר מִי־אַתְּ בְּתִי וַתַּגְדִּלָּהּ אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה־  
לָהּ הָאִישׁ: יז וַתֹּאמֶר שֵׁש־הַשְּׁעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה נָתַן לִי  
כִּי אָמַר [אֵלַי] אֶל־תָּבֹאוּ רִיקָם אֶל־חֲמוּתֶךָ:  
יח וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁבִי בְּתִי עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּדְעֵין אֵיךְ יִפֹּל דְּבַר  
כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ כִּי־אִם־כָּלֵה הַדְּבַר הַיּוֹם:

<sup>14</sup> So, she lay at his feet until morning, but rose before one man can recognise another, “For,” he said, “it must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.” <sup>15</sup> He said, “Bring your cloak and hold it out.” She held it out and he put six measures of barley into it, put it on her back and went into the town. <sup>16</sup> She came to her mother-in-law, who asked, “How did things go, my daughter?” She told her all the man had done for her. <sup>17</sup> She added, “He gave me these six measures of barley and said, “Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”” <sup>18</sup> Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, and see how things go, for the man will not rest until he has settled the matter this very day.”

<sup>14</sup> The article on האשה (*‘the woman’*) is probably a dittography – note the final *he* on the preceding verb, באה (*‘she came’*). In place of בטרם, here following the Kethib, the Qere has בטרם.

<sup>15</sup> In place of *‘then he went into the town’* (ויבא – following the NRSV & MT), the NJB (following the Peshitta and Vg – *Quæ portans ingressa est civitatem*) has *‘then she went into the town’* (והבא).

<sup>16</sup> The literal translation of *‘how did things go (with you)’* (here following the NRSV and NJB) is *‘who are you’* (the implied question being *‘are you his wife’*); the LXX has *‘what is it’* (τίς ἐστίν).

<sup>17</sup> After *‘and said’*, the Qere adds the preposition אֵלַי (*‘to me’*); here, we follow the Kethib. In addition to being a further gesture of kindness on Boaz’s part, the gift of barley served as a token of his intention to marry Ruth.

<sup>18</sup> The literal translation of *‘wait’* is *‘sit’*.

## רות פרק ד

## RUTH 4

א וּבָעַז עָלָה הַשָּׁעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם וְהָיָה הַגָּאֵל עֹבֵר  
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר-בָּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר סוּרָה שְׁבֵה-פָּה פְּלֹנִי  
אֶלְמָנִי וַיֵּסֶר וַיֵּשֶׁב: ב וַיִּקַּח עֲשָׂרָה אַנְשִׁים מִזְקְנֵי  
הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁבוּ-פָּה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ: ג וַיֹּאמֶר לַגָּאֵל חֲלֻקַּת  
הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֵינוּ לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ מִכְרָה נַעֲמִי  
הַשְּׁבֵה מִשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב: ד וְאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֲגִלָּה אֲזַנֶּךָ  
לֵאמֹר קִנְיָה נִגְדָה הַיֹּשְׁבִים וְנִגְדָה זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אֶם-תִּגְאָל  
גָּאֵל וְאִם-לֹא יִגְאָל הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאָדַע וְאָדַע כִּי אֵין

<sup>1</sup> Now Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down, and the relative of whom he had spoken came by. Boaz said, "Come here, friend, and sit down;" and he came and sat down. <sup>2</sup> Then Boaz took ten of the town's elders and said, "Sit down here," so they sat down. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the next of kin, "Naomi, back from the country of Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother, Elimelech. <sup>4</sup> So, I am telling you of it and saying, "Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and the elders of my people. If you want to redeem it, redeem it; if you do not, tell me,

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### RUTH 4

- <sup>1</sup> The disjunctive clause structure (וּבָעַז עָלָה – note the *vav* + subject + verb) here introduces a new scene. The unnamed rival to Boaz renounces the claims he had on Elimelech's property and household. The idiomatic expression here translated as 'friend' (פְּלֹנִי אֶלְמָנִי) literally means 'such and such' or 'a certain one', often used when one wishes to be ambiguous (1S 21:3, 2K 6:8). Boaz would certainly have known his relative's name, but the author refuses to record this in a form of poetic justice, as he refused to fulfil his obligation by marrying Ruth; perhaps 'Mr No-Name' would be a more appropriate translation.
- <sup>2</sup> The 'elders of the town' were leading and influential men who interpreted traditional Israelite law and settled disputes.
- <sup>3</sup> Here, we follow the NRSV and MT; the NJB opens with, "Then Boaz said to the man who had the right of redemption ..." (see #2:20). The nature of Naomi's sale is uncertain; she may have been selling the property rights to the land, but this seems unlikely in light of what is known about ancient Israelite property laws; more likely, Naomi, being a woman, held only the right to use the land until the time of her remarriage or death; because she held this right of use, she also had the right to buy it back from the its current owner (assuming that Elimelech sold the land prior to going to Moab). Since she did not possess the means to do so, however, she decided to dispose of her rights in the matter: she was not selling the land *per se* but disposing of the right to its redemption and use, probably in exchange for room and board with the purchaser. If this is correct, it might be preferable to translate, "Naomi ... is disposing of her rights to the portion of land ..."
- <sup>4</sup> The phrase 'elders of my people' appears to refer to the leaders who were specially chosen as witnesses (v. 2) and the larger group of community leaders standing by; it is possible, however, that this phrase and 'those who are sitting here' are appositional and that both refer to the ten aforementioned leaders. The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here (an added letter) warrants explanation.



זולתך לגאול ואנכי אחריך ויאמר אנכי אגאל:  
 ה ויאמר בעז ביום-קנותך השדה מיד נעמי ומאת  
 רות המואביה אשת-המת קניתי קניתי להקים  
 שם-המת על-נחלתו: ויאמר הגאל לא אוכל  
 לגאול לגאל-לי פן-אשחית את-נחלתי גאל-לך  
 אתה את-גאלתי כי לא-אוכל לגאל:

ז וזאת לפני בישראל על-הגאלה ועל-התמורה  
 לקים כל-דבר שלף איש נעלו ונתן לרעהו וזאת  
 התעודה בישראל: ה ויאמר הגאל לבעז קנה-לך

and I shall know, for there is no one but you to redeem it except me, though I come after you.” He said, “I will redeem it.” <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said, “The day you acquire the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead man, to restore his name to his heritage.” <sup>6</sup> At this, the relative said, “I cannot redeem it without ruining my own inheritance; exercise the right, for I cannot redeem it.”

<sup>7</sup> This was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other; this was the form of ratification in Israel. <sup>8</sup> So, the near kinsman said to

<sup>5</sup> The word here translated as ‘also’ (ומאת) can be understood in two ways: 1 ‘and from’ (vav + conjunction + preposition + definite direct object marker) parallel to the preceding ‘from (the hand of)’ (מיד), suggesting that the field would be purchased from both Naomi and Ruth; 2 ‘and’ (vav + conjunction + enclitic mem + direct object marker) introducing the second part of the acquisition – acquiring the field and Ruth. The dead man, Elimelech, was the head of the family; though Ruth is actually the widow of Mahlon, she ranks in this matter as Elimelech’s widow. In place of the second ‘you (also) acquire’ (קניתי), following the Qere, the Kethib has ‘I acquire’ (קניתי).

<sup>6</sup> To the purchase of the land, to which the man as next-of-kin (go-el) agrees, Boaz links the levirate marriage with Ruth. The child of such a marriage would be legal heir to Mahlon and Elimelech, and the land in question would revert to him. The first go-el is afraid of losing by the transaction and renounces his rights in favour of Boaz. The Kethib/ Qere difference here (a dropped letter) warrants explanation.

<sup>7</sup> At the end of this verse, here following the NRSV (and MT), the NJB adds, “in the presence of witnesses.” (It is not certain which MS is being followed therein.) The procedures described here do not follow the prescriptions of Dt 27:7–10. The exact way of handling such situations probably changed over time and differed regionally.

<sup>8</sup> The NRSV opens with: “So when the next of kin said to Boaz ...” The custom of removing one’s sandal mentioned in Dt 25:9–10 has a different significance. There, the woman shows her contempt for the man who is unwilling to marry her on behalf of his dead brother, her husband. Here, the gesture merely validates a contract of exchange. To put one’s foot on a field, or to throw a sandal on to it, is to take possession of it (Ps 60:8, 108:9). The sandal thus becomes the symbol of the right of ownership. By taking it off and handing it to the purchaser, the owner transfers this right to him. At the end of this verse, the LXX adds the clause ‘and gave it to him’ (καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ), which presupposes the reading לו ויחד – which seems to be a clarifying addition (see v. 7). However, it is possible that a copyist’s eye skipped from the final vav on ‘his sandal’ (נעלו) to the final vav on ‘to him’ (לו), omitting the intervening letters.

וַיִּשְׁלַף נַעֲלָו: <sup>ט</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר בָּעֵז לְזָקָנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֲדִים  
 אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קִנִּיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת  
 כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלֹון מִיַּד נַעֲמִי: <sup>י</sup> וְגַם אֶת־רוּת  
 הַמֹּאבִּיָּה אִשְׁתִּי מַחֲלֹון קִנִּיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקִּים  
 שֵׁם־הַמֵּת עַל־נַחֲלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שֵׁם־הַמֵּת מֵעַם  
 אַחֲזִי וּמִשְׁעֵר מְקוֹמוֹ עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם: <sup>יא</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
 כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר וְהַזְקָנִים עֲדִים יִתֵּן יְהוָה  
 אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתְךָ כְּרַחֵל וְכִלְאָה אֲשֶׁר  
 בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

וַעֲשֵׂה־חֵיל בְּאֶפְרָתָה  
 וּקְרָא־שֵׁם בְּבֵית לַחֵם:

<sup>יב</sup> וַיְהִי בֵיתְךָ כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יִלְדָה תָמָר לַיהוּדָה  
 מִן־הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לְךָ מִן־הַנְּעָרָה הַזֹּאת:  
<sup>יג</sup> וַיִּקַּח בָּעֵז אֶת־רוּת וַתְּהִי־לֹו לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ  
 וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן: <sup>יד</sup> וַתֹּאמְרָנָה הַנָּשִׁים

Boaz, "Purchase it for yourself," and he took off his sandal. <sup>9</sup> Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I buy from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup> I have also bought Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, to be my wife, to keep the name of the dead man in his heritage, so the dead man's name may not die out among his brothers and at the town gate; today you are witnesses." <sup>11</sup> All the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses;" and the elders said, "May Yahweh make the woman who is to enter your House like Rachel and Leah who together built up the House of Israel.

"Grow mighty in Ephrathah  
 and be renowned in Bethlehem!

<sup>12</sup> "And may your House be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the seed Yahweh gives you by this young woman."

<sup>13</sup> So, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, Yahweh made her conceive and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup> Then the

<sup>9</sup> An alternative spelling of 'Chilion' is 'Kilion'.

<sup>10</sup> The literal translation of 'may not die out' is 'will not be cut off'.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase here translated as 'grow mighty' (וַעֲשֵׂה־חֵיל) can also be read as 'prosper' (grow rich), 'have many children' (be fertile), 'do well' or 'do a worthy deed'. The phrase 'and be renowned' (וּקְרָא־שֵׁם – literally 'and call a name') is elliptical; perhaps it should be emended to וַיְקָרָא־שֵׁם ('and may your name be called out'). Whether one reads the imperative (as in the text) or the jussive (as emended), the construction indicates purpose or result following the earlier 'May Yahweh'.

<sup>12</sup> 'Perez' was the ancestor of Boaz (see vv. 18–22). 'Tamar's' marital situation (see Gn 38) was similar to that of Ruth. The WEBBE has 'offspring' in place of 'seed'.

<sup>13</sup> The literal translation of 'became his wife' is 'went in to her', a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

<sup>14</sup> The pronoun 'he' (before 'be famous') represents Boaz (not Yahweh), as the next verse makes clear.

אֶל־נַעֲמִי בְרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָךְ גֹּאֵל  
הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>טו</sup> וְהָיָה לָךְ לְמֹשִׁיב  
נֶפֶשׁ וּלְכֹלֵל אֶת־שִׁיבְתְּךָ כִּי כָלַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אֲהַבְתְּךָ  
יִלְדָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־הָיָא טוֹבָה לָךְ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָנִים:  
<sup>טז</sup> וַתִּקַּח נַעֲמִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשְׁתְּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וַתְּהִי־  
לוֹ לְאִמָּנָה: <sup>יז</sup> וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לֹא הִשְׁכַּנּוּת שֵׁם לְאִמֹּר  
יֶלֶד־בֶּן לְנַעֲמִי וַתִּקְרָאנָה שְׁמוֹ עֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִי־יִשָּׁי  
אֲבִי דָוִד: {פ}

<sup>יח</sup> וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פֶּרֶץ פְּרֶץ הוֹלִיד אֶת־חֲצִרֹן:  
<sup>יט</sup> וַחֲצִרֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־רֵם וְרֵם הוֹלִיד אֶת־עַמִּינָדָב:  
<sup>כ</sup> וְעַמִּינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת־נַחֲשֹׁן וְנַחֲשֹׁן הוֹלִיד אֶת־  
שַׁלְמָה: <sup>כא</sup> וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־בֹּעַז וּבֹעַז הוֹלִיד  
אֶת־עֹבֵד: <sup>כב</sup> וְעֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשָּׁי וְיִשָּׁי הוֹלִיד  
אֶת־דָּוִד: {ש}

women said to Naomi, “Blessed be Yahweh who has not left you without next of kin; may he be famous in Israel. <sup>15</sup> “The child will be a comfort to you and the prop of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you and is more to you than seven sons has given him birth.” <sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child, held him to her breast and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup> The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born for Naomi;” and they named him Obed. This was the father of David’s father, Jesse.

<sup>18</sup> These are the descendants of Perez. Perez was the father of Hezron, <sup>19</sup> Hezron was the father of Arram, Arram was the father of Amminadab, <sup>20</sup> Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon was the father of Salmon; <sup>21</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz and Boaz was the father of Obed; <sup>22</sup> Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.

<sup>15</sup> The translation here follows the NJB; the MT moves ‘she (who) is more to you than seven sons’ to the end of the verse.

<sup>16</sup> Breast-feeding was an adoption ritual (see Gn 48:5), also used by other peoples in the ancient Near East.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Obed’ means ‘servant’ (of Yahweh); he became the grandfather of David; the NT includes him among the ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1:4–6, Lk 3:32).

<sup>18</sup> This second genealogy cannot be the work of the same author, since the whole point of the story is that Elimelech’s name is perpetuated; but here, Boaz is named as the father of Obed, Elimelech’s name disappears, and Ruth’s piety no longer has the same meaning; the law of levirate and the final piety implicit in this are lost to view. However, a different theme emerges: the *foreigner*, Ruth, is the ancestor of David.

<sup>19</sup> In place of ‘Arram’, here following the MT (רם) and LXX (Ἀρραμ), both the NJB and NRSV have ‘Ram’.

<sup>20</sup> In place of ‘Salmon’ (following v. 21), the MT has ‘Salmah’ (שַׁלְמָה).

<sup>21</sup> The LXX has ‘Salman’ (Σαλμαν) in place of שַׁלְמוֹן (‘Salmon’), as also in v. 20.

<sup>22</sup> In summary: God cares for needy people and is their ally in this chaotic world. He richly rewards people like Ruth and Boaz who demonstrate sacrificial love and in so doing become his instruments in helping the needy.