

# Ruth

## 1

**Summary:** *A family from Bethlehem flees famine to Moab. The father and both sons die, leaving three widows. Naomi returns to Judah; one daughter-in-law goes home, the other — Ruth the Moabite — refuses to leave and binds herself to Naomi's people and God.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Ruth's declaration in verses 16-17 is among the most quoted passages in the Hebrew Bible, yet its context is often missed: this is not a wedding vow but a covenant oath sworn by a destitute foreign widow to her equally destitute mother-in-law. Ruth abandons her homeland, her gods, and any prospect of remarriage in Moab — all for a relationship that offers her nothing except shared poverty. The Hebrew verb *davaq* ('clung') in verse 14 is the same verb used for the marriage bond in Genesis 2:24, and for Israel's covenant attachment to God in Deuteronomy. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi uses the vocabulary of the deepest bonds Scripture knows.*

**Translation Friction:** *Naomi's bitter wordplay in verse 20 — 'Do not call me Naomi (Pleasant); call me Mara (Bitter)' — is clear in Hebrew but requires a translator note in English because the names are left untranslated. The verb *shub* ('to return') appears twelve times in this chapter, creating a thematic drumbeat that English can partially preserve ('return,' 'go back,' 'turn back') but cannot fully replicate since Hebrew hears the same root each time. In verse 13, Naomi's phrase *ha-lahen tesabbernah* ('would you wait for them?') uses a rare verb form that may imply either patient waiting or hopeful expectation — we chose 'wait' and noted the ambiguity.*

**Connections:** *The opening phrase 'in the days when the judges ruled' places Ruth within the Judges period but tells a completely different kind of story — not military cycles but domestic faithfulness. The famine that drives Elimelech to Moab echoes Abraham's famine-flight to Egypt (Genesis 12:10) and Jacob's to Egypt (Genesis 42-46) — in each case, leaving the promised land creates crisis. Ruth's oath 'your God will be my God' reverses the pattern of Judges, where Israel repeatedly adopts foreign gods; here a foreigner adopts Israel's God. The genealogy that closes the book (4:18-22) will connect Ruth to David, making this Moabite widow's choice the hinge on which the royal line turns.*

<sup>1</sup>In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah went to live as a foreigner in the fields of Moab — he, his wife, and his two sons. <sup>2</sup>The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion — Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the fields of Moab

and settled there. <sup>3</sup>Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>They married Moabite women; one was named Orpah and the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup>Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her two children and without her husband. <sup>6</sup>She set out with her daughters-in-law to return from the fields of Moab, for she had heard in Moab that the LORD had attended to his people by giving them food. <sup>7</sup>So he left the place where she had been living, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They set out on the road to return to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup>Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return — each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal with you in faithful love, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup>May the LORD grant that each of you finds rest in the home of a new husband." She kissed them, and they raised their voices and wept. <sup>10</sup>They said to her, "No — we will return with you to your people." <sup>11</sup>Naomi said, "Go back, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Do I still have sons in my womb who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup>Go back, my daughters, go. I am too old to have a husband. Even if I said, 'There is hope for me' — even if I were with a husband tonight and even bore sons — <sup>13</sup>would you wait for them until they grew up? Would you shut yourselves off from having husbands? No, my daughters, for it is far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." <sup>14</sup>They raised their voices and wept again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, 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. Go back after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup>But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD do so to me, and worse, if anything but death separates me from you." <sup>18</sup>When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped arguing with her. <sup>19</sup>The two of them walked on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Can this be Naomi?" <sup>20</sup>She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has made my life very bitter. <sup>21</sup>I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought misfortune on me?" <sup>22</sup>So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back from the fields of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening *vayyehi bimei shefot ha-shofetim* ('and it was in the days of the judging of the judges') places the story within the Judges period without specifying which judge. The deliberate vagueness contrasts with the specificity of the Judges narratives — this story operates outside the military-political cycle.
1. The phrase *lagur bisedei Mo'av* ('to sojourn in the fields of Moab') uses the verb *gur* ('to sojourn, to live as a resident alien') — the same term used of Abraham in Canaan (Genesis 20:1) and Israel in Egypt (Genesis 47:4). A *ger* has no land rights, no inheritance, no clan protection. Elimelech trades his ancestral property in Bethlehem for landless vulnerability in Moab.
1. Bethlehem (Beit Lechem, 'House of Bread') suffering a famine is a bitter irony that the Hebrew reader would hear immediately. The House of Bread has no bread.
2. Every name in this verse carries meaning that a Hebrew audience would hear: Elimelech ('my God is king'), Naomi ('pleasant, lovely'), Mahlon (possibly 'sickness' or 'weakness'), and Chilion (possibly 'failing, wasting away'). Whether these names are etymologically predictive or literary symbolism applied retroactively, the effect is the same — the narrator signals that the sons will not survive. The names function as compressed foreshadowing.
2. Ephrathites (Efratim) identifies the family as members of the Ephrathah clan within Judah — the same designation used for Jesse's family in 1 Samuel 17:12. This is not a random family but part of the lineage that will produce David.
3. The death is reported with devastating brevity: *vayyamot Elimelekh* ('and Elimelech died'). No cause, no mourning scene, no burial narrative. The narrator's compression communicates how abruptly and completely disaster strikes. The verb *vattisha'er* ('she was left, she remained') will recur in verse 5 — each use strips another layer of family away from Naomi. The 'man whose God is king' is gone; Naomi is now defined not by what she has but by what remains after loss.
4. The marriages to Moabite women (*nashim Mo'aviyyot*) would have been alarming to an Israelite audience. Deuteronomy 23:3 prohibits Moabites from entering the assembly of the LORD 'to the tenth generation.' The narrator states the marriages without comment — neither condemning nor excusing — and lets the tension stand. The entire book will work to resolve it: how does a Moabite woman become an ancestor of David?

4. Orpah's name may derive from *oref* ('back of the neck, nape') — the part of the body visible when someone turns away. If so, her name foreshadows her departure in verse 14. Ruth's name is less certain — some connect it to *re'ut* ('friend, companion') or *ravah* ('to water, to saturate, to refresh'). The ten-year period (*ke-eser shanim*) underscores that these were real marriages, not casual unions.
5. The second use of *vattisha'er* ('she was left') completes the stripping: Naomi is now *mi-shenei yeladeiha u-me'ishah* ('from her two children and from her husband') — the preposition *min* ('from') marking separation and loss. The word *yeladim* ('children') rather than *banim* ('sons') is notable — the more intimate, maternal term emphasizes the personal nature of the loss.
5. Three deaths in three verses. The narrator's pace is relentless. No explanation is given for why the sons died — the text refuses to moralize. The effect is that Naomi's suffering is presented as raw fact, not as punishment. This restraint is theologically significant: the book does not treat Naomi's loss as divine judgment for the Moab marriage.
6. The verb *paqad* ('to visit, to attend to, to take note of') is a covenant term — when God *paqad* his people, it means He has turned His attention toward them with purpose. It carries both positive (visitation with blessing, as here) and negative (visitation with judgment) valences. The same verb describes God's attention to Sarah (Genesis 21:1) and to Israel in Egypt (Exodus 4:31). God's *paqad* reverses the famine and makes return possible.
6. The phrase *latet lahem lachem* ('to give them bread') closes the circle opened in verse 1: the House of Bread (Bethlehem) that had no bread now has bread again because the LORD has given it. The irony that drove the family to Moab is resolved — but Naomi returns without the family she left with.
7. The verb *shub* ('to return') appears here for the first time in its dominant role — it will recur twelve times in this chapter. For Naomi, the return is geographical (Moab to Judah). For Orpah, it will be relational (returning to her mother's house). For Ruth, it creates a paradox: Ruth has never been to Judah, so she cannot 'return' — she can only go. Yet the narrator includes her in the journey of return, hinting that Ruth belongs in Israel even before she arrives.
8. Naomi's blessing — *ya'as YHWH immakhem chesed* ('may the LORD do with you chesed') — is the first occurrence of *chesed* in Ruth, and it is theologically explosive. Naomi asks Israel's covenant God to show covenant loyalty to Moabite women. She grounds the request in their own demonstrated *chesed*: *ka'asher asitem im ha-metim ve-immadi* ('as you have done with the dead and with me'). The dead (*ha-metim*) are Mahlon and Chilion — the daughters-in-law's faithfulness to their deceased husbands is recognized as *chesed*.
8. The instruction to return to *beit immah* ('your mother's house') rather than the expected *beit av* ('your father's house') is unusual. The 'mother's house' appears in only two other passages (Genesis 24:28, Song of Songs 3:4), both in contexts involving marriage arrangements for women. Naomi may be directing them toward the domestic sphere where remarriage can be negotiated — the mother's house is where a woman's future is arranged.
9. Naomi's second blessing introduces *menuchah* ('rest') — not mere cessation of labor but settled security, the condition of being safely placed. The same word describes the promised land itself (Deuteronomy 12:9) and God's own resting place (Psalm 132:14). For a widow in the ancient Near East, *menuchah* could only come through a husband's household — remarriage was not romance but survival. Naomi wishes them the security she herself has lost.
9. The verb *vattishaq* ('she kissed them') is the standard gesture of familial farewell. The communal weeping — *vattise'nah qolan* ('they raised their voice') — is a public, audible grief, not quiet tears. Three widows on a road, weeping together, with no men and no home in sight: the scene is one of complete social vulnerability.
10. Both daughters-in-law initially refuse to leave. Their declaration — *ittakh nashuv le-ammekh* ('with you we will return to your people') — uses the emphatic *ki* ('surely, indeed') or adversative *ki* ('no, but rather'). The verb *nashuv* ('we will return') applies awkwardly to Orpah and Ruth, who have never been to Judah. By using the verb of Naomi's return, they are declaring that Naomi's destination is their destination — her people are their people. This is the same commitment Ruth will formalize in verse 16.
11. Naomi's argument invokes the institution of levirate marriage (*yibbum*) — the obligation for a dead man's brother to marry his widow and produce an heir in the dead man's name (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Her rhetorical question — *ha-od li vanim beme'ai* ('are there still sons in my womb?') — is both legally precise and emotionally devastating. Even if she could bear sons, the daughters-in-law would have to wait decades for them to grow. The legal framework that should protect these widows has been emptied by death.
12. Naomi builds an impossible hypothetical: *ki amarti yesh li tiqvah* ('even if I said there is hope for me'). The word *tiqvah* ('hope') will prove deeply ironic — Naomi declares herself hopeless, but the narrative will restore her through the very daughter-in-law she is trying to send away. The conditional chain (even if I had a husband tonight, even if I bore sons) piles absurdity upon absurdity to make the legal argument airtight: levirate marriage cannot help them.
13. The verb *tesabbernah* ('would you wait, would you hope') is rare — used only here in the Hebrew Bible. It may derive from *savar* ('to wait, to expect, to hope'). The second verb *te'agenah* ('would you be tied down, would you be restricted') relates to the legal concept of the *agunah* — a woman bound to a marriage that prevents her from remarrying. Naomi is describing a legal and social prison: if they wait for hypothetical sons, they cannot marry anyone else.
13. Naomi's claim *ki mar li me'od mikkem* ('it is more bitter for me than for you') is ambiguous — it could mean 'my situation is more bitter than yours' or 'I am more grieved on your account than you are.' The first reading expresses Naomi's self-pity; the second expresses compassion. Both are grammatically possible. The phrase *yad YHWH* ('the hand of the LORD') attributes her suffering directly to God's agency — Naomi does not blame Moab, famine, or circumstance. She blames God.

14. The verse splits the two daughters-in-law with a single contrast: Orpah kissed (vattishaq) but Ruth clung (davqah). The kiss is farewell; the clinging is refusal to leave. The verb davaq ('to cling, to cleave, to hold fast') is the same verb used in Genesis 2:24 for the marriage bond ('a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife') and in Deuteronomy 10:20 and 11:22 for Israel's covenant attachment to God ('you shall cling to Him'). Ruth's attachment to Naomi is described with the deepest relational vocabulary the Hebrew Bible possesses.
14. Orpah's departure should not be read as failure — she does exactly what Naomi asked. She is the reasonable response. Ruth is the extraordinary one. The narrative needs Orpah's reasonable obedience to measure Ruth's unreasonable devotion.
15. Naomi's final argument links people and gods: el ammah ve-el eloheihā ('to her people and to her gods'). In the ancient world, returning to your people meant returning to their gods — religion and ethnicity were inseparable. Naomi is saying: Orpah made the sensible choice. She went home to everything familiar — family, culture, worship. You should do the same.
15. The term yevimtekh ('your sister-in-law') is from yavam, the same root as yibbum (levirate marriage). The word itself reminds both women of the legal bond that death has severed. By calling Orpah Ruth's yevimtekh, Naomi frames the departing woman in the vocabulary of the broken institution that cannot save any of them.
16. Ruth's declaration — among the most famous passages in the Hebrew Bible — is structured as a series of covenant commitments. The opening al tifge'i bi ('do not press me, do not urge me against') uses the verb paga ('to encounter, to press, to strike against'), here meaning 'do not use force to persuade me.' Ruth is not making a request — she is resisting Naomi's command.
16. The four parallel clauses follow a progression from physical companionship to spiritual identity: (1) where you go, I go (shared journey); (2) where you stay, I stay (shared dwelling); (3) your people are my people (shared community); (4) your God is my God (shared worship). Each clause escalates the commitment. The final claim — Elohayikh Elohai ('your God, my God') — is a conversion statement. Ruth abandons Chemosh, the god of Moab, for YHWH. This is not casual — it is the renunciation of everything she has known spiritually.
16. The verb shub ('to return, to turn back') appears again — Naomi tells Ruth to 'return,' but Ruth redefines the word: she refuses to turn back. For Ruth, turning back would mean leaving Naomi. The entire chapter's thematic verb is here inverted.
17. Ruth's oath climaxes with death itself: ba'asher tamuti amut vesham eqqaver ('where you die I will die and there I will be buried'). Shared burial means permanent identification with Naomi's family and land — Ruth is renouncing any return to Moab, even in death. In the ancient world, burial location defined tribal and family identity permanently.
17. The self-imprecation koh ya'aseh YHWH li vekhoh yosif ('may the LORD do so to me, and add to it') is a standard oath formula (cf. 1 Samuel 3:17, 2 Samuel 3:9, 1 Kings 2:23). The oath invokes divine punishment for oath-breaking, with the unspecified 'so' and 'more' leaving the threatened consequence to God's determination. Ruth swears by YHWH — not by Chemosh — confirming the conversion declared in verse 16.
17. The final clause ki ha-mavet yafird beini u-veinekh ('only death will separate me from you') anticipates Paul's language in Romans 8:38-39 ('neither death nor life... shall be able to separate us'). Whether Paul had Ruth in mind is uncertain, but the verbal echo is striking.
18. The verb mit'ammetset ('was determined, was strengthening herself') comes from the root amats ('to be strong, to be firm') — the same root God uses to commission Joshua: chazaq ve-emats ('be strong and courageous,' Joshua 1:6). Ruth's determination is described with the vocabulary of military-grade resolve. Naomi recognizes an immovable will and vattehdal ledabber eleiha ('she ceased speaking to her'). The silence is acquiescence — not acceptance, not joy, just the end of resistance.
19. The arrival scene: vattehom kol ha-ir aleihen ('the whole city was astir/stirred concerning them'). The verb hamah ('to murmur, to roar, to be in uproar') suggests the entire community buzzing — not a quiet homecoming but a public sensation. Naomi left as a married woman with two sons and returns as a widow with a Moabite daughter-in-law. The question ha-zot No'omi ('is this Naomi?') conveys shock at her changed appearance and circumstances.
19. The feminine verb vattomarnah ('they said,' feminine plural) indicates the speakers are the women of Bethlehem specifically — the community that would have known Naomi before her departure. The recognition scene sets up Naomi's bitter response.
20. Naomi's name-change demand is a theological protest. No'omi means 'pleasant, lovely, delightful'; Mara means 'bitter.' The wordplay — ki hemar Shaddai li me'od ('for the Almighty has made it very bitter for me') — uses the hiphal of marar ('to be bitter'), making God the active agent of her bitterness. She does not say 'life has been bitter' but 'Shaddai has made it bitter.'
20. The divine name Shaddai ('the Almighty') rather than YHWH is significant. Shaddai is the patriarchal-era name (Genesis 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, 48:3, 49:25) — the God of promise and abundance. By using this name, Naomi accuses the God of abundance of producing scarcity. The God who was supposed to make fruitful has left her barren and alone.
21. The full/empty contrast — ani mele'ah halakhti vereiqam heshivani YHWH ('I went full, and the LORD brought me back empty') — is Naomi's summary of her entire Moab experience. Mele'ah ('full') encompasses husband, sons, household, social standing. Reiqam ('empty, empty-handed') is the totality of loss. The irony the narrator sees but Naomi does not: she is not returning empty. Ruth is standing right next to her.
21. Two divine names frame the accusation: YHWH anah vi ('the LORD testified against me') and Shaddai hera li ('the Almighty brought evil/misfortune upon me'). The verb anah can mean 'to answer, to testify against, to afflict' — Naomi casts her suffering as God's legal verdict against her. The accumulation of divine agency — God made it bitter (v. 20), God brought me back empty, God testified against me, God afflicted me — is the most concentrated accusation against God in any narrative text outside Job.

22. The narrator's closing frame reintroduces Ruth with her full designation: Rut ha-Mo'aviyyah kallatah ('Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law'). The epithet ha-Mo'aviyyah ('the Moabite') will follow Ruth throughout the book (2:2, 2:6, 2:21, 4:5, 4:10) — the narrator never lets the reader forget her foreign origin. It is a constant reminder that the woman who will become David's great-grandmother was an outsider.
22. The chapter ends with a temporal marker of hope: bithchillat qetsir se'orim ('at the beginning of the barley harvest'). After famine, death, and emptiness — harvest. The House of Bread has bread again. The timing is also legally significant: the barley harvest is when gleaning rights for the poor (Leviticus 19:9, 23:22) become active, creating the legal mechanism by which Ruth will encounter Boaz in chapter 2.

## 2

**Summary:** *Ruth goes out to glean in the barley fields and, by apparent chance, arrives in the field of Boaz — a wealthy relative of Elimelech. Boaz notices her, extends extraordinary protection, and commands his workers to leave extra grain for her. She returns to Naomi with an abundance of food, and Naomi reveals that Boaz is one of their kinsman-redeemers.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The narrator's use of miqreh ('chance, happening') in verse 3 is deliberately ironic — what looks like accident is providential design. The entire chapter pivots on Ruth ending up in exactly the right field belonging to exactly the right man. Boaz's first words to Ruth echo the language of covenant protection, and his knowledge of her story (vv. 11-12) reveals that her reputation has preceded her. His blessing in verse 12 — invoking the God of Israel 'under whose wings you have come to take refuge' — uses the same word (kanaf, 'wing/corner') that Ruth will later use when she asks Boaz to spread his garment over her (3:9). The verbal thread ties divine refuge to human obligation.*

**Translation Friction:** *We rendered miqreh in verse 3 as 'as it turned out' rather than 'chance' or 'luck' to preserve the narrator's ironic understatement without implying genuine randomness. Boaz's greeting to his workers — YHWH immakhem ('the LORD be with you') — could be routine or theologically charged; we rendered it straightforwardly and noted the ambiguity. The term go'el in verse 20 required extended treatment because 'kinsman-redeemer' is a theological compound with no single English equivalent; we unpacked it in the expanded rendering rather than forcing an artificial gloss.*

**Connections:** *The gleaning laws that structure this chapter originate in Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22 — provisions for the poor, the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan. Ruth qualifies on every count. Boaz's blessing over Ruth (v. 12) echoes Psalm 91:4 ('under his wings you will find refuge') and anticipates the same imagery in Psalm 36:7. Naomi's declaration that God 'has not abandoned his faithful love for the living or the dead' (v. 20) reverses her bitter theology from 1:20-21 — the God who emptied her is now filling her again through the chesed of a relative she had not mentioned.*

<sup>1</sup>Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side — a man of standing and means — from the clan of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup>Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the stalks of grain, following anyone who shows me favor." Naomi said to her, "Go, my daughter." <sup>3</sup>She went out, came to the field, and began gleaning behind the harvesters. As it turned out, the plot of field she came to belonged to Boaz, from the clan of Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>Just then, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He said to the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!" They answered him, "The LORD bless you!" <sup>5</sup>Boaz said to the servant overseeing the harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?" <sup>6</sup>The servant overseeing the harvesters answered, "She is a Moabite young woman — the one who came back with Naomi from the territory of Moab. <sup>7</sup>She asked, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came and has been on her feet from early morning until now, with only a brief rest in the shelter." <sup>8</sup>Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, and do not leave this one. Stay close to my young women. <sup>9</sup>Keep your eyes on the field they are harvesting and follow the women. I have ordered the young men not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the men have drawn." <sup>10</sup>She fell facedown, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you would notice me — a foreigner?" <sup>11</sup>Boaz answered her, "I have been told — told in full — everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death: how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to a people you had never known before. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD repay your deeds, and may your wages be full

from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." <sup>13</sup>She said, "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken to the heart of your servant — though I am not even one of your servant girls." <sup>14</sup>At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here, eat some bread, and dip your piece in the vinegar sauce." She sat beside the harvesters, and he handed her roasted grain. She ate until she was satisfied — and had some left over. <sup>15</sup>When she got up to glean again, Boaz instructed his young men: "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not humiliate her. <sup>16</sup>Also, pull out some stalks from the bundles for her on purpose, and leave them so she can gather them. Do not scold her." <sup>17</sup>She gleaned in the field until evening. When she beat out what she had gathered, it came to about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup>She carried it back and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then Ruth brought out and gave Naomi what she had left over from her meal. <sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who noticed you!" Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one she had worked with and said, "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz." <sup>20</sup>Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, who has not abandoned his faithful love for the living and the dead!" Then Naomi told her, "This man is a close relative of ours — he is one of our kinsman-redeemers." <sup>21</sup>Ruth the Moabite added, "He also told me, 'Stay close to my workers until they have finished all my harvest.'" <sup>22</sup>Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, so that no one harms you in another field." <sup>23</sup>So Ruth stayed close to Boaz's young women, gleaning through the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The narrator introduces Boaz with a backgrounding clause before Ruth or Naomi know he will matter. The term *moda* ('relative, acquaintance') signals a kinship connection to Elimelech's clan. The description *ish gibbor chayil* ('a man mighty of strength/wealth') is the same phrase applied to Gideon (Judges 6:12) and to the ideal woman in Proverbs 31:10 (*eshet chayil*). It encompasses wealth, social standing, and personal capability — Boaz is everything that Naomi's household currently lacks.
1. The name Boaz (Bo'az) may mean 'in him is strength' — from the preposition *be* ('in') and *oz* ('strength'). If so, the name anticipates his role: he is the man in whom the family's future strength resides. The same name was given to one of the two pillars of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:21).
2. Ruth's initiative drives the scene: *elkhah-na hasadeh va'alaqotah* ('let me go, please, to the field and glean'). The particle *na* ('please') is deferential — Ruth asks permission, not forgiveness. She proposes to exercise the legal right of gleaning (*laqat*) granted to the poor and the foreigner in Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22. That a Moabite widow in Israel would know this law — or assume it would be honored — reflects either Naomi's instruction or Ruth's remarkable boldness.
2. The phrase *emtsa-chen be'einav* ('I find favor in his eyes') anticipates the exact language Boaz will use in verse 10 and Ruth will use in verse 13. The narrator builds the encounter through verbal echoes: the favor Ruth hopes for from any landowner will come, specifically and abundantly, from Boaz.
2. Naomi's reply — *lekhi vitti* ('go, my daughter') — is strikingly brief. After the eloquent speeches of chapter 1, Naomi has few words. She sends Ruth into a situation fraught with danger for an unprotected foreign woman and says only two words. Whether this reflects depression, helplessness, or trust in God is left unstated.
3. The phrase *vayyiqer miqrehah* (literally 'her chance chanced upon') uses the root *qarah* ('to encounter, to happen, to befall') in a cognate accusative construction — the verb and its object share the same root, intensifying the meaning. The same root appears in Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 and 9:2-3 to describe the apparent randomness of fate. Here the narrator deploys the language of chance precisely to undermine it: the reader knows from verse 1 that Boaz is Elimelech's kinsman.
3. The three rapid verbs — *vattalekh vattavo vattelaqet* ('she went and came and gleaned') — compress Ruth's journey into staccato action. No description of the walk, the landscape, or her feelings. The narrative pace keeps the focus on what happens, not how she feels about it.
4. The narrative marker *vehinneh* ('and look!') signals a dramatic entrance — Boaz arrives at exactly the moment Ruth is gleaning in his field. We rendered this as 'just then' to convey the narrative surprise without resorting to archaic 'behold.' The timing reinforces the irony of verse 3: one 'coincidence' follows another.
4. The exchange *YHWH immakhem / yevarekha YHWH* ('the LORD be with you / the LORD bless you') is either a routine greeting (like modern 'God bless you') or a marker of Boaz's genuine piety. The narrator does not distinguish — but the exchange establishes Boaz's household as one where the LORD's name is invoked freely and reciprocally. This is not the world of Judges, where everyone does what is right in their own eyes; this is a field where master and workers bless each other in God's name.
5. Boaz's question — *lemi hanna'arah hazzot* ('to whom does this young woman belong?') — reflects the social reality: an unmarried or widowed woman in the ancient Near East was identified by her connection to a male household. The question 'whose is she?' is not objectifying by ancient standards but locating her within the kinship network. Boaz is trying to place her socially — whose family, whose household, whose responsibility?

6. The servant's first identifying marker is ethnic: na'arah Mo'aviyyah hi ('a Moabite young woman she is'). Her foreignness is the primary fact. The phrase ha-shavah im Na'omi ('the one who returned with Naomi') uses the same verb shub ('to return') from chapter 1 — Ruth's reputation has preceded her. The entire community apparently knows the story of the Moabite who came back with Naomi.
6. The servant's identification — 'Moabite young woman' — places Ruth in a double-marginal category: foreign and female. In the social hierarchy of an Israelite harvest field, she has no standing whatsoever. Everything Boaz does next is therefore extraordinary generosity beyond legal obligation.
7. Ruth's request — ala'qotah-na ve'asafti va'omarim ('let me glean and gather among the sheaves') — goes beyond basic gleaning rights. Gleaning (laqat) meant picking up individual stalks that fell during harvesting. Gathering among the sheaves (asaf va'omarim) implies collecting closer to the bundled grain — a more productive but more presumptuous request. Ruth is negotiating for maximum provision.
7. The servant's report emphasizes Ruth's tireless labor: me'az habboqer ve'ad attah ('from the morning until now'). The final clause zeh shivtah habbayit me'at ('this — her sitting in the house/shelter — has been little') confirms she barely rested. The servant is clearly impressed. Her work ethic speaks before Boaz does.
8. Boaz's address — halo shamat bitti ('have you not heard, my daughter?') — opens with paternal authority. The term bitti ('my daughter') establishes a protective relationship, not a romantic one (yet). He immediately issues three imperatives: do not go to another field, do not leave this one, stay close to my workers. The protection is comprehensive.
8. The verb tidbakin ('you shall cling, stay close') is from the root davaq — the same verb used of Ruth's clinging to Naomi in 1:14, of the marriage bond in Genesis 2:24, and of Israel's attachment to God in Deuteronomy 10:20. The narrator threads this verb through the book: Ruth clung to Naomi, now she is told to cling to Boaz's workers, and eventually she will be joined to Boaz himself.
9. Boaz's command tsivviti et-hanne'arim levilti nag'ekhi ('I have charged the young men not to touch you') reveals a reality the text does not romanticize: an unprotected foreign woman in a harvest field was vulnerable to sexual assault. The verb naga ('to touch') in this context means unwanted physical contact — the same verb used in Genesis 20:6 when God prevents Abimelech from touching Sarah. Boaz has already taken protective action before speaking to Ruth.
9. The provision of water — ve'shatit me'asher yish'avun hanne'arim ('drink from what the young men draw') — is significant because drawing water was labor-intensive. Boaz gives Ruth access to water she did not draw, from workers she does not employ, in a field she does not own. Each provision strips away one more layer of her outsider status.
10. Ruth's response — vattippol al paneiha vattishtachu artsah ('she fell on her face and bowed to the ground') — is the full prostration gesture of submission and gratitude. It is the same posture used before kings and before God. From Ruth, it communicates the enormity of what Boaz has offered: not just grain but protection, dignity, and recognition.
10. The wordplay in lehakkireni ve'anokhi nokhriyyah ('to notice me, and I am a foreigner') is one of the finest in the Hebrew Bible. The verb nakhar means both 'to recognize, to pay attention to' and, in a different form, 'to be foreign.' Ruth uses the verb and then identifies herself with its cognate noun: 'Why would you recognize (hakkir) me, seeing that I am a foreigner (nokhriyyah)?' The one who is by definition unrecognizable — the foreigner — has been recognized. The wordplay compresses the entire theological arc of Ruth into a single sentence.
11. The emphatic infinitive absolute construction hugged huggad li ('it has been told, it has been told to me') doubles the verb for emphasis — the report about Ruth has been thorough and complete. Boaz knows her entire story. His summary of her actions — leaving father, mother, and homeland (eret moladtekh) — deliberately echoes God's call to Abraham: lekh-lekha me'artsekha umimoladtekh umibeit avikha ('go from your land and your kindred and your father's house,' Genesis 12:1). Ruth has done what Abraham did: left everything familiar for an unknown destination among an unknown people.
11. The phrase am asher lo yadat temol shilshom ('a people you did not know yesterday or the day before') is an idiom for complete unfamiliarity. Ruth's journey was not to a place of potential welcome but to radical strangeness. Boaz recognizes the full cost of her choice.
12. The verb yeshalleh ('may he repay') and the noun maskurtek ('your wages') are economic terms — payment for work done. Boaz frames Ruth's loyalty not as emotional sentiment but as labor that has earned a wage from God. The theological implication is startling: covenant faithfulness shown by a Moabite generates a debt that God himself will repay.
12. The phrase lachasot tachat kenafav ('to take refuge under his wings') uses the root chasah ('to seek refuge, to take shelter') found throughout the Psalms (Psalms 2:12, 5:11, 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 91:4). Ruth the Moabite has sought shelter under the wings of the God of Israel — and God will provide that shelter through Boaz himself. The double meaning of kanaf ('wing' and 'corner of a garment') creates a verbal bridge to 3:9 that transforms theology into narrative action.
13. Ruth's phrase dibbarta al-lev shifchatekha ('you have spoken to the heart of your servant') uses the idiom dibber al-lev ('to speak to the heart'), which appears in Genesis 34:3, Isaiah 40:2, and Hosea 2:14. It means more than kind words — it means to reassure, to console, to win someone's trust through tender speech. The same phrase describes how God woos wayward Israel.
13. Ruth's self-deprecation — ve'anokhi lo ehyeh ke'achat shifchotekha ('and I will not even be like one of your servant girls') — is not false modesty. She is stating social reality: she ranks below Boaz's own servants. The word shifchah ('female servant, handmaid') is the same term she uses for herself, creating an ironic hierarchy: she calls herself his servant while acknowledging she is not even equal to his actual servants. Boaz's kindness has elevated her beyond her station, and she knows it.

14. The invitation to eat at the communal meal — *goshi halom ve'akhalt min-hallechem* ('come here and eat from the bread') — breaks another social barrier. Ruth the gleaner is invited to eat with the workers, at the landowner's table. The vinegar (*chomets*) is sour wine used as a dipping sauce — a common field condiment that makes coarse bread palatable.
14. The sequence *vattokhal vattisba vattotar* ('she ate and was satisfied and had left over') echoes the language of divine provision. The same three-beat pattern — eat, be satisfied, have surplus — appears in the feeding miracles and in Deuteronomy's descriptions of abundance in the promised land (Deuteronomy 8:10). A Moabite widow in a harvest field receives the same pattern of provision that God promises Israel. The surplus (*vattotar*) anticipates the abundance she will bring home to Naomi in verse 18.
15. Boaz's command — *gam bein ha'omarim telaqet velo takhlimuha* ('even among the sheaves let her glean, and do not humiliate her') — exceeds the gleaning law. Leviticus permits gleaning at the edges; Boaz opens the sheaves themselves. The verb *kalam* ('to humiliate, to put to shame') indicates that gleaners could expect verbal abuse or harsh treatment from workers protecting their employer's grain. Boaz forbids not just physical harm but social degradation.
15. The command is given privately to the workers, not to Ruth. Boaz protects her dignity by arranging generosity she will not witness being arranged. She will think she found the grain; the workers will know it was placed for her. This is *chesed* in its most refined form — kindness that preserves the recipient's sense of agency.
16. The infinitive absolute construction *shol-tashollu* ('you shall surely pull out') emphasizes deliberateness — this is not passive allowance but active provision disguised as accident. Boaz commands his workers to engineer abundance while maintaining Ruth's dignity. She will think she is finding good grain; in reality, the grain is finding her.
16. The verb *ga'ar* ('to rebuke, to scold') suggests that harvesters normally drove off gleaners who took too much or came too close. Boaz dismantles every mechanism of exclusion: no physical harm (v. 9), no humiliation (v. 15), no scolding (v. 16). He creates a zone of total safety around a woman who had no right to expect any.
17. An *ephah* (*eifah*) is approximately 22 liters or about 30 pounds of grain — an extraordinary amount for a single day's gleaning. Normal gleaning might yield a few pounds. The quantity confirms that Boaz's secret instructions in verses 15-16 had their intended effect: Ruth's labor, combined with arranged generosity, produces an abundance that would be impossible under normal gleaning conditions.
17. The verb *chavat* ('to beat out, to thresh') describes Ruth processing the grain herself — separating the kernels from the stalks by striking them. This is additional labor after a full day of gleaning, demonstrating Ruth's relentless work ethic. She does not bring home raw sheaves but processed, ready-to-use grain.
18. The double provision — gleaned grain and leftover food — mirrors the eat/be-satisfied/have-surplus pattern of verse 14. Ruth brings home both the day's wages (grain) and the day's surplus (food from the communal meal). Naomi receives not just provision but evidence of extraordinary generosity.
18. The verb *hotirah* ('she had left over') connects to the *vattotar* of verse 14. What Ruth saved from her own satisfaction she brings to Naomi. The economy of *chesed* operates through surplus: Boaz gives Ruth more than she needs, and Ruth carries the excess to Naomi. Kindness flows downhill from the man of means through the gleaner to the empty widow.
19. Naomi's questions tumble out in rapid sequence — *eifoh liqqatt hayom ve'anah asit* ('where did you glean today and where did you work?') — before Ruth can answer. The quantity of grain has clearly shocked her. Naomi blesses the unknown benefactor before she knows his name: *yehi makkirekh barukh* ('may the one who noticed you be blessed'). The verb *makkirekh* ('the one who noticed/recognized you') echoes Ruth's wordplay from verse 10 — the *nakhar/nokhriyah* connection now extends through Naomi's blessing.
19. Ruth's revelation — *shem ha'ish asher asiti immo hayyom Bo'az* ('the name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz') — is placed at the end of the verse for maximum narrative impact. The name lands like a thunderclap on Naomi, who will immediately recognize its significance.
20. The phrase *asher lo azav chasdo et-hachayim ve'et-hammetim* ('who has not abandoned his *chesed* toward the living and the dead') recalls Naomi's own *chesed* blessing over Ruth and Orpah in 1:8. There, Naomi asked God to show *chesed* to them as they had shown *chesed* to the dead. Now the cycle completes: God's *chesed* toward the dead (Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion) and the living (Naomi, Ruth) flows through Boaz. The woman who accused God of emptying her (1:21) now blesses God for not abandoning his love.
20. The term *go'el* ('redeemer, kinsman-redeemer') is from the root *ga'al* ('to redeem, to buy back, to act as kinsman'). It carries legal, economic, and theological weight: the *go'el* redeems land (Leviticus 25:25), persons (Leviticus 25:47-49), and blood (Numbers 35:19). God himself is called *go'el* of Israel (Exodus 6:6, Isaiah 41:14, 43:14). By identifying Boaz as *go'el*, Naomi introduces the mechanism that will resolve every strand of the plot: land, marriage, lineage, and identity.
20. The word *qarov* ('close, near') signals that Boaz is not just any relative but a close one — close enough in the kinship network to bear the obligation of redemption. The proximity matters legally: the *go'el* responsibility falls on the nearest male relative.
21. Ruth quotes Boaz as saying *hanne'arim asher-li* ('the young men who are mine') — but in verse 8, Boaz actually told her to stay with his *na'arot* ('young women'). Ruth's substitution of 'young men' for 'young women' is noticed by many commentators. It may be an innocent misquotation, or it may reflect that Ruth worked near both groups, or it may be narratively significant — Naomi's response in the next verse will steer Ruth back toward the women, possibly out of concern for her safety among the men.

- 21.** The phrase *ad im-killu et-kol-haqqatsir asher-li* ('until they have finished all my harvest') extends Boaz's protection through the entire harvest season — weeks of guaranteed safety, provision, and access. This is not a one-day favor but a standing arrangement.
- 22.** Naomi's response corrects Ruth's 'young men' back to *na'arotav* ('his young women') — a subtle but deliberate redirection. Whether Naomi is worried about safety, propriety, or both, she steers Ruth toward the female workers. The verb *yifge'u* ('they meet, they encounter, they strike against') can mean anything from an accidental meeting to a violent assault. Naomi is warning Ruth that outside Boaz's field, she has no protection.
- 22.** The phrase *besadeh acher* ('in another field') carries more weight than geography. Boaz's field is the one place where Ruth has been recognized, protected, fed, and given access. Every other field is the field of a stranger where she is just another Moabite gleaner with no protector. Naomi's counsel is both practical and strategic: stay where the *go'el* can see you.
- 23.** The chapter closes with the verb *vattidbaq* ('she clung, she stayed close') — the same root *davaq* that described Ruth's clinging to Naomi in 1:14 and Boaz's instruction in 2:8. Ruth is now bound to Boaz's household by daily habit, even as she remains bound to Naomi at home. The verb quietly stitches together every relationship in the book.
- 23.** The time summary — *qetsir hasse'orim uqetsir hachittim* ('the barley harvest and the wheat harvest') — spans roughly seven weeks, from Passover to Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks). Ruth has gleaned through two full harvest cycles, establishing herself as a known presence in Boaz's field. The closing note *vatteshev et-chamotah* ('and she lived with her mother-in-law') returns us to the domestic frame: whatever happens in the field, Ruth comes home to Naomi. The chapter opened with Ruth going out; it closes with her dwelling in. Between departure and return, everything has changed.

### 3

**Summary:** *Naomi devises a plan for Ruth to approach Boaz at the threshing floor under cover of night. Ruth bathes, dresses, and goes to the threshing floor where Boaz is winnowing barley. After he eats and drinks and lies down, Ruth uncovers his feet and lies beside him. When Boaz wakes at midnight, Ruth identifies herself and asks him to spread his garment over her — invoking his role as kinsman-redeemer. Boaz praises her loyalty, reveals that a closer kinsman-redeemer exists, and promises to settle the matter at dawn. Ruth returns to Naomi with six measures of barley and a promise.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The threshing floor scene is constructed with extraordinary literary precision. The Hebrew employs a sustained double register: every key verb — *shakav* ('to lie down'), *galah* ('to uncover'), *yada* ('to know'), *margelot* ('feet' or 'legs') — carries both an ordinary meaning and a sexual connotation. The narrator never resolves the ambiguity, and we have not resolved it either. What matters theologically is that Boaz responds to Ruth's vulnerability not with exploitation but with blessing. His first words to her are a benediction. The word *kanaf* ('wing' or 'garment corner') in verse 9 directly echoes Boaz's prayer in 2:12 that Ruth would find refuge 'under the wings of the LORD' — Ruth is now asking Boaz himself to be the answer to his own prayer. This is one of the most elegant theological callbacks in the Hebrew Bible.*

**Translation Friction:** *The deliberate ambiguity of the threshing floor scene resists clean English rendering. The Hebrew *margelot* literally means 'the place of the feet' but is widely understood as a euphemism. We rendered it as 'the place of his feet' to preserve the surface meaning while noting the undertone. The verb *galah* ('to uncover') in verse 4 and verse 7 carries both literal and sexual senses elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 18 uses it repeatedly for sexual exposure). We chose 'uncovered' and addressed the ambiguity in notes rather than importing either a sanitized or sexualized reading into the rendering itself.*

**Connections:** *Boaz's exclamation that Ruth's 'later chesed is greater than the first' (v10) frames the entire book's theology: Ruth's faithfulness deepens as the story progresses, moving from loyalty to Naomi (chapter 1) to active pursuit of redemption for the family. The *kanaf* imagery connects Ruth's request (3:9) to Boaz's prayer (2:12) and ultimately to the theology of divine refuge found in the Psalms (Psalm 36:7, 57:1, 91:4). The *go'el* institution, which Boaz formally acknowledges here, bridges private loyalty and public law — redemption in Ruth is simultaneously a legal transaction and an act of covenant love.*

<sup>1</sup>Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek security for you — a settled place where things will go well for you? <sup>2</sup>Now then — is not Boaz our relative, the one whose young women you have been working with? Listen: tonight he is winnowing barley at the threshing floor. <sup>3</sup>So bathe, put on perfumed oil, dress in your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup>When he lies

down, take note of the place where he is lying. Then go over, uncover the place of his feet, and lie down. He will tell you what to do." <sup>5</sup>Ruth said to her, "Everything you say, I will do." <sup>6</sup>She went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law had instructed her. <sup>7</sup>Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was content. He went to lie down at the edge of the grain pile. Then she came in secretly, uncovered the place of his feet, and lay down. <sup>8</sup>In the middle of the night, the man jolted awake and twisted around — and there was a woman lying at the place of his feet. <sup>9</sup>He said, "Who are you?" She answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread the corner of your garment over your servant, for you are a kinsman-redeemer." <sup>10</sup>He said, "May the LORD bless you, my daughter. Your later act of faithful love is greater than the first, because you did not go after the young men, whether poor or rich. <sup>11</sup>Now, my daughter, do not be afraid. Everything you ask, I will do for you, for everyone at the gate of my people knows that you are a woman of strength. <sup>12</sup>Now it is true that I am a kinsman-redeemer, but there is also a kinsman-redeemer closer in kinship than I am. <sup>13</sup>Stay the night. In the morning, if he will redeem you — good, let him redeem. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then I myself will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning." <sup>14</sup>She lay at the place of his feet until morning, then got up before anyone could recognize another person. He said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor." <sup>15</sup>Then he said, "Hold out the shawl you are wearing and grip it." She held it out, and he measured six measures of barley and set it on her. Then he went into the city. <sup>16</sup>When she came to her mother-in-law, Naomi said, "How did it go, my daughter?" Ruth told her everything the man had done for her. <sup>17</sup>She said, "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said, 'You must not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" <sup>18</sup>Naomi said, "Wait here, my daughter, until you learn how the matter settles, for the man will not rest until he has resolved this today."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Naomi uses the word *manoach* ('resting place, security'), a form closely related to *menuchah* from 1:9 where she wished each daughter-in-law 'rest in the home of a husband.' The root *nun-vav-chet* ('to rest, to settle') carries the sense of being safely placed — not idleness but stability. By returning to this theme, Naomi signals that what she wished for Ruth in chapter 1 she now intends to pursue actively.
1. The phrase *asher yitav lakh* ('where it will go well for you') echoes Deuteronomy's formula for life in the promised land (Deuteronomy 4:40, 5:16). Naomi is not merely playing matchmaker — she is seeking for Ruth the covenantal blessing of being well-settled.
2. The particle *hinneh* ('look, listen') — rendered here as 'Listen' — marks a shift from general observation to specific intelligence. Naomi has been watching and knows Boaz's schedule. The threshing floor (*goren*) was an open-air elevated platform where grain was tossed into the wind to separate wheat from chaff. During harvest, owners slept at the threshing floor to guard the grain — making Boaz both accessible and alone at night.
2. The term *moda'tanu* ('our relative, our acquaintance') uses a softer kinship word than *go'el*. Naomi identifies Boaz as family without yet naming the legal claim she intends to invoke. The possessive 'our' (first person plural) is significant — Naomi includes herself in the family connection, reminding Ruth that this is not a stranger but their own kin.
3. Naomi's instructions form a precise sequence of preparation: *rachats* ('bathe'), *sakht* ('anoint with oil'), and *samt simlotayikh* ('put on your garments'). The anointing with oil (*sakht*) was both cosmetic and ceremonial — it could signal the end of mourning (2 Samuel 12:20, 14:2). If Ruth has been in widow's garments, this preparation marks a transition: she is presenting herself not as a mourner but as a woman available for marriage.
3. The instruction *al tivvade'i la-ish* ('do not make yourself known to the man') uses the reflexive of *yada* ('to know'). The verb *yada* carries sexual connotations elsewhere (Genesis 4:1), but here the straightforward sense is simply 'do not reveal your identity' — remain unnoticed until the right moment. The double register of the verb, however, is part of the chapter's sustained ambiguity.
3. The Ketiv/Qere notation in the WLC for *simlotayikh* ('your garments') reflects a minor textual variant in the consonantal tradition, though both forms yield the same meaning.
4. This verse is the crux of the chapter's deliberate ambiguity. Three loaded terms appear together: *shakav* ('to lie down'), *galah* ('to uncover'), and *margelot* ('the place of the feet'). Each carries both an ordinary sense and a sexual connotation. The verb *shakav* means simply 'to lie down' but is also the standard euphemism for sexual intercourse (Genesis 19:32-35, 2 Samuel 11:4). The verb *galah* ('to uncover') is the verb of sexual exposure in Leviticus 18. And *margelot* ('the place of the feet/legs') may be a euphemism for the genital area, as 'feet' (*raglayim*) is used elsewhere (Judges 3:24, Isaiah 7:20). The narrator deploys all three without resolving the ambiguity.
4. The Ketiv reads *veshakhavti* ('and you shall lie down' — second person), while the Qere reads *veshakhavti* ('and I shall lie down' — first person). The Ketiv is the expected form for Naomi's instruction to Ruth. The Qere with the first-person form is difficult — some scholars suggest it reflects Naomi momentarily identifying with Ruth's action.
4. Naomi's closing instruction — *vehu yaggid lakh et asher ta'asin* ('he will tell you what to do') — places the initiative with Boaz after Ruth's approach. Naomi's plan gets Ruth to the threshing floor; what happens next is Boaz's decision.

5. Ruth's response — kol asher tomeri e'eseh ('everything you say I will do') — echoes Israel's covenant formula at Sinai: kol asher dibber YHWH na'aseh ('everything the LORD has spoken we will do,' Exodus 19:8). Whether the echo is deliberate or simply reflects conventional Hebrew agreement language, the effect is the same: Ruth commits to Naomi's plan with the totality of covenant obedience.
5. The Ketiv reads elai ('to me') while the Qere reads elayikh ('to you'). The Qere makes better contextual sense — 'everything you say to me' — while the Ketiv as written ('everything you say to you') appears to be a scribal anomaly.
6. The verb yarad ('to go down') is geographically accurate — threshing floors were typically on elevated ground outside the village, but Bethlehem sits on a ridge and the floor would have been below the town. The narrative restraint here is notable: the text simply says vatta'as kekhol asher tsivvattah chamotah ('she did according to all that her mother-in-law commanded her') without narrating the bathing, anointing, or dressing. The reader must supply what the narrator compresses.
7. The phrase vayyitav libbo ('his heart was good') indicates satisfaction and contentment after the harvest meal — the same phrase is used of Boaz's ancestor Judah's heart being 'good with wine' in other harvest contexts. It does not necessarily imply drunkenness, though some interpreters read it that way. We rendered it 'content' to capture the sense of post-meal satisfaction without importing intoxication.
7. Ruth comes balat ('in secret, stealthily, quietly'). The word appears only here and in Judges 4:21 (where Jael approaches Sisera secretly) and 1 Samuel 18:22 and 24:4. The parallel with Jael is striking — another woman approaching a sleeping man — though with radically different intent.
7. The narrator now executes Naomi's instructions in compressed form: vattegal margelotav vattishkav ('she uncovered the place of his feet and lay down'). The same ambiguous vocabulary from verse 4 reappears without further explanation. The narrator refuses to clarify what the reader most wants to know.
8. The opening vayyehi bachatsi ha-laylah ('and it was at the middle of the night') uses the narrative formula vayyehi to mark a dramatic turning point. Midnight is the hour of crisis throughout the Hebrew Bible — it is when the LORD strikes Egypt's firstborn (Exodus 12:29) and when Samson carries off Gaza's gates (Judges 16:3).
8. The verb yecharad ('he trembled, he was startled') indicates a visceral, physical reaction — not mere surprise but a shudder of alarm. The verb yillafet ('he turned, he twisted, he bent forward') is rare, appearing only here. Its exact meaning is debated: some derive it from lafat ('to twist, to grasp') suggesting he reached forward; others connect it to a root meaning 'to turn over.' We chose 'twisted around' to convey both the physical movement and the disorientation.
8. The particle hinneh ('and there') — rendered naturally as part of the sentence — marks Boaz's moment of discovery. The narrator briefly adopts Boaz's perspective: he sees what he sees — ishah shokhevet margelotav ('a woman lying at the place of his feet') — before he knows who she is.
9. Ruth identifies herself — anokhi Rut amatekha ('I am Ruth, your maidservant') — using the formal first-person pronoun anokhi rather than the common ani, and the term amah ('maidservant') rather than the lower-status shifchah. The choice of amah signals that Ruth sees herself as eligible for marriage, not merely as a servant — amah is the term used for women who may become wives (Exodus 21:7-11).
9. The verb ufarasta ('spread out') with kenafekha ('your wing/garment corner') directly echoes Boaz's blessing in 2:12: tachat kenafav ('under His wings'). Ruth takes Boaz's theological language and turns it into a concrete request. The effect is both bold and theologically precise: if God shelters under His wings, and Boaz is God's agent of redemption, then Boaz's garment-wing should cover Ruth.
9. Ruth grounds her request in law: ki go'el attah ('for you are a kinsman-redeemer'). The go'el is the kinsman obligated to restore what a family member has lost — property, freedom, or family line. Ruth names the legal basis for what she is asking, transforming a nocturnal encounter into a formal legal claim.
10. Boaz's first words are a blessing — berukhah att la-YHWH ('blessed are you by the LORD') — the same formula used for covenant blessings throughout the Hebrew Bible. His immediate response to Ruth's nighttime approach is not suspicion or exploitation but benediction.
10. The phrase hetavt chasdekha ha-acharon min ha-rishon ('you have made your later chesed greater than the first') is the theological pivot of the chapter. Boaz identifies two distinct acts of chesed: the rishon ('first') — Ruth's loyalty to Naomi in chapter 1 — and the acharon ('later') — her choice to seek a go'el rather than a young husband. The comparative min ('greater than') does not diminish the first act but elevates the second: choosing covenantal obligation over personal preference is the deeper loyalty.
10. The phrase levilti lekhet acharei ha-bachurim ('not going after the young men') implies that Ruth had other options. As a young woman of evident character (her reputation precedes her, 2:11), she could have attracted younger suitors. By coming to Boaz — older, established, but legally positioned as go'el — she chose family redemption over romantic possibility.
11. Boaz's promise — kol asher tomeri e'eseh lakh ('everything you say I will do for you') — mirrors Ruth's identical commitment to Naomi in verse 5. The symmetry is deliberate: Ruth pledged total obedience to Naomi's plan; Boaz now pledges total commitment to Ruth's request. The echo binds the three characters in a chain of loyalty.
11. The phrase eshet chayil ('woman of strength, woman of valor') is the same term used in Proverbs 31:10 for the ideal woman: 'an eshet chayil, who can find?' The word chayil means 'strength, capability, worth, valor' — it is used of warriors (gibbor chayil, 'mighty warrior') and of wealth (ish chayil, 'man of substance'). Applied to Ruth, it encompasses all of these: she is strong, capable, worthy, and courageous. We chose 'woman of strength' to preserve the term's primary force without narrowing it to domesticity.

11. The phrase *kol sha'ar ammi* ('all the gate of my people') refers to the city gate where legal and commercial business was conducted. That 'the whole gate' knows Ruth's reputation means her character is a matter of public record — not private opinion but communal recognition.
12. Boaz confirms Ruth's legal claim — *ki omnām ki go'el anokhi* ('for indeed, I am a kinsman-redeemer') — using the emphatic particle *omnām* ('truly, indeed'). He does not deny the obligation but immediately introduces a complication: *vegām yesh go'el qarov mimmenni* ('and also there is a kinsman-redeemer closer than I'). The closer *go'el* has prior legal right — the obligation falls on the nearest kinsman first. Boaz cannot act until this closer relative either accepts or declines the responsibility.
12. The Ketiv/Qere here reflects a textual difficulty: the Ketiv appears to have the conditional *im* ('if') before *go'el*, while the Qere smooths the reading. The sense in either case is Boaz's acknowledgment that a closer kinsman exists.
13. The verse is saturated with the root *ga'al* ('to redeem'): *yig'alekh* ('he will redeem you'), *yig'al* ('let him redeem'), *lego'alekh* ('to redeem you'), *uge'altikh* ('I will redeem you'). Four occurrences in a single verse hammer the legal term into the listener's consciousness. Redemption is not abstract theology here — it is a concrete legal act that one specific person will perform for one specific woman.
13. Boaz's oath — *chai YHWH* ('as the LORD lives') — is the most solemn form of oath in the Hebrew Bible, invoking God's own life as guarantee. This is not a casual promise. By swearing by the life of the LORD, Boaz binds himself irrevocably: if the closer kinsman declines, Boaz will act.
13. The instruction *lini ha-laylah* ('stay the night') followed by *shikhvi ad ha-boqer* ('lie down until morning') frames the rest of the night as a period of protected waiting. Boaz has committed to resolution at dawn. The same verb *shakav* ('lie down') that carried ambiguity earlier now carries the straightforward sense of 'rest until daylight.'
14. The phrase *beterem yakkir ish et re'ehu* ('before a man could recognize his neighbor') indicates the predawn darkness — the time between first stirring and actual visibility. Ruth leaves in the window when people are moving but cannot yet see clearly. The timing is protective: it shields both Ruth's reputation and Boaz's legal position.
14. Boaz's instruction — *al yivvada ki va'ah ha-ishah ha-goren* ('let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor') — uses the passive of *yada* ('to know, to be known'). His concern is for public perception: the legal transaction must be settled properly at the gate before any rumors circulate. The definite article on *ha-ishah* ('the woman') rather than Ruth's name may reflect Boaz speaking in general terms to anyone who might overhear — or it may simply be Hebrew narrative style.
15. The *mitpachat* ('shawl, cloak, wrap') is a large cloth garment that could serve as a carrying vessel when gathered. The word appears only here and in Isaiah 3:22 among items of women's clothing. Boaz's gift of *shesh se'orim* ('six barleys') is deliberately vague about the unit of measure — the text says 'six of barley' without specifying whether these are sheahs, ephahs, or another measure. Six sheahs would be roughly 60-90 pounds — an enormous load. Some interpreters suggest a smaller unit. The ambiguity may be intentional: the point is generosity, not arithmetic.
15. The final clause *vayyavo ha-ir* ('and he went into the city') has a Ketiv/Qere issue in some traditions — the subject may be 'he' (Boaz) or 'she' (Ruth). The Masoretic vocalization as *vayyavo* ('and he went,' masculine) gives the action to Boaz, who would be heading to the gate to begin legal proceedings. Some ancient versions read 'she went into the city,' giving Ruth the action of returning to Naomi. We follow the Masoretic reading.
16. Naomi's question — *mi att bitti* ('who are you, my daughter?') — is puzzling if taken literally, since she would recognize Ruth. The question likely means 'what is your status now?' or 'how do things stand?' — essentially, 'are you betrothed or not?' We rendered it as 'How did it go?' to capture this pragmatic sense rather than forcing the literal 'Who are you?' which would imply Naomi cannot see Ruth in the dark. Some interpreters do take it literally as a predawn darkness question; the ambiguity is acknowledged.
16. Ruth's report — *et kol asher asah lah ha-ish* ('everything the man had done for her') — uses the preposition *lah* ('for her') rather than *immah* ('with her'). The distinction matters: the man acted for her benefit. The narrator's summary is deliberately opaque about the details, leaving the reader dependent on what has already been narrated.
17. Boaz's instruction — *al tavo'i reqam el chamotekh* ('do not go to your mother-in-law empty') — uses the word *reqam* ('empty, empty-handed'), the same word Naomi used of herself in 1:21: *reqam heshivani YHWH* ('the LORD brought me back empty'). Boaz's gift directly addresses Naomi's emptiness. The barley is not merely provision but a reversal of the condition Naomi named as her defining grief.
17. The Ketiv reads *elai* ('to me') while the Qere reads *elayikh* ('to you'), a variant also seen in verse 5. The Qere ('he said to you') would make Boaz address Ruth directly; the Ketiv ('he said to me') has Ruth quoting Boaz's words to herself. Either reading yields the same practical meaning.
18. Naomi's instruction — *shevi bitti* ('sit, my daughter') — uses the imperative of *yashav* ('to sit, to dwell, to remain'). After a night of action, the instruction is to be still and wait. The phrase *eikh yippol davar* ('how the matter will fall') uses the verb *nafal* ('to fall') in its sense of 'to turn out, to be decided' — the same verb used for the fall of lots (Esther 3:7, Jonah 1:7). The outcome is now in process and will land where it lands.
18. Naomi's confidence — *ki lo yishqot ha-ish ki im killah ha-davar ha-yom* ('the man will not rest until he has finished the matter today') — reveals her reading of Boaz's character. The verb *shaqat* ('to rest, to be quiet, to be at ease') echoes the chapter's opening theme of *manoach* ('rest, security'). Ironically, Boaz will not have rest until he secures Ruth's rest. The chapter ends with Naomi trusting Boaz's urgency — the resolution will come in chapter 4.

## 4

**Summary:** *Boaz goes to the town gate to settle the matter of redeeming Elimelech's land and Ruth's future. A closer kinsman-redeemer has first right but declines when he learns the obligation includes marrying Ruth the Moabite. Boaz acquires the land and Ruth before witnesses. Ruth bears a son, Obed, whom the women of Bethlehem declare to be Naomi's kinsman-redeemer. The book closes with a genealogy tracing the line from Perez through Boaz and Obed to David.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The entire legal drama of verses 1-12 turns on a single Hebrew word: go'el, the kinsman-redeemer. The unnamed closer relative is willing to redeem the land but not to take on Ruth — the Moabite element is the deal-breaker. Boaz accepts both, and the text frames this as the greater act of faithfulness. The sandal ceremony in verses 7-8 preserves an ancient legal custom that the narrator must explain to his own audience, indicating the story's antiquity. Most striking is the ending: the women of Bethlehem declare the newborn child — not Boaz — to be Naomi's go'el, her redeemer. The infant restores what death took. Then the genealogy delivers its quiet earthquake: this child of a Moabite widow is the grandfather of King David.*

**Translation Friction:** *We rendered go'el as 'kinsman-redeemer' throughout rather than simplifying to 'redeemer' because the kinship obligation is inseparable from the legal function — a go'el must be a relative. The verb ga'al ('to redeem') and the noun go'el share the same root, and we preserved this connection in English where possible. The phrase peloni almoni in verse 1 (the unnamed kinsman) is a Hebrew idiom roughly equivalent to 'so-and-so' — we rendered it 'a certain man' with a translator note. The sandal custom in verse 7 required careful handling: the Hebrew teudah ('attestation, confirmation') indicates a legal validation ritual, not a casual exchange.*

**Connections:** *The gate scene connects to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, where levirate marriage and the sandal ritual are legislated. Boaz's declaration in verse 10 — 'to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance' — echoes that Deuteronomic mandate precisely. The women's blessing in verse 11 invokes Rachel and Leah, the mothers of all Israel, placing Ruth alongside them. The Perez genealogy in verses 18-22 reaches back to Genesis 38 — another story of a woman (Tamar) who used unconventional means to secure offspring within the family line. Ruth and Tamar are literary sisters: foreign or marginalized women whose bold action preserves the covenant line that leads to David.*

<sup>1</sup>Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and was sitting there. And look — the kinsman-redeemer Boaz had spoken about came passing by. Boaz said, "Come over here and sit down, friend." So the man turned aside and sat down. <sup>2</sup>He gathered ten men from the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." They sat down. <sup>3</sup>He said to the kinsman-redeemer, "The parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech — Naomi, who has returned from the territory of Moab, is selling it. <sup>4</sup>So I decided to bring it to your attention: Acquire it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not redeem it, tell me so I will know, because there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I am next after you." He said, "I will redeem it." <sup>5</sup>Then Boaz said, "On the day you acquire the field from Naomi's hand, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the dead man upon his inheritance." <sup>6</sup>The kinsman-redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself — I would ruin my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, because I cannot redeem it." <sup>7</sup>Now this was the custom in former times in Israel regarding redemption and exchange: to confirm any matter, a man would remove his sandal and give it to the other party. This was the method of legal attestation in Israel. <sup>8</sup>The kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself." And he removed his sandal. <sup>9</sup>Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have acquired everything that belonged to Elimelech and everything that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon from Naomi's hand. <sup>10</sup>And I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, in order to raise up the name of the dead man upon his inheritance, so that the name of the dead will not be cut off from among his relatives or from the gate of his town. You are witnesses today." <sup>11</sup>All the people at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman entering your house like Rachel and like Leah, who together built the house of Israel. May you prosper in Ephrathah and gain renown in Bethlehem. <sup>12</sup>May

your house become like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring that the LORD will give you from this young woman." <sup>13</sup>So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. He slept with her, and the LORD granted her conception, and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup>The women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer today. May his name be proclaimed in Israel. <sup>15</sup>He will be a restorer of your life and a sustainer in your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you has borne him — she who is better to you than seven sons." <sup>16</sup>Naomi took the child and held him on her lap and became his guardian. <sup>17</sup>The neighbor women 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. <sup>18</sup>These are the descendants of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, <sup>19</sup>Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, <sup>20</sup>Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmah, <sup>21</sup>Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, <sup>22</sup>Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *vayyehi* is implied in the narrative sequence — the scene opens with Boaz already positioned at the gate (*ha-sha'ar*), the public space where legal transactions and judicial decisions were conducted. This is Israel's courtroom.
1. The phrase *peloni almoni* is a Hebrew idiom for an unnamed person — roughly 'so-and-so' or 'Mr. What's-his-name.' The narrator's refusal to name this man is deliberate: the one who refuses the redemption obligation forfeits his name in the story. We rendered it as 'friend' in Boaz's speech because *peloni almoni* is the narrator's descriptor, while Boaz would have used the man's actual name. The idiom signals to the reader that this man's identity does not matter — his refusal to redeem will erase him from the record.
1. The verb *sur* ('to turn aside') indicates the kinsman was walking past — Boaz catches him in transit. The timing is presented as providential: the exact person Boaz needs appears at the exact moment Boaz is ready.
2. The ten elders (*asarah anashim mi-ziqnei ha-ir*) function as both witnesses and judicial authority. Ten became the standard quorum for legal proceedings — later Jewish tradition formalized this as the *minyán*. Boaz is not acting impulsively; he has assembled a court. The verb *vayyiqqach* ('he took, he gathered') suggests purposeful selection, not a random group of bystanders.
3. The phrase *chelqat ha-sadeh* ('the parcel of the field') indicates a specific plot of ancestral land. Under Israelite land law (Leviticus 25:23-28), land could not be permanently sold outside the family — it must be redeemed by a kinsman. The verb *makhrah* ('she is selling' or 'she has sold') is ambiguous in form — it could be a perfect ('she sold') or a participial sense ('she is selling'). We read it as an ongoing offer: Naomi is making the land available for redemption.
3. Boaz calls *Elimelech achinu* ('our brother/relative'), establishing the kinship network that activates the *go'el* obligation. This is not biological brotherhood but clan membership — the shared family identity that triggers the legal duty.
4. The phrase *egleh oznekha* ('I will uncover your ear') is a Hebrew idiom meaning 'to inform, to bring to your attention' — literally 'to expose the ear.' The same idiom is used of God's revelation to Samuel (1 Samuel 9:15). Boaz is formally disclosing the situation in a legal setting.
4. The verb *ga'al* ('to redeem') appears four times in this verse, creating an emphatic legal refrain: *im-tig'al ge'al... ve-im lo yig'al... ligeol* ('if you will redeem, redeem... if not redeem... to redeem'). The repetition hammers the legal question: will the obligation be fulfilled? The closer kinsman answers *anokhi eg'al* ('I myself will redeem') — but he does not yet know the full terms.
4. Boaz's statement *ve-anokhi achareiykha* ('and I am after you') establishes his legal position as second in line. This is not rivalry but proper legal procedure — the closer relative has priority.
5. Boaz now reveals the full scope of the obligation. The verb *qanah* ('to acquire, to buy') applies to both the field and to Ruth — the legal transaction is indivisible. The phrase *me'et Rut ha-Mo'aviyah eshet ha-met* ('from Ruth the Moabite, wife of the dead man') keeps Ruth's ethnic identity front and center. She is not just a widow; she is a Moabite widow. This is the detail that will change the kinsman's calculation.
5. The purpose clause *lehakim shem ha-met al nachalato* ('to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance') invokes the levirate principle of Deuteronomy 25:5-6. The firstborn son of this union would legally be counted as Mahlon's heir, not the redeemer's. This means the kinsman would spend his own resources to produce an heir for another man's line — a costly obligation that the closer relative is unwilling to bear.
6. The verb *shachat* ('to ruin, to destroy, to corrupt') is strong language — the kinsman sees marrying Ruth not as inconvenience but as destruction of his inheritance. The *ga'al* root appears three more times in this verse: *ligeol li... ge'ulati... ligeol* ('to redeem for myself... my redemption right... to redeem'). The unnamed man hands off his *ge'ullah* (redemption right) to Boaz, and with it exits the story permanently.
6. The phrase *ge'al lekha attah et ge'ullati* ('redeem for yourself my redemption right') transfers the legal obligation. This is the pivot point of the entire book — the closer kinsman steps aside, and Boaz steps forward.
7. The narrator pauses to explain the *sandal* custom to his audience — the phrase *vezot lefanim be-Yisra'el* ('and this was formerly in Israel') indicates that the practice had already fallen out of use by the time the book was composed. This editorial aside is strong evidence that the story's setting is considerably older than its composition date.

7. The noun *teudah* ('attestation, testimony, confirmation') indicates a formal legal validation — the sandal functions as what we would call a notarized signature or a sealed contract. The verb *shalaf* ('to draw out, to pull off') is the same verb used for drawing a sword from its sheath (Judges 3:22), suggesting a decisive, formal gesture — not a casual shoe-removal.
7. The pairing of *ge'ullah* ('redemption') and *temurah* ('exchange') covers both types of transactions at stake: the redemption of Elimelech's land and the exchange of the kinsman's obligation to Boaz. Deuteronomy 25:9 describes a different sandal ceremony — there the rejected widow removes the man's sandal in disgrace. Here the transfer is voluntary and orderly, suggesting a distinct legal tradition.
8. The brevity is striking: *qeneh lakh* ('acquire for yourself') followed by *vayyishlof na'alo* ('and he pulled off his sandal'). Two short clauses — and with them, the entire legal transfer is complete. The closer kinsman disappears from the narrative. He is never named, never seen again. His refusal to redeem Ruth means he has no legacy in this story. The man who feared ruining his inheritance has in fact lost the only inheritance that would have mattered — a place in the line of David.
9. Boaz's declaration *edim attem ha-yom* ('you are witnesses today') transforms the gathered crowd into legal attestors. The threefold *ki qaniti* ('that I have acquired') — covering Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon — is comprehensive. Boaz takes on the entire family's legacy, not just a portion. The phrase *mi-yad No'omi* ('from Naomi's hand') establishes Naomi as the legal holder of the family property, confirming her standing despite her widowhood.
10. The phrase *velo yikkaret shem ha-met* ('and the name of the dead will not be cut off') uses the verb *karat* ('to cut, to cut off') — the same verb used for being 'cut off' from the covenant people as divine punishment. To have one's name cut off from 'the gate of his place' (*mi-sha'ar meqomo*) means to lose all legal and social existence in the community. Boaz's act prevents this covenantal erasure.
10. Boaz repeats *edim attem ha-yom* ('you are witnesses today') to close the declaration, creating an *inclusio* with verse 9. The entire speech is framed as witnessed legal testimony. The public nature is essential — redemption is not a private deal but a community event.
11. The blessing invokes Rachel and Leah — *asher banu sheteihem et beit Yisra'el* ('who, the two of them, built the house of Israel'). The verb *banah* ('to build') applied to a household through children is standard Hebrew idiom (compare Genesis 16:2, 30:3). But the comparison is stunning: Ruth the Moabite is placed alongside the matriarchs of all Israel. The community's blessing overwrites her foreign status — she is no longer 'Ruth the Moabite' in their eyes but a potential mother of Israel.
11. The phrase *aseh chayil be-Efratah* ('do valiantly in Ephrathah' or 'prosper in Ephrathah') uses *chayil* — the same word used to describe Ruth in 3:11 (*eshet chayil*, 'woman of strength/valor') and Boaz in 2:1 (*gibbor chayil*, 'man of standing/wealth'). The wordplay ties them together: they are matched in *chayil*.
11. The parallel *uqera shem be-Beit Lachem* ('and call out a name in Bethlehem') — to have a name proclaimed in Bethlehem — is precisely what Boaz sought for Mahlon's legacy. The blessing asks that Boaz's own name be established as well. History will grant this request beyond anything the speakers imagined.
12. The invocation of Perez (Peretz, 'breach, breaking forth') whom Tamar bore to Judah is not random — it is a precise intertextual connection. Tamar, like Ruth, was a woman outside the family who used unconventional means to secure offspring within the covenant line (Genesis 38). Tamar was Canaanite (or at minimum, non-Israelite); Ruth is Moabite. Both were widows of men in Judah's line. Both took bold, sexually risky action to compel a kinsman to fulfill his obligation. The people of Bethlehem, by invoking Tamar, are saying: we have seen this pattern before — God works through foreign women who refuse to let the family line die.
12. The phrase *min ha-zera asher yitten YHWH lekha* ('from the seed which the LORD will give you') places conception under divine sovereignty. The child is not merely biological but a gift of God — the same language used for Isaac (Genesis 21:1-2). The closing genealogy (vv. 18-22) will trace the line from Perez through Boaz to David, fulfilling this blessing beyond what the speakers could foresee.
13. The verb *vayyavo eleiha* ('and he came to her') is the standard Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse. The narrator then inserts divine agency: *vayyitten YHWH lah herayon* ('and the LORD gave her conception'). This is theologically deliberate — Ruth had been married to Mahlon for ten years without producing a child (1:4). The text implies that her previous childlessness was not biological inability but divine timing. God's gift of conception at this moment, with this man, in this place, is presented as purposeful. The child who will come is not an accident of fertility but a sovereign act.
13. The entire journey from chapter 1 to this moment collapses into a single verse: marriage, consummation, conception, birth. After the slow, detailed legal proceedings of verses 1-12, the narrator accelerates radically. The legal process matters; the private details do not.
14. The phrase *asher lo hishbit lakh go'el ha-yom* ('who has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer today') uses the verb *shavat* (hiphil: 'to cause to cease, to leave without'). God is credited with ensuring the *go'el* line did not fail. The women's theology is precise: the LORD is the one behind the human actors.
14. The identity of the *go'el* in this verse is debated — some read it as Boaz, others as the child. The immediate context (the women speak to Naomi about the birth, and verse 15 calls the child the 'restorer of your life') strongly favors the child. This reinterpretation of *go'el* — from legal redeemer to infant restorer — is one of the book's most profound theological moves.
15. The phrase *meshiv nefesh* ('restorer of life/soul') uses *nefesh* in its fullest sense — not merely physical life but vitality, identity, being. The child restores Naomi's *nefesh* — the self that was emptied in chapter 1. The parallel *ulkhalkel et sevitekh* ('and to sustain your old age') adds the practical dimension: this child will provide for Naomi when she can no longer provide for herself.

- 15.** The climactic declaration — *asher hi tovah lakh mi-shiv'ah vanim* ('she who is better to you than seven sons') — is the most extraordinary tribute to Ruth in the book. Seven is the number of completeness in Hebrew thought; seven sons is the ideal family (compare 1 Samuel 2:5, Job 1:2). To say a Moabite daughter-in-law surpasses seven sons overturns every ancient Near Eastern assumption about the value of male heirs versus female foreigners. The verb *ahavah* ('she loves you') is the women's summary of Ruth's entire journey: everything Ruth has done — the oath in chapter 1, the gleaning in chapter 2, the threshing floor in chapter 3 — is love.
- 16.** The verb *vatteshitehu vecheiqah* ('she placed him on her lap/bosom') is a gesture of adoption or legal acceptance — the same action by which a patriarch acknowledged a grandchild (Genesis 50:23, 30:3). Naomi, who in 1:21 declared 'the LORD brought me back empty' (*reqam*), now holds a child in her arms. The word *omeneth* ('nurse, guardian, caretaker') comes from the root *aman* ('to be faithful, to support') — from which we get *amen*. Naomi is the one who will faithfully raise this child. The woman who called herself *Mara* ('Bitter') has been restored.
- 17.** The neighbor women (*ha-shekhenot*) name the child — an unusual act, as naming was typically the prerogative of the parents. Their declaration *yullad ben le-No'omi* ('a son has been born to Naomi') attributes the child to the grandmother, not to Ruth or Boaz. This is not erasure of Ruth but legal language: through the levirate-like arrangement, the child is counted as Naomi's grandson and Elimelech's heir. Naomi's family line is restored.
- 17.** The name *Oved* ('servant, one who serves, worshiper') from the root *avad* ('to serve, to work') anticipates a life of faithful service. But the narrator's editorial comment — *hu avi Yishai avi David* ('he is the father of Jesse, the father of David') — drops the genealogical thunderbolt almost casually. The entire story of a Moabite widow's loyalty and a Bethlehemite farmer's redemption has been building to this: the royal line of David passes through Ruth. A woman from the nation excluded in Deuteronomy 23:3 is David's great-grandmother.
- 18.** The *toledot* ('generations, descendants') formula — *ve-elleh toledot Peretz* — echoes the structuring device of Genesis (Genesis 2:4, 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, etc.). By opening with this formula, the narrator places Ruth's story within the grand genealogical architecture of the Torah. The line begins with *Perez*, the son of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38), connecting the blessing of verse 12 to this closing genealogy. The ten-generation list (*Perez to David*) may be selectively compressed — ten being a number of completeness — rather than exhaustive.
- 19.** The verb *holid* ('fathered, sired') is the *hiphil* of *yalad* ('to bear, to give birth') — the causative form indicating the father's role in producing offspring. *Ram* and *Amminadab* appear in the tribal genealogies of 1 Chronicles 2:9-10, confirming the Judahite lineage. *Amminadab* ('my kinsman is generous/noble') will be the father of *Nahshon*, the tribal leader of Judah during the wilderness period (Numbers 1:7).
- 20.** *Nahshon* (*Nachshon*) was the leader of the tribe of Judah during the wilderness wandering (Numbers 2:3, 7:12) and brother-in-law of Aaron (Exodus 6:23). His presence in this genealogy anchors the line in Israel's most formative period. The name *Salmah* (also spelled *Salmon*) appears in variant forms across the Hebrew manuscripts — the WLC reads *Salmah* here. He will be identified as *Boaz's* father in the next verse.
- 21.** The spelling shifts from *Salmah* (v. 20) to *Salmon* (*Salemon*) here — a minor textual variant within the WLC itself. More significant is what the genealogy omits: *Ruth's* name does not appear. In a patrilineal genealogy, mothers are invisible — yet the entire book exists to tell her story. The reader knows what the genealogical form cannot say: between 'Salmon fathered Boaz' and 'Boaz fathered Obed' stands a Moabite woman whose chesed and courage made the line possible. The genealogy is incomplete without the narrative that precedes it.
- 22.** The final two words — *et David* — are the destination the entire book has been traveling toward. The genealogy does not say 'King David' or 'David the king' — simply *David*. The name stands alone, unadorned, as though its weight is self-evident. And yet everything that preceded it — famine, death, a widow's oath on a Moabite road, gleaning behind harvesters, a midnight encounter on a threshing floor, a sandal removed at a city gate — all of it was the path to this name.
- 22.** The theological implications are staggering when read alongside Deuteronomy 23:3: 'No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD, even to the tenth generation.' Ruth is a Moabite. David is her great-grandson — the third generation. The genealogy does not resolve this tension; it simply presents it. Israel's greatest king, the man after God's own heart, the ancestor of the Messiah, carries Moabite blood. The book of Ruth does not argue against Deuteronomy 23 — it tells a story that explodes its categories from within. Covenant faithfulness, it turns out, is not limited by bloodline.
- 22.** The ten-generation structure (*Perez to David*) parallels other biblical genealogies and may be theologically shaped rather than exhaustively complete. Ten generations from *Perez* — the son born of Tamar's desperate faithfulness — to *David*, the king born of Ruth's desperate faithfulness. The symmetry suggests divine design operating through human loyalty across centuries.