

Ruth

Chapter 4

Boaz Marries Ruth

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down.² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so.³ Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech.⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.” “I will redeem it,” he said.⁵ Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.”⁶ At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, “Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.”⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)⁸ So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” And he removed his sandal.⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon.¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!”¹¹ Then the elders and all those at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

4:1-12 From scenes where women took the initiative (chapters 1–3), in 4:1–12 the story shifts about-face into a man’s world where only men are present and make decisions. From privacy, secrecy, and darkness (chapter 3), the focus shifts to broad daylight and public activity. For what had been a private matter must receive public settlement for validity in the community. Thus follows a legal process in legal language. (CC)

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

my friend. The other kinsman remains unnamed. (CSB)

The relative's name is not included in the story so as not to shame his family. (TLSB)

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

A quorum to judge and settle the case. Participants and even passersby could freely discuss the matter until a decision was reached, based on consensus and common sense (vv 9–12) (TLSB)

It may appear surprising that Boaz opened the negotiations, in precise legal terms, with mention of property (“the portion of the field,” 4:3). For the reader may have assumed from chapter 3 that the future of Ruth was the principle object to be settled (3:13). However, it must be recalled that Ruth, under instructions from Naomi (3:5–6), requested Boaz to be her redeemer (3:9). The only duty of redemption that would apply to this case was that of redeeming property, which would necessarily include the care of the widow (Naomi) of the deceased (Elimelech) who had been the owner of the property. (CC)

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

Or, “has sold.” The Hbr verb is in the perfect tense, a straightforward way of saying the land had already been sold. Wives could act in business matters. See also the covenant oath in Dt 29:10–13. Before leaving for Moab 11 years earlier, Elimelech sold the rights to the harvests on his land. This is why Naomi returned to Bethlehem penniless and dependent on Ruth's gleanings from a generous kinsman. Naomi is now asking that the redeemer purchase back the use of the land. (TLSB)

brother. Used in the broader sense of “relative.” (CSB)

4:4 With such direct speech, Boaz rebukes the man for his unfaithfulness to the Lord and His covenant when he did not purchase the rights 11 years ago to keep the land from being sold outside the family (2:20). Those assembled show no surprise at Boaz's direct words, because they understood the man's responsibility, which he had not fulfilled. Boaz announced his plans, contingent on those of the primary redeemer. (TLSB)

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

The day you buy the field. Israelites could not literally sell their inheritance; land could only be leased (Lv 25:23–28; Nu 36:7). They owned the harvests, not the land itself. *you also acquire Ruth.* Or, “I will also acquire Ruth.” In other words, “the day you redeem the land, I will marry Ruth as she and I agreed to earlier” (cf 3:10–13). The Hbr has historically presented some difficulty for translators. Since the primary redeemer was not a brother of Elimelech, there is no biblical basis for the primary redeemer to enter into a levirate marriage. Additionally, levirate marriages were pursued with Israelite widows, not with foreigners. Ruth was not yet considered an Israelite, as her marriage with Mahlon had not been in the land of Israel. Neither the primary redeemer nor townspeople knew Boaz and Ruth planned to marry (3:13). (TLSB)

4:6 When Boaz and Ruth had a son, the boy would perpetuate the name of his mother’s first husband and stand as heir to his property, though the boy would physically be the son of Boaz the redeemer. The primary redeemer’s family would ultimately lose the property rights to the boy. (TLSB)

Take my right of redemption. Technically, the transaction is not one of redemption, for no exchange of goods occurred. Rather, it is the transfer of the right of redemption. (TLSB)

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

4:7 *custom in former times.* Implies that the events were not familiar to the reader and that the writing occurred later. In earlier times, transfer of property occurred when the seller lifted up his foot from the property and placed the buyer’s foot on it. To “set foot” on the land was associated with ownership (Dt 1:36; 11:24; Jsh 1:3; 14:9). (TLSB)

one party took off his sandal. The process of renouncing one’s property rights and passing them to another was publicly attested by taking off a sandal and transferring it to the new owner (cf. Am 2:6; 8:6). The Nuzi documents (see chart on “Ancient Texts Relating to the OT”) refer to a similar custom. (CSB)

The custom had changed. A sandal was removed and handed to the other, which symbolized the legal transaction. (TLSB)

4:8 *drew off his sandal.* The primary redeemer gave Boaz the right to step onto the property. Such public symbolism was important testimony in a society that did not keep day-to-day legal records, as happened in later times. The primary redeemer publicly renounced his claim on the harvests from the land. (TLSB)

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

The 10 elders could testify later, in case a dispute arose. The transaction, witnessed by all, was the equivalent of a notary or a judge's ruling. (TLSB)

4:10 *bought*. Or, "acquired." Boaz had assumed the right of redemption. Secondly, in marrying Ruth, he would acquire the responsibility to raise up an heir. This placed Boaz at a financial disadvantage, but it secured the future for Ruth and Naomi. Boaz would benefit from the harvests until either the Year of Jubilee, when all land was returned to the original owners (Lv 25:8–13), or until an heir was born from Ruth's womb. The field was large enough to provide sustenance in normal (not famine) conditions. (TLSB)

name of the dead. See Dt 25:6. (CSB)

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

The elders regarded Ruth legally as an Israelite. Rachel and Leah were Arameans (Gn 30:14–15; 31:19–20). (TLSB)

Ephrathah. See note on 1:2. (CSB)

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

Probably a Canaanite (Gn 38:2, 6, 14–18, 26). These foreign women gave birth to the descendants of Israel, and Judah in particular. (TLSB)

young woman. She was of childbearing years. The drama comes full circle with words Boaz first used to describe Ruth (2:5). The man who inquired earlier about this young woman would take her home as his wife. (TLSB)

4:1–12 Boaz acts boldly on behalf of Naomi and Ruth to secure their future and family inheritance. Today, God calls us to act with wisdom on behalf of the helpless, to perpetuate their life and share with them the inheritance of eternal life in His name. Jesus bears witness that He has and will act as the Redeemer of us all. • Jesus, my inheritance is rich from You! Give me a bold heart to share what I have received from Your Word and blessings. Amen. (TLSB)

The Genealogy of David

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son.” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸ This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ²¹ Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, ²² Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

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

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

Boaz consummates his marriage to Ruth: “Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went to her” (4:13). The marriage itself fulfills the immediate goals of Naomi and Ruth, as well as Boaz’s praise of and promise to Ruth (2:11; 3:10, 11, 13). Earlier she had come to believe in the God of Israel (1:16–17) and Boaz had welcomed her de facto into his extended family (2:8–16). Now, through marriage to a clan elder, Ruth has become de jure a fully acknowledged Israelite and thus eligible to provide an heir for an Israelite family. Significant too is that only now Boaz “went to her.” Their sexual intercourse took place only now, after marriage, dispelling any suspicion that it may have occurred during their nocturnal encounter at the threshing-floor (3:6–15). Thus Boaz remained “an honorable gentleman” (2:1) and Ruth “an honorable woman” (3:11). (CC)

became his wife. In light of the culture, it is reasonable to assume Boaz was a family man, and so Ruth would become his second wife. (TLSB)

conception. The Lord creates us in our mothers’ wombs (Ps 139:13) as full human beings from the moment of conception. (TLSB)

4:14–15 Some scholars regard these verses as poetry. Naomi, who once felt shame (1:19–21), is now exalted at the birth of her grandson. (TLSB)

4:14 *women.* They wished to bless Naomi and Ruth, asking that Ruth’s son become famous in all Israel. (TLSB)

Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you. The faithfulness of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi to the Lord’s covenant brought the praise of the villagers. (TLSB)

kinsman-redeemer. The child Obed, as v. 15 makes clear. (CSB)

May he become famous. This same wish is expressed concerning Boaz in v. 11. (CSB)

4:15 *better to you than seven sons.* See 1Sa 1:8. Since seven was considered a number of completeness, to have seven sons was the epitome of all family blessings in Israel (see 1Sa 2:5; Job 1:2; 42:13). Ruth's selfless devotion to Naomi receives its climactic acknowledgment. (CSB)

Ruth's faithfulness multiplies blessings for others. Regarding Ruth, Naomi might say, "The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love" (Ps 147:11). (TLSB)

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

Naomi did not serve as a wet nurse to the child but cared for him as a grandmother. (TLSB)

4:17 *Naomi has a son.* Through Ruth, aged Naomi, who can no longer bear children, obtains an heir in place of Mahlon. (CSB)

women ... gave him a name. This passage and 1Sm 1:20 suggest that women gave children their names (cf Lk 1:57–63). (TLSB)

Obed. The name means "servant," in its full form possibly "servant of the LORD."

"One who serves." He was going to care for the earthly needs of his mother and grandmother. (TLSB)

the father of Jesse, the father of David. Obed is the grandfather of King David. There is the nuance in Obed's name that he is also the servant of Yahweh. Ruth and Obed are ancestors of King David and of Christ Jesus. (TLSB)

4:13–17 The Lord blesses Boaz and Ruth with marriage and with a child; Naomi's friends celebrate His merciful redemption. As the Lord blesses you, let others know of His kindness so that they may celebrate with you. He restores your life and guarantees your future through the blessings of His beloved Son. • Bless me, O Lord, that I may not fail to bless Your name before others and lead them in celebration of Your bountiful goodness. Amen. (TLSB)

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

This genealogy is not complete, nor was it meant to be. See p 9. Two other 10-generation lists are found in Genesis: Adam to Noah (5:1–29) and Shem to Abraham (11:10–26). Both lists end with a new beginning and hope. (TLSB)

4:20 *Nahshon*. Brother-in-law of Aaron. Emerged as a tribal leader in Israel, helping Moses conduct the census of Israel in the wilderness. When Israel dedicated the temple, Nahshon was the first leader to do so (Nu 7:12, 17). (TLSB)

4:21 Boaz is the seventh ancestor named. Ancient genealogies reserved the seventh spot as a place of special honor and importance. (TLSB)

4:18–22 The Book of Ruth ends with a summary of the genealogy of King David. The drama of God's mercy has come full circle. Those seemingly abandoned by God now see His mighty arm of covenant blessing reaching out to them. • Lord God, Your faithfulness and covenant to us were seen when You did not spare Your Son, Jesus, for the forgiveness of our sins. May Your Spirit work in our hearts a desire for faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the new covenant He made for us in the Sacrament of the Altar, wherein we receive Jesus' body and blood for forgiveness and peace. Amen. (TLSB)