

Closer Than You Think

Ruth 2:17-23

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I. Went to Work vs. 17-18a

- a. Gleaned
 - i. Until Evening
 - 1. Gleaned - The Hebrew verb translated *beaten ... out* occurs elsewhere only in Judges 6:11 and in Isa 28:27, where it has this same literal meaning of threshing out small quantities of grain by knocking them loose from the stalk by means of a curved stick, club, or wooden hammer
- b. Ephah of Barley
 - i. By either standard, to thresh an ephah of grain from one day's labor is an extraordinary feat, not to mention Ruth's having to carry it home! Depending upon the quality of the grain and which standard one uses, an ephah of barley could have weighed from thirty to fifty pounds. The harvesters obviously followed Boaz's instructions and allowed Ruth to scavenge liberally
- c. Took it to the City
 - i. Took it to Naomi
 - ii. What she Had Left
 - 1. After she had showed her mother-in-law what she had gleaned, Ruth measured out as much as she needed and gave Naomi the rest

II. Blessings on Blessings vs. 18b-20

- a. Where oh Where?
 - i. Work or Glean
 - 1. occasioned by Naomi's amazement at the quantity of grain and food that she has just seen (v 18). That the two questions do not inquire after a geographical location, but about the owner of the field, is made clear by the blessing that follows
- b. Who
 - i. Took Notice
 - 1. Notice
 - 2. Blessed

- a. is difficult to translate into a number of languages. In the Hebrew text the corresponding expression is literally “blessed be the man who took notice of you. “I pray that God will bless the man.” In this type of context, blessing implies “helping,” “doing good to,” or “looking with favor upon,” and is the opposite of cursing
 - b. But she is not really interested in the geographical location of the field. Before Ruth can answer, Naomi breaks out in a spontaneous utterance of blessing upon the man who had taken notice of her daughter-in-law
 - c. so “may he be blessed by Yahweh.” At this point, Naomi has not revealed that Boaz is their kinsman, so her blessing is solely based on his generosity, not on family responsibility.
 - c. Drop Names Not Locations
 - i. Boaz
 - d. He be blessed
 - i. Blessed
 - 1. Naomi’s excitement is also reflected in the form of the blessing (lit.): “May he who took notice of you be blessed!”
 - 2. In Naomi’s blessing, we sense a significant change in her. First, she asked God to bless her daughters-in-law (1:8–9), then she accused God of cursing her (1:13, 20–21), but now she returns to asking God to bless
 - 3. This is the major turning point of the Ruth narrative. Naomi’s spirits began to lift as she saw Ruth’s haul of grain. Now she connects Boaz’s generosity with Yahweh’s blessing. From ascribing her bitterness to Yahweh, she now proclaimed blessing upon Yahweh and Boaz. Her theological realization will lead to her initiating a plan (3:1–4).
 - ii. Of the Lord
 - iii. Kindness
 - 1. Kindness –
 - a. The focus here, however, is upon “loyalty” “The LORD continues to be loyal to those who are living and to those who have died.” In many languages, however, the expression of *keeps his promises* is a very effective rendering
 - b. To my mind, it is a case of intentional ambiguity: that is, the phrase “has not abandoned” refers to both Yahweh and Boaz. This reflects the underlying theology of the Ruth narrative. God is the ultimate source of kindness, and he does not cease to bless the living and the dead. He does so here through Boaz’s acts of kindness (cf. v. 12).

- c. God through Boaz was being faithful to Elimelech's line by showing generosity to Naomi and Ruth. Second, the use of similar words recalls Naomi's prayer in 1:8. Hearing 1:8 and 2:20 together reveals a chiasmic pattern:
dead-living-living-dead. We wonder if Naomi's prayer for kindness for her daughters-in-law is now being fulfilled, raising hopes for the future restoration of the line of "the dead."
- d. This is the second time we have heard it from the lips of Naomi (cf. 1:8). As noted in the introduction, this is one of the key theological expressions in the book. It wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts—love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, and covenant faithfulness. As the following clauses indicate, here it involves Yahweh's covenant grace to this family. This speech represents a total turnaround from her despairing and accusatory words in 1:20–21. The expression she uses, *'āzab ḥesed*, "to abandon *ḥesed*," occurs elsewhere in Gen 24:27 and Jonah 2:9 and represents the opposite of *'āśâ ḥesed*, "to demonstrate *ḥesed*," in 1:5

2. Living and to the Dead

- a. First, *haḥayyîm*, "the living," in this context must refer to Naomi and Ruth, who survive of this family, and *hammētîm*, "the dead," to the deceased Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion
- b. Who are "the living and the dead"? The phrase could be a merism for "everyone," but in the Ruth narrative it more likely refers to all the family members. Earlier, Naomi asked God to show kindness to her daughters-in-law because of the kindness they had shown to "the dead and with me [Naomi]" (1:8). "The dead" were Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, so if we take the phrase to refer to the same in this verse, "the living" would be Naomi and Ruth. How did God through Boaz show kindness to the dead? First, the provision of grain and leftover food for Naomi and Ruth expressed "loyalty" to "the dead."

e. Redeemer

i. Relative

- 1. Specifically, in Naomi's eyes Ruth's coming upon the field of Boaz was a demonstration of God's grace and favor. In 1:8–9 she had prayed that Yahweh would match Ruth's *ḥesed* to her family by granting her rest in the house of her own husband. There she had in mind a Moabite husband, but now, in remarkable fulfillment of that prayer, she is struck by the potential of Ruth's encounter with

Boaz. Her amazement at what has transpired is expressed in two emphatically redundant descriptions of the man. First, (lit.) “The man is our near [relative]” (*qārôb lānû hā’îš*). The expression represents a stylistic variant of *môda’*, “relative,” in 2:1. Second, “He is one of our kinsman-redeemers” (*miggō’ālēnû hû*).

ii. Closest Relatives (Redeemers)

1. As a kinship term it denotes the near relative who is responsible for the economic well-being of a relative, and he comes into play especially when the relative is in distress and cannot get himself/herself out of the crisis. The Scriptures note five aspects of a *gō’ēl*’s redemptive role: (1) to ensure that the hereditary property of the clan never passes out of the clan (Lev 25:25–30); (2) to maintain the freedom of individuals within the clan by buying back those who have sold themselves into slavery because of poverty (Lev 25:47–55); (3) to track down and execute murderers of near relatives (Num 35:12, 19–27); (4) to receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime (Num 5:8); and (5) to ensure that justice is served in a lawsuit involving a relative (Job 19:25; Ps 119:154; Jer 50:34). The Israelite provision for the *gō’ēl* is based upon an assumption of corporate solidarity and the sanctity of the family/clan: to offend a relative is to offend oneself. The custom of redemption was designed to maintain the wholeness and health of family relationships, even after the person has died
2. Still it is commonly assumed that in addition to these functions of the *gō’ēl* the kinsman-redeemer also came into play in the case of a widow whose husband had died without leaving progeny. This view is based largely on the use of the word *gō’ēl* in the Book of Ruth and the relationship between the customs reflected here and Deut 25:5–10, the defining text regarding the custom of levirate marriage in Israel.
3. When Naomi learns that Ruth has met up with Boaz, the sun rises again in her life. Yahweh has been gracious to her deceased husband and her sons by sending a potential “redeemer-kinsman” into their lives. Here the use of the plural (Boaz is “our near relative,” he is “our kinsman-redeemer”) suggests the wheels are turning in her mind, a conclusion that is confirmed in the next chapter.
4. The “redeemer” in Naomi’s usage here refers to that family member who has a moral responsibility to come to the aid of family members in need (see *Comment*). As Naomi’s glad cry invoking Yahweh to bless Boaz who “has not neglected to show kindness to the living and the dead” has revealed, she recognizes in him not just one who has this responsibility but also one who

has clearly signaled that he is willing to meet that responsibility to the full.

III. Stay Close vs. 21-22

- a. Ruth the Moabitess
 - i. Rather, the occasional use of “Ruth the Moabitess” instead of “Ruth” occurs because this is simply her full name. In the Israelite setting where she was a גרה, a “resident alien,” the patronymic, the addition of which normally formed the full name with native Israelites, was replaced by the gentilic, in just the same way that most other foreigners who were permanently domiciled in Israel were regularly identified by their country or region of origin
- b. Stay Close to the (Servants Protection)
 - i. Until Finished
 - ii. No one fall upon you
 - 1. Before we move onto the next scene, we will consider Boaz’s application of the law. His is a generous application according to the principle of kindness, based not on the letter of the law but the moral logic underlying it. Boaz protects and provides for her way beyond the minimal requirements of the gleaning law (Deut 24:19–22). Like his field overseer, Boaz could have applied the law restrictively by viewing Ruth as an outsider because of the Moabites’ previous inhospitality and their tempting of Israel into idolatry (Deut 23:1–6). And perhaps some hostility toward Ruth the Moabite can be detected in Boaz’s commands for his male servants not to harm her. Boaz’s kindness is even more remarkable against the backdrop of lawlessness that marks the judges, the historical period in which the Ruth narrative is set. He knows Ruth had pledged her allegiance to Yahweh, so she will not seduce him into idolatry. He also knows she had shown hospitality to Naomi’s family in Moab. Thus, the law excluding Moabites did not apply in Ruth’s case.
- c. Back to Work
 - i. Meanwhile, in fulfillment of her oath of commitment in 1:16–17, Ruth settled down (*yāšab*) with her mother-in-law. The note not only brings the chapter full circle (cf. 1:22) but also creates the impression that they had settled into a regular routine
 - ii. In this the concluding scene Ruth and Naomi evaluate the events of the day. Ruth’s contribution throughout has been consistent with her character. Her actions have sprung from her loyalty and commitment to Naomi

Word Studies

Ruth 2:17

As already noted, verse 17 concludes the account of Ruth's gathering grain in the field of Boaz. It begins with a particle translated *So*, which indicates result and which may be translated in some languages "As a result," "And so at the end," or "And thus finally."

Until evening is most generally rendered "until the sun went down," "until the sun could be seen no longer," or "until the sun had disappeared."

Gleaned - The Hebrew verb translated *beaten ... out* occurs elsewhere only in Judges 6:11 and in Isa 28:27, where it has this same literal meaning of threshing out small quantities of grain by knocking them loose from the stalk by means of a curved stick, club, or wooden hammer.^{1*} One ancient version makes the instrument explicit by translating "she beat with a stick what she had gleaned."^{2*} Another translation makes explicit both the instrument and the two events of hitting the heads of barley and driving out the grain: "she beat with a stick what she had gleaned and drove out the grains."^{3*} The latter translation is an excellent descriptive model for those languages which lack a technical term for "beating out." In some instances, however, one must use a causative expression, such as "cause to fall out" or "cause to become loose."

Ruth 2:18

Most modern translations begin a new paragraph with verse 17, as TE⁴V does, but some have a new paragraph begin with verse 18 (see J⁵B). It is even possible to divide verse 18 and to take the first part as constituting a conclusion to the previous section. A new paragraph would then begin after the first clause *took ... back into town* (see Moffatt). If this is done, it will be important to introduce the following clause with "Then Ruth showed to her mother-in-law how much she had gathered." A break in the structure at this point obviously requires a more specific indication of who does what, and proper nouns must be used in place of pronouns, even as in some of the ancient versions.^{6*}

Showed her mother-in-law how much she had gathered is the reading of the Hebrew text in a few manuscripts, but all other manuscripts have "her mother-in-law saw what she had

^{1*} See Dalman, op. cit., III, page 92.

^{2*} So LXX in using the Greek verb *rabdizo*.

^{3*} So the Vulgate reading: *et quae collegerat virga caedens et excutiens*.

⁴ TEV Today's English Version

⁵ JB JERUSALEM BIBLE

^{6*} So LXX.

gleaned.”^{7*} The difference in the two readings involves merely a different way in which the vowels of the Hebrew verb are understood. Although the majority reading is no doubt more original,^{8*} it is better to follow in this instance the text employed in TE⁹V, since this produces a far smoother sequence of events. It avoids the suggestion that after Ruth took the grain back into the town, her mother-in-law discovered how much she had gleaned, with the implication that Ruth did not tell her exactly what she had done.

She also gave her the food renders what is literally in Hebrew: “she brought out and gave her.” “Brought out” does not indicate the place from which she took the food. The term “cupboard” has been suggested,^{10*} but there is no indication whatsoever as to what place is involved. It would be possible to translate the clause simply as “she also showed her mother-in-law the food that was left over from the meal.”^{11*}

The last clause of the Hebrew text of verse 18 is literally “gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.” This is a reference to what has already been stated in verse 14. A literal rendering of the Hebrew text may, however, lead to misunderstanding, since it could imply in some languages that Ruth was inconsiderate of Naomi and therefore had only reserved for Naomi what she did not want. It is better, therefore, to translate as “gave her the remainder of the food,” “gave her what she had left over from lunch” (NA¹²B), or “gave her what she had saved from her meal” (NE¹³B). NE¹⁴B employs a very useful device of placing the modifying clause concerning the food earlier in the verse and stating in the last clause merely “gave it to her.”

Ruth 2:19

The questions in the Hebrew text of verse 19 would seem to be in a wrong order, since “Where did you glean today?” appears to be more specific than “Where did you work?” Some translators, therefore, feel justified in reversing the order. The second is really a double

^{7*} The reading found in TEV is attested by two Hebrew manuscripts, according to C. H. H. Wright, *The Book of Ruth in Hebrew with a Critically Revised Text*, 1864, *ad loc.* Moreover, this reading is followed by the Syriac and Vulgate versions.

^{8*} So Barthélemy, page 133.

⁹TEV Today’s English Version

^{10*} So Brown-Driver-Briggs, s.v. *yatsa’* (“food from one’s cupboard”).

^{11*} So rightly Dhorme and BJ.

¹²NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

¹³NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

¹⁴NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

question, involving not only “working” but also “going.”^{15*} This is made explicit in NA¹⁶B as “Where did you go to work?” In a sense the second question is also highly specific, for Naomi’s intention was no doubt to find out the particular field in which Ruth had gleaned. Therefore, from the standpoint of the development of the text, the first question should be regarded as being more general and the second as more specific. For this reason TE¹⁷V renders the second question as *Whose field have you been working in?* That the second question focuses upon the owner of the field is indicated by the second benediction which Naomi then expresses: *May God bless the man who took an interest in you!*

The third person imperative in the expression *May God bless the man who took an interest in you* is difficult to translate into a number of languages. In the Hebrew text the corresponding expression is literally “blessed be the man who took notice of you.” This passive expression is often awkward to render, and a translation such as “blessings on the man” (NE¹⁸B) is of very little help in finding a practical solution to translation in most receptor languages. It may, therefore, be necessary to employ, as in so many cases, some verb to introduce direct discourse; for example, “I pray that God will bless the man.” In this type of context, blessing implies “helping,” “doing good to,” or “looking with favor upon,” and is the opposite of cursing. It should not be related merely to material prosperity (though this component of meaning was important in biblical Hebrew) and certainly should not be related to games of chance or gambling.^{19*}

For the expression *took an interest in you*, see the comments on verse 10, where the same Hebrew verb is used.

The second part of verse 19 in the Hebrew text is somewhat confusing and misleading. Literally, it may be rendered as “so she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” In the first place, it may be preferable to use proper names—*Ruth told Naomi*—rather than to say “she told her mother-in-law.”

The clause “with whom she had worked” may be misleading because it might suggest that she worked together with Boaz. This, of course, was not the case; she simply worked in the field which belonged to Boaz. Furthermore, it is misleading to have, as in the Hebrew text, a

^{15*} So rightly Gerleman, op. cit., ad loc: “abgekürzte Redeweise, eigentlich, ‘Wohin (bist du gegangen) und hast gearbeitet?’ ” For the hapax ’anah = ’an, see the dictionaries. NEB seems to render a meaning “whither” and seems to interpret “to do” rather erroneously as “to go” (“Which way did you go?”). Another possibility is that NEB makes the first kernel structure explicit and the second implicit because of its repetitive character. If this is how the translators came to this translation, both the method and the result could be acceptable, though an implicit kernel structure in Hebrew could scarcely be given this importance. The meaning “where” for ’anah has rightly been defended by Baumgartner, s.v. Stinespring’s proposal (in JNEST 3, page 101) to translate ’anah with “to what purpose?” does not seem to make any sense in this particular context.

¹⁶NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

¹⁷TEV Today’s English Version

¹⁸NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

^{19*} Compare E. A. Nida, *God’s Word in Man’s Language*, New York, 1952, page 43.

repetition of the information with regard to working, first in an indirect form and then in a direct form. For this reason the two expressions are coalesced in TE²⁰_V to read: *Ruth told Naomi that she had been working in a field belonging to a man named Boaz*. Some ancient translators recognized the problem in the discrepancy between questions and answers, and this led them to formulate what seemed to be a more satisfactory answer to come from Ruth.^{21*}

Ruth 2:20

The verb translated *said* introduces an emphatic statement and in some languages may be appropriately translated as “Naomi exclaimed” (see NA²²_B) or, as in some languages, “Naomi said strongly to her.”

May the LORD bless Boaz involves a Hebrew construction which is literally “blessed be he with reference to the LORD”, but the preposition refers clearly to the LORD as the author of the action.^{23*} Such a passive expression, however, is extremely difficult in many languages, and therefore one must use an active form; for example, “May the LORD, who always keeps his promises to the living and the dead, bless him.” In other instances it may be necessary to introduce this expression by a verb marking direct discourse; for example, “I pray that the LORD may bless....”

The relative pronoun in the Hebrew, “who,” can be related to the grammatical subject of the preceding verb, that is “he” = “Boaz,” or to the complement of the agent, “the LORD.” The majority of commentators and translators choose the second interpretation (“the LORD”), but a significant minority present solid arguments for the first interpretation (“Boaz”). Both are acceptable; what is important for the translator is to leave no ambiguity in the receptor language. We suggest that the translator give one interpretation in the text and the other as a variant in a footnote (a variant suggested for TE²⁴_V is “May he be blessed by the LORD,” ... “for he has always kept his promises ...”).^{25*}

²⁰_{TEV} Today’s English Version

²¹* So LXX, which reads: “And Ruth told her mother-in-law where she had worked.”

²²_{NAB} NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

²³* See Joüon, par. 132–133; Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax*, par. 107e.

²⁴_{TEV} Today’s English Version

²⁵* In the LXX the relative clause may refer back to Boaz or to the LORD. One manuscript de Rossi and the Syriac and Old Latin versions read: “Blessed be the Lord.” Very probably the rare meaning of the preposition *le* was no longer understood, or both of the existing formulae “Blessed be he by the LORD” and “Blessed be the LORD” were confused. For further reference, see Rebera, “Yahweh or Boaz? Ruth 2:20 reconsidered,” *The Bible Translator* 36 (1985): 317–327.

The term translated *promises* is rendered in some translations as “kindness” (RS²⁶V) and in others as “mercy” (cf. NA²⁷B). The focus here, however, is upon “loyalty” (cf. NE²⁸B “keep faith with”). One may translate: “The LORD is always loyal to the living and to the dead” or “The LORD continues to be loyal to those who are living and to those who have died.” In many languages, however, the expression of *keeps his promises* is a very effective rendering, since this clearly specifies the way in which God continues to be loyal. *Keeps his promises* may be rendered as “does what he has promised he will do,” “helps them even as he said he would help them,” or “is good to them just as he said he would always be good to them.”

And she went on may be translated as “And she also said to Ruth” or “And in addition she said.”

In some languages *that man* must be rendered as “Boaz,” since it is a specific reference, and therefore the proper name (which has already been mentioned in verse 19) must be employed.

A close relative of ours is rendered in a number of different ways in different receptor languages; for example, this man is one of our brothers, “” this man belongs to our clan, “” this man is like one of our family, “or” this man is one of our large family “(in which” large family” is a reference to the extended family in contrast with the immediate family).

The Hebrew term translated *one of those responsible for taking care of us* is a highly technical one which could be literally translated as “one of our redeemers” or “one of those who has the right of redemption over us.”^{29*} Such a person was a relative who was obliged to protect the interests of the family and clan. This involved the individual’s freedom, his goods, and his posterity. One of the duties of such a “redeemer” was to produce an heir to one who had died. Another obligation involved buying property that was in danger of being lost to the family by being sold outside the family group. As is clear in chapter 4, both of these duties play an important role in the story of Ruth, and the same term occurs in 3:9–12 and 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14. Various aspects of the duties involved will be pointed out in the comments on these verses.^{30*}

In most receptor languages it is necessary to employ some type of descriptive phrase which will identify not only the relationship of a person to a particular family or clan, but also something of his obligations. Accordingly, TE³¹V employs the translation *a close relative of ours, one of those responsible for taking care of us*. An equivalent descriptive phrase might also be “he is one of those who can help us as a relative” or “he is one of those who can provide for us as one does for members of a family.” Where levirate marriage is well known in a society and where there

²⁶RSV Revised Standard Version

²⁷NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

²⁸NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

^{29*} Hebrew has a plural suffixed form of the participle. See H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache*, 1922, par. 252r.

^{30*} For more recent literature we refer especially to J. J. Stamm, *Erlösen und Vergeben im Alten Testament*, 1940, pages 27 ff.; A. R. Johnson, “The primary meaning of ga’al,” *V. T. Suppl. I* (1953), pages 67 ff.; and A. Jepsen, “Die Begriffe des Erlösens im Alten Testament” (in *Festgabe für Rudolf Hermann z. 70. Geburtstag: “So lange es ‘huete’ heiát”*), 1957, pages 153–163.

³¹TEV Today’s English Version

are other similar responsibilities and obligations involved, one may even employ a translation such as “he is one of those who can take us as widows.” Such an expression could be classified as a fully dynamic equivalent and one which would be in keeping with this context.

In some languages, however, it is not easy to speak of “responsibility.” *One of those responsible for taking care of us* may need to be rendered as “one of those who must take care of us,” “one of those who our customs say must take care of us,” or “one who must take care of us because he is related to us.”

Ruth 2:21

In the Hebrew text the name *Ruth* is immediately followed by the expression “the Moabitess,” but it is not always necessary to repeat this expression (see the comments on 1:22 and on 2:2). In a number of ancient versions also the repetition was regarded as superfluous.^{32*} Some of the ancient versions do introduce, however, the person spoken to in this case, namely, her mother-in-law: “Ruth said to her mother-in-law.”^{33*}

Since Ruth here provides information which she has not already communicated, it may be necessary to change the verb *said* to something such as “added” (NA^{34B}). It is not clear whether the information that Ruth provides in verse 21 is directly related to her recognizing that Boaz has certain responsibilities for her and Naomi, but it is certainly not out of keeping with what has been stated in the latter part of verse 20. Some commentators suggest this relation,^{35*} and it is hinted at in some translations (cf. Moffatt “Yes, said Ruth ...”). It is questionable, however, whether one is justified in trying to introduce this type of connection between verses 20 and 21.

Best of all, he told me is a free rendering of a complex Hebrew construction which may be literally rendered as “there is still this, which he said.”^{36*} Direct discourse within direct discourse may present certain problems in some receptor languages. Therefore a second direct discourse can often be changed into an indirect one: “he told me to stay close” (NE^{37B}) or *he told me to keep gathering grain with his workers* (TE^{38V}).

To keep gathering grain with his workers reflects a Hebrew expression containing the phrase “keep close to.” (See the comments on verse 8.)

^{32*} So in LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac versions.

^{33*} So LXX and Syriac versions.

³⁴ NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

^{35*} Compare Hertzberg, op. cit., AD loc.

^{36*} So Joüon, par. 157a N: “(il y a) encore (ceci) qu’il a dit.” Differently Gerleman, op. cit., AD loc.: “(ich muá) noch (hinzufügen).” NEB “And what is more ...” seems to intensify the following statement, which is overtranslation. Even an omission (as in Moffatt) is semantically more justified.

³⁷ NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

³⁸ TEV Today’s English Version

The term *workers* has in Hebrew the masculine form, but the emphasis is not here upon the sex of the servants; it is rather a more general term to include both male and female servants. The focus is upon “working with his servants,” that is, in his field rather than in the field of some other man. A number of ancient versions, however, used the feminine form of the noun for “servants” (namely, “women servants”^{39*}), but that is a secondary reading introduced to harmonize this information with what occurs in verses 8, 22, and 23 of this chapter.

Until they finish the harvest involves both the barley and the wheat harvest. Normally the wheat harvest took place about a month later than the barley harvest. Traditionally the wheat harvest ended at the Feast of Weeks, seven weeks after the barley harvest had begun.^{40*}

Ruth 2:22

The Hebrew text has “Ruth her daughter-in-law,” but it is not necessary to reproduce “daughter-in-law” in this context, since the relationship is quite clear (cf. NE⁴¹B and NA⁴²B).

In some languages a general verb for *said* is appropriate in introducing Naomi’s comment in this verse. In other languages the link between verse 22 and verse 21 needs to be made more evident, and therefore one may use a verb such as “rejoined” (NA⁴³B), “responded,” or “replied in turn.”

For the translation of *daughter*, see the comments on verses 8 and 9. The connotation of this term is one of affection and kinship. A modern English equivalent may be “my dear” (see NA⁴⁴B).

The Hebrew text of verse 22 presents the two statements of Naomi in the same order as that shown in TE⁴⁵V. The comparative *it will be better for you to work with the women in Boaz’ field* precedes the statement concerning Ruth’s possibly being molested if she goes to another man’s field. It may seem more natural in many languages, however, to state the reason first, *You might be molested ...*, and then the result or conclusion, namely, that Ruth had better stay with the servants of Boaz.

The clause *it will be better for you to work with the women in Boaz’ field* is in Hebrew a comparative construction, but the second part of the comparison is left out, namely, “better than....”^{46*} This makes the Hebrew clause correspond more or less to the English construction “you had better accompany his girls” (Moffatt). However, in some receptor languages it may not be possible to leave out the second member of a comparison. One may have to say, for example, “it is better for you to stay with his servants than to go with the servants of some

^{39*} So in some LXX manuscripts, the Ethiopic, Old Latin, and Armenian versions.

^{40*} See the Century Bible, page 416.

⁴¹ NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

⁴² NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

⁴³ NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

⁴⁴ NAB NEW AMERICAN BIBLE

⁴⁵ TEV Today’s English Version

^{46*} See Joüon, par 141g.

other man.” Perhaps a more natural expression for this comparison would employ a statement containing an expression of necessity; for example, “you should only accompany his women servants” or “you must stay with his servants.”

You might be molested translates a Hebrew verb which often means merely “to meet.” In this context, however, it means “to meet with hostility.” There seems no reason for following NE⁴⁷B “let no one catch you,” since the meaning seems clearly to be “molest” or “harm.” One may even have the active verbal construction: “so that no one may attack you in the fields” or “so that the reapers in the field of someone else may not attack you there.”

Ruth 2:23

Verse 23 serves as a summary of the contents of chapter 2, but it seems to provide no clue as to further developments in the story. Yet there is a suggestion for the transition which occurs in the following verse, the first verse of chapter 3. Chapter 2 ends with Ruth living with her mother-in-law, but the first verse of chapter 3 contains Naomi’s declaration that she should seek a home for Ruth, since a permanent arrangement for Ruth would obviously be more satisfactory than continuing indefinitely with her mother-in-law. Thus, though the text of verse 23 does not seem to provide a clue as to the rest of the story, in fact it actually does. It is the issue of a permanent home and relationship which is regarded as so essential for Ruth.

It is important to recognize that verse 23 is a type of summary, and therefore a particle such as *So* is quite appropriate. This may be rendered as “And therefore,” “And as a result,” or “In keeping with this.”

It would be wrong to translate the first clause of verse 23, *Ruth worked with them*, in such a way as to give the impression that Ruth was hired by Boaz as one of his servants. Rather, she continued to gather or to glean on the same basis as Boaz had specified to his servants in verse 16. It is rather misleading to follow the RS⁴⁸V translation, “she kept close to the maidens of Boaz,” since this could imply quite a different dimension of relationship.

Until all the barley and wheat had been harvested can be restructured as “till the harvester had cut and brought in all the barley and wheat,” which is somewhat more specific.

In some of the ancient versions, the final clause, *And she continued to live with her mother-in-law*, is placed at the beginning of chapter 3,^{49*} but there seems to be no special need to follow this division.^{50*} It may be useful, however, to introduce the last clause with an expression such as “After that” (that is to say, “After the work in the field”). One is not advised to follow the alternative Hebrew reading, “and she returned to her mother-in-law.” This reading

⁴⁷ NEB NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

⁴⁸ RSV Revised Standard Version

⁴⁹* So in the Vulgate and in the Syriac version.

⁵⁰* NAB is one of the rare exceptions in which this versional division is followed.

has very little textual support and seems clearly secondary, since it appears to be only a smoother transition from the first statement to the second⁵¹

Commentary Studies

2:17–23 Like the previous field scene, the final episode of the chapter is dominated by dialogue. The first two verses (vv. 17–18) are in narrative prose, but thereafter dialogue takes over, as Naomi and Ruth discuss the results and the implications of the events of the day (vv. 19–22). A summary statement concludes the chapter (v. 23).

The detail with which the conversations at the field are recounted contrasts with the cursory description of Ruth's activity in the field. Obviously the narrator is more concerned to portray Boaz's generosity and grace than Ruth's industry. Not that the latter is to be underestimated. According to v. 17 Ruth scavenged for grain in the field until evening. Then, presumably with a flail or a stick, she "beat out" the grain from the heads of barley. Where she did this is not indicated. In Judg 6:11, where the same verb, *ḥābaṭ*, was used, Gideon had used a winepress to hide from marauding Midianites. Given Boaz's generosity in the previous scene, one may imagine that Boaz had invited her to use his threshing floor.

The results of a day's work in the field are nothing short of amazing. When Ruth measured the grain that she had threshed, it amounted to one ephah.⁵²⁸ Hebrew *ʿēpā*, a loanword from Egyptian *ypt*, denotes the unit of measurement used for dry goods, especially grain and flour. According to Ezek 45:11 it was equivalent to the *bath*, used in the measurement of liquids, and one-tenth of a *ḥōmer*,⁵³⁹ the amount of grain a donkey (*ḥāmôr*) could carry. Scholars are not agreed on the size of an ephah. Containers marked *bt* found at Tell Beit Mirsim and Lachish averaged twenty-two liters (5.8 U.S. gallons). Other calculations are more generous. According

⁵¹ Jan de Waard and Eugene Albert Nida, [*A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth*](#), 2nd ed., UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 37–44.

⁵²⁸⁸ The NIV renders the *kaph* prefixed to *אֵיפָה*, "ephah," as "about." This is a common use, but in some cases the prefixed *kaph* actually serves not as a mark of approximation but exactitude, a *kaph veritatis*, as in Neh 7:2, "He is an honest man precisely." This usage is attested in the seventh century B.C. Yabneh Yam Ostrakon in which a harvester argues to his master that he has delivered the exact amount of grain requested (Gibson, *SSI* 1.26–30). For discussion see S. Talmon, "The New Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C. in Historical Perspective," *BASOR* 176 (1964): 33. For other examples of the *kaph veritatis* in extrabiblical inscriptions see *DNWSI*, 482–83.

⁵³⁸⁹ Not to be confused with the *ʿōmer*, which is one-tenth of an ephah (Exod 16:36).

to Josephus (*An*⁵⁴t 3.8.3 §197), the *bath* (= ephah) was thirty-six liters. The differences may reflect competing standards within biblical Israel.⁹⁵⁵⁰ By either standard, to thresh an ephah of grain from one day's labor is an extraordinary feat, not to mention Ruth's having to carry it home! Depending upon the quality of the grain and which standard one uses, an ephah of barley could have weighed from thirty to fifty pounds. The harvesters obviously followed Boaz's instructions and allowed Ruth to scavenge liberally.⁹⁵⁶¹

Verse 18 has Ruth picking up the fruits of the day's labor and heading for the city. After she had showed⁹⁵⁷² her mother-in-law what she had gleaned, Ruth measured out as much as she needed and gave Naomi the rest.⁹⁵⁸³

Not surprisingly, the grain that Ruth brought home sparked conversation between her and her mother-in-law. Naomi's incredulity at the sight of so much grain evokes a response whose sense is as much exclamation as question: "Where⁹⁵⁹⁴ in the world did you glean today, and where did you work?"⁹⁶⁰⁵ By our standards the verbs are illogically sequenced, but the order and the redundancy combine to reflect her utter amazement at Ruth's productivity. But she is not really interested in the geographical location of the field. Before Ruth can answer, Naomi breaks out in a spontaneous utterance of blessing upon the man who had taken notice of her daughter-in-law.

Naomi's excitement is also reflected in the form of the blessing (lit.): "May he who took notice of you be blessed!" (*yěhî makkîrēk bārûk*). This structure⁹⁶¹⁶ occurs elsewhere only in 1 Kgs 10:9 (= 2 Chr 9:8), in an expression of praise to Yahweh, and Prov 5:18, in a metaphor using "fountain" in place of "wife."⁹⁶²⁷ In this instance the word order highlights the person "who paid attention to" Ruth.⁹⁶³⁸

In Ruth's response to Naomi's question she seems to be just as excited as her mother-in-law. Her emotional state is reflected in the redundancy of v. 19b. First, the narrator notes that Ruth

⁵⁴*Ant Antiquities*

⁵⁵⁹⁰ For recent discussion and bibliography see R. Fuller, "איפה," *NIDOTTE* 1.382–88.

⁵⁶⁹¹ According to 1 Sam 17:17, an ephah of grain could feed fifty fighting men. According to Old Babylonian records from Mari (nineteenth century B.C.), the ration of threshed grain demanded of a male harvester rarely was more than one or two pounds. Cf. Sasson, *Ruth*, 57. The text is published by J. Bottéro, *Textes économiques et administratifs*, ARMT 7 (Paris: 1958), 272.

⁵⁷⁹² The MT *wattēre* reads "when her mother-in-law saw." A few MSS, the LXX, and the Vg read *wattar*, "and she showed." In the absence of the sign of the definite direct object, אַת, the former is preferred. So also Bush, *Ruth*, 133, who cites supporters of both readings. The meaning is the same either way.

⁵⁸⁹³ Note the reversal of verbs from v. 14, which has וַתִּשְׂבַּע וַתֵּתֵר, "And she was satisfied and had some left over." Here it is הוּתְרָה מִשְׂבָּעָה, "she had left over from her satisfaction/being satisfied."

⁵⁹⁹⁴ The particle אֵיפָה (*ēpōh*), "where," plays on אֵיפָה (*ēpā*), the word for measurement.

⁶⁰⁹⁵ The context suggests a note of incredulity.

⁶¹⁹⁶ Involving the jussive of *hāyā* + object + passive participle of *brk*. Cp. the form in v. 4. The root בִּרַךְ occurs in the *qal* stem only in the passive participle form. Cf. *HALOT*, 159–60.

⁶²⁹⁷ The more common form occurs in v. 14.

⁶³⁹⁸ מִכִּיר involves the same root as לְהִכִּיר in v. 10.

reported (*higgîd*) to Naomi with whom she had worked; then he quotes her speech, using some of the same words: “the one with whom she/I worked” (‘ăšer ‘ăšētâ/ ‘ăšîî ‘immô). The repetition has the additional effects of slowing down the narrative,⁹⁶⁴⁹ setting the stage for the climactic announcement of Boaz’s name, and drawing the reader’s attention to the blessing that follows.¹⁰⁶⁵⁰ Ruth’s statement, “The name of the man ... is Boaz,” does not answer Naomi’s question precisely. She had asked “where” Ruth had worked; Ruth answers “with whom” she has worked. This intentional switch draws the reader’s attention to the person who has been the focus of the narrator’s interest throughout this chapter. Since Boaz’s name was never mentioned in the preceding dialogue, we may assume that Ruth had heard it repeatedly in his conversations with his workers.

Realizing the significance of Ruth’s “chance” encounter with Boaz, Naomi spontaneously erupts with a second blessing for him. The opening line follows the conventional pattern of Israelite blessings:¹⁰⁶⁶¹ *bārûk* + subject + *lamedh* attached to the name *yhwh*.¹⁰⁶⁷² Scholars are not agreed on the meaning of this blessing. Assuming that the passive form represents a modification of the active construction, “I bless him to Yahweh,” some treat *bārûk* as a virtual synonym for “praise.” Accordingly, Naomi’s utterance is an exclamation of praise to Boaz and a commendation of him to Yahweh.¹⁰⁶⁸³ But despite the 235 occurrences of this form (*piel*) of the verb in the Old Testament,¹⁰⁶⁹⁴ this use is lacking entirely. It is preferable, therefore, to interpret

⁶⁴⁹⁹ Notice also the wordiness of Ruth’s answer, particularly the addition of a seemingly unnecessary הַיּוֹם, “today.”

⁶⁵¹⁰⁰ Cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 184.

⁶⁶¹⁰¹ Cf. the unconventional form in the previous verse.

⁶⁷¹⁰² For other biblical examples see Ruth 3:10; Gen 14:19; Judg 17:2; 1 Sam 15:13; 23:21; 2 Sam 2:5; Ps 115:15. The form is also common in extrabiblical inscriptions. Note especially: (1) Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos 5: “Belonging to Obadyahu son of ‘Adnah, may he be blessed by Yahweh.” (2) Khirbet el-Qôm Tomb Inscription: “Uriyahu the rich wrote it: Blessed be Urihau by Yahweh, for from his enemies by his Asherah he has saved him. By Oniyahu and by his Asherah.” A slight variation uses the *piel* finite verb, as in Kuntillet Ajrud Pithos 3: “I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah.” For a discussion of these blessings see T. G. Crawford, *Blessing and Curse in Syro-Palestinian Inscriptions of the Iron Age*, American University Studies, Series VII, 120 (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 46–53. For further discussion of the form see J. Scharbert, “ברך *brk*,” *TDOT* 2.279–308, esp. 284–88.

⁶⁸¹⁰³ Thus Waltke and O’Connor (*IBHS* §11.2.10.d), “May he be pronounced blessed to Yahweh.” Similarly Hubbard, *Ruth*, 185.

⁶⁹¹⁰⁴ The *piel* form followed by לַיהוָה does indeed occur once in the OT, in 1 Chr 29:20, but here the *lamedh* introduces the direct object. Cf. GKC 117*n*; *BHS* §125*k*, note. Possible examples may be found in Arad Ostrakon 16:2–3 (בִּרְכִּיתֶיךָ לַיהוָה, “I bless you to Yahweh”) and perhaps 21:2 and 40:3, though the inscriptions on these are incompletely preserved. So also *BHS* §132*f*, note. Crawford (*Blessing and Curse*, 35–40) is inconsistent, interpreting these texts this way but a similar construction in Kuntillet ‘Ajrud Pithos 3 as “by Yahweh.” P.47. The *lamedh* in the Arad texts should be interpreted similarly. Thus *DCH* 1.270.

the *lē* (otherwise “to”) attached to *yhwh* as introducing the actor/agent behind a passive verb, who becomes the subject when changed into the active (as in NIV).¹⁰⁷⁰⁵

As already intimated, how one interprets the *lē* prefix has an important bearing on one’s understanding of the following clause (in the Hb. text “Naomi said to her daughter-in-law” comes first in the verse). As it stands, the clause is quite ambiguous for two reasons. First, it begins with an introductory particle *’āšer*, which may be treated either as a relative pronoun (viz., “who has not abandoned his *ḥesed*”) or a subordinate conjunction introducing a causal clause (viz., “because he has not abandoned his *ḥesed*”).¹⁰⁷¹⁶ Second, to whom does *’āšer* refer if the word is treated as a relative pronoun, or who is the subject of the verb *’āzab*, “to abandon” (NIV “stopped”) if one treats the particle as a causal conjunction? If one treats the blessing as a commendation of Boaz to Yahweh, then the answer to both questions must be Boaz, in which case the clause introduced by *’āšer* expresses the reason Boaz is to be commended: he has not abandoned his *ḥesed*. That is, he has fulfilled the covenant people’s highest ideals.¹⁰⁷²⁷ But this interpretation is doubtful, first because *yhwh* is the nearer antecedent. Second, and more importantly, by this interpretation it is difficult to explain Naomi’s specification of the nearer relative as *hā’îš*, “the man.” One would have expected the simple pronoun *hû*, “he,” as at the end of the verse. On the other hand, if Yahweh is the one who has faithfully demonstrated *ḥesed*, then the reference to “the man” is necessary to distinguish the subject of the last two clauses of the verse from the subject of the preceding clause. Finally, an analogue to this text by this interpretation is provided by Gen 24:27. After Abraham’s servant has discovered Rebekah as a potential wife for Isaac, he declares, “Blessed be the LORD . . . who has not abandoned his *ḥesed* and his truth toward my master.”¹⁰⁷³⁸

But what does Naomi mean when she says that Yahweh has not abandoned his *ḥesed* toward the living and the dead? First, *haḥayyîm*, “the living,” in this context must refer to Naomi and Ruth, who survive of this family, and *hammētîm*, “the dead,” to the deceased Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion.¹⁰⁷⁴⁹ Together this pair of antonyms functions as a figure (*merism*) referring to the family as a whole. Second, the word *ḥesed* bears a much fuller sense than “kindness” as rendered by the NIV. This is the second time we have heard it from the lips of Naomi (cf. 1:8). As noted in the introduction, this is one of the key theological expressions in the book. It wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts—love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, and covenant faithfulness. As the following clauses indicate, here it involves Yahweh’s covenant grace to this family. This speech represents a total turnaround from her despairing and accusatory words in 1:20–21. The expression she uses, *’āzab ḥesed*, “to abandon *ḥesed*,”

⁷⁰¹⁰⁵ On which see *HALOT*, 510; *BHS* §132f; *GKC* §121f.

⁷¹¹⁰⁶ Thus Sasson, *Ruth*, 60. On the causal use of *’āšer* see *GKC* §158b; *BHS* §170e; *DCH* 1.432–33. Most of the examples cited here involve a perfect verb, as in our text.

⁷²¹⁰⁷ Thus Hubbard, *Ruth*, 186.

⁷³¹⁰⁸ Note the similarities of construction: Gen 24:27 בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנִי אֲבִרְהָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עָזַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶתוֹ מִעַם אֲדֹנִי Ruth 2:10 חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶתוֹ מִעַם אֲדֹנִי Campbell (*Ruth*, 106) rightly observes that the shift in prepositions from מִעַם אֶת to אֶת is inconsequential.

⁷⁴¹⁰⁹ Cf. 1:8, where the Naomi juxtaposes the dead with herself.

occurs elsewhere in Gen 24:27 and Jonah 2:9¹¹⁷⁵⁰ and represents the opposite of *‘āśâ ḥesed*, “to demonstrate *ḥesed*,” in 1:5.¹¹⁷⁶¹

Specifically, in Naomi’s eyes Ruth’s coming upon the field of Boaz was a demonstration of God’s grace and favor. In 1:8–9 she had prayed that Yahweh would match Ruth’s *ḥesed* to her family by granting her rest in the house of her own husband. There she had in mind a Moabite husband, but now, in remarkable fulfillment of that prayer, she is struck by the potential of Ruth’s encounter with Boaz. Her amazement at what has transpired is expressed in two emphatically redundant descriptions of the man. First, (lit.) “The man is our near [relative]” (*qārôb lānû hā ’îš*).¹¹⁷⁷² The expression represents a stylistic variant of *môda’*, “relative,” in 2:1. Second, “He is one of our kinsman-redeemers” (*miggō ’ālēnû hû*).

With this comment Naomi has raised another one of the most important notions in the book. Hebrew has two words commonly translated “to redeem.” The first, *pādâ*, is used with reference to “redeeming” the firstborn (Exod 13:13–15) with a sheep or money (Num 18:15–17) or cultic offerings that could be “redeemed” with money (Leviticus 27). In such cases the object is always a human or an animal and is the work of a near male relative, usually the father. By contrast, the second, *gā’al*, may have an inanimate object. In contexts like this, *gō’ēl*, a participle form of the verb, functions as a technical legal term, related specifically to Israelite family law.¹¹⁷⁸³ As a kinship term it denotes the near relative who is responsible for the economic well-being of a relative, and he comes into play especially when the relative is in distress and cannot get himself/herself out of the crisis. The Scriptures note five aspects of a *gō’ēl*’s redemptive role: (1) to ensure that the hereditary property of the clan never passes out of the clan (Lev 25:25–30); (2) to maintain the freedom of individuals within the clan by buying back those who have sold themselves into slavery because of poverty (Lev 25:47–55); (3) to track down and execute murderers of near relatives (Num 35:12, 19–27);¹¹⁷⁹⁴ (4) to receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime (Num 5:8); and (5) to ensure that justice is served in a lawsuit involving a relative (Job 19:25; Ps 119:154; Jer 50:34). The Israelite provision for the *gō’ēl* is based upon an assumption of corporate solidarity and the sanctity of the family/clan: to offend a relative is to offend oneself. The custom of redemption was

⁷⁵¹¹⁰ This is one of several expressions available in Hb. for not keeping a covenant promise or not demonstrating grace. Cf. כָּחַד חֶסֶד, “to hide *ḥesed*” (Ps 40:11); מָאַס חֶסֶד, “to reject *ḥesed*” (Job 6:14); אָסַף חֶסֶד, “to take away *ḥesed*” (Jer 16:5); הֵסִיר חֶסֶד, “to remove *ḥesed*” (Pss 66:20; 89:34 [MSS]; 1 Chr 17:13); הִפִּיר חֶסֶד, “to violate *ḥesed*” (Ps 89:34); נָחַה חֶסֶד “to wipe out *ḥesed*” (Neh 13:14).

⁷⁶¹¹¹ Other antonymic expressions are מָשַׁח חֶסֶד, “to extend *ḥesed*” (Jer 31:3; Pss 36:11; 109:12; Gen 39:21; Ezra 7:28; 9:9); שָׁמַר חֶסֶד, “to keep *ḥesed*” (Deut 7:9, 12; 1 Kgs 8:23 = 2 Chr 6:14; Hos 12:7; Ps 89:29; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 9:32 [often with בְּרִית, “covenant”]); זָכַר חֶסֶד, “to remember *ḥesed*” (Jer 2:2; Pss 25:6 [+ רַחֲמִים, “compassion”]; 98:3 [+ אֱמוּנָה, “faithfulness”]; 1 Chr 17:13).

⁷⁷¹¹² The expression לִקְרֹב לְ, “near to,” as an expression of near kinship is found also in Neh 13:4. Cf. קָרֹב אֵל, “near to,” in Lev 21:2–3; 25:25; Num 27:11; 2 Sam 19:42 [Hb. 43].

⁷⁸¹¹³ More than half of its occurrences are found in four texts involving Israelite family matters: Leviticus 25; 27; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19.

⁷⁹¹¹⁴ Note the expression גֹּאֵל הַדָּם, “avenger of blood” in vv. 19, 21, 25, 27.

designed to maintain the wholeness and health of family relationships, even after the person has died.¹¹⁸⁰⁵

Remarkably, in none of the texts clarifying the role of the *gō'ēl* is there any reference to marrying the widow of a deceased person. Still it is commonly assumed that in addition to these functions of the *gō'ēl* the kinsman-redeemer also came into play in the case of a widow whose husband had died without leaving progeny. This view is based largely on the use of the word *gō'ēl* in the Book of Ruth and the relationship between the customs reflected here and Deut 25:5–10, the defining text regarding the custom of levirate marriage in Israel.

As noted earlier on 1:11–13, by definition a levirate marriage represents a legally sanctioned union between a *yēbāmā*, a widow whose husband has died without having fathered any offspring, and the *yābām*, the brother of the deceased. Variations of this type of marriage are attested in second millennium B.C. Ugaritic,¹¹⁸¹⁶ Hittite,¹¹⁸²⁷ and Middle Assyrian¹¹⁸³⁸ sources. According to the Israelite custom as recorded in Deut 25:5–10, the unmarried brother-in-law was obligated to “perform the duties of the *yābām*” by marrying the widow. To prevent the name and family of the deceased from dying out, the first child born of this union should assume the name of the deceased. If a *yābām* chose to forego his responsibility, in the presence of the elders the widow should remove his sandal and humiliate him publicly by spitting in his face.

Because of differences in language between the Book of Ruth and the Deuteronomic prescription, specifically because the marriage in the Book of Ruth does not involve a brother (*'āh*) but a more distant relative, and because Ruth expresses no concern to fulfill her part in the levirate,¹¹⁸⁴⁹ some have argued that a levirate marriage is not involved in this book.¹²⁸⁵⁰ However, this conclusion derives from an invalid demand for conformity between narrative accounts and formal statements on the one hand and a misreading of Deut 25:5–10 as a legal code rather than an individual decision incorporated in a larger literary document on the

⁸⁰¹¹⁵ See further the studies of the word by R. L. Hubbard, “The *gō'ēl* in Ancient Israel: The Theology of an Israelite Institution,” *BBR* 1 (1991): 3–19; id., “לגל,” *NIDOTTE* 1.789–94.

⁸¹¹¹⁶ In an Akk. text from Ugarit a certain Arhalba writes, “After my death, whoever takes (in marriage) my wife, Kubaba daughter of Takan (?), from my brother—may Baal crush him.” *PRU* 3: 16.144.

⁸²¹¹⁷ Hittite Law §193 reads: “If a man has a wife, and the man dies, his brother shall take his widow as wife. (If the brother dies,) his father shall take her. When afterwards his father dies, his (i.e., the father’s) brother shall take the woman whom he had.” As translated by H. A. Hoffner, Jr., in *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2d ed., M. T. Roth, ed.; SBL Writings from the Ancient World Series 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 236.

⁸³¹¹⁸ MAL §33 reads: “If a woman is residing in her own father’s house, her husband is dead, and she has sons [...], or [if he so pleases], he shall give her into the protection of the household of her father-in-law. If her husband and her father-in-law are both dead, and she has no son, she is indeed a widow; she shall go wherever she pleases.” As translated by Roth, *ibid.*, 165.

⁸⁴¹¹⁹ Cf. Tamar’s sense of compulsion in Gen 38:24.

⁸⁵¹²⁰ See, e.g., A. A. Anderson, “The Marriage of Ruth,” *JSS* 23 (1978): 171–83.

other.¹²⁸⁶¹ Although the story of Boaz and Ruth does not follow the letter of the law of the *levir*, it certainly captures its spirit.

When Naomi learns that Ruth has met up with Boaz, the sun rises again in her life. Yahweh has been gracious to her deceased husband and her sons by sending a potential “redeemer-kinsman” into their lives. Here the use of the plural (Boaz is “*our* near relative,” he is “*our* kinsman-redeemer”) suggests the wheels are turning in her mind, a conclusion that is confirmed in the next chapter.

Having heard this, Ruth adds¹²⁸⁷² another small but significant comment. But before we comment on her statement, we note the oddness of the addition of “the Moabite” after her name. Bush suggests plausibly that, like “Uriah the Hittite” in 2 Samuel 11, in this alien context “Ruth the Moabite” functioned as her full name.¹²⁸⁸³ One may surmise that this was how the citizens of Bethlehem distinguished her from other women in town who had the same name. On the other hand, the narrator may hereby be deliberately reflecting a clash of cultures. Naomi’s reference to Boaz as a *gō’ēl* makes sense only within the context of Israel’s unique theology of family and land.¹²⁸⁹⁴ As a Moabite, Ruth may not have grasped the significance of Naomi’s statement. Not being on Naomi’s train of thought, the latter’s use of the word *qārôb*, “one near by,” may have triggered Ruth’s apparent quotation of Boaz’s words inviting/advising her “to cling to”¹²⁹⁰⁵ or stay nearby his servants until his entire harvest has been taken in. Her continued amazement is expressed by placing the prepositional phrase before the verb.¹²⁹¹⁶ The previous scene contains no report of Boaz telling Ruth that she could work in his field until the harvest was completed, but it makes sense that he would have said this (the reported speech does not contain the entire conversation), On the other hand, Ruth may be drawing logical implications from what he has said and putting the words in his mouth.

In her final comment (v. 22) Naomi approves of Boaz’s offer, but not because of the food this guarantees Ruth and her. Concerned about her welfare, she changes Boaz’s *nē’ārîm*, “servants” (the masculine stands for all harvesters, irrespective of gender), to *na’ārôt*, “female servants.” Apparently Naomi had been worried about Ruth as she sent her out of the house in the morning and she would have been relieved to see her return safe and sound. The danger she fears, presumably from male workers in the field, is expressed with *pāga’*. Elsewhere the verb means “to meet, encounter, attack.” In 1:16 it had been used of “to pressure, compel.” But coming after the conversations in vv. 8–16, the reader may interpret it as a catchall for *nāga’*,

⁸⁶¹²¹ Cf. the analysis of D. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament with Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack, 1974); V. P. Hamilton, “Marriage: Old Testament and Ancient Near East,” *ABD* 4.567–68; F. R. Ames, “Levirate Marriage,” *NIDOTTE* 4.902–5; Gow, *Book of Ruth*, 143–82.

⁸⁷¹²² The emphatic tone of *וְגַם כִּי-אָמַר אֵלַי* may be captured with “And guess what else he said to me!” or “There is one other thing he said to me.” This expression occurs ten times in the OT. Cf. *DCH* 1, 361. On the emphatic sense of *וְגַם כִּי* see *HALOT*, 195.

⁸⁸¹²³ Bush, *Ruth*, 138.

⁸⁹¹²⁴ Cf. Jezebel’s failure to comprehend Naboth’s refusal to sell Ahab his field in 1 Kgs 21:3.

⁹⁰¹²⁵ Her use of the word *דָּבַק* links this comment with v. 8. The NIV’s “stay with” is much too mild for *דָּבַק*, better rendered “to cling to.”

⁹¹¹²⁶ The Hb. order translates, “With the servants who belong to me stick.”

“to touch, harass,” in v. 9, *hiklîm*, “to shame, embarrass,” in v. 15, and *gā‘ar*, “to rebuke, insult,” in v. 16.

The chapter ends with a summary of the results of all that transpired in this chapter. Ruth clung to (*dābaq*) Boaz’s female servants (*na‘ārôt*, as per Naomi’s advice), intending to scavenge (NIV “glean”¹²⁹²⁷ in Boaz’s field not only to the end of the barley harvest but until the end of the wheat harvest as well. Obviously she was comfortable with Boaz’s generosity and the crew of women workers he had in the field. Based on the information provided by the Gezer agricultural calendar alluded to earlier,¹²⁹³⁸ Ruth must have been out in the fields for six to seven weeks, from late April till early June by our designations of the months. The narrator does not indicate whether there were any further contacts between her and Boaz. Meanwhile, in fulfillment of her oath of commitment in 1:16–17, Ruth settled down (*yāšab*) with her mother-in-law. The note not only brings the chapter full circle (cf. 1:22) but also creates the impression that they had settled into a regular routine. We are left to wonder what has happened to Naomi’s dream (v. 20). Boaz has been introduced as an extremely kind and gracious man and as one who qualifies to rescue the line of Elimelech. But the dream seems to have died an early death; Boaz has helped Naomi and Ruth economically, but he is doing nothing about the real crisis in the family created by the deaths of all the male members. Only time will tell if this situation will be resolved.⁹⁴

2:17. After working hard all day **Ruth ... threshed the barley**, beat out the grain from the stalks, and had **an ephah**. This was about half a bushel, an unusually generous amount for one day of gleaning. It weighed about 30 pounds and was enough food for many days.

⁹²¹²⁷ Note the purpose infinitive construction, *וּלְלֶלֶךְ*, “in order to scavenge.”

⁹³¹²⁸ See above p. 650, n. 3.

⁹⁴ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 669–677.

C. An expression of joy (2:18–23)

Ruth's return home to Naomi ended Naomi's emptiness and filled the older woman with anticipation, thankfulness, and hope.

2:18. When Ruth brought home the ephah of barley grain, the results of her toil, Naomi **saw** the large amount. Also **Ruth** gave Naomi the extra portion **she had** saved from her lunch (cf. v. 14). Here was a widow who was not overlooked in the daily supply of food (cf. Acts 6:1). Naomi would be cared for by Ruth.

2:19. Naomi requested the name of Ruth's benefactor and prayed a blessing on him before Ruth answered her question. **Ruth** disclosed that she had **worked** in the field of **Boaz**.

2:20. **Naomi** repeated her blessing, now knowing to whom it should be applied (cf. v. 19a). Her night of sorrow with its fog of depression had broken into the dawning of a new day of joy. As God was the source of her sorrow (1:20–21), He was now the source of her joy. God's **kindness** (*hesed*; cf. 3:10 and comments on 1:8) again rested on **the living**, Ruth and herself.

Naomi's mind immediately perceived the significance of the situation. Even **the dead** might soon be blessed, in that the name of Elimelech, her dead husband, could live on through her faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth. Boaz was a **close relative**, but more than that, he was a **kinsman**-redeemer. He could act as a redeemer of property and persons. He could act as a *levir*, a Latin term for brother-in-law. Boaz could redeem by fulfilling the levirate law, which required a brother of a deceased man to marry his widow and raise up a son to his name (Deut. 25:5–10). Though Boaz was not a brother to Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband (Ruth 4:10), he was a close relative to the family and could act as a *levir* if he so desired. Naomi sensed the willingness of Boaz. No explanation is given as to why Naomi did not mention the nearer kinsman-redeemer (cf. 3:12).

2:21–22. **Ruth** had more good news. Boaz had invited her to remain in his field throughout the harvest (cf. vv. 8, 23). Naturally Naomi encouraged Ruth to accept Boaz's generosity. Perhaps to emphasize her need to stay there, **Naomi** reminded **Ruth** of the danger that might lurk in another **field**. This was a reminder of the especially low morals in the days of the Judges and Ruth.

2:23. Ruth's loyalty was revealed in her obedience to Naomi's words. She gleaned with Boaz's **servant girls** (cf. v. 8) for the several weeks of **the barley and wheat harvests**, and **lived with** Naomi during that time. However, the tension in the plot continued, for the harvest would soon come to an end. What would happen to the widows after the harvest was over?⁹⁵

⁹⁵ John W. Reed, "[Ruth](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 423–424.

17 וַתַּחבֹּט אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לָקְטָהּ בֹּט, lit.⁹⁶. “she beat out what she had gleaned.” The verb חבט means literally “to beat” and refers to the practice of threshing small quantities of grain by beating the stalks and ears with a stick (cf. Judg 6:11; for the use of a stick, cf. the “beating out” of seeds of certain spices in Isa 28:27). On the practice in antiquity, see Borowski, *Agriculture*, 63; Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte* 3:61, 92, especially plate 25.

וַיְהִי כְּאַיֶּפֶה שְׁעָרִים, “and it came to a full ephah (of barley).” Although the preposition כ here is almost invariably taken in its fairly common sense of “about, approximately” (cf. *Heb*⁹⁷S § 257), Campbell notes with approval the suggestion of Talmon on the basis of a usage in the Yavneh-Yam inscription (*BASO*⁹⁸R 176 [1964] 33) that the preposition כ here should carry the meaning “exactly” (the so-called *kaph veritatis*). Since the point in this passage is to stress the extremely large amount of grain that Ruth threshed from her gleanings, this is just the meaning the context requires.

An ephah was a dry measure equivalent to one tenth of a homer, the homer (חֹמֶר *hōmer*) being the amount that one donkey (חֲמֹר *hāmôr*) could carry. Obviously it was a substantial amount for one woman to glean in one day, but determining the size of the ephah in modern equivalents has not yet been possible with certainty, particularly since the size may have varied throughout the long course of OT history (note esp. the well-taken caveat of de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 201–2). Two different estimates are currently in vogue (see *IDB*⁹⁹B 4:834; Campbell, 104, gives a full discussion), on the basis of which an ephah would be equivalent to either 22 or 36.4 liters respectively (approximately 5.8 or 9.6 U.S. gallons). On the basis of United States government standards, these quantities of barley would weigh slightly less than thirty or fifty pounds! Whatever may be the accuracy of these estimates, the amount is clearly intended to be extremely large for one day’s gleanings, particularly given the estimate cited by Sasson (57) that the ration of grain per day for a male worker at Mari in the Old Babylonian period rarely exceeded one to two pounds. (Cf. also the remarks of Hubbard, 179.)

18 וַתֵּרָא וַתִּמְוֶתָהּ, “Her mother-in-law saw.” Syr. and V¹⁰⁰g do not read the qa¹⁰¹ וַתֵּרָא, “(her mother-in-law) saw,” of the M¹⁰²T but the hiphil וַתִּרְא, “she showed (her mother-in-law),” as do a very few Hebrew MS¹⁰³s (see Campbell). Many modern commentaries and translations adopt the change (e.g., Gerleman, Rudolph, de Waard-Nida, J¹⁰⁴B, NA¹⁰⁵B, RS¹⁰⁶V, TE¹⁰⁷V), on the grounds that the same subject throughout the verse creates a smoother text (e.g., Rudolph, de Waard-Nida, Zenger). However, the lack of אַת, the sign of the definite direct object, before חַמּוּתָהּ, “her

⁹⁶lit. literally

⁹⁷*HebS* R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

⁹⁸*BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

⁹⁹*IDB* G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*

¹⁰⁰Vg Vulgate

¹⁰¹qal the basic stem of Heb. verbs

¹⁰²MT Masoretic Text

¹⁰³MSS manuscript(s)

¹⁰⁴J_B *Jerusalem Bible*

¹⁰⁵NAB The New American Bible

¹⁰⁶RSV Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952, Apoc. 1957)

¹⁰⁷TEV Today’s English Version

mother-in-law,” and the criterion that the more difficult reading is to be preferred strongly favors the M¹⁰⁸ pointing (so also Campbell, Joüon, Sasson; Barthélemy et al., *Preliminary and Interim Report* 2:140; cf. NRS¹⁰⁹v).

19 **אֵיפֹה לִקְטַתְּ הַיּוֹם וְאַנֶּה עָשִׂיתָ** 19, “Where did you glean today, and where did you work?” The apparent redundancy of the two questions has occasioned problems for translators. Joüon, for example, emends the second to read **וְאִתְּמִי**, “with whom,” instead of “where.” The two questions seem to our manner of thinking to be in the wrong order, since the more general question should come first (de Waard-Nida). Gerleman, therefore, understands **אנה** in its more usual sense of “whither” (see *Note* 2:19.¹¹⁰a) and treats the sentence as a condensed way of speaking: “whither (did you go and) did you work?” (accepted by de Waard-Nida; cf. NA¹¹¹B). However, the redundancy can be understood perfectly well in context as a prolix way of speaking (Rudolph) occasioned by Naomi’s amazement at the quantity of grain and food that she has just seen (v 18). That the two questions do not inquire after a geographical location, but about the owner of the field, is made clear by the blessing that follows (cf. Zenger, 60). Stinespring’s proposal to render **אנה** with “to what purpose” (*JNE*¹¹²S 3 [1944] 101) makes no sense in the context.

יְהִי מְכִירְךָ בָּרוּךְ, lit.¹¹³. “Let-be he-who-noticed-you blessed.” As Campbell notes, this form of the blessing formula, using the jussive of the verb “to be,” **יְהִי**, occurs outside this passage only in 1 Kgs 10:9 (= 2 Chron 9:8) and Prov 5:18. The first passage blesses Yahweh himself and the second “your fountain,” a metaphor for a man’s wife. It cannot really be said that this is an unusual blessing form except perhaps statistically. It is simply a variant form in which the jussive force is expressed by the verb **יְהִי**, “let be,” whereas the more common form expresses the wish with a nonverbal clause (ליהוה) **בָּרוּךְ** X. “May X be blessed (by Yahweh)” (see *Heb*¹¹⁴S § 551). The word order here is not unusual (contra Campbell, 105); it is the normal and expected word order in a verbal clause: i.e., verb-subject-predicate/object (cf. **יְקֻם יְהוָה אֶת־דְּבָרוֹ**, “May Yahweh confirm his word!” 1 Sam 1:23; see *Heb*¹¹⁵S §§ 184, 546). Thus, there is no emphasis on **מְכִירְךָ**, “he who noticed you” (contra Campbell).

וַתִּגַּד לְחֻמוֹתֶיהָ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה עִמּוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בֵּעַז “Then she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’” Both Campbell and Sasson note the redundant nature of the language in these two sentences. To obviate this redundancy, which he believes “may not be legitimate,” Sasson (59) seeks to understand the two clauses, **אֲשֶׁר עָשְׂתָה עִמּוֹ** and **אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ** as identical but for the person of the verb, in two quite different ways, basing his interpretation on the

¹⁰⁸MT Masoretic Text

¹⁰⁹NRSV New Revised Standard Version (1989)

¹¹⁰2:19.a **אנה** normally means “whither, to where?” (BDB, [a], p. 33). However, in the same way that **שָׁמָּה**, “thither, to that place,” can mean simply “there, in that place” (cf. 1:7), **אנה** here must mean simply “where” (see BDB, [b], p. 33).

¹¹¹NAB The New American Bible

¹¹²*JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies*

¹¹³lit. literally

¹¹⁴*HebS* R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

¹¹⁵*HebS* R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

nuance of the meaning of the two verbs **הגיד** and **אמר**, which introduce the two clauses. On the basis that **הגיד** “presumes that an elaborate retelling of events was presented by Ruth upon her return home,” he translates the first clause “that which she accomplished with him,” and sees it as “but a phrase used to avoid repeating details of Ruth’s interview with Boaz” (59). On the basis, however, that the verb **אמר** is “much more precise, often times demanding that a definite statement follow,” he renders the identical clause in the second sentence “with whom I dealt” (57). But the two verbs in and of themselves simply do not bear such narrow and specific meanings. The hiphil verb **הגיד** in a context such as this simply means “to tell, inform”; in itself it implies nothing whatever about the nature of that which is to be told. In context, this can be a single fact (e.g., Gen 24:23) or an account (e.g., Gen 24:28). Hence, the clause must be translated the same way in both parts of the sentence. Indeed, this seems virtually demanded by the context, for Naomi’s question “Where did you work?” is far more plausibly answered by Ruth telling her with whom she worked than by an account of what she accomplished with the man. As Hubbard (184) puts it, “Syntactically, the direct address specified the content of the indirect address (i.e., ‘to be specific, she said ...’).” Campbell’s assessment of the redundancy (106) is the correct one: our narrator slows his pace once more to gain effect. By repeating the clause “(the man) with whom she worked,” a clause replete with the alliterative repetition of shin and ayin (see Porten, *GC*¹¹⁶A 7 [1978] 36; Hubbard, 185), he postpones Ruth’s revelation of the name to the very end and so creates suspense. Further, by greatly expanding the subject of Ruth’s nonverbal identifying sentence (*Heb*¹¹⁷S § 578) by such repetition, he places great emphasis on the name “Boaz”—an emphasis awaited by us the readers with delighted and expectant anticipation, for we know that Naomi will know who this man is (see *Explanation*)!

20 **בְּרוּךְ הוּא לִיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לַעֲזֹב חֲסִדוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים**, “May the LORD bless him, for he has not neglected to show kindness to the living and the dead!” The translation of this sentence depends upon the decision one makes in regard to two grammatical ambiguities. First, it is not clear whether **חֲסִדוֹ**, “his *hesed*,” is the subject or object of the verb **עֲזַב**, “forsake, withhold,” and, second, it seems uncertain whether the antecedent of **אֲשֶׁר**, “who,” is “Yahweh” or “he” (i.e., Boaz). In regard to the first, there is no substantive difference in meaning whichever way one construes the clause. However, it is far more likely in a context such as this that the verb **עֲזַב**, “abandon, forsake,” would have a personal subject (either Yahweh or Boaz) than an impersonal one (**חֲסִדוֹ**) (cf. the remarks of Hubbard, 185–86).

The second ambiguity, whether the antecedent of **אֲשֶׁר** is Yahweh or Boaz, has been much debated. In his study of **חֲסִדוֹ**, Glueck argued that Boaz is the antecedent (*Hesed in the Bible*, 41–42), his most cogent arguments being the parallelism in content with 1:8 and the parallelism in form with 2 Sam 2:5. In 1:8, the doing of **חֲסִדוֹ** with the living and the dead is predicated of humans, and in 2 Sam 2:5 the antecedent of the **אֲשֶׁר** clause cannot be Yahweh but only the human subject involved. Most recent commentators have disagreed with Glueck and, with little comment or discussion, have stated that the antecedent must be Yahweh (e.g., Gray, NCB¹¹⁸C, 393; Hertzberg, 270; Morris, 280; Rudolph, 50; de Waard-Nida, 42). Campbell (106) and Sakenfeld (*The Meaning of Hesed*, 104–7) both argue that Yahweh is the antecedent on the

¹¹⁶*GCA Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies*

¹¹⁷*Heb* S. R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

¹¹⁸NCBC New Century Bible Commentary

grounds of a comparison with the similar construction in Gen 24:27 (cf. also Gerleman, 28; Zenger, 61), where the antecedent of the relative clause is unmistakably Yahweh. Campbell adds the further grounds that Naomi's blessing is general, not specific, since she speaks of doing *hesed* to הַחַיִּים, "the living [mas¹¹⁹ c p¹²⁰]", "a quite general expression, whereas a specific reference to the two women would be feminine plural. In answer to this, however, Rebera (*B*¹²¹*T* 36 [1985] 320) correctly observes that the masculine plural הַחַיִּים, "the living," is the only such form available in OT Hebrew to refer to persons, male or female, since the feminine noun (חַיָּה, pl¹²². חַיּוֹת) refers exclusively to animals. In favor of Yahweh as the antecedent, Sakenfeld (106) adds the further grounds that Boaz's action of allowing Ruth to glean a few stalks of grain can hardly be regarded as *hesed* to the dead husbands or to Ruth herself. However, this rather badly misjudges the significance of Boaz's actions. In the light of the understanding of the scene worked out above, Naomi can indeed construe Boaz's actions as an act of *hesed* (as such an act has been elucidated by Sakenfeld herself, 233–34): (1) Naomi knows they spring from an existing relationship: Boaz is a relative (2:20; cf. Rebera, *B*¹²³*T* 36 [1985] 323–24); (2) it involves an urgent need on the part of the recipient: the two women are destitute and without means; (3) it is a free act on Boaz's part: he has responsibility as a relative, but no legal obligation; and (4) it involves "going beyond the call of duty": from the moment he knew who Ruth was, he treated her in an extraordinarily generous manner (see the last scene). It is not only the large amount of grain that Ruth has gleaned that prompts Naomi's outburst of blessing but also the food Ruth brought home from her noon meal.

Although in v 19 Naomi immediately blesses this unknown person, she cannot yet deem the action *hesed*. As soon as she knows it is Boaz, however, a second invocation is called for; blessing him for *hesed* because she recognizes that his actions spring from his relationship to both women through his kinship with Elimelech (Rebera, *B*¹²⁴*T* 36 [1985] 324). Hence, her blessing is followed by her explanation to Ruth that "the man is a relative of ours; he is among those who have the responsibility of redeeming us" (v 20d–e). Boaz's actions then, are very properly deemed *hesed* by Naomi.

Regarding the comparison with Gen 24:27, the definitive treatment of Rebera (*B*¹²⁵*T* 36 [1985] 317–27) has demonstrated that it is erroneous, for Gen 24:27 differs from Ruth 2:20 in both form and function. It is an *ascription of praise to Yahweh*, of the form ... בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר, "blessed be Yahweh who ...," in which the אֲשֶׁר clause states the grounds on which Yahweh is praised (cf. the exactly parallel clause in Ruth 4:14). On the other hand, Ruth 2:20, exactly parallel to 2 Sam 2:5 (contra Zenger, 61), is an *invocation of Yahweh* to bless someone, of the form [N] לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר ... בָּרוּךְ, blessed by Yahweh be [N] who ...," in which the אֲשֶׁר clause states

¹¹⁹masc masculine

¹²⁰pl plural

¹²¹*BT The Bible Translator*

¹²²pl. plate or plural

¹²³*BT The Bible Translator*

¹²⁴*BT The Bible Translator*

¹²⁵*BT The Bible Translator*

the grounds on which the invocation of Yahweh for blessing is made (see *TDO*¹²⁶ 2:284). Compare 3:10, where the grounds for the blessing are stated in a separate sentence, but the causal connection is obvious, and 1 Sam 23:21, where the grounds are introduced by כִּי, “because,” rather than אֲשֶׁר. Indeed, as Rebera (*B*¹²⁷ 36 [1985] 323) points out, אֲשֶׁר in Ruth 2:20 could well be taken as a causal connective, “since ...,” making the grounds explicit, as many translations do in 2 Sam 2:5. Further, the idiom עָזַב מֵעַם in Gen 24:27 is *not* a synonym of עָזַב אֶת in Ruth 2:20 (contra Campbell, 106). The preposition מֵעַם invariably means “from,” involving a sense of motion, action, direction, or source (see *HALO*¹²⁸ 4, עַם, p. 840). Hence, the idiom עָזַב מֵעַם can only mean something like “withhold from” (= “refuse, deny,” *HALO*¹²⁹ 4, עַם, p. 807), as the very similar idioms כָּרַת חֶסֶד מֵעַם/הִסִּיר, “remove/cut off *hesed* from” (1 Sam 20:15; 2 Sam 7:15), show.

Finally, in *IBH*¹³⁰ § 11.2.10.d, p. 207, the phrase is translated, “May he be pronounced blessed to Yahweh” and not “by Yahweh.” This is based upon the view of D. G. Pardee (*U*¹³¹ 8 [1976] 221–23) that the construction is the passivization of the active construction “I bless him to Yahweh,” i.e., “I commend him for blessing to Yahweh,” and not of “May Yahweh bless him,” because of the appearance of this active construction, i.e., בָּרוּךְ + personal name + ל + divine name], in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic, and the Hebrew of the Arad letters (cf. Scharbert, *TDO*¹³² II.1.i, 2:287). If such an analysis is correct, it makes virtually certain that the following אֲשֶׁר clause gives the grounds for which the person is commended to Yahweh for blessing rather than being a relative clause modifying Yahweh. However, given the frequency and variety of blessing formulas in the Hebrew of the OT, the complete lack of this active construction therein raises serious questions about the validity of the analysis for OT Hebrew (cf. the remarks of Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK*, 111–12; Scharbert, *TDO*¹³³ 2:287).

In light of the above, it seems unquestionable that Boaz is the antecedent of the relative clause. Of all the modern renditions, only מִי¹³⁴ has correctly so translated. The clause [N] עָזַב אֶת חֶסֶדוֹ, lit.¹³⁵ “he forsook his *hesed* with (someone),” is an antonym of [N] עָשָׂה חֶסֶד אֶת, “to do *hesed* with (someone).” We have therefore rendered it “he has not neglected to show kindness.”

¹²⁶*TDO* G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

¹²⁷*BT The Bible Translator*

¹²⁸*HALOT The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Eng.tr. of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*

¹²⁹*HALOT The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Eng.tr. of L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*

¹³⁰*IBHS* B. K. Waltke and M. O’Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*

¹³¹*UF UF Ugarit-Forschungen*

¹³²*TDO* G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

¹³³*TDO* G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

¹³⁴*NIV The New International Version* (1978)

¹³⁵lit. literally

קָרוֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ מִגֹּאֲלֵינוּ הוּא, lit¹³⁶. “The man is a relative of ours; he is among our redeemers.” Naomi explains her blessing of Boaz by observing not only that he is a relative (see 3:1 and *Comment* thereto) but also that he is among their “redeemers” (on the plural form, see *Note* 2:20.d¹³⁷). The context here makes it clear that Naomi is not using גֹּאֵל, *gô`ēl*, “redeemer,” in any of its technical legal senses. When used in this legal sense, it refers to that family member upon whom was incumbent the following: (1) the responsibility to receive the payment of restitution that accompanies a guilt-offering (עֹשֶׂה אֲשָׁם; cf. Lev 5:20–26[Eng. 6:1–7]) in the event of the death of the relative to whom this restitution was due (Num 5:5–8); (2) the “redemption of blood,” i.e., blood vengeance (Num 35:9–28; Deut 19:6–13); (3) the “redemption of persons,” i.e., the responsibility to purchase the manumission of a relative who has been forced by poverty to enter into slavery to a non-Israelite (Lev 25:47–55); (4) “the redemption of land,” i.e., the responsibility to purchase family property that, because of poverty, must be or has been sold outside the family (Lev 25:24–25; see the detailed discussion in the *Comment* on 4:4 below). The first three legal obligations of the גֹּאֵל have no bearing on the events and social situations of the book of Ruth at all. And, although the fourth, the redemption of land, does figure importantly in the legal scene at the gate in chap. 4, that Naomi at this point in time had as a viable option the legal right to the redemption of land to which she then would have rights as the widow of the deceased owner, or in any other capacity, makes nonsense of the story. For if she had such rights, it is incredible that neither she nor Boaz has made any move in the matter, and instead Ruth has been forced to glean in the fields, the vocation of the destitute. No, Naomi is using גֹּאֵל in a more general sense, that sense with which it is frequently used in reference to God’s actions on behalf of his people. In this nontechnical sense, the idea of payment, prominent in the legal meaning, is not involved. David Daube (*Studies in Biblical Law*, 40) has put it well:

“To buy back” is not a perfectly accurate translation of גֹּאֵל. It would be safer to translate “to take back,” seeing that the word is as often as not employed where he who recovers makes no payment. The word simply denotes the rightful getting back of a person or object that had once belonged to one but had been lost.

In such usage it means “to deliver a member of one’s kinship group (family, clan, tribe, or people) from evil of any kind.” The evil involved may be general (e.g., all harm, Gen 48:16; distress of various kinds, Ps 107:2; even death and Sheol, Lam 3:53–58; see *TDO*¹³⁸ גֹּאֵל III.1, 2, 2:352–53), or it may be specific. Several such passages are pertinent to the usage in Ruth. In Ps 72:14 the king is said to redeem the poor and needy from oppression and violence, and in Isa 54:4–8 Yahweh is the גֹּאֵל who removes the reproach of widowhood from Israel and becomes

¹³⁶lit. literally

¹³⁷2:20.d. Lit. “he is among our redeemers”; see *Comment*. מִגֹּאֲלֵינוּ must be understood as defective writing for מִגֹּאֲלֵינוּ; i.e., the pl. noun plus 1 c pl. suff. Such defectively written forms do occur; see *GKC* § 91k.

¹³⁸*TDO* G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*

her husband (cf. Prov 23:11). As Beattie cogently observes (in connection with Ruth's use of גאל in 3:9, *JSO*¹³⁹ 5 [1978] 44):

Ruth used the word as descriptive of Boaz in the part he has already played in the story. In welcoming Ruth to his fields, feeding her at meal-times and making sure that she gleaned ample grain to sustain herself and her mother-in-law, Boaz could be said to have redeemed Ruth and Naomi from their destitution.

In my opinion, this is just the sense that Naomi uses here in 2:20. It is also in this sense that we must understand the use of גאל in 4:14 to refer to the child born to Ruth and Boaz: he will restore Naomi to life and sustain her old age (v 15a; see *Comment* there; cf. Beattie, *JSO*¹⁴⁰ 5 [1978] 66). Since there is no similar institution in modern Western society, there is no word in English remotely equivalent. We have chosen to render the plural term here “those responsible for us.” In later passages where this translation does not fit well, I use the term “redeemer.” On the question of translation, see the helpful remarks of Albrectson, *TPB*¹⁴¹ 29 (1978) 106–7.

21 ותאמר רות המואבית, “Then Ruth the Moabite said.” It has seemed incongruous to some, apparently including some of the ancient translators (see *Note* 2:21.a¹⁴²), that Ruth's origin should be mentioned again here (e.g., Rudolph, 51). Consequently, some modern translators adopt the reading “to her mother-in-law,” which replaces “the Moabite” in the LX¹⁴³X, Syr., and O¹⁴⁴L (Joüon, Rudolph, J¹⁴⁵B; NJ¹⁴⁶B includes both!). However, given the account of Ruth's origin in chap. 1, the words of the overseer to Boaz identifying her as “a Moabite young woman who came back with Naomi” (2:6), and Ruth's own stress on her foreignness in her response to Boaz's kindness (2:10), her foreign origin was not only well known to the inhabitants of Bethlehem but would have been clear to the readers of the story as well, whether the author occasionally added the gentilic term or not. Rather, the occasional use of “Ruth the Moabite” instead of “Ruth” occurs because this is simply her full name. In the Israelite setting where she was a גרה, a “resident alien,” the patronymic, the addition of which normally formed the full name with native Israelites, was replaced by the gentilic, in just the same way that most other foreigners who were permanently domiciled in Israel were regularly identified by their country or region of origin. Thus, note “Uriah the Hittite” (2 Sam 11) vis-à-vis “Uriah Son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim” (Jer 26:20–23), or the Philistine “Ittai the Gittite” (2 Sam 15:19–22; 18:2–12) vis-à-vis “Ittai Son of Ribai from Gibeath of Benjamin” (2 Sam 23:29). The family or clan of origin of such foreigners would have had no standing and little meaning in the Israelite setting, so the gentilic replaces the patronymic. In 2 Sam 11 “Uriah the Hittite” is used where the full name is appropriate (vv 3, 6, 21, 24; cf. 2 Sam 12:10); elsewhere either form

¹³⁹*JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

¹⁴⁰*JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

¹⁴¹*TPBT Technical Papers for the Bible Translator*

¹⁴²2:21.a. The LXX, Syr., OL, and Vg omit “the Moabite,” and the first three add לחמותה, “to her mother-in-law.” MT is to be retained, contra Rudolph, Joüon.

¹⁴³LXX The Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT

¹⁴⁴OL Old Latin

¹⁴⁵J^B *Jerusalem Bible*

¹⁴⁶NJB *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985)

may be used, but the form without the gentilic is more common, as in Ruth. Thus, Ruth's full name was "Ruth the Moabitess" (exactly as Uriah's was "Uriah the Hittite"), and her full name is used in the narrative where appropriate, as in 1:22 (see *Comment* there) and especially in 4:5, 10, where Boaz identifies her in the formal public setting of the legal assembly. Elsewhere the narrator may use either form of her name. Although it is certainly possible that the choice of the full name over the short form could be used in order to place emphasis upon foreign origin, there is certainly nothing in this context (or in that of v 2 above) that makes such stress the least bit appropriate (contra Hubbard, 190).

גַּם־כִּי אָמַר אֵלַי, "Why, he even said to me." The meaning of the idiom כִּי גַם in this syntactic setting must be determined from context. In its six other occurrences, it functions as a subordinating conjunction introducing concessive clauses (*Heb*¹⁴⁷S § 530), which cannot be the case here. BD¹⁴⁸B (1 כִּי.d, p. 472) helpfully takes it to be an example of idioms in which כִּי is added to adverbs or interjections "to add force or distinctness to the affirmation which follows." In this light, it can be taken to be a more emphatic form (since כִּי is added) of the intensifying use of גַּם (BD¹⁴⁹B, 2, p. 169; K¹⁵⁰B¹⁵¹³, 5, p. 188). It is a synonym, then, of כִּי הָא, which can be used in exactly the same way (e.g., Ezek 23:40; cf. *IBH*¹⁵²S § 39.3.4.d). This sense eminently fits the context: having learned who Boaz is, Ruth is struck by his willingness to grant her the privilege of gleaning right beside his reapers until the harvest is over. This makes much better sense than to use an etymology that gives the phrase the meaning "also (it is) that," i.e., "besides, in addition, moreover" (so BD¹⁵³B, 6, p. 169; cf. *GB*¹⁵⁴H § 157a n. 2; Schoors, OT¹⁵⁵S 21 [1981] 261; yet see n. 119), adopted by Gerleman, Joüon, Rudolph, J¹⁵⁶B, NJ¹⁵⁷B, NA¹⁵⁸S, RS¹⁵⁹V. Ruth is not so much adding a new piece of information to her report to Naomi as she is expressing understanding of Boaz's actions, now that she knows of his relationship to them, including the fact that he has accorded her the same extraordinary gleaning rights (עַם דְּבָק; see *Comment* on v 8d) throughout the rest of the harvest. Consequently, we have reordered the

¹⁴⁷*Heb*S R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

¹⁴⁸BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

¹⁴⁹BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

¹⁵⁰KB L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 3rd ed.

¹⁵¹³ L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 3rd ed.

¹⁵²*IBHS* B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*

¹⁵³BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

¹⁵⁴*GBH* P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, tr. & rev. T. Muraoka

¹⁵⁵OTS Oudtestamentische Studiën

¹⁵⁶J^B *Jerusalem Bible*

¹⁵⁷NJB New Jerusalem Bible (1985)

¹⁵⁸NAS New American Standard Version

¹⁵⁹RSV Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952, Apoc. 1957)

phrase, “Why, he even said to me.” NE¹⁶⁰B catches the force well (contra de Waard-Nida, 93 n. 78) with “And what is more ...”; cf. NA¹⁶¹B, NI¹⁶²V.

עַד אִם עַד, “until they have completed all my harvest.” עד אִם is a rare form of the conjunction עד, “until,” governing a verb, which usually has the form עַד אֲשֶׁר (BD¹⁶³B, II Conj. 1.a, b, pp. 724–25). Normally our author uses 3:18 ;1:13) עַד אֲשֶׁר or עד plus the infinitive (1:19; 2:23; 3:3) to express this same sense (Joüon, 65). Given the expression עַד-כִּלּוֹת, “until (they) finished,” in the author’s narrative summary in v 23, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is another example of unusual speech on the part of Boaz (here quoted by Ruth), as Campbell (107) notes. Williams (*Heb*¹⁶⁴S § 457) understands the particle אִם to introduce an element of doubt, citing this passage, but there is surely none such in this context (or in Gen 24:19, 33; Isa 30:17?).

Twice in these last two clauses, in words of Boaz quoted by Ruth, Boaz avoids the simple pronominal suffix in favor of the expanded form אֲשֶׁר-לִי, “which is mine.” This is considered to be emphatic by Rudolph (51; cf. Hubbard, 190 n. 44), but he must then delete the second occurrence since there is patently no need for emphasis on the pronoun in “my harvest” (cf. also, Witzernath, 15). GK¹⁶⁵C (§ 135m n. 3) simply lists the form as a free variant of the simple preposition; i.e., it is purely a matter of style. We agree with Campbell that it is chosen by our author to give Boaz’s speech a stilted, formal style.

22 טוֹב בְּתִי כִי תֵצֵאִי עִם-נַעֲרֹתָיו lit¹⁶⁶. “Best is it, my daughter, that you go out with his young women.” טוב must be understood as the comparative/superlative use of the adjective (see GB¹⁶⁷H § 141g). As Joüon points out, when the comparison has a single member (i.e., when that to which the comparison is made is omitted), the simple adjectival form must suffice; cf. 2 Sam 18:3 (Joüon, Rudolph). This is a far preferable understanding of the construction than to consider טוב as an expletive “good!” followed by the emphatic כִּי, “indeed” (given as alternative renderings by Campbell, 107; Sasson, 62), especially given the questions raised about the emphatic use of כִּי by Aejmelaeus (*JB*¹⁶⁸L 105 [1986] 204–5). Finally, since there is no appreciable difference morphologically between the comparative and the superlative in Hebrew, this is best taken as a superlative (so NE¹⁶⁹B).

Although Boaz’s words in v 21, quoted by Ruth, speak of נַעֲרִים, which we have interpreted to refer to the whole group of harvesters, men and women, Naomi in her response speaks specifically of the נַעֲרוֹת, the “young women.” As Campbell (107) notes, her counsel here is very similar to that of Boaz in v 8. Naomi’s use of the term does not mean that she opposes Boaz’s

¹⁶⁰NEB The New English Bible

¹⁶¹NAB The New American Bible

¹⁶²NIV The New International Version (1978)

¹⁶³BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

¹⁶⁴HebS R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*

¹⁶⁵GKC GKC Gesenius’ *Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, tr. A. E. Cowley

¹⁶⁶lit. literally

¹⁶⁷GBH P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, tr. & rev. T. Muraoka

¹⁶⁸JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹⁶⁹NEB The New English Bible

women workers to his male workers (contra Hubbard, Rudolph); i.e., “It is better that you go out with his women (rather than his men).” Most likely the reference means nothing more than the fact that Naomi assumes that Ruth’s closest and most natural associations would be with the young women who gather the cut grain into bundles and sheaves (see *Comment* above). Indeed, since she uses the verb יצא, “to go out, go forth,” she may mean “go forth (to the fields)” with these women.

וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ-בְךָ בְּשָׂדֵה אֲחֵרָה, “then no one will harm you in some other field.” The verb פגע means “to meet, encounter.” When the encounter is with hostile intentions, it can mean “to fall upon, attack.” Usually the context makes clear that the intent of the attack is to kill (cf. Judg 15:12 vis-à-vis v 13), but without such implications from context, some phrase must be added to show that death was the result (cf. 1 Kgs 2:25, 46). The verb, then, means “to attack physically with the intent to do harm” (cf. RE¹⁷⁰B). Naomi, consequently, uses a much stronger word than Boaz did in either v 9 or v 15, and it seems unmistakable that she is concerned for Ruth’s safety (contra Sasson, 62). Doubtless it was possible that she could be driven off by overzealous harvest hands or other gleaners greedy for the scanty leavings of the reapers. Sasson’s attempt (62) to understand the verb to mean “entreat, urge, press,” yielding the translation “and not be pressed into another field,” is unconvincing, even if פגע could be taken to mean “coerce, compel” rather than “beseech, implore” (cf. 1:16). The meaning “offend, insult” (Rudolph, NA¹⁷¹B) is unwarranted. NE¹⁷²B’s rendering “let no one catch you” (taking the verb to mean “to meet”?) is most difficult in the context. Does it imply that she should not be apprehended in some other field (that is, by Boaz; so Morris, 281–82)?

23 עַד-כָּלוֹת קְצִיר-הַשְּׂעִרִּים וְקְצִיר הַחֲטִיטִים, “until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.” Campbell (108) shows from Deut 16:9–12 and from the Gezer Calendar that the time period from the beginning of barley harvest to the end of the wheat harvest was normally seven weeks, concluding at Pentecost, and that the period of the year was approximately from late April to the beginning of June. For ancient readers of the story, who well knew the length of time involved in these activities of the agricultural year, the point is well made: Ruth has gleaned for a very considerable period—the whole harvest of both crops—but nothing further has developed between her and Boaz. A development that appeared to hold the promise of a solution to their widowed and helpless state seems to have resulted in nothing more than the provision of food for a season.

There is a problem raised, however, by the statement that Ruth gleaned until the end of the wheat harvest, for the next scene takes place on the threshing floor during the threshing of *barley* (3:2). On these grounds, Gunkel (“Ruth,” 75) and Bertholet (410) delete “and the wheat harvest” as a gloss. But there is not a shred of textual evidence to support such surgery. It is entirely possible that the *threshing* of barley continued past the end of the *harvesting* of wheat.

וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶת-חֲמוּתָהּ. There are two possible ways of understanding this phrase: (1) “And she lived with her mother-in-law” (i.e., while she was gleaning) or (2) “Then she stayed (at home) with her mother-in-law” (i.e., after she finished gleaning). Sasson opts for the first, translating “Meanwhile she lived with her mother-in-law” and arguing that the storyteller is “emphasizing

¹⁷⁰REB Revised English Bible

¹⁷¹NAB The New American Bible

¹⁷²NEB The New English Bible

... that ... Ruth was not so completely taken into Boaz's *familia* that she no longer dwelled with Naomi" (62). This interpretation is based on his contention (Sasson, 42–61) that Ruth has cleverly prevailed upon Boaz to accord her status as a member of his family. But, as we have already shown above, this is a misunderstanding of the meaning of Ruth's actions and words. Rather (see *Explanation* to the last scene), Boaz has treated her as a member of his family because of her relationship and commitment to Naomi from the moment that he learned who she was. The most natural understanding of the waw-consecutive form וַתֵּשֶׁב is to take it in its regular sense of temporal (or logical) sequence, "Then she stayed at home." This sentence in the concluding summary thus makes the same point as the reference to the length of time Ruth gleaned (see above and note the remarks of Hubbard, 193). Although Boaz's relationship to the two widows and his extraordinary kindness to Ruth have hinted strongly that he will play a major role in the solution to their problems, that expectation seems to have died aborning: Ruth and Naomi live together in much the same status as when the chapter opened.

Explanation

In this the concluding scene Ruth and Naomi evaluate the events of the day. Ruth's contribution throughout has been consistent with her character. Her actions have sprung from her loyalty and commitment to Naomi. She went to glean in the field to provide food for the two of them, and, as Tribble (180) observes, her response to Naomi's explanation of Boaz's identity bears out her commitment. Hearing that Boaz has the responsibilities of a relative and redeemer, understanding dawns upon her, and suddenly his inexplicable benevolence is comprehensible. Almost wonderingly, she remembers his further words and assures her mother-in-law that their source of sustenance and support will continue throughout the harvest season (v 21). It is very clear, in the light of developments to come, that she does not think of Boaz as a prospective husband for herself or as the means to provide a male heir for the line of her deceased husband. As her first act upon returning home was to give Naomi food (v 18), so now her last words in the scene affirm the continuance of this provision (Tribble, 180). This activity she faithfully pursues until the end of both barley and wheat harvests, and then she continues to live with her mother-in-law (v 23).

For Naomi, however, the scene means nothing less than a return to life. She had begun her journey home from Moab with the painful dialogue with Ruth and Orpah that ended with her silent acceptance of Ruth's resolve to return with her (1:8–18), and she had concluded that journey at Bethlehem in the black despair and emptiness that climaxed in open and bitter complaint against Yahweh himself (1:20–21). Even at the beginning of the day, still absorbed in her affliction and emptiness, she had responded to Ruth's proposal to glean in the fields with naught but two brief words of assent (2:2). But now, startled by the large amount of grain Ruth has produced and the quantity of food left over from her meal, Naomi asks excited questions about where Ruth has worked and blesses proleptically whoever it was that paid her such attention. The whole exchange is fraught with delightful irony, for we, the hearers, realize that each of the women knows more than the other: Ruth knows that she worked with Boaz but does not know who Boaz is, while Naomi has no idea that Ruth has worked all day with Boaz, but knows very well who he is! Ruth replies to Naomi's questions unaware of the significance of

what has happened and in “enormous and touching innocence” (Rauber, *JB*¹⁷³L 89 [1970] 32) leaves out the name of the man who has been so inexplicably attentive and generous until the very end of her response: “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz!” As soon as Naomi hears that it is Boaz who has showered such kindness and attention upon Ruth, she sees and understands full well the possibilities latent in that reality and so breaks forth into glad words of praise and blessing for him. One cannot but affirm with Rauber (*JB*¹⁷⁴L 89 [1970] 32) that “with the advent of this understanding comes an upward surge of her spirit, a lifting from the depths ... and we know that Naomi, who was herself among the dead, lives again.” The reason for Naomi’s glad cry of blessing she leaves to the end: “The man is a relative of ours; he is among our redeemers.” The “redeemer” in Naomi’s usage here refers to that family member who has a moral responsibility to come to the aid of family members in need (see *Comment*). As Naomi’s glad cry invoking Yahweh to bless Boaz who “has not neglected to show kindness to the living and the dead” has revealed, she recognizes in him not just one who has this responsibility but also one who has clearly signaled that he is willing to meet that responsibility to the full.

Now, as Rebera insightfully observes (*B*¹⁷⁵T 36 [1985] 324), it is most important for the development of the story to recognize that Naomi blesses *Boaz*, not *Yahweh*, for his *hesed* (see *Comment* on v 20). On the one hand, this signal indication of Boaz’s willingness to “do *hesed*,” i.e., to act sacrificially in a manner faithful to the obligations of his kinship, forms “the logical base upon which the entire strategy, with which the third act begins, depends for its success” (*B*¹⁷⁶T 36 [1985] 324). On the other hand, this recognition is also important for the correct assessment of the stages in the story’s resolution of the death and emptiness that have afflicted Naomi.

For Naomi, who at 1:20–21 delivers a scathing indictment of Yahweh as her oppressor, to declare the munificence of his *hesed* conduct at 2:20 without any redress is to scuttle the plot and reduce everything that follows to a disappointing anticlimax. The vindication of Yahweh is not to be found in the utterances of Naomi but in the utterances of the women in 4:14 to whom Naomi addressed her indictment in 1:20–21. (Rebera, *B*¹⁷⁷T 36 [1985] 324)

Naomi has indeed come back to life—as her glad cry of blessing for Boaz reveals—but at this stage of the story it is a rebirth of hope. “Yahweh had seen to the needs of his people by giving them food” (1:6c), and now Boaz’s *hesed* has given them a share in that provision. Naomi’s new life springs from the hope that these actions may presage further acts of *hesed*. Does she perhaps hope that they might even go so far as to relieve the death and emptiness that childlessness and widowhood represented for these women who live in a man’s world? That she identifies him as “one of our redeemers” perhaps hints that she does.

The conclusion of this scene, however, presents to us suddenly a most puzzling impression of Boaz. Our narrator very carefully and deliberately drew our attention to him at the very beginning of the act. He introduced him to us in a digression that was well calculated to raise

¹⁷³*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹⁷⁴*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

¹⁷⁵*BT The Bible Translator*

¹⁷⁶*BT The Bible Translator*

¹⁷⁷*BT The Bible Translator*

intriguing possibilities and so to incite our interest: Boaz is a man of substance and standing in the community from the same “clan” as Elimelech and so related to Naomi (v 1). Our interest was further heightened when Ruth, going out to glean unaware, happened “by chance” across his field. Boaz then immediately put in his appearance, and his almost excessive kindness and benevolence to Ruth have further sustained our interest and curiosity. And now Naomi’s sudden return to life and hope at the mention of his name and her revelation that he is one of a group of relatives with socially imposed responsibilities for her and Ruth have virtually confirmed our impression that in this man will lie the solution to their problems. Yet, with the concluding verse of this scene, our narrator brings the whole forward thrust of the narrative suddenly and completely to a halt. “So she gleaned close to Boaz’s young women,” he tells us, “until the barley and wheat harvests were finished”—a period of some seven weeks!—“and then she lived at home with her mother-in-law”! Once again they exist in much the same state as when they first returned home from Moab, for the end of the harvest season must ultimately mean for them the return of famine and emptiness. At the end of chap. 1 the narrator presaged hope (1:22c), while Naomi languished in bitter despair (1:20–21); here at the end of chap. 2 Naomi lives again (2:20), but our narrator has returned us full circle to the clouded and uncertain state that existed before Ruth set out to glean (Trible, 181). He drops not a single hint as to how the story will move forward. Further progress toward resolution waits in suspense for an impetus from some quarter, as do we, the hearers. At the beginning of the act, initiative for progress in the story had devolved upon Ruth since Naomi was wrapped up in the silence of her bitter despair. In the next act, however, it will be Naomi, brought to life again by the possibilities latent in Boaz’s willingness to “show kindness to the living and the dead,” who will provide a new and startling impetus.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Fredric W. Bush, [*Ruth, Esther*](#), vol. 9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1996), 132–143.

17 Refreshed by her meal, Ruth *gleaned in the field until evening*. She had arrived in the field in the morning (v. 7) but did not start gleaning until Boaz gave her permission (v. 8). So she diligently worked until the end of the day to make the most of Boaz's generosity. Then she *beat out* the collected grain from its stalk, probably using a stick or rod (cf. Isa 28:27).¹⁵¹⁷⁹¹ The amount of grain was extraordinary—*about an ephah*¹⁵¹⁸⁰² *of barley*. The word *ʿêpâ* is an Egyptian loanword, a unit of dry measure, especially grains (Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10).¹⁵¹⁸¹³ It was equal to the liquid measure bath (Ezek 45:11) and ten omers (Exod 16:36; Ezek 45:11). The exact amount in modern equivalents is hard to estimate because ancient societies probably had differing measuring norms based on local customs, and the size may have changed from the pre-exilic to post-exilic periods.¹⁵¹⁸²⁴ Estimates range from 22 to 40 liters (5.8 to 10.6 gallons), with a weight from 13.6 to 22.7 kilograms (30 to 50 pounds).¹⁵¹⁸³⁵ For comparison, an omer of manna fed a person for a day (Exod 16:16), David brought an ephah of parched grain and ten loaves for his three brothers (1 Sam 17:17), and the ration for a male worker at Mari (Old Babylonian period, nineteenth century BC) was 0.45 to 0.9 kilograms (1 to 2 pounds) per day.¹⁵¹⁸⁴⁶ In a day, Ruth probably collected enough grain to feed herself and Naomi for at least a week. In this verse, Ruth's large gleanings show that Boaz's workers followed his commands and that Ruth worked hard.

The amount Ruth gleaned creates literary links. Within the narrative, the word *ʿêpâ* creates a soundplay with the word *ʿêpōh*, “where,” two verses later (see comment on v. 19). “An ephah” also draws an inner-biblical link between the Ruth narrative and the narrative of Hannah and Elkanah (1 Sam 1–2). There is already a connection between Ruth and Hannah since Samuel is the son of the latter and the anointer of the first two kings, including David. Both narratives thus concern the coming monarchy. And their similar expressions about being better than seven/ten sons (Ruth 4:15 and 1 Sam 1:8; see comments on 4:15) reinforces the connection. Given these inner-biblical links, the use of “an ephah” brings out a contrast.¹⁵¹⁸⁵⁷ Ruth offers “an ephah” to her mother-in-law, while Hannah offered “a three-year-old bull, one ephah of flour and a skin of

¹⁷⁹¹⁵¹ The verb *hābaṭ*, “beat out,” refers to threshing small quantities of grain and to “beating” trees to shake out the fruit (e.g., olives, Deut 24:20). Gideon “beats out” wheat in a winepress to hide from the Midianites (Judg 6:11). Large quantities of grain were threshed on an open floor with cattle (e.g., Isa 28:27, 28); BDB, 286.

¹⁸⁰¹⁵² Heb. *kəʿêpâ* could mean “about an ephah” (reading the *kaph* as a mark of approximation) or “exactly an ephah” (*kaph* as a mark of precision; *kaph veritas*); see Campbell, *Ruth*, 104. In this verse, it does not make much difference to our understanding of the large amount Ruth collected.

¹⁸¹¹⁵³ It also refers to a vessel (“basket”) of the same measure (e.g., Zech 5:6–10).

¹⁸²¹⁵⁴ For discussions, see R. Fuller, “*ʿêpâ*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:382–88; M. A. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” *ABD* 6:897–908.

¹⁸³¹⁵⁵ Eighth-century BC vessels from Tell Beit Mirsim and Lachish marked *bt* (“bath”) contained approximately twenty-two liters. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.8.3 §197) suggests the higher end of the range; cf. forty liters, *HALOT* 1:43; BDB, 144.

¹⁸⁴¹⁵⁶ For the Mari evidence, see Sasson, *Ruth*, 57.

¹⁸⁵¹⁵⁷ After Grossman, *Ruth*, 173–74.

wine” to God, to give thanks for her son (1 Sam 1:24). Ruth has the same amount of barley but no son. She has the fruit of the land but still waits for the fruit of the womb.

Before we move onto the next scene, we will consider Boaz’s application of the law. His is a generous application according to the principle of kindness, based not on the letter of the law but the moral logic underlying it. Boaz protects and provides for her way beyond the minimal requirements of the gleaning law (Deut 24:19–22). Like his field overseer, Boaz could have applied the law restrictively by viewing Ruth as an outsider because of the Moabites’ previous inhospitality and their tempting of Israel into idolatry (Deut 23:1–6). And perhaps some hostility toward Ruth the Moabite can be detected in Boaz’s commands for his male servants not to harm her. Boaz’s kindness is even more remarkable against the backdrop of lawlessness that marks the judges, the historical period in which the Ruth narrative is set. He knows Ruth had pledged her allegiance to Yahweh, so she will not seduce him into idolatry. He also knows she had shown hospitality to Naomi’s family in Moab. Thus, the law excluding Moabites did not apply in Ruth’s case.¹⁵¹⁸⁶⁸

Although Boaz was “a man of great worth,” which also includes his material wealth, this does not mean he would have automatically shared his wealth. This can be deduced from the laws commanding generosity toward the poor and needy, both fellow Israelites and sojourners. These laws not only outline the requirements but also provide motivations for obedience. God’s people are a redeemed people, freed to serve him who places ethical demands on them. They have been redeemed from oppressive bondage under Pharaoh to become slaves of God (Lev 25:42, 55). In response, they were to act generously and with compassion toward sojourners (e.g., Deut 10:19), indentured servants (e.g., Deut 15:13–15), and the marginalized and the underprivileged (e.g., Deut 24:17–21). God’s people must not repeat the oppression of their former masters; instead, a redeemed people must seek to redeem others through generosity (Deut 24:18, 22). God’s people are to give from what God has blessed them with (e.g., Deut 15:14). They are commanded to not be tight-fisted but open-handed toward the needy, presumably because stinginess was the attitude of many. Such an attitude is understandable in a subsistence agricultural society, where generosity requires trust in God, even for the relatively wealthy. And, in Boaz’s assertion that Ruth’s kind loyalty to Naomi deserved reward from God, we find an echo of a motivation to be generous in the law: “Give freely ... because for this Yahweh your God will bless you in all that you undertake” (Deut 15:10). Boaz understands this virtuous cycle of blessing, and as someone who has been richly blessed by God, his generous attitude is manifested in his acts of kindness beyond legal requirement. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul says that Christians have experienced an even greater redemption in Jesus Christ. We thus have even greater motivation to be cheerful, generous givers to those in need (cf. 2 Cor 8:1–15; 9:7), but especially to others who have sought refuge under God’s wings, those of the household of faith (cf. Gal 6:10).

F. HOME: NAOMI AND RUTH DEBRIEF (2:18–23)

The location and actors for this final scene of act 2 are the same as the first, but the mood cannot be more different. Naomi’s despondency is transformed as she sees Ruth returning

¹⁸⁶¹⁵⁸ See section “Applying the Law” in the introduction.

home from the field with an enormous haul of grain (v. 18). This scene draws out the significance of Ruth's encounter with Boaz (vv. 4–17) and flags future events. Ruth set out to glean in a field where she would find favor (2:2), the audience knows Boaz has lived up to his reputation (cf. v. 1), but now we share in Naomi's elated surprise at Ruth's reveal of Boaz's identity (v. 19). As Naomi's accusation against God (1:20–21) turns to praise and gratitude (2:20), we are reminded of God's hand working through human actors (cf. v. 12). Boaz's acts of kindness included provision, protection, and inclusion for Ruth (vv. 21–23), yet there is a hint of more to come: Boaz is not just a relative (v. 1), not just a *close* relative, he is a "kinsman-redeemer" (v. 20). Ruth gleaning "until the end of the barley and wheat harvests" (v. 23) draws a thread back to the end of act 1, when Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem "at the beginning of the barley harvest" (1:22). We can draw the thread back even further, to the mention of God breaking the famine (1:6). The harvest provision is God's providence and blessing.

¹⁸*She carried it^{187a} and entered the town. Her mother-in-law saw^{188b} what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what she had left over from her full meal.^{189c}*

¹⁹*Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work?"^{190d} May he who took notice of you be blessed." So she reported to her mother-in-law whom she worked with. She said, "The name of the man whom I worked with today is Boaz."*

²⁰*Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by Yahweh, who has not abandoned his kindness to the living and the dead!" Then Naomi said to her, "The man is our close relative, he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."^{191e}*

^{187a} The implied object of the verb *nāśā* ' , "to lift, carry," is the threshed grain from the previous verse.

^{188b} Heb. *wattēre* ' , "she saw" (*qal*). Two Kennicott MSS (18 and 109; *BHQ*, 53–54*) read the verb as a *hiphil*, and add a direct object marker before "her mother-in-law," which produces "she [Ruth] showed her mother-in-law" (supported by Syr. and Vulg.). This reading avoids a change in subject, from Ruth to Naomi to Ruth. However, the MT^L is preferred because of the lack of a direct object marker, subject switching is found elsewhere (e.g., 4:13), and it is the more difficult reading (supported by LXX, 2QRutha, and Tg.).

^{189c} Heb. *miśśābā 'āh* can be read as an infinitive construct with a feminine suffix, and the *min* marks the cause of the situation (the so-called ablative use of *min*, *IBHS* §11.2.11d; e.g., 2 Sam 3:37; Ezek 28:18), so "because of her fullness." Or it could be read as the noun *śōbā* ' , "satisfaction, fullness," and the *min* has a temporal function (see *IBHS* §11.2.11c; e.g., Ps 73:20; Hos 6:2), so "after her fullness." The former is preferred in this context, although it does not make much difference to the meaning of the verse. MT^L *miśśābā 'āh* is supported by LXX and Tg., whereas 2QRutha, supported by Vulg., reads *bśb 'h*, which is consistent with the ablative sense of *min* in MT^L.

^{190d} The root 'śh here and elsewhere in this verse means "work"; *HALOT* 2:891.

^{191e} Heb. *miggō 'ālēnū* looks like a singular noun with the preposition *min*. In this context, the *min* is partitive, which requires a plural reading, "one of our kinsman-redeemers" (so LXX, Syr, and Vulg.). The reconstruction of 2QRutha supports MT^L. It may thus be a shortened spelling for the plural (see GKC §91k).

²¹Ruth the Moabite^{192f} said, “Also, he even said to me, ‘Cling to the male servants^{193g} who are mine until they have finished all the harvest that is mine.’ ”

²²Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is better,^{194h} my daughter, that you go out with his female servants, so they will not assault you in another field.”¹⁹⁵ⁱ

²³So she clung to Boaz’s female servants to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived^{196j} with her mother-in-law.

This scene can be structured as a chiasm:¹⁵¹⁹⁷⁹

- A Ruth carries gleanings to town, her *mother-in-law* sees what she has *gleaned*, she gave her what she had left over because of her *fullness* (v. 18)
- B Naomi asks *where* Ruth gleaned and blesses the one who took notice of her
 - C Ruth tells Naomi that she *worked with Boaz* (v. 19)
 - D Naomi blesses *Boaz* because of his and/or Yahweh’s unceasing kindness
 - D’ Naomi tells Ruth that *Boaz* is a relative and redeemer (v. 20)
 - C’ Ruth tells Naomi that *Boaz told her to stay with his servants* until the end of the harvest (v. 21)
- B’ Naomi tells Ruth to *stay with Boaz’s female servants* because she might be assaulted in another field (v. 22)
- A’ Ruth clung to Boaz’s female servants to *glean* until the barley and wheat harvests were *finished*. She lived with her *mother-in-law* (v. 22).

This third and final scene is mostly a dialogue, which takes place with the same speakers at the same location as the first of act 2. The scene is enclosed by a narrative introduction and conclusion that describe the actions of Ruth and include “her mother-in-law” (*ḥāmôtāh*), “glean” (*laqqēṭ*), and the idea of fullness or completion (A-A’). Each of the three paired elements contains the verb *’āmar*, “to say.” Naomi initiates the conversation and has the last say (B-B’). In this pair of speeches, she focuses on the location of Ruth’s gleanings, first with questions, then with a warning (B-B’). Ruth does not speak until spoken to, her first speech revealing with whom she worked, and the second revealing with whom Boaz said she should work until the end of the harvest (C-C’). The central elements are Naomi’s benediction on Boaz and her revelation that he is a kinsman-redeemer of the two women. This structure highlights

^{192f} LXX, Syr., OL, and Vulg. omit “the Moabite,” with the first three adding “to her mother-in-law.” 2QRutha and Tg. support the MT^L.

^{193g} Heb. *hannē ‘ārîm* could refer to both male and female servants or just male servants; see comment on v. 21. For further discussion, see Lim, “Otherness,” 103–6.

^{194h} The adjective *tôb* could be understood in an absolute (“good”; Tg., LXX), comparative (“better”; Vulg.), or superlative (“best”) sense; see *IBHS* §14.4–5; *JM* §141g. Since Naomi is correcting Ruth’s misconception, either of the latter two senses is in view. The comparative sense is found in 1 Sam 27:1; 2 Sam 18:3 and is preferred here.

¹⁹⁵ⁱ Syr. “in the field of someone you do not know.”

^{196j} A few Heb. MSS read *wattāšāb*, “and she returned.” This reading is supported by Vulg., which takes this clause as the beginning of the next chapter. LXX, Syr., and Tg. support the MT^L, which is to be retained.

¹⁹⁷¹⁵⁹ Modified from Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, 131–32.

the predominance of Naomi's speeches and the crucial importance of her words in D-D'. Apart from Ruth's last designation ("the Moabite"), the rest foreground the mother-and-daughter-in-law relationship. Ruth's respect for her mother-in-law (filial piety) is reflected in this dialogue, and Naomi dominates the discussion as the head of her family unit.

There are similarities between this Naomi-Ruth dialogue (vv. 19–22) and the Boaz-Ruth dialogue (vv. 8–14).¹⁶¹⁹⁸⁰

| | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Boaz (vv. 8–9) | Naomi (v. 19a) |
| Ruth (v. 10) | Ruth (v. 19b) |
| Boaz (v. 11–12) | Naomi (v. 20) |
| Ruth (v. 13) | Ruth (v. 21) |
| Boaz (v. 14) | Naomi (v. 22) |

As an Israelite landowner in his field, Boaz dominates the discussion, like Naomi as head of her Israelite household at her home. Although Naomi and Boaz never meet in the narrative, the core of Naomi's speeches focus on the significance of Boaz (v. 20), and the core of Boaz's speeches outline the significance of what Ruth had done for Naomi as the trigger for his generous response (vv. 11–12). Both Boaz and Naomi invoke a blessing—Boaz on Ruth, and Naomi on Boaz (vv. 12, 20). And Boaz's initial concern for Ruth's safety and instruction to stay close to his maidservants (vv. 8–9) form an inclusio with Naomi's final concern and instruction for the same (v. 22). The similarities reinforce the stature of Boaz and Naomi—Israelites from the older generation—and their shared concern for Ruth the Moabite.

18 There is a quick shift in location, from the field to the town. *Ruth carried* the collected grain, which would have taken some effort since it weighed up to 22.7 kilograms (50 pounds). The first time *she entered the town*, her mother-in-law complained that she was empty, although her daughter-in-law was beside her (1:19–22). This time Ruth enters alone, with a huge bundle of grain (perhaps in a shawl slung over her shoulder) to give to her mother-in-law. Naomi immediately *saw what she had gleaned*, and we can imagine her astonished look, perhaps with a gaping mouth. For a day which had begun with uncertainty had finished with plenty. But there was more—her daughter-in-law also brought out and gave her the surplus roasted grain from her lunch. No doubt this was a surprise for Naomi (as it is a surprise for us) since it was not mentioned that she stashed away her leftovers. The Hebrew is chiastic: Ruth ate until she was full and had some left over (*wattišba' wattōtar*, v. 14), now she brings out to give to her mother-in-law what she had left over after eating her fill (*hōtirā miššābē'āh*). Boaz handed her roasted grain, some of which she had kept to pass on to her mother-in-law. Even as she was filling her stomach, she was thinking of her mother-in-law. Previously, Naomi was left without (*wattiššā'ēr min*) her two children and her husband (1:5); now she enjoys the leftovers from (*hōtirā min*) Ruth.¹⁶¹⁹⁹¹

¹⁹⁸¹⁶⁰ After Zakovitch, *Rut*, 125.

¹⁹⁹¹⁶¹ Cf. Joüon, *Ruth*, 62; 1 Kgs 9:21.

19 Naomi's amazement at seeing what Ruth carried and the leftovers she brought out is reflected in her two parallel questions. First, *Where did you glean today?* Naomi's question begins with a relatively rare word *'êpôh*, "where," which forms a soundplay with *'êpâ*, "ephah," two verses earlier. For a reader of the ancient Hebrew text, it would have been written the same way.¹⁶²⁰⁰² We are to make the connection between Ruth's massive grain haul and Naomi's question, and perhaps the interrogative particle was triggered by Naomi's estimation of the amount Ruth gleaned.¹⁶²⁰¹³ Second, *Where did you work?* The word *'ânâ* is also relatively rare, also meaning "where" (e.g., 2 Kgs 6:6; Isa 10:3).¹⁶²⁰²⁴ The redundancy of this second question reflects Naomi's excitement, and we can imagine her face and mood transformed from despondency to delight.

Naomi's two breathless questions about location are followed by an exclamation of benediction on the benefactor, *May he who took notice of you be blessed!* She knows that Ruth's huge haul and roasted grain are not primarily because of the field in which Ruth gleaned but the generosity of the field owner. If the word order of this blessing is unusual,¹⁶²⁰³⁵ it would emphasize "he who took notice." The blessings of Naomi and Boaz (2:12) draw another thread between them.

In Naomi's blessing, we sense a significant change in her. First, she asked God to bless her daughters-in-law (1:8–9), then she accused God of cursing her (1:13, 20–21), but now she returns to asking God to bless. Her use of the participle *makkîrēk*, "he who took notice of you," from the verb *nkr*, points to those responsible for this transformation. Ruth spoke of Boaz as the one who "paid attention" to her (v. 10), and although Naomi does not know it yet, she referred to the same person. Boaz acknowledged Ruth without her knowing the kinship connection, and Naomi blesses Ruth's benefactor without knowing the kinship connection. For Ruth, Boaz taking notice of her meant that she had found favor in his eyes (v. 10), the very thing she set out to seek at the beginning of the day (2:2). Yet Ruth returned with more than just grain. Her loyalty triggered a Godward reflex in Boaz (2:9), and now Naomi experiences the same.

There have been attempts to amend the redundancy in the rest of v. 19, but it is best explained stylistically. Naomi's double questions about location were followed by a blessing on Ruth's unnamed benefactor. The narrator tells us that Ruth *reported to her mother-in-law whom she worked with*. Then Ruth says, *The name of the man whom I worked with today is Boaz*. The LX²⁰⁴X and Syr²⁰⁵. read "where she worked," which not only removes the redundancy but also

²⁰⁰¹⁶² The reader thus would have enjoyed the visual and the aural effect; Rendsburg, *How the Bible Is Written*, 209.

²⁰¹¹⁶³ So Hubbard, *Ruth*, 183.

²⁰²¹⁶⁴ The word is comprised of the locative interrogative and the directional suffix *he*, usually meaning "where to?" (e.g., Gen 16:8; Josh 2:5); HALOT 1:69.

²⁰³¹⁶⁵ See 1 Kgs 10:9 = 2 Chr 9:8; Prov 5:18; Jer 20:14; cf. Gen 27:33; Deut 7:14. Those who find the verb-subject word order significant emphatic include Campbell, *Ruth*, 134; Block, *Discourse*, 144; and those who do not include Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, 133–34; Holmstedt, *Handbook*, 140.

²⁰⁴LXX Septuagint

²⁰⁵Syr. Syriac

answers Naomi's "where" questions. Yet the Tg²⁰⁶. and Vulg²⁰⁷. support the M²⁰⁸T, so if we retain the M²⁰⁹T, why the redundancy? First, the repetition slows the narrative pace and creates suspense for Ruth's revelation. Second, just as Naomi's excitement was heard in her two questions, so Ruth's excitement may be heard in the repetition. This repetition is punctuated by the alliteration of *shin*, the gutturals *aleph* and *ayin*, and *mem*.¹⁶²¹⁰⁶

- 'ăšer- 'ăśetâ 'immô, "whom she worked with"
- šēm hā 'iš 'ăšer 'ăśîti 'immô hayyôm, "the name of the man whom I worked with today."

Both the narrator and Ruth state that she worked "with him" ('immô) rather than, say, "in his field."¹⁶²¹¹⁷ Yet, there is no description of Boaz working in the field, and Ruth stays close to his servants to glean (vv. 8, 21). This may be a way of saying that she worked "under the authority of" Boaz,¹⁶²¹²⁸ or, given his tender generosity, may intimate the closeness she felt to him.¹⁶²¹³⁹ They did not work side-by-side in his field, but they did share a meal and the harvest of his field.

Ruth's answer is indirect but follows the flow of the conversation. Although Naomi twice asked about location, Ruth answers about identity. In a sense, to name the field owner reveals where she gleaned, but Ruth's reply also follows the sequence of the conversation because Naomi shifted her focus from field to field owner. Like Naomi, Ruth realized that "who" or "with whom" was the crucial factor. Ruth's reply shifted the focus to her benefactor, and she delayed naming him for as long as possible, teasingly perhaps, even to the last word in her sentence: *Boaz*.¹⁷²¹⁴⁰ In response to her mother-in-law's "today" (*hayyôm*) in her first question, Ruth adds *today*, although it is unnecessary. All this adds to the suspense for Naomi and the pleasure for us, the audience. We were conspiratorially introduced to him before the action began (v. 1), and Ruth met him face-to-face in his field (v. 3). Now Naomi is let in on the secret. As the reality dawns on her, we can feel her world shifting, and we anticipate her response to this revelation.

20 Naomi's next words are the turning point of the conversation, as reflected in the chiasmic structure above. Upon hearing that the benefactor was Boaz, Naomi revealed his dual significance for them, marked out by the repetition of *Naomi said*. For the first time in this scene, she is named, and her foregrounding prepares us for her important words. First, she again breaks out with a spontaneous blessing (cf. v. 19), *May he be blessed by Yahweh*. In the phrase *layhwh*, the *lamed* could be read to indicate the goal of the action, so "may he be

²⁰⁶Tg. Targum

²⁰⁷Vulg. Vulgate

²⁰⁸MT Masoretic Text

²⁰⁹MT Masoretic Text

²¹⁰¹⁶⁶ Cf. Porten, "Scroll," 36; Hubbard, *Ruth*, 185n24.

²¹¹¹⁶⁷ "With whom she/I worked" is better English grammar (so most EVV), but I translate "whom she/I worked with" to reflect the surprising Hebrew preposition "with."

²¹²¹⁶⁸ Jeremy Schipper, "Translating the Preposition 'm in the Book of Ruth," *VT* 63 (2013): 665–66.

²¹³¹⁶⁹ So also Grossman, *Ruth*, 176.

²¹⁴¹⁷⁰ The narrator employs the same dramatic effect in 1:1–2 and 2:1.

blessed to Yahweh,” but it is better to read it as the source of the blessing, so “may he be blessed by Yahweh.” At this point, Naomi has not revealed that Boaz is their kinsman, so her blessing is solely based on his generosity, not on family responsibility. The latter might have played a part (cf. 2:11–12), but the dominant note is the former because he went much beyond the requirement of the law.

Naomi’s next clause, *who has not abandoned his kindness to the living and the dead*, has stimulated much discussion. First, is *ḥasdô*, “his kindness,” the subject or object of the verb *‘āzab*, “abandoned”? The former would yield the translation “whose kindness has not abandoned,” while the latter “who has not abandoned his kindness.” Although the latter is the better reading in this context because it has a personal subject (cf. Gen 24:27; LX²¹⁵X),¹⁷²¹⁶¹ both are possible and convey a similar meaning.

Second, who is the referent for the “who”?¹⁷²¹⁷² Naomi could refer to Boaz’s kindness or Yahweh’s. The reasons for Boaz include: (1) Ruth 1:8 and 3:10, where similar phrases refer to people showing kindness; (2) 2 Sam 2:5, where people show kindness, not Yahweh;¹⁷²¹⁸³ (3) the absence of God showing kindness to the dead elsewhere in the Old Testament;¹⁷²¹⁹⁴ (4) if *‘zb*, “abandoned,” is an anagram of *b’z*, Boaz’s name,¹⁷²²⁰⁵ it would point to him as the subject; and (5) Boaz is the subject of Naomi’s succeeding speech.¹⁷²²¹⁶ The reasons for Yahweh include: (1) the nearest grammatically acceptable antecedent is usually the referent of a relative clause;¹⁷²²²⁷ (2) Ruth 4:14, where the women of the town refer to Yahweh using a similar blessing formula; and (3) Gen 24:27, where God has “not abandoned his kindness.”¹⁷²²³⁸ It is hard to choose one or the other option, although the context slightly favors Boaz. To my mind, it is a case of intentional ambiguity: that is, the phrase “has not abandoned” refers to both Yahweh and

²¹⁵LXX Septuagint

²¹⁶¹⁷¹ See Hubbard, *Ruth*, 185–86.

²¹⁷¹⁷² The *’āšer* can function here as a relative pronoun (“who”) or as a causal connective indicating the grounds for the blessing (“for” or “because”). On the latter, see GKC §158b; JM §170e.

²¹⁸¹⁷³ Syntactically, 2 Sam 2:5 is the closest blessing in the Old Testament: “Blessed be you by Yahweh, because you have shown this kindness with my lord Saul and have buried him.”

²¹⁹¹⁷⁴ See especially Glueck, *Hesed*, 40–42; Basil Rebera, “Yahweh or Boaz? Ruth 2.20 Reconsidered,” *BT* 36 (1985): 317–27.

²²⁰¹⁷⁵ Porten, “Scroll,” 36.

²²¹¹⁷⁶ LXX and Vulg. read Boaz as the referent of the *’āšer* clause. He is the referent in NIV, NET, NLT, CEV.

²²²¹⁷⁷ Holmstedt, *Handbook*, 141–42.

²²³¹⁷⁸ Yahweh is the referent in NJPS, ESV, HCSB, NRSV, NASB. Genesis 24:27 is the only other narrative occurrence of “who has not abandoned his kindness” (cf. Jonah 2:9[8]). In this verse, God “has not abandoned his kindness” from Abraham, as evidenced in his arranging the meeting between Abraham’s servant and Rebekah. Similar to the Ruth narrative, human initiative is also important since she kindly gives Abraham’s servants and camels water to drink (24:15–21).

Boaz.¹⁷²²⁴⁹ This reflects the underlying theology of the Ruth narrative. God is the ultimate source of kindness, and he does not cease to bless the living and the dead. He does so here through Boaz's acts of kindness (cf. v. 12).

Who are "the living and the dead"? The phrase could be a merism for "everyone," but in the Ruth narrative it more likely refers to all the family members. Earlier, Naomi asked God to show kindness to her daughters-in-law because of the kindness they had shown to "the dead and with me [Naomi]" (1:8). "The dead" were Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion,¹⁸²²⁵⁰ so if we take the phrase to refer to the same in this verse, "the living" would be Naomi and Ruth. How did God through Boaz show kindness to the dead? First, the provision of grain and leftover food for Naomi and Ruth expressed "loyalty" to "the dead." As noted above in 1:8, *hesed* is a key word in the Ruth narrative, a word pregnant with meaning, unable to be captured by one English word. Here *hesed* has ideas of generosity and kindness, but also loyalty and faithfulness. In group-oriented societies, loyalty is a core value. God through Boaz was being faithful to Elimelech's line by showing generosity to Naomi and Ruth. Second, the use of similar words recalls Naomi's prayer in 1:8. Hearing 1:8 and 2:20 together reveals a chiasmic pattern: dead-living-living-dead.¹⁸²²⁶¹ We wonder if Naomi's prayer for kindness for her daughters-in-law is now being fulfilled, raising hopes for the future restoration of the line of "the dead."

This is the major turning point of the Ruth narrative. Naomi's spirits began to lift as she saw Ruth's haul of grain. Now she connects Boaz's generosity with Yahweh's blessing. From ascribing her bitterness to Yahweh, she now proclaimed blessing upon Yahweh and Boaz. Her theological realization will lead to her initiating a plan (3:1–4). The repetition of *Naomi said* without reporting a response from Ruth introduces a brief pause and keeps the focus on Naomi. It also suggests an afterthought, whereby Naomi realizes the significance of her previous words.¹⁸²²⁷² She outlined what Boaz did for them; now she reveals his kinship relation, and hence what he could do for them. Although we as the audience knew the significance of Boaz (2:1), Ruth did not. Only now Naomi reveals *the man is our close relative* (Heb. "close to us"). Naomi does not refer to Boaz by name, but as *hā'îš*, "the man," which highlights his social role and hence his significance for them. Boaz was described as a "relative" (2:1), and "close to us" is also a kinship term, which can refer to an immediate family member (Lev 21:2–3) or a relative from the same clan (Num 27:11; cf. Lev 25:25).¹⁸²²⁸³ The former applies in this verse. Naomi's subsequent identification of Boaz as *one of our kinsman-redeemers* sharpens his significance.

²²⁴¹⁷⁹ Cf. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 44: "Instead of God's abandoning (' -z-bh) [sic] his *hesed*, there is now Boaz (b- ' -z)." Ruth also showed loyalty by refusing to "abandon" ('zb) her mother-in-law (1:16).

²²⁵¹⁸⁰ Elimelech "died" in 1:3, and his sons in 1:5. Ruth is described as "the wife of the dead," i.e., Mahlon (4:5), and "the name of the dead" is mentioned twice, referring to Mahlon.

²²⁶¹⁸¹ Cf. Zakovitch, *Rut*, 128.

²²⁷¹⁸² Cf. Gen 30:27–28; 41:39–41; Num 32:2–5.

²²⁸¹⁸³ In Exod 32:27, the term could mean "fellow Israelite"; see Gane/Milgrom, "*qārab*," *TDOT* 13:144–45.

Drawn from Israelite family law, a kinsman-redeemer is a relative who restores to wholeness that which has been lost, usually at personal cost.¹⁸²²⁹⁴ The duties were at the clan level and included: (1) buying back property that was lost outside the clan for an indebted relative (Lev 25:25–30); (2) buying back a relative who had sold themselves into slavery (Lev 25:47–55); (3) executing murders of relatives as an “avenger of blood” (Num 35:12, 19–27; Deut 19:6, 11–13); (4) receiving restitution money on behalf of a deceased relative (Num 5:8); and (5) mediating for a relative in lawsuits (Job 19:25; Ps 119:154; Prov 23:11; Jer 50:34). The relative who needed redemption could not help themselves, and the redeemer acts because of family solidarity—every Israelite is linked by a series of widening networks: father’s house, clan, tribe, and nation. If a relative was in need, there was an obligation to help: the closer the relation, the stronger the obligation.

Naomi says that Boaz is “one of” their kinsman-redeemers, which suggests there is more than one relative who could help them. It is significant that not only is her mood and view on life improving, she now has a clear option—redemption through a kinsman. She sees this redemption as not only for Ruth, who has formed a relationship with Boaz, but for her also: “the man is *our* close relative, he is one of *our* kinsman-redeemers.” When Naomi proclaimed she was “empty” upon her arrival in Bethlehem although Ruth was by her side (1:21–22), we wondered if she resented the presence of her foreign daughter-in-law. And even though Naomi addressed Ruth as “my daughter,” the narrator kept reminding us they were mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. But here Naomi speaks of Ruth as a member of her family and hence holds out the potential for the redemption of her family.

Yet, it is not clear how Boaz will act as a redeemer. Naomi and Ruth do not fall under one of the five family law situations outlined above. According to the law, marriage was not a role for a kinsman-redeemer but assisting a relative in a lawsuit was not mentioned in the law either.¹⁸²³⁰⁵ Isaiah 54:4–5 might provide additional background to this custom. These verses describe Yahweh as the redeemer who marries “a widow” (*’almānâ*), a woman without the protection and security provided by a male (husband, son, or brother). Ruth is not described as an *’almānâ*, but we might recall Naomi’s view that Ruth’s security is to be found in the home of another husband (1:9). It seems likely that the law outlined the basic obligations for a kinsman-redeemer, but the real-life application was broader. It included helping a clansperson in whatever way required, including mediating in lawsuits and marrying widows. In any case, the audience now wonders how Boaz might act in his role as a redeemer.

21 In response to Naomi’s excitement, Ruth adds information not previously disclosed. Yet, the narrator calling Ruth *the Moabite* is unexpected. She had been accepted into Boaz’s field, she had worked alongside his servant girls, and had been invited to eat with him and his workers. Naomi had just disclosed that Boaz was one of their kinsman-redeemers. Yet the audience is reminded of her foreign status, recalling her arrival in Bethlehem (1:22) and before she went out to glean (2:2). There are three possible reasons for this reminder. First, despite all that she had achieved in Boaz’s field, she remained an outsider. Her integration into Israelite

²²⁹¹⁸⁴ For a longer discussion of the kinsman-redeemer, including tracing the theme through to the New Testament, see Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, 117–39.

²³⁰¹⁸⁵ The latter is not drawn from the law but from instances in the Writings and a prophetic text; see point (5) above.

society had started, and she would have felt some belonging among the workers in Boaz's field, but it was only the beginning. Boaz had accepted her, but it is unlikely the overseer and rest of the workers viewed her as kindly. It would take a lot more for her to be integrated into the wider Israelite society. Second, it highlights the magnitude of her success in Boaz's field.¹⁸²³¹⁶ By "chance" she stumbled into his field (v. 3) and became the recipient of his generosity. Might Yahweh have more in store for this foreigner who had taken refuge under his wings (v. 12)? Third, it prepares the audience for what Ruth says next.

She reports that Boaz told her, *Cling to the male servants who are mine*, although Boaz said to cling to his female servants (v. 8). The masculine plural can refer to all of Boaz's workers, and maybe Ruth is conflating Boaz's two instructions in verses 8 and 9. She might even include Boaz's later instructions to his male servants to allow her to glean among the sheaves (vv. 15–16). But in the context of the more specific use of the masculine plural noun in verses 9 and 15, it is more likely that the narrow meaning is meant here (cf. Naomi's use of *na'ārôtāyw*, "his female servants," v. 22). If so, it is consistent with Ruth's foreignness: Boaz told Ruth to stay close to the female harvesters, but in her charming naivety the Moabite misunderstood the instructions.¹⁸²³²⁷ She does not know the farming etiquette in Bethlehem.

And perhaps she has not fully digested all the information. For in response to Naomi's excitement, her speech also has an excited tone, as reflected in her awkwardly phrased sentence. She begins with *gam kî*, "also (it is) that," which signals a disjointed addition, *also ... even*.¹⁸²³³⁸ Her words do not follow naturally from Naomi's, nor her own previous words, and are emphatic ("even"). Then her sentence fronts *'im-hannə'ārîm*, "with/to the male servants," which draws our attention to this group. The relative clause *'ăšer-lî*, "who are mine," is periphrastic, and since Boaz used the simpler "my" previously (*na'ārôtāy*, "my female servants," v. 8), we wonder if Ruth relays Boaz's meaning but expresses it in her own words. If it is a reliable quotation of Boaz, it is consistent with his slightly stilted speech elsewhere,¹⁸²³⁴⁹ perhaps part of his characterization as from the older generation.¹⁹²³⁵⁰ Either way, the emphasis of the wordy "who are mine" is on Boaz's possession, here of the servants.¹⁹²³⁶¹ So, she says, "Also, he even said to me, 'Cling to the male servants who are mine.'" If these words are a rephrase of Boaz's words, it reflects an excited mind in which the information has not quite settled. This would be expected after the multitude of new things Ruth had experienced that day.

Ruth then ends her speech by revealing how long she was permitted to harvest. She can cling to Boaz's harvesters *until they have finished all the harvest that is mine*. The combination

²³¹¹⁸⁶ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 190.

²³²¹⁸⁷ Cf. Lim, "Otherness," 109, who suggests that Ruth's misunderstanding is due to "unevenness in her facility in the Hebrew language."

²³³¹⁸⁸ This combination of words occurs only seven times elsewhere, meaning "moreover, when ..." (Josh 22:7; Prov 22:6) or "even though" (Isa 1:15; Hos 8:10; 9:16; Ps 23:4; Lam 3:8). But this is the only verse where a *paseq* separates the two words, indicating they are not to be read together; Holmstedt, *Handbook*, 143.

²³⁴¹⁸⁹ Cf. Campbell, *Ruth*, 107: "Boaz is depicted to us as a man of rather turgid speech."

²³⁵¹⁹⁰ See note on 1:8.

²³⁶¹⁹¹ See JM §130e and references there.

of *ʿad* and *ʿim*, “until,” is rare and seems superfluous.¹⁹²³⁷² Since the narrator later uses *ʿad-kəlôt*, “until (they were) finished” (v. 23), either this is another example of Boaz’s stilted speech or the product of Ruth’s excited mind. The entire harvest will include the barley and wheat harvests (v. 23). We hear of this extended permission for the first time here. Placing these words in Ruth’s mouth emphasizes the implications for her and her mother-in-law, and leads the scene to end on an even higher note. It is no wonder that Ruth begins her words with, “Also, he even said to me.”

There are two implications of Ruth’s speech. First, previously Ruth “clung” to Naomi, which meant loyalty to her mother-in-law and their kinship relationship. Now that she is to “cling” to Boaz’s male servants, the narrative flags a possible shift in her loyalty. But the emphasis is on Boaz, not the male servants, as the relative clause “who belong to Boaz” especially highlights. And since Boaz is from the clan of Naomi’s husband, perhaps she can also maintain her loyalty to her mother-in-law? Second, Boaz’s generosity was not just for a day, it was for a season. He will continue to provide for Ruth and Naomi from his harvest, “the harvest that is mine.” Not just a part of the harvest, but the entire harvest. Given his largesse for a single day, this signals that Ruth and Naomi would be sustained for many months.

22 Naomi closes their conversation by correcting Ruth’s misunderstanding. Her words echo those of Boaz’s (vv. 8–9) with the same parental tone, underscored here by the narrator’s mention of *Ruth, her daughter-in-law* and Naomi’s address to Ruth (“my daughter”). She redirects Ruth by telling her *it is better* to do two things. First, whereas Ruth reported that Boaz said “cling to” the male servants, Naomi instructs Ruth to *go out with his female servants*. Since the word translated “male servants” can mean servants in general (both male and female), Naomi is quick to clear up any confusion. Second, Naomi uses the verb *yšʿ*, “to go out,” since she wants to avoid the kinship associations of “cling to.” Perhaps there is a hint that Naomi only wants Ruth to “cling to” Boaz.¹⁹²³⁸³ “Go out with” (*tēšəʿî ʿim*) might also imply leaving the town with the group of female workers,¹⁹²³⁹⁴ thus providing further safety for Ruth. For Naomi reinforces Boaz’s understanding that the open field is dangerous for an unattached foreign woman.

Naomi gives the reason for her restriction: *so they will not assault you in another field*. Boaz commanded his male workers not to molest (v. 9) or humiliate (v. 15) or rebuke her (v. 16). It is better for Ruth to stay in his field because it is highly unlikely that she would be afforded the same protection in another field. The phrase *pāgaʿ bə-* has a broad range of meaning. The basic meaning is “to meet, encounter,” but it can have the sense of “to entreat, urge” (cf. 1:16), and the more hostile sense of “to fall upon, attack.”¹⁹²⁴⁰⁵ Considering Boaz’s warning and commands, the last sense is most likely here. This sense of *pgʿ* recalls its use in the book of Judges (8:21; 15:12; 18:25), the disordered and often depraved historical period in which the Ruth narrative is

²³⁷¹⁹² The combination only occurs elsewhere in Gen 24:19, 33; Isa 30:17. To express the same sense, Naomi uses *ʿad ʾāšer* (1:13; 3:18) and *ʿad* with an infinitive (3:3), while the narrator only uses the latter (1:19; 2:23).

²³⁸¹⁹³ Cf. Grossman, *Ruth*, 184.

²³⁹¹⁹⁴ So Hubbard, *Ruth*, 182n11.

²⁴⁰¹⁹⁵ For references, see comment on 1:16.

set (Ruth 1:1). As such, a whole range of assaults are in view here—verbal, physical, and even sexual. Like Boaz, Naomi wants to protect Ruth from these.

This raises the question of why Naomi did not warn Ruth of such dangers when Ruth left for the field in the morning. Some view Naomi with a jaundiced eye: she is ambivalent about having a foreign daughter-in-law lingering with her in Bethlehem so that she only becomes concerned about Ruth's welfare when she realizes the benefit of having her around.¹⁹²⁴¹⁶ For, as it is argued, Ruth had become the breadwinner, and, moreover, Naomi detects the potential in Ruth's newly formed association with Boaz. Since human motivations are complex, often with an amount of self-interest intermingled with altruism, this is a possible reading of Naomi's motives. Yet, I prefer a reading more sympathetic to Naomi's situation. She had returned "home" empty and bitter, with no family and no food. She also had to deal with the stresses of repatriation with the added stress of having to look after a daughter-in-law that she had encouraged to return to her own mother's house. We might even speculate that her grief and repatriation triggered an adjustment disorder with depressed mood,¹⁹²⁴²⁷ so she could only bring herself to utter a one-word assent to Ruth's request to glean (2:2). Naomi's words reveal that she knew of the dangers in the field, but her unmotivated state is only broken by Ruth's day-end report of her activities. Her success in the field shakes Naomi out of her inertia, as she now takes on the role of mother-in-law, or even mother, to Ruth. Not only is Naomi becoming comfortable with the presence of Ruth, she is also waking up to the responsibility and promise of Ruth's presence.¹⁹²⁴³⁸

23 The narrator closes the act and scene with a summary that also anticipates events in the next act (as the mention of "the beginning of the barley harvest" in 1:22 prepares for act 2). Ruth followed Naomi's and Boaz's instruction: *she clung to Boaz's female servants*, perhaps hinting that she had nothing to do with the male servants,¹⁹²⁴⁴⁹ hence removing the romantic potential. She stayed close to them *to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished*. This is the "entire harvest" Boaz mentioned (v. 21), lasting around seven weeks, which in the modern calendar runs from April until early June.²⁰²⁴⁵⁰ Although the narrator does not report

²⁴¹¹⁹⁶ See, especially, Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising*, 76–77.

²⁴²¹⁹⁷ An adjustment disorder is "the development of emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to an identifiable stressor(s) occurring within 3 months of the onset of the stress-or(s)." See "adjustment disorders," in American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013). My diagnosis is tentative since it is based on sparse textual evidence: her outburst in response to the townswomen's question (1:19–20) and her response to Ruth (2:2). It is hard to establish a baseline for Naomi's behavior to compare with those found in act 2, but she functions as a mother-in-law on the road to Bethlehem, urging her daughters-in-law to return to find a husband (1:8–9, 11–13, 15). There is a marked contrast with initiative-taking Naomi on the road with withdrawn and verbally restricted Naomi in her Bethlehem home. However, a definitive diagnosis requires an extensive interview with a patient.

²⁴³¹⁹⁸ Cf. Johanna W. H. Bos, "Out of the Shadows: Genesis 38; Judges 4:17–22; Ruth 3," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 59.

²⁴⁴¹⁹⁹ Porten, "Scroll," 37.

²⁴⁵²⁰⁰ Cf. Deut 16:9; Miller II, "Judges and the Early Iron Age," 183–84.

further contact between Boaz and Ruth, this seems inevitable during these weeks in his field. She would have collected and stored enough of the two grains to last for months. Thus, the food needs of these two widows are supplied for the short to medium term. But that is all. Something needs to be done to secure their long-term provision.

The narrator hints as much in his conclusion: *and she lived with her mother-in-law*. The harvest was completed, but Ruth still lived with Naomi. She had formed ties with Boaz's household in his field, but she was still living in her mother-in-law's household, under her authority, not Boaz's. The end of the harvests also means the end of contact with Boaz, and hence the end of the opportunity to develop their relationship. Naomi's wish was for her daughters-in-law to find rest in the home of a husband, but now this is fast fading. The resonances with the end of act 1 invite comparison. Act 1 ended with the widows "returning" (from *šûb*) to Bethlehem at the beginning of the "barley harvest." The "barley and wheat harvests" have ended, but she still lives (from *yšb*) with Naomi.²⁰²⁴⁶¹ There has been some progress from act 1, but it has now halted. Each scene had raised audience expectation higher, especially for a relationship between Boaz and Ruth, and a reversal of the widows' emptiness and isolation and shame, but the act ends anticlimactically. And so, the stage is set for the next scene.

In our age of globalization, there has been an unprecedented movement of people.²⁰²⁴⁷² People move to and between cities, states, and countries. People migrate for several reasons, which can be broadly classified as "push" and "pull." "Push" factors are difficulties in migrants' home country that make it difficult or impossible to live there, such as famine, war, or oppression. "Pull" factors are circumstances in a destination country that make it a more attractive place to live than their home country, such as work opportunities, a better quality of life, or being united with family members. The former is the case for Elimelech and his family at the beginning of act 1; the latter is the case for Naomi and Ruth at the end of act 1. Ruth is an immigrant, someone who seeks refuge under the wings of Yahweh and in his covenant community in Bethlehem (2:12). The responses of the receiving community and the immigrant are both instructive. There are solidarity and mutuality, both ministry to and of the immigrant.

Boaz exemplifies an ideal response to an immigrant in the covenant community. His first step is to recognize the stranger and to seek after her attachments and identity. He recognizes Ruth as a person, not just as an anonymous member of an amorphous grouping of "Moabite," "foreigner" or "foreign worker" or "outsider" or "refugee."²⁰²⁴⁸³ This recognition of her personhood and her membership in Israelite society triggers Boaz's sense of responsibility

²⁴⁶²⁰¹ Cf. 3:18, where *yšb* will mean "sit" or "wait, sit tight."

²⁴⁷²⁰² In 2019, the number of international migrants was estimated to be 272 million, 3.5% of the world's population; see "World Migration Report 2020," International Organization for Migration, accessed 11 May, 2020, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf.

²⁴⁸²⁰³ The modern definition of a refugee is "a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster"; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "refugee." Unless Ruth would have faced persecution for turning to Yahweh, she does not fit this definition. She is a refugee, however, in the sense that she went to Israel and sought refuge under Yahweh's wings (2:12).

toward the poor and weak. The wealthy and influential in all societies should use their physical resources and social capital to help the needy. This is still relevant for Christians, whose first responsibility is to the household of faith (Gal 6:10), then all others who might come across our path. After all, in the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus said that our neighbor is anyone in need, especially those we can help (Luke 10:25–37). Set against an undercurrent of suspicion and hostility toward outsiders in the Ruth narrative, Boaz manifests the covenant ideal by taking up his responsibilities as expressed in his acts of kindness to Ruth. And Boaz's acceptance of Ruth in his gleaning community opens the path to her sense of belonging in Bethlehem.

Yet, the responsibility is not one-sided; an immigrant can also contribute. Ruth does not passively wait for a handout as if it were her right; instead, she takes the initiative to go out to glean. Her response to Boaz as her patron is ideal: she expresses her gratitude and gives him due respect. The patron-client relationship is unequal, but there is still reciprocity. With her words and actions, she seizes the opportunity to secure Boaz's patronage, not just for a day but for a whole harvest season. She works hard in the field to improve her lot, as well as that of Naomi. Boaz ministers to this refugee but the refugee also has much to give. She gives due honor to Boaz, enhancing his reputation in Israelite society and Naomi's eyes. She also ministers to her Israelite mother-in-law by assuaging her hunger and helping her break out of despondency. By the end of the narrative, this singular Moabite will contribute immeasurably more to the house of Israel.

The migratory impulse pervades the Bible's story line.²⁰²⁴⁹⁴ God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and spread throughout the earth (Gen 1:28), and because of their sin they were forced out of the garden of Eden (Gen 3:23–24). Abraham was a migrant called by God, whose life was punctuated by movement (e.g., Gen 12:1). The same can be said of Abraham's descendants Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and indeed, the people of Israel. After the exodus from Egypt, Israel finds "rest" in the promised land (Josh 21:43–45). Yet the three annual pilgrimage festivals—journeys to Yahweh's sanctuary—perhaps reminded them they were historically a people on the move. This movement continues when the kingdom of Judah is forcibly deported out of Canaan to Babylon and again when a remnant returns to the promised land. In the New Testament, God himself becomes a migrant and a refugee. Jesus leaves his heavenly home and becomes a refugee with his family in Egypt (Matt 2:13–15). In his ministry, he would withdraw from ministry in primarily Jewish areas to gentile regions.²⁰²⁵⁰⁵ In his self-sacrificial death, he journeyed to the realm of the dead, then back to the realm of the living. Finally, he would ascend back to heaven, where he awaits his followers to join him in a new heaven and earth. And after the coming of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament church was scattered (Acts 1:8; 8:1; 11:19).

Not surprisingly, then, Christians are called "sojourners" and "aliens" or "strangers" in this world (Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13–16; 1 Pet 2:11). We are encouraged to persevere on our journey to our final promised rest (Heb 4:1–13). We are "sojourners" who find our refuge in God through

²⁴⁹²⁰⁴ For an introduction to immigration in the Bible, see M. Daniel Carroll R., *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020).

²⁵⁰²⁰⁵ See, e.g., Paul Hertig, "Jesus' Migrations and Liminal Withdrawals in Matthew," in *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission*, ed. vanThanh Nguyen and John M. Prior (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 46–61.

the work of Christ. As such, we must recognize the sojourner and foreigner in our midst—the migrant worker, the undocumented foreigner, the new migrant, the refugee, and the asylum seeker among them—and live out our responsibility to them. And if we are one of these people, we can look for opportunities to contribute to improving our situation and that of our community. This is nothing less than what God commands in his law, as exemplified by Boaz and Ruth. Of course, the best example is Jesus. Although his mission was first to the Jews, he still shows compassion and concern for the female outsider, including the foreigner (e.g., the Syrophoenician woman; Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30) and the despised (e.g., the Samaritan woman; John 4:3–42). We would do well to imitate Jesus, because in serving the needy and poor and marginalized, we are serving him: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt 25:35, 40).²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Peter H. W. Lau, [The Book of Ruth](#), ed. E. J. Young et al., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 165–183.