kinsman-redeemer

The relative who restores or preserves the full community rights of disadvantaged family members. The concept arises from God's covenant relationship with Israel and points to the redemption of humanity in Jesus Christ.

Covenant rules for the kinsman-redeemer

The kinsman-redeemer's obligation to redeem the land Lev 25:25-28; **Jer** 32:6-9

The kinsman-redeemer's obligation to redeem the enslaved Lev 25:47-55

The kinsman-redeemer's obligation to provide an heir Ge 38:8-10; **Dt** 25:5-10; **Mt** 22:23-28 pp Mk 12:18-23 pp Lk 20:27-33

The kinsman-redeemer's obligation to avenge death Nu 35:16-21

The kinsman-redeemer's obligation to be a trustee Nu 5:5-8

The kinsman-redeemer in the book of Ruth

Ru 2:20 *See also* **Ru** 3:1-4:17

The LORD as redeemer

Ex 6:6-7 *See also* **2Sa** 7:22-24; **Isa** 43:1-7; 54:5-8; **Jer** 50:33-34

The kinsman-redeemer reflects God's concern for the poor and oppressed

Pr 23:10-11 *See also* **Ps** 68:5-6; 72:2-4

God's provision of Jesus Christ as kinsman-redeemer

Gal 4:4-7 *See also* **Gal** 3:13-14; **Heb** 2:11-18[1]

Act 4: Boaz Arranges to Marry Ruth (4:1–12)

THIS ACT IS amazingly parallel to Act 1 (esp. Scene 1, 1:7–19a); Boaz here has a dialogue with the nearer kinsman-redeemer and then with the legal assembly. In the course of this dialogue, the nearer redeemer withdraws. This is like the dialogue between Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah, in the course of which Orpah departs for home. Boaz's acquisition of the right to marry Ruth in 4:9–12 resolves the question of a home and husband for her. This, of course, was the very problem on which the dialogue between Naomi and the two young women centered and which Ruth appeared to forfeit when she committed her life to Naomi and Yahweh.

Act 4 is comprised of two scenes. In Scene 1 (4:1–8), Boaz confronts an unnamed kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) who has the legal first right of redemption. In Scene 2 (4:9–12), Boaz acquires the right to redeem the field of Elimelech with its implications concerning Ruth and Naomi.

[1] Manser, M. H. (1999). *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*. London: Martin Manser.

The opening line intimates the development of this Act—the decisive event at the gate (4:1). The closing sentence acts as transition to what follows in the epilogue (4:12). The section emphasizes the responsibilities inherent in ties of kinship, in particular to the levirate marriage (i.e., the future). Just as Orpah served as a foil to heighten the character of Ruth in 1:7–19a, so the unnamed kinsman-redeemer serves as a foil to heighten the character of Boaz in 4:1–12. Finally, the initiative for action shifts to Boaz in this act. Without his positive, purposeful, and skillful maneuvering, the story will not see its favorable resolution.

Scene 1. Boaz confronts the unnamed kinsman (4:1–8). Scene 1 divides into two clearly discernible parts: Boaz's convening of the legal assembly (4:1–2) and Boaz's negotiations with the nearer redeemer (4:3–8). The first part sets the stage for the dialogues of negotiation in the second part. After Ruth gave Naomi her report (3:16–18), Boaz, true to his words, "went up to the town gate and sat there" (obviously with the intent of resolving the matter concerning Ruth).

The NIV's translation of 4:1a ("When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along") completely obscures the impact of the Hebrew grammatical construction, which is better translated here as "and just then" (*w^{e}hinnēh* + subj. + part.). It is meant to convey surprise. Campbell states:

> Here, as there [2:4], the scene is set (Boaz taking his place at the gate), where upon at just the right moment along comes just the right person. Commentators who point out that virtually every male in town was bound to go out through the gate at some time during the morning on the way to work in the field are missing the impact of the Hebrew construction, which at least in Gen 24:15 and in Ruth conveys a hint of God's working behind the scenes.

Thus this is not simply coincidence but the hidden hand of Yahweh at work.

Boaz calls to this individual to come over and sit down ("Come over here, my friend [*p^{e}lōnî ʾalmōnî*], and sit down"). Again, the NIV translation misses the impact of the sentence. The phrase *p^{e}lōnî ʾalmōnî* is an example of a wordplay termed *farrago*. The best translation is "So-and-So." The same expression is used in 1 Samuel 21:2 and 2 Kings 6:8, where the narrator does not wish to give the name of the place, so that the translation "such and such a place" is appropriate.

This phrase originates with the narrator, not with Boaz. Boaz would surely know the name of a fellow citizen in a small town like Bethlehem, not to mention a relative who is the *gōʾēl* just prior to him. Consequently, the narrator is underscoring the namelessness of this man in order to create a less than favorable impression and is prompting the audience to suspect a pejorative purpose in the choice of the expression. Therefore, to translate the expression as "my friend" is to obscure the narrator's purposeful omission of the man's name.

Having called the man over, Boaz now procures ten elders of the city. This contrasts markedly with the way in which Boaz summoned the nearer relative. While he summoned this man over at the moment he passed through the gate, the text strongly suggests that Boaz does not simply wait in the gate with the other redeemer until ten elders of the city chance to pass through on their way to the fields. Instead, he actively seeks these individuals out so that the legal proceedings can start. As Bush puts it:

> … it would seem that the specific statement that Boaz procured ten of the town's elders is intended to stress the care that he took to ensure that a duly constituted legal forum would be present to notarize and legitimate the civil proceedings he wished to set in motion.

The second part of Scene 1 records Boaz's negotiations with the nearer *gōʾēl* (4:3–8). Having convened the legal assembly, he immediately opens the negotiation with a statement to this relative of his (4:3). It introduces a totally new item to the story. Without a single prior word on the subject, the narrator has Boaz inform the nearer redeemer that "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech." The understanding of this statement and the rest of Act 4 are difficult, and there are uncertainties on practically every level. Time and space do not permit an explanation of all the intricacies of the text.[7] What appears to be the main thrust of the passage will be presented.

First of all, it is clear that the text is *not* describing an outright sale of land by Naomi. Instead, this refers to a transaction in which only the right of use of the land is being transferred for a stipulated value (paid completely at the beginning of the deal) for a stipulated period of time (Lev. 25:14–16). This is because the land of the family or clan could not be sold permanently (25:23; cf. 1 Kings 2:3). In this context, the word translated by the NIV "is selling" (*mkr*) is best translated into English as "to surrender the right to."

It also seems best to understand (as the majority of scholars do) that Naomi must have inherited rights to the field of Elimelech. The proprietary rights to the land in the Old Testament were vested in the clan, with the individual only holding the right of possession and usufruct. Thus, a widow could only hold usufructuary rights to her husband's property, and she did this only until she married again or died in her turn, at which time the rights reverted to her husband's clan in the normal order of inheritance.

Since Naomi "is selling" the field, only two broad scenarios are possible explanations: (1) Elimelech did not sell the usufruct of his field before emigrating to Moab, and Naomi now has the usufructuary rights to the field. Naomi through Boaz is calling on the nearer redeemer to acquire these rights from her. The transaction, then, is a case of preemption such as is related in Jeremiah 32. (2) Elimelech sold the usufruct of his land[11] before he and his family emigrated to Moab, and the field since then has been in the possession of others. Since Naomi has no means to repurchase the field, she transfers this obligation/right to her nearest kinsman. Now Naomi through Boaz is calling on the nearer redeemer to repurchase the field from its present possessor. The transaction, then, is a case of redemption such as is described in Leviticus 25:25. This is the more likely scenario in this context.

Hence, Naomi is surrendering her rights to the usufruct of Elimelech's land, rights she enjoys as the widow of the deceased. Boaz then solemnly calls on the nearer redeemer to accept these rights and to redeem the field, that is, to repurchase it from the unnamed third party to whom, since it stands in need of redemption, Elimelech must have previously sold it.

Surely this nearer kinsman is aware of Naomi's return (1:19 states "when they [Naomi and Ruth] arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them"). Thus, it seems apparent that he has not taken any initiative to "help" Naomi and/or Ruth. In other words, in contrast to Boaz, who had already functioned as a *gōʾēl* of sorts for

Naomi and Ruth, this man has done *nothing*. It seems likely that this nearer redeemer has been thinking along different lines.

In all probability he knows about the plot of Elimelech. So, if he quietly ignores his voluntary family responsibility to marry Ruth (the only eligible widow of marriageable age), then he can negate the possibility of raising up an heir to the property of the deceased (see the discussion of the levirate in the introduction). Without a descendant of the line of Elimelech, the field will simply become part of his own family inheritance. The amount that he would pay to redeem it (and perhaps care for the elderly widow involved) would be offset by the value and produce of the field. With such self-interest in mind, the nearer redeemer quickly consents to redeem the field when Boaz draws his attention to it.

However, the levirate was indelibly linked to the inherited estate (*naḥᵃlâ*). Where the land has already been alienated (as in the case of Elimelech), redemption of it "triggers" the levirate duty[15] (cf. the discussion about the levirate in the introduction, pp. 399–403). Thus Boaz now publicly calls on the nearer redeemer to take on (lit., "you acquire") the voluntary family or clan responsibility of marrying Ruth the Moabitess, in order (lit.) "to raise up the name[17] of the deceased on his inherited estate [*naḥᵃlâ*]" (4:5).

In appealing to the nearer redeemer (*gōʾēl*) to raise up the name of the deceased, Boaz is not appealing to the letter of the law but its spirit. This is another manifestation of Boaz's *ḥesed*. Neither man is legally bound by Deuteronomy 25:5–10 to marry Ruth; it is voluntary. But this does not erase all moral responsibility. As *gōʾēl*, Boaz, the reader knows, is prepared to do this. But what about this nearer *gōʾēl*?

The nearer redeemer could have agreed to take on both responsibilities. Thus for a brief moment, suspense builds. Will Boaz lose Ruth to this nearer nameless redeemer? But quickly the narrator relieves any troubling thoughts concerning this. The nearer redeemer reveals that he has neither the motives nor the character to rise to this occasion: "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate [*naḥᵃlâ*]. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." Thus Bush correctly sums it up:

> His words clearly express concern only for his own interests; they show no concern for Ruth and the line of Elimelech at all. Thus unwilling to shoulder his full responsibilities as the redeemer with the prior right, he summons Boaz to acquire his rights (4:8a) and expresses the transfer symbolically by the physical act that customarily accompanied such a transfer: he removed his sandals and gave them to Boaz (4:8b).

Nonverbal action closes the scene. The nearer redeemer (*gōʾēl*) removes his sandal and hands it to Boaz as a symbolic act declaring his abdication of his own right of redemption.

In this light, it is more understandable why the narrator leaves this *gōʾēl* anonymous and has Boaz address him pejoratively as "So-and-So." As Trible rightly notes, "Since he refused to 'restore the name of the dead to his inheritance,' he himself has no name. Anonymity implies judgment." This is also the probable reason that Boaz assembles an "official" meeting at the city gate. As a man of strength of character (*gibbôr ḥayil*), he manifests the *ḥesed* that the spirit of the law intends.

Scene 2. Boaz acquires the right to redeem Naomi and Ruth (4:9–12). Calling the entire assembly to be his witnesses, Boaz formally declares in a full and detailed form the

two obligations that the nearer redeemer has ceded to him. His sworn commitment to these obligations encompasses three expansions, as illustrated in the following table.

Item	Formulation given to nearer redeemer		Expanded formulation in Boaz's legal oath
The property	"the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech" (4:3b)	→	"all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon" (4:9a^2)
Ruth's identification	"Ruth the Moabitess … the dead man's widow" (4:5b^1)	→	"Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow" (4:10a)
The purpose of the marriage	"in order to maintain the name of the dead and his property" (4:5b^2)	→	"in order to maintain the name [*šēm*] of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records" (4:10a^2)

These detailed expansions are not just a formality. They irrevocably and legally obligate Boaz to the family of Elimelech as *gōʾēl*, thereby securing the restoration of clan wholeness. Through this solemn and emphatic declaration, Boaz names once again the whole family that sojourned from Judah to Moab (cf. 1:2). This reinforces the issue of restoration of the clan—the memory of the deceased may not perish.

The only character from the prologue who is not mentioned is Orpah, for obvious reasons. However, her role as a foil to Ruth has been filled by the nearer redeemer as a foil to Boaz.

> But substitution means dissimilarity. Orpah had both name and speech (1:10). She decided to die to the story by returning to her own people, and the judgment upon her is favorable (1:15). The unnamed redeemer chooses to die to the story by returning to his own inheritance, and the judgment upon him is adverse. After all, he is not a foreign woman but the nearest male kin. Thus he passes away with the infamy of anonymity.

While both Orpah and the nameless *gōʾēl* are motivated by self-interest, Orpah's is a self-interest that is humanly understandable; the nameless *gōʾēl*'s is morally inexcusable. Quite simply, he has failed in every way in his *gōʾēl* functions.

The elders and all those at the gate declared their witness of the legal proceedings. They then pronounce a threefold blessing on Boaz:

1. "May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel."
2. "May you have standing [*ʿasē ḥayil*] in Ephrathah and be famous [*qārāʾ šēm*] in Bethlehem."
3. May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman.

In the first blessing, the elders express the hope that Ruth will be fruitful and build up the house of Boaz as Rachel and Leah did in the case of Jacob. Interestingly, Rachel is listed first, Leah second. This may be a case in which the more important person is named second, as with Ruth in 1:4, 14 and Mahlon in 4:9. Leah as the mother of Judah and her descendants are in view in the third blessing (v. 12).

The second blessing contains a poetic paralleling. The last clause enhances the understanding of the first. The phrase *qārāʾ šēm* literally means "may a name be called/given," which appears to be idiomatic for "be famous." The recurrence of the word *šēm* (name) in this blessing cannot help but be a play on the third part of Boaz's sworn declaration, "to maintain the name [*šēm*] of the dead." Thus the first clause of the blessing is best seen (as the NIV translation reflects) as dealing with standing or reputation, though the richness of the nuances of *ʿasē ḥayil* cannot be overlooked.

The third blessing invokes the case of Perez, the offspring of Tamar and Judah, who in spite of the machinations of his father and mother (Gen. 38) proved to be a gracious blessing from God. This blessing subtly speaks to the parallel of Ruth and Tamar as non-Israelites included in the tribal delineation. Like the story of Boaz and Ruth, the story of Judah and Tamar is a story of family continuity achieved by the determination of a woman,[29] though the story of Boaz and Ruth is also a tremendous contrast to the tale of Judah and Tamar.

Boaz is certainly a praiseworthy man. The threefold blessing begins and ends with a reference to the woman he has pledged himself to marry. However, she is not named in any of the three blessings. Moreover, the first blessing mentions her only so that Boaz may have a family commensurate in size with that of the patriarch Jacob/Israel. And she is alluded to in the third blessing only because she is the means through which Boaz may have a family line as significant as that of Perez. The focus and emphasis in the blessings is on Boaz. While the offspring of Boaz and Ruth will count in the family line of Elimelech, he will also count as a genuine scion of Boaz.[2]

If someone had indeed killed inadvertently, he could flee to a city of refuge to escape the "avenger of blood" *(gōʾēl haddām)*. This person is mentioned in only four contexts in the Old Testament, three of them legal or semilegal and one a narrative, all of them dealing with the same principle. A more general term (the *gōʾēl*) is mentioned close to fifty times and is usually translated as "close relative," "kinsman redeemer," or something similar. The *gōʾēl* seems to have been one who had certain obligations to fulfill, whether they were recovering people or property that had been lost through

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[2] Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. The NIV Application Commentary (472–480). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

indenture, or they were paying a fee (usually by a relative or an owner), or they were meting out punishment for killing someone. The law of the *gōʾēl* is given in Leviticus 25, where provisions for redeeming family property (vv. 25–28), dwellings (vv. 29–34), and needy relatives (vv. 47–49) are made. The best-known example of this being played out in practice is from the Book of Ruth, where Boaz and an unnamed relative (a "kinsman redeemer") were involved in a legal situation over their obligations to the widowed Ruth (Ruth 4).

The idea of blood vengeance behind our passage here in Joshua 20 (and the related passages in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19) is more limited than the broader idea of the "kinsman redeemer." The "avenger of blood" was not free to take private vengeance: the Bible clearly reserves vengeance to God alone (Deut 32:35; Isa 34:8; Rom 12:19). Numbers 35 states clearly that the avenger of blood was only free to kill someone who had killed another if (1) that person ventured forth from a city of refuge (Num 35:26–28) or (2) that person was guilty of murder, and not manslaughter (Num 35:16–21). The avenger of blood had a legal status in society to carry out society's (i.e., God's) judgments and was by no means one who was to exact private vengeance.[3]

300c גּאֵל (*gōʾēl*) **I, *redeemer***.

The participial form of the Qal stem of the verb has practically become a noun in its own right though it may properly be considered as merely a form of the verb.

The primary meaning of this root is to do the part of a kinsman and thus to redeem his kin from difficulty or danger. It is used with its derivatives 118 times. One difference between this root and the very similar root *pādâ* "redeem," is that there is usually an emphasis in *gāʾal* on the redemption being the privilege or duty of a near relative. The participial form of the Qal stem has indeed been translated by some as "kinsman-redeemer" or as in KJV merely "kinsman." The root is to be distinguished from *gāʾal* II, "defile" (which see).

The root is used in four basic situations covering the things a good and true man would do for his kinsman. First, it is used in the Pentateuchal legislation to refer to the repurchase of a field which was sold in time of need (Lev 25:25 ff.), or the freeing of an Israelite slave who sold himself in time of poverty (Lev 25:48ff.). Such purchase and restitution was the duty of the next of kin. Secondly, but associated with this usage was the "redemption" of property or non-sacrificial animals dedicated to the Lord, or the redemption of the firstborn of unclean animals (Lev 27:11ff'.). The idea was that a man could give an equivalent to the Lord in exchange, but the redemption price was to be a bit extra to avoid dishonest exchanges. In these cases, the redeemer was not a relative, but the owner of the property. Thirdly, the root is used to refer to the next of kin who is the "avenger of blood" (RSV "revenger") for a murdered man. The full phrase "avenger of blood" is almost always used (cf. Num. 35:12ff.). Apparently the idea is that the next of kin must effect the payment of life for life. As a house is repurchased or a slave redeemed by payment, so the lost life of the relative must be paid for by the equivalent life of the

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[3] Howard, D. M., Jr. (1998). *Vol. 5*: *Joshua*. The New American Commentary (384–385). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

murderer. The kinsman is the avenger *of blood*. This system of execution must be distinguished from blood feuds for the *gōʾēl* was a guiltless executioner and not to be murdered in turn.

Finally, there is the very common usage prominent in the Psalms and prophets that God is Israel's Redeemer who will stand up for his people and vindicate them. There may be a hint of the Father's near kinship or ownership in the use of this word. A redemption price is not usually cited, though the idea of judgment on Israel's oppressors as a ransom is included in Isa 43:1–3. God, as it were, redeems his sons from a bondage worse than slavery.

Perhaps the best known instance of redemption of the poor is in the book of Ruth which is the most extensive OT witness for the law of levirate marriage. According to Deut 25:5–10, a widow without issue should be taken by her husband's brother to perpetuate seed and thus insure the succession of the land which was bound to the male descendants. The near relative here is called a *yābām*. The root *gāʾal* is not used. In the situation in Ruth two things are mentioned, the field and the levirate marriage. The near kin was willing to buy the field, but not to marry Ruth.

The point is that when Naomi in her poverty had to sell the field the next of kin was obligated to buy it back for her. This he was willing to do for his brother's widow without issue. The land would presumably revert to him anyway at last. When he learned that he must marry Ruth and raise children who would maintain their inheritance, he refused and Boaz stepped in. But the two things, kinsman redemption and levirate marriage, are to be distinguished. The word *gōʾēl* "redeemer," does not refer to the latter institution.

In the famous verse Job 19:25 the word *gōʾēl* is translated "redeemer" in the AV and some have taken it to refer to the coming of Christ in his work of atonement. This would be expressed more characteristically by the Hebrew word *pādâ* (which see). This word in Job 19:25 is now more accurately referred to the work of God who as friend and kinsman through faith will ultimately redeem Job from the dust of death. The enigmatic "after my skin" of v. 26 could well be read with different vowels "after I awake" (see NIV footnote and Job 14:12–14 where Job's question about resurrection is climaxed by his hope that God will have regard for him at last and that Job like a tree will have a second growth–*ḥălîpâ*, v. 14, which answers to the *ḥālap* of v. 7). In any case Job expects with his own eyes to see God his *goʾēl* at last.

Bibliography: A. R. Johnson, "The Primary Meaning of the Root *gʾl*," Supp VT 1:67–77. AI, 11–12, 21–23. Leggett, Donald A., *The Levirate Goel Institutions in the OT*, Presbyterian & Reformed Press. TDOT, II, pp. 350–55.[4]

Go'el

Definition **"one who redeems"; "redeemer";**

[4] Harris, R. L. (1999). 300 גָּאַל. In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr. & B. K. Waltke, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (144–145). Chicago: Moody Press.

	avenger"; "revenger"; "to deliver"; "to ransom"
English Translation	**Versions**
to deliver; to ransom	KJV; NKJV; NRSV
redeemer; to redeem	ESV; KJV; LEB; NIV; NASB; NKJV; NRSV
avenger; revenger	ESV; KJV; LEB; NIV; NASB; NKJV; NRSV
Old Testament Occurrences	
Pentateuch	35
Prophets	28
Psalms	11
Wisdom Literature	3
Historical Books	27
Total OT Uses	104

Go'el in the Mosaic Law

The word *go'el* comes from the verb *ga'al* meaning "to redeem" or "to buy back." It is used in legal contexts to refer to kinship laws and rights. In legal terms, a *go'el* is the nearest relative who has the responsibility to redeem or buy back something from a family member. The responsibility for a *go'el* fell first to someone's brother, then uncle, cousin, and finally to the nearest living clan relative (Lev 25:48–49). The Law allowed for a *go'el*, or kinsman-redeemer, to redeem the land of a family member that became poor and was forced to sell it (Lev 25:23–31). This was done to keep the land in the family. The *go'el* also had the right to redeem individuals who had sold themselves into indentured servitude (Lev 25:47–49). They were also responsible for avenging manslaughter (Num 35:12) or murder as an "avenger of blood" (*go'el haddam*; Num 35:19; Deut 19:6).

Go'el in Ruth

The clearest example of a kinsman-redeemer is Boaz. The book of Ruth describes Boaz as a *go'el* to Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 2:20; 3:9). As a *go'el* he has the right to purchase Naomi's land. However, this also includes marrying Ruth and producing offspring for the line of Elimelech, Naomi's deceased husband according to Levirate marriage law (Ruth 4:5; Deut 25:5–10). Boaz—who had to get permission to redeem Ruth and the land because there was a relative closer than him—redeems Ruth and produces an heir for Naomi (Ruth 3:12; 4:6, 13–17).

Go'el in Isaiah

The term *go'el* is often applied to God. On a national level, God is described as the redeemer of Israel (Psa 74:2). The verb *ga'al* describes God's deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt (Exod 6:6; 15:13). God's redemption of Israel is a theme throughout the prophets (Jer 50:34; Mic 4:10). This is seen especially in Isaiah who often describes God as Israel's Redeemer (Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 47:4; 60:16) and refers to Israel as the redeemed (Isa 35:9; 62:12).

Go'el in the Psalms

In the Psalms, God is seen as a Redeemer on a more personal level. The psalmist cries out for God to redeem him, often from enemies (Psa 69:18). God is the one who delivers or redeems the life of the psalmist (Psa 103:4), and God's past acts of redemption serve as hope for current troubles (Pss 107:2; 119:154). In the midst of his trials, Job also clings to the hope of God's redemption—he expresses confidence that his Redeemer lives (Job 19:25).

MILES CUSTIS

See Also:

Redeem, Redemption DBI

Ga'al (gâʾal), q. to redeem, deliver, ransom; n. be redeemed, delivered NIDOTTE

Go'el (gōʾēl) I, redeemer TWOT

To Redeem Vine's[5]

The "kinsman," "near relative" *(gōʾēl)*, was a close relative (25:48–49) who was under obligation to reclaim the land sold by his impoverished family member (25:25) and to redeem a relative who due to difficult times found himself enslaved to someone else (Lev 25:47–49). The kinsman redeemer also had the responsibility of carrying out the role of the avenging of blood (Num 35:12–19). Illustrations of the application of this law of redeeming property of an impoverished relative in Israel's history may be found in Ruth 4 and in Jer 32:7–14.

If the poor man regained a measure of economic stability, he had the right to buy back his land at its fair market value (25:26–27). The opportunity for an individual to regain his land was to be maintained. The right of redemption could not be refused. Presumably he would pay back to the buyer the money he received minus the amount the purchaser had earned from the land since the sale.[331] The value of the property would decrease the closer they were to the next Jubilee. Otherwise the land would return to him during the Year of Jubilee, when the Lord himself performs the role of the nearest relative (25:28). The legislation of Leviticus 25 went a long way in providing the socioeconomic basis for Israel's identity and preservation.

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[5] Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Because the *gōʾēl* was a close family member who had an obligation to deliver a family member in need, the term was rightly applied to God in the outworking of covenant relationship with Israel. God is described as Israel's father in Exod 4:22; in Isa 63:16 God is not only Israel's father but also *gōʾēl*. In Isa 54:5–8 God is Israel's husband and *gōʾēl*. Thus it was not at all a stretch to consider God as "Nearest of Kin" for all impoverished Israelites when the trumpet sounded at the time of the Jubilee. Oehler writes that:

> The God who once redeemed His people from Egypt, and acquired as His possession, here appears again as a redeemer, to restore to the bondman his personal freedom, and to reendow the poor with the share allotted him in the inheritance of his people.

Moreover, in that the *gōʾēl* helped to keep the family intact and thereby contributed to tribal unity, this institution kept the nation intact and in this way had a part to play in the coming of the Messiah.[6]

b. The Legal Process Itself (4:3–12)

(1) Boaz Obtains the Right of Redemption (4:3–8)

(a) Boaz and Kinsman: Legal Discussion (4:3–6)

3 *Boaz said to the kinsman-redeemer, "A piece of property which belonged to our relative Elimelech, Naomi, who returned from the country of Moab, has put up for sale.*[3]
4 *Now for my part, I hereby say, let me inform you as follows: Buy it before those sitting here and before the elders of my people. If you wish to serve as kinsman-redeemer, do so, but if you do not,*[6] *tell me, for I know that there is no one except you to do so, while I am next in line after you." He replied, "I myself will serve as kinsman-redeemer."*
5 *Then Boaz said, "Now on the day you purchase the property from Naomi's hand, also Ruth the Moabitess, wife of the deceased, you thereby purchase*[9] *in order to raise up the name of the deceased over his inheritance."*
6 *"In that case, I cannot perform the duty myself,"*[12] *the kinsman-redeemer said, "lest I ruin my own inheritance. You yourself redeem my redemption right, for I cannot do so."*

3 As Boaz prepared to address his kinsman, one can imagine that the twelve men sitting in official session attracted a curious crowd. Perhaps merchants from nearby stalls stationed themselves within earshot and unhurried passersby paused to watch the proceedings. The din of others chatting as they streamed past on their way to work continued in the background. Surprisingly, Boaz begins with *a piece of property*, not Ruth's marriage request. On the one hand, at first glance this approach seems incongruous with the quick resolution of the matter forecast by Boaz's character (3:18).

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[6] Rooker, M. F. (2000). *Vol. 3A*: *Leviticus*. The New American Commentary (306–308). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Yet Boaz is still direct: the initial, emphatic position of the words in the sentence immediately ushered the subject to the forefront of the process. Was Boaz, for some unexplained reason, slyly diverting the fellow's attention from Ruth? Had he heard rumors circulating about the previous night? (For Boaz's cleverness, see 4:9.) On the other hand, the mention of property might not have surprised the ancient audience, since property redemption was among the duties of a *gō'ēl* (Lev. 25:25). Further, Boaz's sweeping promises to Ruth may even have encompassed familial inheritance, though inheritance was not explicitly mentioned (see 3:11–13).

In any case, with a formal precision typical of this scene (cf. vv. 5, 9), Boaz specified carefully that the property in question *belonged to our relative Elimelech*. From *our relative* (*'āḥînû*, lit. "our brother"), one need not conclude that Elimelech, Boaz, and the kinsman were actually blood brothers. Heb. *'āḥ* often refers to relatives besides brothers, e.g., nephews (Gen. 14:16; 29:15) or members of the same tribe (Num. 16:10; 25:6; Judg. 14:3). The context implies only that Elimelech, Boaz, and the kinsman had a close familial relationship, perhaps that of cousins. Further, it indicates that the subject of the land was of concern to the two men present because Elimelech was dead.

Even more surprisingly, however, Boaz continued that *Naomi … has put up* [the property] *for sale*. The perfect verb *mākᵉrâ* is problematic and has stirred up much scholarly comment. Normally, the perfect indicates an action already completed (here, "sold," "has sold"), but that sense does not suit this context. First, it would mean that the redemption proposed by Boaz (v. 4) would involve a third party, the property purchaser. But no such party was present, and the text leaves the impression that everything was fully settled on this morning (vv. 9–12). Further, vv. 5 and 9 state that the property was purchased from Naomi, not someone else. In my judgment, therefore, the surrounding legal context best explains the perfect verb form. In such formal legal declarations, the perfect was apparently the appropriate form to declare chronologically present action. In sum, at the outset Boaz announced Naomi's intent to sell Elimelech's property.[21]

4 Boaz then drew the implication of the information just given (v. 3). The emphatic pronoun *'ᵃnî (for my part)* shifted attention from Naomi and the field to the two relatives present. It also perhaps signaled Boaz's desire to dispel any public suspicions concerning his role in this affair by addressing this matter right away. Like *mākᵉrâ* (v. 3), the perfect *'āmartî* has the same present sense befitting the legal context. It introduced a formal, two-part statement (*I hereby say*). First, as a preface, Boaz declared his intention (*let me inform you*). The colorful idiom *gālâ 'ōzen* (lit. "to uncover the ear") may derive from a long-forgotten symbolic gesture common to legal transactions whereby one party exposed the ear of the other by parting the latter's long hair or kaffiyeh prior to stating a complaint, accusation, or dispute. Though normally *lē'mōr* (*as follows*, lit. "to say") introduces new content (cf. 1 Sam. 9:5; 2 Sam. 7:27), here it precedes a command to act on information already given (*buy it* [i.e., the property]). The imperative *buy* (*qᵉnēh*) is a fixed expression at home in legal transactions involving a purchase. In view of the root's well-attested use in commercial transactions, *qnh* no doubt means specifically "buy," not "get, acquire."

It is less certain whether the witnesses to this purchase constituted two groups or one. No doubt, *the elders of my people* are the ten men seated in v. 2, but who are *those sitting here* (Heb. *hayyōšᵉbîm*)? Some equate them with the elders, assuming that syntactically

w^{e}negeḏ ziqnê ʾammî (“and before the elders …”) simply explains its predecessor (i.e., “the sitters, namely, the elders”). In view of the legal usage of *yšb* in this context, Sasson’s suggestion that *hayyōš^{e}bîm* means specifically “magistrates” is attractive, although he leaves their relationship to “elders” unexplained. If “elders” was a subcategory of the term “magistrate” (so 1 K. 21:11), then the phrase under discussion distinguished between two levels of meaning and yet referred to the one body, i.e., the elders who belonged to and represented the magistrates in this proceeding. Against this approach, however, stands the usage of the twofold prepositional phrase *neḡeḏ … w^{e}negeḏ*. In its four occurrences elsewhere, the two objects concerned are different, not parallel. Were the same pattern true here, “sitters” and “elders” would not be equivalent. Hence, the “sitters” were probably a second group corresponding to *kol-hāʾām* (vv. 9, 11), i.e., “onlookers” sitting in on the proceedings (so Rudolph) or “inhabitants” of Bethlehem (the root *yšb* means both “sit” and “dwell”).

Second, Boaz explained his command in the language of redemption (root *gʾl*), giving the kinsman two alternatives. If, on the one hand, *you wish to serve as kinsman-redeemer*, he said, then *do so* (*g^{e}ʾāl*, lit. “be a redeemer”). The language recalled the first option in Boaz’s promise to Ruth (3:13). At first glance, Boaz seemed about to implement that promise even though Ruth has yet to be mentioned. While in 3:13 Ruth was the direct object of *gʾl*, however, here its implied object is the field. That change probably made the reader suspect that he knew more than the kinsman—and perhaps also that Boaz was pursuing some scheme. On the other hand, Boaz continued, if *you do not, tell me*. Again, the reader recalls the language of 3:13. As with the other option, however, the kinsman would probably assume that redemption concerned only the property, not Ruth. The audience probably still wondered if Boaz was not being coy (cf. 3:12–13; 4:5). Was he cleverly creating just that impression in his relative while awaiting the right moment to include Ruth in the transaction? Certainly the language sounded as if he were implementing 3:13. Though the focus was upon property, care for Naomi was probably assumed as part of the redemption. In other words, to buy the field from Naomi required the kinsman to provide for her, probably with the profits from the field.

In any case, Boaz wanted to know the kinsman’s reply, *for I know that there is no one except you to do so* (lit. “to serve as kinsman-redeemer”). Boaz fully knew the order of kinship applicable in this case. Normally the preposition *except* (*zûlâ*) indicates the only exception to the case in question. Thus, Boaz apparently meant that, besides the two of them (note: *I* [emphatic] *am next in line after you*), there were no other redeemers. If so, that sounded an ominous note: if both men waived their rights, Naomi was left without a redeemer at all, and, sadly, the land would pass into less related (perhaps even *un* related) hands. One wonders also if the remark aimed subtly to pressure the kinsman into a positive reply by implying Boaz’s eagerness to get the property. If so, psychologically it appealed to the fellow’s competitive spirit.

The man replied affirmatively: *I myself will serve as kinsman-redeemer* (*ʾānōḵî ʾeḡʾāl*). His emphatic *I myself* answered the similar emphasis of Boaz in the preceding line. He, not Boaz, would perform the duty of redemption. One wonders whether this answer took Boaz by surprise, but the storyteller gives no clue. Some scholars compare the imperfect verb here (*ʾeḡʾāl*) with Boaz’s more decisive perfect in v. 9 (*qānîṯî*, “I hereby buy”) and judge it to be a rather weak reply, perhaps implying a lack of enthusiasm or even a desire to renege on the agreement. But such an interpretation

misunderstands the legal process. The issue in vv. 3–8 was whether the kinsman would claim or waive his prior right to redemption (cf. Jer. 32:7–12). Hence, v. 4 reports only the kinsman's *intention* to do so, not his actual redemption. Presumably, he would have next turned to the witnesses and spoken something formally to seal the transaction, as Boaz will do later (v. 9). One can easily imagine him smiling to himself at his good fortune. For very little money, he could carry out a respected family duty and perhaps enhance his civic reputation. Financially, the investment was a bargain without risk. There were no known heirs of Elimelech to reclaim title to the property later, and elderly Naomi was certainly unlikely to produce any. Even the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:13–17), were it applicable, would pose no threat to his ownership. Hence, his little investment would develop into years of productive, profitable harvests; it would enlarge the inheritance of his heirs. How could he lose?

The audience probably remained mystified by the proceedings. When would Ruth's petition for marriage come up for discussion? Recalling the language from 3:13, the audience suspected that Boaz was in fact cleverly raising the issue, without the kinsman realizing it. At the same time, the other man's yes proved an ominous disappointment. If the man took the field, he might also take Ruth. Only a fool would not! If so, the story would end in hollow happiness: romance would surrender to regulation, love capitulate to legality—unless, of course, Boaz had some shrewd scheme in mind.

5 The story now stood at its pivotal point. The audience expected the kinsman to turn to the witnesses and formally declare his redemption of the property (cf. v. 9). In the tense instant before he spoke, however, Boaz himself interjected a word—the crucial factor, he hoped. He converted the man's consent (v. 4b) into a condition (*Now on the day you purchase the property from Naomi's hand*) which, if done, carried an additional stipulation: *also Ruth* [note the emphatic wording and position] … *you thereby purchase*. Strikingly, Boaz specified her nationality (*the Moabitess*, cf. v. 10; 2:2, 21), probably more for legal precision than to scare off the possibly racially skittish kinsman. More importantly, he presented Ruth as *ʾēšet hammēt* (*wife of the deceased*), possibly another technical legal term. In view of v. 3, this identification in effect made Ruth Elimelech's widow, i.e., some sort of legally acceptable substitute for Naomi with respect to the purpose about to be stated (see further below). In sum, Boaz informed the kinsman that Ruth came with the property. If he bought it, he automatically bought her. Thus, Boaz finally implemented his earlier promise (3:13). Ruth's redemption now drew nigh.

The meaning of *qānîtâ* requires clarification. As with the perfect verb forms in vv. 3b and 4, this verb expressed forcefully that the action was a decisive, legal transaction (i.e., a "legal perfect"). The tense derives from the legal context (*you thereby purchase*). The author apparently avoided coining his own phrases, yet he chose his terminology carefully. Given the context's formality and other legal terms, one suspects that *qnh* was also a term appropriate to—perhaps even required by—the legal procedure. Further, *qnh* means "buy" even though no money actually changes hands (see v. 4). Unlike the field's purchase, however, there is no precedent for actual payment in this case; who, after all, would receive it? Certainly not Naomi, Elimelech's estate, or Ruth's parents. Thus, Weiss's suggestion is probably right: like Mishnaic Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew used *qnh* when discussing marriage in conjunction with other actual purchases. Therefore, "purchase" here meant broadly "to marry as part of a legally valid transaction." Hence, this is technically not an example of a "bride purchase."

Finally, Boaz concluded, the purpose of the acquisition of Ruth was *to perpetuate the name of the deceased over his inheritance*. In Hebrew thought *the name* (*šēm*) was more than the identification label borne by a person. The word's meaning encompassed various nuances—physical (existence, family), material (property, possessions), and spiritual (fame, honor, memory). Here, however, *the name* probably referred to Elimelech's personal existence among and remembrance by his clan; he was *the deceased* to whom Boaz referred (cf. v. 3). The *inheritance*, by contrast, was Elimelech's share in the tribal land passed down from ancestors over the centuries. Now, one must fully grasp how important it was for an Israelite to have an heir living on the family land. The loss of land and heirs amounted to personal annihilation—the greatest tragedy imaginable. An Israelite's afterlife depended upon having descendants living on ancestral soil. Without them, he ceased to exist. To "raise the name of the dead," then, was to provide an heir to keep the deceased in existence on the ancestral property (*over his inheritance*). Thus the purpose here was not simply to retain the land or to care for Ruth but to ensure that Elimelech's family line survived. This point, of course, followed up a theme from ch. 1, namely, the annihilation of the family of Elimelech. The possibility of an heir for Elimelech has increased with this legal discussion—and on his own ancestral land! One suspects, however, that by introducing marriage into the proceedings, Boaz hoped to complicate matters and thereby scare off the kinsman. If so, Ruth could become his wife and the property his possession pending the birth of an heir to inherit it.

6 Now came the moment of truth. For a pregnant instant, the issue hung in the balance: would the kinsman accept the new condition and claim both Ruth and the land? Or would he waive his rights, thereby clearing the way for Boaz to exercise them (cf. v. 4)? The man's reply broke the tense silence: *In that case, I cannot perform the duty myself*. He withdrew his offer to serve as redeemer (v. 3). By his word choice he stressed not his unwillingness but his inability to act. He then explained his caution (perhaps even fear): to execute the duties would *ruin my own inheritance*. As in v. 5, *inheritance* was his share in the ancestral land to be passed on to his heirs. The verb (*šḥt*, in the Hiphil, "to ruin, spoil, destroy") is a strong word; it describes warfare (2 Chr. 34:11), pests devouring crops (Mal. 3:11), and a jealous husband's revenge (Prov. 6:32). Despite its ambiguity, the remark probably meant, "I simply cannot afford it." That is, any addition to the man's family would ruin his children's inheritance.[50] He would, first, here buy Naomi's property from assets eventually part of his estate—only to lose that investment when Ruth's first child claimed it, presumably without cost, as Elimelech's heir. Meanwhile, that child's care and feeding would further drain his wealth. Similarly, besides the lost investment in land and child, he may have faced additional expense in caring for Ruth, other children born to her, and Naomi, too. Had he bought only the property, he would not only have enlarged his inheritance but recouped his initial investment from its produce. Hence, the prospect of a wasted investment (whatever its social value) plus additional mouths to feed proved too expensive for him. The cost would be even greater if, besides inheriting Elimelech's estate, Ruth's firstborn were also to inherit a share of the kinsman's own legacy. In that case, his inheritance would be divided among more children, each receiving a smaller part.

Therefore, addressing Boaz, he waived his prior rights as *gōʾēl*: *You yourself redeem my redemption right*. His words clearly bear the marks of an emphatic, formal declaration. The *lᵉkā* (lit. "for yourself") and pronoun *ʾattâ* (*you*)—the latter

grammatically not required—follow the imperative *gᵉʾal* (lit. "redeem"). That both the imperative and its object (*gᵉʾullâ*, *redemption right*) derive from *gʾl* made the statement all the more emphatic. He said, in essence, "I cannot do it, *you* do it." *gᵉʾullâ* ("right/duty to buy back") is a technical term drawn from Israelite family law. Normally, it refers to the *gōʾēl*'s right or duty to restore tribal land to its original owner or to purchase the release of temporarily enslaved members. Like the root *gʾl* in general, this duty had a salvific goal: to restore lost tribal wholeness by returning tribal land to tribal ownership. Here, however, *redemption right* included the provision of an heir through marriage to Ruth. That provision also contributed to tribal wholeness by keeping a family alive that otherwise would have been forever lost.

Finally, the kinsman justified why Boaz should exercise the redemption right. He repeated virtually word for word his earlier renunciation (only the emphatic *lî* is missing): *for I cannot do so*. In view of the legal setting, precise legal procedure perhaps required the apparent redundancy. If v. 8 constituted the right's formal transfer, v. 6 marked the renunciation of intention to exercise it. Alternatively, it might simply have been the narrator's way of giving the statement added drama. Whatever the case, the man certainly left no doubt as to his decision to withdraw from the transaction. Hence, the romantic dimension of the story reached its climax. Boaz could now keep his promise personally! What a stark contrast separated the two men. Without a word of either eulogy or blame, the narrator juxtaposed the kinsman and Boaz, in effect, exposing the *ḥesed* of each. Though living under the same circumstances, Boaz joyfully accepted the duty which the kinsman declined. Hence, as ch. 1 set the ordinary *ḥesed* of Orpah beside the extraordinary *ḥesed* of Ruth, so this scene did with the kinsman and Boaz. By withdrawing, the one did what was expected; by risking financial loss, Boaz modeled exemplary *ḥesed*. The text does not fault the kinsman for being responsible, for not taking on more than he could manage. Rather, it portrays Boaz's actions as truly extraordinary.

(b) Ceremony of the Sandal (4:7–8)

> 7 *(Now back then in Israel this was the way to ratify any transaction whether redemption or exchange:*[2] *one removed his sandal and gave it to his fellow. This was the attestation custom in Israel.)*
> 8 *So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." Then*[5] *he removed his sandal.*

7 In this verse, the normally unobtrusive narrator abandoned story-telling to address his audience directly. Besides 4:1, this was the only such occasion in the book, and the intrusion is all the more striking since it interrupts the kinsman's address to Boaz. On the surface, the verse seems aimed to explain (*Now … this was the way*) in advance the symbolic custom about to be performed (v. 8). The comment implies that the audience either was unfamiliar with the practice or unlikely to understand its significance. It also implies that the author wrote at some temporal distance from the events of his story. But the remark is also strikingly ambiguous—a rather strange feature for an alleged "explanation" aimed at an ignorant audience (see further below).[9] Further, it has a definite structure and noticeable word repetition and verbal assonance. All these features suggest that the remark serves more literary than historical purposes. In effect, the verse

introduced a brief literary pause between the discussion (vv. 3–6) and the formal legal steps which follow (vv. 8–10). The break allowed the audience to absorb the momentous significance of v. 6. It also slowed the story's pace slightly, thereby extending the suspense and setting off the episode's conclusion from what preceded. Finally, its content gave the following ceremony (v. 9) a formality and solemnity it would not otherwise have had.

Thus, the author quickly referred the reader to the situation *back then in Israel*. Though imprecise, *l^e^pānîm* (lit. "formally, earlier") probably pointed to a period at least beyond the audience's lifetime. In those ancient days, this was the proper legal way *to ratify any transaction*. Derived from Israelite family law, *redemption* (*hagg^e^ʾûllâ*) encompasses several social responsibilities. In v. 6 it meant "right of redemption," here "redemption practice." By contrast, *exchange* (*hatt^e^mûrâ)* comes from the realm of Israel's commercial life. For example, it means "real estate transaction" (Job 20:18), "selling price, market value" (28:17), and "wages, profit" (15:31). Together the two probably formed a merismus meaning "all forms of transactions."[16]

The oft-discussed *l^e^qayyēm* (*qûm* in the Piel, "to ratify") merits a passing comment. Because of its rarity and concentration in so-called "late" texts, some scholars consider it either an Aramaism (i.e., a verb borrowed from Aramaic) or Aramaized Hebrew (i.e., Hebrew vocalized like an Aramaic verb). Since one normally expects either a Hiphil or Polel form, these scholars assume that the present Piel reflects Aramaic influence and thus a late date for the composition of the entire book. Against this view, there is good reason to consider the form as reflecting either early (not late) Aramaic influence on Hebrew or an old Hebrew dialect. As Campbell points out, the expected *qûm* in the Polel seems to have a different meaning from *qûm* in the Piel. Further, *qûm* in the Piel evidences a wide variety of nuances: "to confirm, ratify" (Ps. 119:28; Ruth 4:7), "to make happen, make come true" (Ezek. 13:6), and "to institute, regulate" (Esth. 9:21–32). This variety implies that, if the form is in fact Aramaic, it reflects an early adoption of Aramaic, for the development of that many nuances would require considerable time. Finally, forms of hollow verbs with doubled medial *waw* or *yod* occur in early texts. In sum, *l^e^qayyēm* need not be considered as late language even if it reflects Aramaic influence.

Further, the storyteller commented, symbolically to ratify the deal *one removed his sandal and gave it to his fellow*. Though unusual, the perfect of *šālap̱* ("to remove") here apparently has frequentative force (i.e., "used to remove [as a matter of custom]"). Heb. *naʿal* (lit. "footgear") denotes both "shoe" and *sandal*, but sandals were probably more common. Ancient pictorial evidence attests a variety of both—sandals with straps, low-cut boots, and even shoes with upturned pointed toes. The narrator's cryptic style, however, obscures the custom's details. Since *naʿal* (sing.) has a collective sense (Deut. 29:4; 1 K. 2:5), it is uncertain whether the custom required the removal of one or both sandals. Further, who was *one* (lit. *ʾîš*, "a man") and who was *his fellow* (*rēʿēhû*)? That is, who *gave* the sandal(s) to whom? V. 8 may clarify the situation. If, as seems likely, the speaker (the first *gōʾēl*) was the one who removed the sandal(s), apparently the one waiving his right gave the footgear to the other party. Thus the transfer of the sandal symbolized the transfer of something from one party to another. In this case, the *gōʾēl* passed the right of redemption—not specifically the property—to Boaz.

Scholars have speculated about the origin and underlying significance of the sandal symbol. The removal of a sandal also plays a symbolic role in the law concerning levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10), and it was once fashionable to trace connections between it and Ruth 4. Despite the similarities (shoe-removal symbol, a childless widow), however, the two texts treat different cases and hence are probably not directly related. Nevertheless, they do attest the importance of shoe symbolism in Israel. What specifically did sandals/shoes represent? In the OT "feet" and "shoes" symbolized power, possession, and domination (Josh. 10:24; Ps. 8:7 [Eng. 6]; 60:10 [Eng. 8] = 108:10 [Eng. 9]). When Moses removed his shoes (Exod. 3:5; cf. Josh. 5:15), he acknowledged Yahweh's lordship; when David walked barefoot, he showed his powerlessness and humiliation (2 Sam. 15:30; cf. Isa. 20:2–4; Ezek. 24:17, 23). Feet and shoes also played symbolic roles in ancient property transactions. According to the Nuzi texts, for example, to validate a transfer of real estate the old owner would lift up his foot from the property and place the new owner's foot on it. In the OT, to "set foot" on the land was associated with ownership of it (Deut. 1:36; 11:24; Josh. 1:3; 14:9). Therefore, the sandal transfer in Ruth 4:7 may be a symbolic offspring of such ancient customs. If so, the practice had come a long way: originally associated with transfers of land ownership, in Israel the custom had become a symbol for other transactions as well. In this case, the right ceded involved both land and marriage to a surviving widow. In that regard, erotic associations of shoes and feet may also have played some role (see 3:4).

The narrator closed his intriguing parenthesis with a summary conclusion. As indicated, this line structurally parallels and forms a nice inclusio with the opening one (*Now this was …*). Here *in Israel* comes at the end, not near the beginning. The seemingly superfluous statement maintained the verse's suspense and solemnity. The rare word *hatt*^{e}*ʿûḏâ* derives from the Hiphil of *ʿûḏ*, "to testify, bear witness," the same root behind *ʿēḏ*, "witness" (vv. 9, 11). Elsewhere it means "testimony" (Isa. 8:16, 20, i.e., Isaiah's prophetic credentials and indictments). Only here does it have the sense *attestation custom*. Given its etymology, Tucker may be right that it refers to the means of proving the consummation of a transaction. But his suggestion that it alludes specifically to "the use of witnessing formulae in oral contracts" (vv. 9–11a) seems not to fit this context. In v. 7 it points backward to the shoe custom, not forward to the witnessing. Thus, that custom was the "attestation" in view here.

8 The *gōʾēl* again addressed Boaz, thus ending the suspense. To avoid audience confusion, the writer reintroduced the characters, clarifying that *the kinsman-redeemer* (*haggōʾēl*) spoke *to Boaz* (as in v. 6). The mention of both—the only time in the scene—also prepared the reader for the scene's climax, the formal transfer of the right of redemption. He commanded Boaz, *Buy it yourself*. Jer. 32:7, 8 suggest that the idiom *q*^{e}*nēh lāḵ* may have been a fixed legal formula. If so, the audience understood the words as a statement of legal formality, i.e., the official formula to execute the symbol about which v. 7 commented ([he] *removed his sandal*). Thereby what he publicly renounced (v. 6), he passed to Boaz, namely, the right to serve as kinsman-redeemer. Presumably, the legal process required both steps, although one cannot be certain. In any case, the unnamed kinsman now had no rights or responsibilities to care for Elimelech's land or to provide him an heir. His part finished, he exited the story, never to be heard from again. As surely as Boaz held the sandal before his peers, so his hands held the kinsman-redeemer's rights. The stage was now set for Boaz to exercise them.

(2) Boaz Buys the Property and Ruth (4:9–12)

> 9 *Then Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, "You are witnesses today that I hereby buy everything which belonged to Elimelech and everything which belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon from Naomi's hand.*[3]
>
> 10 *And, more importantly, Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's wife, I hereby buy as my wife*[5] *in order to perpetuate the name of the deceased over his inheritance, so that*[7] *the name of the deceased be not cut off from his family circle and from the assembly of his town. You are witnesses today."*
>
> 11 *All the people in the gate area and the elders replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord grant the wife about to enter your house to be like Rachel and Leah, the two who*[10] *built the house of Israel, so you may prosper*[12] *in Ephrathah and enjoy fame in Bethlehem.*
>
> 12 *Also, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the descendants which the Lord may give you*[14] *from this young woman."*

Boaz now exercised the right of redemption just won. His words—his last in the entire story—were solemn, precise, and strikingly detailed. In this juridical setting, he sought formal precision in order to make the transaction legally binding and to head off future claims. He addressed, not the kinsman, but *the elders* and *all the people*. The former were the ten chosen in v. 2, mentioned first, no doubt, because of their superior legal standing. The latter apparently were the many onlookers whom the session had attracted. The elders had presided over the earlier proceedings to ensure their legality, but this transaction required attestation. Hence, the public was more than just spectators. Rather, Boaz told the crowd and the elders, *You are witnesses today*. This and the corresponding response formula (v. 11) were fixed Israelite legal formulas used to notarize transactions contracted orally. Thus, here the elders and the crowd, not a judge or other permanent legal official, were to notarize the transaction being declared. Apparently no written records were to be kept, a situation probably typical of that historical period. The crowd (elders and people) were to attest the act's completion and verify its legality before any future claims or disputes. The *today* (*hayyôm*) was a typical Israelite date formula indicating the consummation and perpetual validity of the action.

Boaz specified the precise details of the transaction. Compared to v. 3, however, the extent of the purchase probably took the reader by surprise. Up to now the package had involved only a specific piece of property owned by Elimelech. Here, however, Boaz bought not only *everything which belonged to Elimelech* but also *everything which belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon*. In short, Boaz formally established ownership of anything (land, houses, movable goods, etc.) which belonged to Elimelech and his sons. Perhaps the comprehensive terms derive from his desire for legal precision and finality. That is, v. 9 simply repeated the terms of v. 3 in technical jargon in order to establish Boaz's ownership. Given the role of human cleverness in the story, however, one wonders if Boaz has tricked the naive kinsman. To obtain the redemption right, Boaz originally downplayed the amount of goods to be gained (v. 3)—the large amount he then acquired. In any case, he bought everything *from Naomi's hand* (i.e., from her possession). Incidentally, this was the first mention since 1:2 of Elimelech's entire family. Thematically, it signals that their tragic story might be coming to completion; the dead, indeed, might live on in the living.

10 Next *And, more importantly*, Boaz bought *Ruth*. Coming first in the sentence, the words were emphatic. For Boaz (and the long-suffering audience!) this was the heart of the matter. Strikingly, he identified Ruth both as *the Moabitess* (cf. 1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5) and—the only such time—as *Mahlon's wife*. Probably the two qualifiers aimed to give the statement formal, legal precision. The former may have been her name among the people, the latter her designation as a widow. That Ruth was legally a substitute widow for Naomi (see v. 5) may have required her identification here as Mahlon's widow. Thematically, the terms recall Ruth's double misfortune—her non-Israelite ethnicity and her tragic widowhood. With the emphatic words *I hereby buy* [Ruth] *as my wife* (*qānîṯî lî*), Boaz formally declared his acquisition of Ruth. This statement marked only the "purchase" of Ruth as Boaz's wife. The actual marriage took place at 4:13. Significantly, this simple declaration tied up several thematic loose ends. It finally granted Ruth's earlier petition for marriage (3:9) and provided the security and reward for which both Naomi (1:8–9; cf. 3:1) and Boaz (2:12) prayed. Further, as Boaz's wife, Ruth finally enjoyed full membership in the covenant community of Israel. The blessings which follow (vv. 11–12) confirm this new status. First, by appealing to Yahweh for blessing on Ruth, the community tacitly acknowledged that Ruth and Israel shared the same God. Second, the townspeople explicitly compared Ruth to Israel's founding mothers, Rachel and Leah, and to Judah's tribal mother, Tamar. This comparison likewise tied up a thematic loose thread, the entrance of Ruth into Israel.

The author probably implied two theological points about Yahweh in that theme. First, Yahweh cared as much for all the world's Ruths—i.e., all its outcast foreigners—as Boaz did for Ruth. Second, God actually desired to "redeem" them into fellowship with himself. In sum, the theme voiced earlier reaches its climax here: Yahweh welcomes foreigners who demonstrate the faithfulness demanded of ethnic Israel. In so doing, the narrator sounded like the author of Jonah (Jon. 4:11) and laid a theological foundation stone on which Jesus later built when he scattered his followers among all nations to preach the gospel (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8).

Boaz next stipulated the purpose of his purchase. On the surface, these words seem superfluous. In view of the legal context, however, the statement probably conformed to the expected formula for marriages by a *gōʾēl*. The purchase was to *perpetuate the name of the deceased over his inheritance*. As noted above (4:5, 10), *the deceased* probably included at least Elimelech and Mahlon, and perhaps Chilion by virtue of his sonship to Elimelech. The first child born to Ruth and Boaz would own Elimelech's family property and keep him and his sons alive in association with it. This possibility raised hopes that Naomi's poor heirless family, on the verge of annihilation at present, might survive. Again, note the assumption that the dead continued to exist on his land (cf. Num. 27:4). The perpetuation of the name, however, had an additional happy result. It ensured that the name *not be cut off* from two important realms. *from his family circle* (lit. "from with his brothers") referred to the extended family of relatives within the clan. Thus, the heir owning the property would maintain the dead's existence in the larger family. Second, the *assembly of his town* (lit. "from the gate of his place") was the local legal authority, the body of elders which guarded the dead's legal rights and of which Elimelech himself might have once been a member. Hence, his heir (by name, "such-and-such, son of Elimelech") would look after the deceased's legal rights, especially his "inheritance,"

within the community. Again, this statement reinforced the concern for the continued existence of the dead on his land.

In closing, Boaz again affirmed the crowd's role: *You are witnesses today*. Since their response keys on Boaz's words here (see v. 11 below), the statement seems tantamount to a question. As *witnesses*, they had heard his legal declaration and could, if called upon, verify its validity in the face of any future challenge (cf. Josh. 24:27). *today* emphasized that the moment the crowd accepted that role, the transaction was final—it was legally binding. As a clever rhetorical echo of Naomi's prediction ("today," 3:18), it also closed an important chapter in the story—as if to say, "Boaz, indeed, accomplished the task properly!"

11 The crowd's affirmative reply (*We are witnesses!*) legally notarized the transaction. The MT has simply "witnesses" (*ʿēḏîm*; cf. Josh. 24:22). In Hebrew style, one commonly indicated an affirmative response by repeating the key word in question, often without a subject. The crowd's response here conformed to that style. At that moment, Boaz officially became owner of the property in question (cf. v. 9) and the husband of Ruth. As if to underscore the act's finality, the narrator cleverly reversed the order of crowd members from v. 9, thereby forming a chiasm. Also, that *All the people* preceded *the elders* may imply popular, as well as legal, acceptance of the transaction. By identifying the people as those *in the gate area* (*baššaʿar*), the city's courthouse, the author further underscored the transaction's legality.

That task accomplished, the crowd pronounced an effusive, beautifully balanced poetic blessing on Boaz and his new wife. Syntactically, two parallel jussives (vv. 11b, 12a) enclose two imperatives. Just how widespread or typical it was to conclude a legal transaction with an invocation of divine help is uncertain. The practice may have been limited to cases involving marriage, perhaps a reflection of Israelite betrothal or wedding customs. One recalls the familial blessings on Rebekah before she left to marry Isaac (Gen. 24:60; cf. Gen. 48:20; Ps. 45:18 [Eng. 17]; Tob. 7:12, 13; 10:11–12). As covenant partners invoked divine surveillance of their agreements (cf. Gen. 31:53), people perhaps invoked divine blessing on newly acquired wives, particularly when a family's survival was at stake.

The first wish fell on the bride (*the wife about to enter* [lit. "who is coming to"] *your house*), although indirectly the blessing was on Boaz as well. As noted above, the term *ʾiššâ* ("woman, wife") confirmed Ruth's arrival to full status as an Israelite. Having achieved equality with Naomi (4:3), she was no longer a Moabite, foreigner, or girl, but *wife*. More importantly, this wish echoed—indeed, answered—Naomi's earlier wish (1:9a). Ruth finally had a home with a husband (see also 4:12b). To be specific, the crowd wished that *the Lord grant* [Ruth] *to be like Rachel and Leah*. The latter were the founding mothers of Israel. They and their servants, Bilhah and Zilpah, bore Jacob twelve sons (Gen. 29–30; 35:16–18) from whom, in turn, sprang the twelve tribes of Israel. From nothing the two women, indeed, *built the house of Israel*. Hence, the people wished Yahweh to give Ruth fertility comparable to that of Rachel and Leah, i.e., many and distinguished children.[36] Such wishes for fertility may have been typical in the ancient Near East (cf. Gen. 17:16; 24:60) and are still popular today. Israel highly valued large families as a kind of protection against enemies (Ps. 127:3–5). The invocation of Israel's ancient mothers here, however, is significant in several respects. Strikingly, the good wishes go beyond the simple provision of an heir for Elimelech. Hence, they strongly

imply that something larger is afoot here than the birth of only one child (see the two following cola). Indeed, they may hint that future children might somehow descend from both Elimelech and Boaz. Further, they may imply a future foundational role for Ruth comparable to that played by Rachel and Leah. Finally, they linked Ruth to the patriarchal mothers, perhaps suggesting that she stood in continuity with that line.

The next two poetic cola expressed the happy results Boaz would enjoy from Ruth's fertility. First, the people hope that, through a large family, Boaz *may prosper in Ephrathah*. In this context the otherwise ambiguous idiom *ʿāśâ ḥayil* (lit. "to make power") probably means "to acquire wealth." Thus, Ruth's fertility may make Boaz economically prosperous. That wish might sound strange to modern readers who regard additional children as extra mouths to feed. In a primitive agricultural economy like Bethlehem's, however, the larger the family, the better the means of production. And the better the means of production, the greater the prosperity. Since *Bethlehem* is its poetic parallel, *Ephrathah* probably is Bethlehem's ancient name (Gen. 35:16, 19; Gen. 48:7; cf. "Ephrathites," Ruth 1:2).

The meaning of the next wish, however, is even less clear than its parallel. The idiom *qārāʾ šēm* (lit. "to call a name") occurs only here. Some compare it to common Hebrew idioms meaning "to name (a child)," but that seems doubtful. Attempts to clarify the obscurity through textual emendations have not won a following.[41] While certainty eludes us, a good case commends the present rendering, *enjoy fame in Bethlehem*. First, *šēm* ("name") can mean "reputation, renown" (Gen. 11:4; 12:2; 2 Sam. 7:9; Ezek. 16:14; etc.). Second, if the two cola under discussion are parallel, the idiom might be an unattested variation of *ʿāśâ šēm* ("to make a name"), as Joüon claims (but with an emendation). Third, according to Sasson, the line forms a thematic bridge to the last blessing, namely, that Boaz may found a famous family (v. 12). If so, the idiom anticipates this blessing and makes the sense for *šēm* noted above all the more likely. Thus, in addition to prosperity (i.e., the previous cola), the townspeople wished Boaz sterling renown in his hometown, presumably through the worthy reputation of his many children. The line perhaps even wished that Boaz found a ruling dynasty in anticipation of the reference to David (v. 17b). More importantly, the line introduced *qārāʾ šēm* as a key expression in the book's closing verses (see vv. 14b, 17a, 17b). It hinted that this union may be destined for great things.

12 Finally, to the wish for Ruth's fecundity (v. 11), the people added one concerning Boaz's *house* (i.e., his family line). They hoped it to be like *the house of Perez*, the clan from which Boaz and most of his audience descended (vv. 18–22). For unknown reasons, that clan had bypassed older clans to achieve preeminence in the tribe of Judah. In short, the crowd wished that Boaz found a family line of similar prominence in Judah. As in v. 11, they obviously reckoned future children to Boaz, not to Elimelech. This point is significant. Clearly, the story's focus has shifted from providing an heir for the latter to procuring and promoting a heritage for the former.

Perez was the oldest of twin boys born to Judah under somewhat scandalous circumstances (Gen. 38). Since Judah refused to give Tamar his youngest son as husband, she posed as a prostitute, became pregnant by an unsuspecting customer (Judah himself), and gave birth to Perez and Zerah. Perez's birth was as unusual as his conception (vv. 27–30). As if pushing his twin aside at the last moment, Perez was born first and earned his name (lit. "breach, breaking out"), a portent of his clan's later importance. The words

whom Tamar bore to Judah recall that famous episode in tribal lore. Its mention probably led the ancient audience to compare that story with the present story. Like Ruth, *Tamar* was a foreigner who perpetuated a family line threatened with extinction, one which later became Judah's leading house, and thereby gained herself fame as its founding mother. If fertile, may not the equally creative (ch. 3) foreigner, Ruth, also preserve Elimelech's line, and, if that line became famous, thereby earn a similar grand destiny?

With the closing line, the blessings came full circle—and with a rhetorical flourish (cf. v. 15b). Again, as with Ruth's fertility (v. 11), Yahweh, the enforcer of blessings, plays the crucial role. The growth of Boaz's house would depend upon *descendants* [lit. "seed"] *which the Lord may give you*. Ultimately, future generations would derive from Yahweh, the "giver" of life—a necessary intervention in view of Ruth's possible earlier infertility (cf. 1:4–5). The line actually anticipates the answer reported in both v. 13 and v. 17b. The means through whom that gift would come was, of course, *from this young woman*, that is, Ruth. One might have expected the term "wife" (cf. v. 11), but this phrase (*hanna ʿărâ hazzōʾṯ*) probably recalled the same words in Boaz's reaction on first seeing Ruth (2:5). Thus, it formed a thematic inclusio around the romance of Ruth and Boaz: the man who asked about "this young woman" now would take her home as his wife! Thus, it also concluded the husband theme first articulated by Naomi (1:8–13). Naomi's prayer had been answered. At the same time, it may have reminded the audience that the drama was not quite over. Unless Yahweh intervened, this marriage would be as infertile as Ruth's first one (1:4–5)—and with tragic results for Naomi.

In sum, the crowd wished Boaz and Ruth a destiny of prosperity and prominence akin to those of the famous ancestors Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Perez. The author prepares cleverly for the startling revelation of v. 17b. With these elaborate blessings, however, Boaz exits the story until his genealogical curtain call (v. 21). The worthy destiny wished him resembles a chorus of praise for his loyalty to family. It befits someone who has rendered a great public service at great personal cost. As Ruth's extraordinary devotion overshadowed Orpah's, so that of Boaz stood in stark contrast to the kinsman's withdrawal. As the public anthem faded and the crowd dispersed, however, two questions remained unanswered. First, would Naomi finally have an heir? Second, would Boaz and Ruth in fact found some great dynasty?[7]

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(1) Boaz's Preparation for Court Action (4:1–2)

[1]Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

[2]Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so.

4:1–2 The atypical placement of the subject before the verb in the opening line of the final act is deliberate and literarily significant for two reasons. First, by avoiding the usual sequential narrative verb form (*waw*-consecutive imperfect) the narrator breaks the

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[7] Hubbard, R. L. (1988). *The Book of Ruth*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (236–262). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

temporal sequence of episodes and signals the beginning of a new act rather than another scene within the preceding act. But in so doing he does not intend to drive a major chronological wedge between chaps. 3 and 4. On the contrary, in view of Boaz's midnight promise to take action on behalf of Ruth "in the morning" (3:13) and Naomi's expression of confidence that Boaz will not rest unless he settles the matter "today" (3:18), this episode must be understood to have transpired that very day.

Second, by front-loading Boaz, the reader's attention is drawn to this character. Admittedly Ruth's fate will be a key issue in the court proceedings, but the narrator hereby forces the reader to focus on Boaz. This first impression is confirmed by the way in which each of the segments of this scene are constructed. In this first episode he is the one who takes the initiative in calling the court into session: he goes up to the gate and sits down; he notices the nearer kinsman and calls him over; he summons ten of the elders to session. The other characters merely respond to his initiatives. In the second stage (vv. 3–8) Boaz presents the issue to the nearer redeemer with a thirty-six-word speech, to which the man replies positively with two words. Then Boaz introduces the complicating factor in the case, and the man declares his change of mind. In the end the audience's and the reader's attention is shifted to Boaz by the transfer of the nearer kinsman's sandal. The third episode (vv. 9–10) is taken up entirely with Boaz's speech, as he explains the significance of his actions this day. In the final segment (vv. 11–12) Boaz is silent to be sure, but he is the focus of the court witnesses' blessing.

Boaz's first action in this scene is to go up to the gate. The verb *ʿālâ*, "to go up," reflects the relatively higher position of the town vis-à-vis the surrounding countryside and answers to Ruth's movement from town "down" *(yārad)* to the threshing floor in 3:3, 6. But since to "go up to the gate" is also idiomatic for "to go to court," this sentence introduces a secondary function of city gates in this context. City gates in Palestine in the early iron age were complex structures with lookout towers at the outside and a series of rooms on either side of the gateway where defenders of the town would be stationed. But these gateways also served a secondary purpose, as a gathering place for the citizens of the town. This was where the official administrative and judicial business of the community was conducted. Verse 13 of chap. 3 had left Ruth and the reader wondering how Boaz would overcome the obstacle to their desire to marry. Now we learn that Boaz has decided to put the case to a court of law.

Normally when individuals would come in from the fields and go up to the town, they would pass right through the gate and go straight to their homes. But Boaz seems to have had no time to go home. Having arrived at the gate, he "sat there." The citizens would recognize this as an official act; he had arrived for legal business. No sooner had he sat down than the *gōʾēl* "just happened" to pass by. The word *hinnēh*, "Behold," which begins the second sentence of v. 1 (not reflected in the NIV), serves two functions: expressing Boaz's surprise at his appearance and turning the reader's attention to a new character in the drama. With a superficial reading of the book the timing of the kinsman-redeemer's arrival may seem coincidental, but a deeper reading will recognize again the hidden hand of God. In 3:13, when Boaz had suggested to Ruth that he would take action in the morning, he had invoked the name of Yahweh in an oath as a sign of his determination to resolve the issue quickly. Now Yahweh ensures the quick resolution of the matter by sending him by the gate just as Boaz was sitting down. Presumably the *gōʾēl* was on his way out of town to work in his fields.

Addressing the man directly, Boaz invited the *gōʾēl* to turn aside and sit down. But the way in which he addressed the man is curious. The expression *pĕlōnî ʾalmōnî*, rendered "my friend" in the NIV, has caused difficulty since Talmudic times. Although most modern versions render the word "My friend,"[4] the REB and the NAB follow the Latin Vulgate in reading variations of "He called to him by name." But this seems to be precisely what he did not do. The NJPS has "So-and so."

The rhyming of these words creates the impression of an artificial creation, a kind of wordplay known as *farrago,* in which unrelated and perhaps even meaningless rhyming words are combined to produce a new idiom. English equivalents might be "hodge-podge," "helter-skelter," "heebie-jeebies," and "hocus-pocus." In such wordplays the meaning of the phrase is much greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, it may be unrelated to the meaning of the parts.

The meanings of *pĕlōnî* and *ʾalmōnî* individually are difficult to establish. The first could be derived from *pālâ*, "to be different, distinct," but this scarcely advances the discussion. More helpful are the occurrences of related words in the cognate Semitic languages, specifically *plny/pila-nu*, "a certain one," in Aramaic, *fulān* in Arabic (the origin of Spanish *fulano,* "John Doe"), and *fellān* in Tigre, on the basis of which *pĕlōnî* may be defined as "so and so," "someone known." Apparently the word is used "when the proper name cannot or should not be used." The second element, in this idiom *ʾalmōnî*, is equally enigmatic. Some find the origin of this word in *ʾal-mōneh*, "not counted, not named," but a derivation from *ʾālam*, "to be silent, dumb," hence "quiet one," is more likely. Whatever Boaz's motivation in using this designation for the *gōʾēl*, in the present literary context *ʾalmōnî* seems to play on *ʾalmānâ*, the Hebrew word for "widow." Remarkably, the latter expression never occurs in this book, even though three of the characters (Naomi, Ruth, Orpah) are widows. This chapter specifically deals with a legal resolution of the problem of widowhood for two of these.

A clue to the meaning of the idiom here may be found in its two other occurrences in the Old Testament. In 1 Sam 21:2 [Hb. 3] and 2 Kgs 6:8 the same expression is applied to places whose names are withheld, hence "such and such a place." The idiom seems to be archaic, its real meaning having been lost; but it continues to be used merely as an indicator of an indefinite person or place. The rendering "Mr. So-and-so," found in the NJPS, certainly captures the sense better than the NIV's "my friend," but our "Hey you" also works in the present context.[10]

But this raises an important question: Why would the narrator, who is otherwise so careful with names, keep this character anonymous? Whatever the motivation, the effect is to diminish our respect for him. To be sure, nothing overtly negative is said about him, but like Orpah, who serves as a foil for Ruth in chap. 1, this man presents a contrast to Boaz. He may be the *gōʾēl*, but he will shortly be dismissed as irrelevant to the central theme of the book: the preservation of the royal line of David.

Whatever the meaning of Boaz's expression for the *gōʾēl*, it communicated, and the man came and sat down with Boaz. With the principals in this court case present, it remained for Boaz to gather a quorum of witnesses. The verb *lāqaḥ*, "to take, procure," suggests that, unlike the *gōʾēl*, who happened to be passing by just then, Boaz had to go and round up enough men to constitute a legal assembly. Obviously the men were all full citizens of Bethlehem; being identified as elders they were responsible for the administration of the town. The fact that they left their work and followed Boaz reflects

his stature in the community. As noted earlier, the side chambers of town gates in ancient Israel were designed so that the town's business could be done here, complete with plastered benches around the walls for the men to sit. If the gate at Bethlehem was the size of the tenth century B.C. Gezer gate (slightly more than seven by fourteen feet, there would have been room for all twelve men, but it would have been crowded; and observers would have had to look on from the passageway outside the chamber. Since Bethlehem was always a less significant center than Gezer, the gateway might have been smaller, in which case the proceedings probably transpired in the plaza just inside the gate.

(2) The Report of the Court Proceedings (4:3–8)

[3]Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. [4]I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line."

"I will redeem it," he said.

[5]Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

[6]At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

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

[8]So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

These verses represent an ancient equivalent to modern transcripts of court proceedings. The report flows smoothly except for the insertion of v. 7, which is an explanatory comment for a readership unfamiliar with the legal custom reflected in v. 6. Excepting this verse, the account is dominated by dialogue, with Boaz and the *gōʾēl* exchanging speeches. Boaz's primary role in the proceedings and in the mind of the narrator is reflected by the amount of space devoted to his comments. In three speeches he utters ninety-three words, while his counterpart speaks only nineteen.

Unfortunately, however, the interpretation of these speeches is fraught with problems, primarily because of our chronological and cultural distance from the events recorded here. Whereas the author knew exactly what he was writing about and was in fact extremely concerned that his readers understand (note the addition of v. 7), modern readers have inadequate grasp of the language of the book, and above all of ancient Israelite customs regarding widowhood, inheritance, redemption, and so forth.

BOAZ'S FIRST SPEECH (4:3–4c)

4:3–4c It seems Boaz wasted no time in getting to the heart of the matter. The NIV obscures the emphatic construction of the Hebrew, which places the object in front (lit.):

"the portion of field belonging to our brother Elimelech Naomi, who returned from the field of Moab, is selling." As in 2:3 the identification of the property in question as Elimelech's portion *(ḥelqâ*; cf. Deut 33:21; Josh 24:32; 2 Kgs 9:21, 25) is rooted in the apportionment of the land among the tribes and clans of Israel under Joshua. According to Mosaic law this land was never to leave the family, and the institution of the *gōʾēl* was one of the nation's customs designed to prevent this from happening (Lev 25:25–30). Boaz reminds the man of a small but significant detail: the owner of the land was "our brother," that is, a relative to both of them. How closely related they were we may only speculate. As recounted in Deut 25:5–10, the legal levirate obligation applied to the immediate brothers of a deceased man (so also Genesis 38). While we have no textual documentation, it is possible, perhaps even likely, that according to Israelite custom (not law), in cases where there was no unmarried brother, the principle of levirate obligation was extended in accordance with the "pecking order" in inheritance law. According to Num 27:9–11, if a man died without a progeny (either son or daughter), his property would pass to his brothers; if he had no progeny or brothers, it would pass to his paternal uncles (father's brothers); if he had no progeny, brothers, or paternal uncles, the property would pass to his nearest relative from his own clan. The text does not indicate how far down this order Boaz and the *gōʾēl* were. In 2:1, however, the narrator does note that Boaz was from the clan of Elimelech. If the *gōʾēl* was a closer relative than Boaz (3:12), he must have been ahead in the pecking order.

According to Boaz's opening line in v. 3, the need for the present court case was precipitated by a decision of Naomi, who had recently returned from the land of Moab. But the nature of that decision is disputed. According to the NIV, Naomi was *selling* the land that belonged to Elimelech. This looks like an appropriate rendering of the verb *mākĕrâ*, the feminine perfect of *mākar*, which normally means "to sell." However, this interpretation flies in the face of ancient Israelite customs regarding land ownership, according to which Naomi, a widow, was in no position to sell the land. The regulations concerning the transfer of real estate in Numbers 27 cited above have the land of a deceased man passing to the son or daughter(!), or brother, or uncle, or another near relative; but there is no hint of a widow being allowed to claim the land. This explains why a widow's lot in Israel was so precarious. With the death of her husband, she lost her base of support.[14] It also explains why Mosaic law was so concerned to protect the widow, along with the orphan and the alien, from oppression and exploitation. The precarious economic position of widows has been assumed in the previous chapters; why else would Ruth need to experience the humiliation of scavenging after harvesters, and why was she at the mercy of some gracious landowner (2:2)?

If Naomi was not selling the land, then what was she doing? The answer lies in part in a more nuanced understanding of the verb *mākar.* It is true that in most cases in the Old Testament the word denotes an economic transaction involving transfer or sale of property, movable or real estate, from one owner to another. By no means, however, does it always involve a sale. In the Book of Judges we observed the figurative use of the verbs in the formula, "the LORD 'sold' Israel into the hand of [the enemy]" (Judg 3:8; 4:2–3; 10:7–8). Here *mākar* serves as a stronger alternative to *nāten*, "to give." None of these cases involved a purchase or money. At the personal economic level a person in debt may "hand himself over" or "be handed over" *(yimmākēr)* to a creditor for six years (Deut 15:12; Jer 34:14) or until the next Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:39–54), or a piece of

patrimonial land may be "handed over" *(timmākēr)* to another person until the next Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:23–28; 27:20–24), but neither case constitutes a true sale. This interpretation is confirmed in the regulations concerning the use of patrimonial lands in Lev 25:13–16 and houses in 25:29–31. At issue is not the transfer of ownership of property but "the acquisition of the right of holding in usufruct someone else's property until the next Jubilee Year." Accordingly, Naomi's action was not to sell the land that belonged to her deceased husband Elimelech; it was not hers to sell because by law ownership of the land would be transferred to the nearest relative (Num 27:8–11). What she had done was authorize the court to give it in usufruct to the *gōʾēl.*

What had happened to Elimelech's land since he had taken his family to Moab and since he had died we can only speculate. It seems most reasonable that moving to Moab had been a last resort for Elimelech. Before he would embark on such a drastic (and shameful) course of action, he would have attempted every other alternative, including selling the land to an outsider (cf. Lev 25:25–30). Obviously the poverty continued; and after the money from the sale was used up, he seems to have been faced with two choices: sell himself into slavery (cf. Lev 25:47–55) or move to a place where food was available. In moving to Moab he chose the lesser of two evils.

Meanwhile ten years had elapsed. During that time Elimelech and his two heirs had died in the land of Moab, and back in Bethlehem it appears the land had fallen into the hands of someone outside the family. When Naomi returned with Ruth, she could not automatically reclaim the land and begin making her own living from it. Consequently she and Ruth are left with no options but to scavenge for food. It seems, however, that because of Boaz's generosity Naomi and Ruth had been assured of sufficient food for the near future, enabling the senior widow to turn her attention to the legal issues relating to the patrimonial holdings of her husband.

Boaz's use of the perfect, *mākĕrâ*, is best interpreted as "a perfective of resolve," that is, "she has decided to give up the right of usufruct." But Boaz was now initiating efforts to get the land back into the family. Nowhere does the text suggest that Naomi had contacted Boaz to arrange for the legal transfer of the rights. Nevertheless he seems to have concluded from the events of the previous night that he must do something about the land; it is not right for it to remain in an outsider's hands. Even though his conversation with Ruth at the threshing floor had not mentioned land at all, he knew that gaining the rights to the use of Naomi's property was the key to winning the right to Ruth's hand.

Having announced the occasion for calling the court to session in v. 3, that is, Naomi's decision to dispose of her deceased husband's land in v. 4, Boaz explained his own involvement in this case. Not presuming upon a favorable reception from the *gōʾēl*, he began cautiously and apologetically (more literally): "As for me, I thought, I will open your ears by saying, …" The idiom "to open the ears" has its origin in a nonverbal gesture to be sure, but to suggest that it has its background in a legal context where one party exposes the ear of the other by pushing the hair back[20] is unnecessarily speculative and precise. This idiom occurs thirteen times in the Old Testament and is usually interpreted by the NIV and most others to mean "to inform." But the present form, with a following *lēʾmōr* (lit. "to say"), occurs elsewhere only in 1 Sam 9:15 and 2 Sam 7:27. Since these two cases have *lēʾmōr* followed by declarative sentences describing the information communicated, to translate the idiom as "to inform" might be justified. It

hardly suits the present situation, however, which has an imperative (*qĕnēh*, "acquire," rendered by the NIV, "and suggest that you buy it"), not information for the *gōʾēl*, following the idiom. In this context "to open the ears" is best interpreted as "to get someone's attention," that is, to make a person receptive to communication. The following *lēʾmōr*, which should be rendered "by saying" introduces the quoted statement.

Having won the *gōʾēl's* attention, Boaz challenged him to acquire the rights to Elimelech's land in the presence of the gathered witnesses. Just as *mākar* in v. 3 does not mean "to sell," so here *qānâ* does not mean "to buy" but to accept Naomi's offer and "acquire the rights of usufruct." The witnesses are identified as those sitting in the gate, that is, the officially summoned ten, along with the elders of his people. It is possible that "the elders of my people" represents a nearer definition of the quorum of sitting witnesses, but it seems more likely that by now others have gathered in the passageway to observe the spectacle. Boaz's ultimatum is simple: if the *gōʾēl* wishes to perform the duty or exercise the rights of a *gōʾēl*, then let him act; but if he prefers not to do so, then he should let Boaz know.

The prescriptive texts concerning the role of the *gōʾēl* mentioned earlier had not covered the present case, that is, the rights of usufruct. This application of the laws suggests that the prescriptions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy were viewed neither as exhaustive nor restrictive to the situations described. Not every circumstance in which the principle could or should be applied is covered in that text. The present application arises from Israel's distinctive theology of land (which is a gift of God and must remain within the family) and family (which must remain intact in order for the life of the ancestors to continue).

Boaz concluded his first speech by asserting his need to know and giving the reason for presenting the demand to the *gōʾēl:* he has first rights to acquire the land, and he, Boaz, is next in line. As recorded, he did not declare that he would like to acquire the rights, but the implication would have been clear to everyone.

The *Gōʾēl's* First Speech (4:4d)

4:4d The *gōʾēl* answered Boaz with a mere two words, *ʾānōkî ʾegʾāl*, "I will redeem it." If Ruth was watching, her heart must have sunk. Boaz had expressed resignation to the will of the *gōʾēl* earlier (3:13), but in Ruth's mind this was probably not an acceptable option. Meanwhile the reader wonders why Boaz has not mentioned her in the transaction.

Boaz's Second Speech (4:5)

4:5 In v. 5 Boaz introduces Ruth as a complication to the present case. But the verse raises some of the most difficult problems in the book. The first part of the temporal clause is clear, anticipating a time (lit. "on the day") when the *gōʾēl* would acquire the rights to Elimelech's field from the hand of Naomi, that is, the transfer of the rights of usufruct. But what is to be made of the following clause, rendered, "and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow …"? Limitations of space prevent a discussion of all the options and force us to get to the point as quickly as possible. The NIV's "and from Ruth" represents a fairly literal reading of *ûmēʾēt*, "*and from with* Ruth," creating the impression that Ruth also had some legal interest in the land. But this is highly improbable. Because the verb *qānîtā*, "you acquire," lacks a direct object according to the preserved Hebrew text *(kethib),* Hubbard follows *BHS* in emending

consonantal *wmʾt* (“and from”) to *wgm ʾt* (“and also”) and understands Ruth to be the direct object. The same effect can be achieved, however, without the textual surgery by assuming that consonantal *wmʾt* consists of the conjunction *waw*, an enclitic *mem* and the sign of the direct object.

The second major problem involves the form of the verb. the traditional Hebrew consonantal text reads *qnyty*, which normally would mean “I have acquired.” However, the Massoretes recognized the improbability of this spelling by vocalizing the word *qānîtāy* and suggesting an alternate reading *qnyth.* Vocalized *qānîtāh*, the latter means “you have acquired her.” This is the preferred reading, with the feminine suffix referring to Ruth, the direct object named at the beginning of the clause.

Combining these solutions to the problems of this clause yields a sensible sentence that balances the previous, as the following juxtapositioning illustrates:

On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi,
And Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the deceased, you acquire.

Boaz hereby reminded the *gōʾēl* that this transaction is more complex than merely acquiring usufruct rights to Elimelech’s field. Elimelech had a son whose death has left a second widow in the picture. This woman is implicated in any action that he as a *gōʾēl* might take. The manner in which Boaz introduced Ruth is significant. First, he introduced Ruth by her full name, “Ruth the Moabitess.” This more precise identification seems intended to cast doubts about the wisdom of acquiring the rights to Elimelech’s land in the mind of the *gōʾēl.* For Boaz, who has had direct contact with the woman, this is no problem, but he may have been counting on a measure of anti-Moabite sentiment on the part of his kinsman, rendering him less inclined to accept Naomi’s offer. Second, he introduced her as “the wife of the deceased,” though which deceased he does not specify. The *gōʾēl* obviously knew about the death of Naomi’s husband. In view of Boaz’s comment in 3:11, he must also have known about Ruth, but at this point he withholds the name of her husband. We will not know until v. 9 whether Ruth’s deceased husband was Mahlon or Chilion.

To this point in Boaz’s efforts to resolve the issue of Elimelech’s land, he seems to have sought an application of the Israelite custom of the *gōʾēl*, according to which a close relative was responsible for ensuring that the patrimonial land stayed within the family (Lev 25:25–30). With the final purpose clause, however, Boaz introduced a new notion. If the *gōʾēl* would acquire the usufruct rights to Elimelech’s land, he must also assume responsibility for rescuing the line of Elimelech. Presently the line is hanging on by two fragile threads: Naomi, Elimelech’s elderly widow, who is past child-rearing age, and Ruth, Elimelech’s Moabite daughter-in-law. But realistically the latter represented the only hope for the line. Accordingly Boaz added that if the *gōʾēl* would acquire rights to the land, he must also acquire Ruth with the specific purpose of marrying her and fathering a child through her on behalf of Elimelech and his son. Since the clause (lit.) “to establish the name of the deceased on his patrimonial land” borrows heavily from Deut 25:7, we observe here for the first time in the book an explicit reference to the levirate law.

The word *šēm*, “name,” does not mean simply the label by which one is identified. Boaz was not asking the *gōʾēl* to recover the name “Elimelech” (or “Mahlon”) by giving it to someone. Rather, he used the name in its dynamic sense as a designation for the

memory of a person's deeds and achievements, ones' reputation and honor, as well as a metonymic expression for one's descendants, who give one a sort of posthumous existence. In the ancient world one of the most fearful curses one person could invoke on another was "May your seed perish and your name die out."

Technically there is nothing in the prescription concerning the levirate marriage in Deut 25:5–10 that obligated either Boaz or the *gōʾēl* to marry Ruth and establish the name of Elimelech or Mahlon. The Mosaic prescription had the immediate brothers of the deceased in mind, and this is assumed in the application of the custom in Genesis 38 and 2 Sam 14:7. Accordingly, when Boaz challenged the *gōʾēl* to "establish the name of the deceased," he was not appealing to the letter of the law but its spirit. Neither man was legally bound by Deut 25:5–10, but this does not eliminate a moral obligation. Boaz was prepared to operate on these grounds. The question is, Was the *gōʾēl*?

With the purpose clause in v. 5 the reader observes the convergence of two distinctly Israelite customs: the preservation of a genealogical line, through the levirate law, and the maintenance of the patrimonial estate through the law of the *gōʾēl*. But Boaz's motivation in summoning the court and his concern for Ruth are of interest for a second reason. In the previous chapter Naomi's scheme to have Ruth and Boaz marry was grounded in her concern for Ruth's security, and this was obviously part of Boaz's motivation as well (3:10–13). The reference to a *gōʾēl* introduces a second incentive, however, which is in fact uppermost in the narrator's mind. His concern is for the line of Elimelech, not his land nor the welfare of Ruth. Because the personal story of these characters must lead inexorably and ultimately to David, this sentence is one of the most significant in the book.

THE *GŌʾĒL'S* SECOND SPEECH (4:6)

4:6 Whatever enthusiasm the *gōʾēl* may have had after Boaz's first speech for acquiring the rights of usufruct to Elimelech's land was completely dampened by his second speech. Having received this added information, that Ruth came with the transfer, he declared that he could not "redeem," that is, perform the obligation of a *gōʾēl*, for himself. No object for the verb *gāʾal* is specified. Ruth would be the nearer antecedent, but the "land" is apparently the primary object. The addition of *lî*, "for myself," in the Hebrew text heightens the contrast between this man and Boaz, who appears throughout to be operating in the interests of others.

After Boaz's second speech the *gōʾēl* found himself on the horns of a dilemma. Actually he was faced with four options: First, while not legally bound, he could accept moral responsibility for Elimelech's estate, redeem the field, marry Ruth, and ensure the well-being of Naomi, the senior widow. This would have been an honorable course of action. Second, he could redeem the field and pledge to marry Ruth but then renege on the pledge after the transaction was complete. By doing this, however, he would have jeopardized his own reputation and standing in the community. Third, he could reject the offer, thereby ceding the rights to the land and the responsibility of raising up the name of the deceased to Boaz. This move would not necessarily have been irresponsible. After all, Boaz intimated his interest in assuming the role of *gōʾēl* by declaring that he was next in line (v. 4). Fourth, he could accept the responsibility of a *gōʾēl* and redeem the field but reject the responsibility of a *levir* and cede to Boaz the moral obligation and/or right to marry Ruth. This would doubtless have cost him considerably in terms of respect and honor in the community in the short range and in long-range terms could have proved

economically precarious. If Boaz would raise up the name of Elimelech by producing an heir through Ruth, this heir could eventually claim the original patrimony of Elimelech.

Faced with this economic and ethical dilemma, the *gōʾēl* chose the third option. The negative purpose clause explaining his rationale suggests he seriously considered only the first two options. The clause itself is not difficult to translate: *pen-ʾaḥšît ʾet-naḥălātî*, means "lest I destroy/jeopardize my patrimonial estate." However, it is not so clear how this statement is to be interpreted. How could the addition of Ruth into the equation jeopardize his own hereditary holdings, which presumably referred to the land that he had inherited from his own ancestors? Two factors need to be considered. First, when he added up the cost of redeeming the property, plus the cost of maintaining the widow Naomi, plus the cost of marrying Ruth, he may have concluded that this was not a fiscally sound move. Rather than enhancing his assets, the newly acquired responsibilities would drain resources from the holdings he had inherited from his own ancestors. Second, he probably also considered the implications of raising up the name of the deceased, that is, producing an heir for Elimelech. Given his own age and the age of Ruth, he may have thought that she might bear him no more than one child. Since this child would be legally considered the heir and descendant of Elimelech, upon the death of the *gōʾēl* he would inherit the property that had come into his hands through this present transaction as well as the *gōʾēl's* inherited holdings. Furthermore, since the name of Elimelech had been established/raised up through the child, the *gōʾēl's* entire estate would fall into the line of Elimelech, and his own name would disappear. Third, in view of Boaz's introduction of Ruth as "the Moabitess," he may have have pondered the ethnic implication of the transaction, concluding that his patrimonial estate would not be jeapordized by falling into the hands of one with Moabite blood in his veins.

Having reflected on the implications, the *gōʾēl* announced his decision. In unequivocal and emphatic terms he declared (lit.), "Redeem for yourself, you, my redemption right [*gĕʾullâ*]." The noun *gĕʾullâ*, from the same root as *gāʾal*, is a technical term for the rights, privileges, and obligations of *gōʾēl* status.

THE *GŌʾĒL'S* NONVERBAL SPEECH (4:7–8)

4:7–8 In v. 7 the narrator interrupts the report of the court proceedings with a parenthetical comment concerning an ancient legal custom. By modern standards of composition the clarification would have been more appropriate after v. 8, but its present location creates the impression of a pause in the proceedings and a shift from verbal to nonverbal legal communication. In any case, having said his piece in v. 6, the *gōʾēl* removed his sandal and handed it to Boaz. This was a symbolic act declaring his abdication of his own rights as *the gōʾēl* and their transfer to the next in line. The gesture was accompanied by another verbal declaration (v. 8), *qĕnēh lāk*, "Acquire for yourself." The utterance represents a two-word recapitulation of his statement in v. 6. The use of the verb *qānâ* in place of *gāʾal*, "to redeem," confirms our earlier interpretation of this verb as "to acquire" (see comments on v. 4).

The narrator's insertion of the parenthetical comment in v. 7 suggests that this custom was no longer understood at the time of the writing of the book. For the sake of the modern reader we add some additional explanatory comments. Sandals *(naʿal)* were the most common form of footwear in the ancient world, generally being made of leather and fastened with straps or laces. The act involved in this transaction is described as "taking off"[40] the sandal and handing it to the person to whom rights are ceded. The narrator

notes that the *gōʾēl's* action follows an ancient practice in Israel.[43] This nonverbal gesture was performed particularly in legal contexts involving "redemption" *(haggĕʾûllâ)* and "transfer of property" *(hattĕmûrâ).* The meaning of the former expression is clear by now; but the latter calls for further comment. The noun *tĕmûrâ* occurs elsewhere only five times, twice in Leviticus and three times in Job. Derived from a root *mûr*, which in the causative stem *(hiphil)* means "to change, exchange," in Lev 27:10, 33 the word denotes a "substitute" sacrificial animal. Job 28:17 declares that no vessels of gold can equal or substitute for wisdom. Job 15:31 employs the expression in the sense of "reward, recompense" and in 20:18 as the act of bartering, trading. In contexts like the present it has to do with legal attestation of a transfer of goods or rights.

The purpose of this legal gesture is defined with two expressions. The first is in the form of a purpose infinitive phrase (lit.), "to put any matter into effect," that is, to make it legally binding (NIV "to become final"). Boaz used the same verb in v. 5 of "establishing" the name of the deceased. The second expression of purpose functions as a summarizing verbless clause (lit.), "Now this is/was the form of attestation/legalization in Israel." The noun *tĕʿûdâ*, "form of attestation/legalization," occurs elsewhere only in Isa 8:16, 20. It derives from a root *ʿûd*, which in the causative stem *(hiphil)* carries two senses, "to warn, admonish" and "to call to witness." The latter is obviously intended here, a conclusion confirmed by Boaz's declaration of the role of the observers in v. 9: they are *ʿēdîm*, "witnesses," which derives from the same root.

(3) Boaz's Response to the Outcome of the Court Proceedings (4:9–10)

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

4:9–10 With the transfer of the sandal as the final legal gesture, the official court proceedings were complete. The rights and responsibilities of redemption vis-à-vis Elimelech's estate had been officially transferred to Boaz, and he was legally recognized as the *gōʾēl.* Boaz's legal standing had been advanced, but now the "peloni almoni" (v. 1) may disappear from the scene. In relinquishing his rights in the present context his name also disappears from history. In keeping with ancient legal proceedings, Boaz then turned to the witnesses and presented an impassioned closing speech, offering his interpretation of the significance of the scene they have observed. As in v. 4 the narrator refers to two groups of observers, though they are identified slightly differently: "those sitting" and "the elders of my people" are replaced by "the elders" *(hazzĕqēnîm)* and "all the people." The former expression probably refers to the ten whom Boaz had formally summoned (v. 2); and the latter, to all who had in the meantime been passing through the gate on the way to work but who had stopped to watch what was happening in one of the chambers.

Boaz's speech is framed by identical clauses at the beginning and at the end. With this declaration he adds a second form of attestation to go along with the passing of the sandal he now has in his possession. In the future if his claims to the rights to Elimelech's land or his claim to Ruth are ever questioned, not only will he be able to produce the sandal, but he also will appeal to this host of witnesses that has observed him gain this

right through legal process. Within this framework Boaz's speech divides into two parts: a summary of his own role and the legal transaction on the one hand and an explanation of his motivation in seeking the status of *gōʾēl* with respect to the estate of Elimelech on the other. From the narrator's perspective the twofold reference to "today" highlights Boaz's promptness in fulfilling his promise to Ruth in 3:13 and in the fulfillment of Naomi's words in 3:18.

Boaz's summary of his actions consists of two parts. The first (v. 9b) focuses on the estate of Elimelech, and the second focuses on the person of Ruth (v. 10a). With respect to the former, Boaz refers to the estate as "all that belongs to Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon." The addition of the names of Elimelech's sons raises the inheritance implications. Boaz reverses the narrator's order of the two names in 1:2, 5, presumably because he will name Mahlon again in v. 10. The NIV's rendering of v. 9 creates the impression that Boaz actually bought the estate of Elimelech, but this is wrong on several counts. First, as noted earlier, the estate was not Naomi's to sell. She had merely relinquished the right to hold it in trust and transferred that right to the *gōʾēl.* Second, the court proceedings were not about redeeming land but transferring the right to redeem it. Through this action Boaz's status is changed from being a *gōʾēl* to being the *gōʾēl (haggōʾēl).* Third, the actual redemption of the land still lay in the future and would involve negotiations between Boaz and the person who currently held Elimelech's estate.

In the second portion of his summary Boaz declared that he had also acquired the rights to Ruth. He mentioned the estate of Elimelech first because his right to Ruth was contingent upon gaining the right to the property. It is obvious from the construction of the sentence, however, that Ruth was his primary goal (lit.): "And also Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I have acquired for myself." The use of the full name "Ruth the Moabitess" may be required by the legal context, but it is evident that Ruth's Moabite status is no barrier for Boaz. On the contrary, perhaps because of her public reputation but especially because of his personal contacts with her, he seems to relish the prospect of marriage to this foreigner. His identification of Ruth specifically as the wife of Mahlon is also illuminating. We had known since the beginning that both she and Orpah were married to the sons of Elimelech and Naomi, but now for the first time we learn which woman had been married to which man.

The remainder of v. 10 is devoted to explaining Boaz's motivation in the preceding legal proceedings. Again it is obvious that his primary interest is Ruth and not the estate. In v. 9 he had not bothered to explain why he desired the status of *haggōʾēl*, "the kinsman-redeemer," vis-à-vis Elimelech's property, but now he offers his reasons for wanting Ruth. The addition of "for a wife" (NIV "as my wife") creates the initial impression that his motives are purely personal. But not for long. In Boaz's explanation of his motivation in the foregoing legal efforts he used three significant expressions. His first goal was to establish the name of the deceased on his own patrimonial holding. The infinitive phrase translated "in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property" is identical to the challenge he had put to the *gōʾēl* in v. 5. Boaz's second goal was to prevent the name of the deceased from being (lit.) "cut off from his brothers." The expression "cut off the name" represents one of several expressions for annihilating one's honor and reputation and preventing one's posthumous existence. Boaz's third goal is to prevent his name from being cut off from (lit.) "the gate of his place." "His place" is a designation for the town, that is, Bethlehem, but the NIV's interpretation of *šaʿar*, "gate,"

as "records" is misleading. Here "gate" functions metonymically for "the assembly" that meets at the gate. This decision by Boaz is intended to guarantee Elimelech/Mahlon the right to representation in the gathering of the town council. In the end Mr. So-and-So will disappear without a name, but the security of Mahlon's and Elimelech's names is hereby guarded.

(4) The Public Reaction to the Outcome of the Court Proceedings (4:11–12)

[11]Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. [12]Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

4:11–12 The response to Boaz's appeal by (lit.) "all the people who were in the gate" and "the elders" (the NIV reverses the order of the two groups) was positive in the extreme. First, they answer Boaz's twofold challenge at the beginning and end of his speech and accept their official role in the legal proceedings. Since biblical Hebrew has no word for "Yes,"[51] they declare their response by repeating Boaz's last word and affirming unanimously, *ʿēdîm*, "Witnesses!" With this speech-act they have indeed fulfilled their present legal obligations, but this does not mean they are finished. On the contrary, they break out in an effusive pronouncement of blessing upon Boaz.

The benediction consists of three parts. Although the people's attention was focused primarily on Boaz, they expressed their concern for him with a prayer for Ruth's fertility. They did not mention her by name but referred to her as "the woman who is coming into your house." The expression "who is coming/about to come to your home" derives from the ancient customary practice of the wedding party proceeding to the home of the groom after the marriage ceremony and him formally ushering the bride into his house.[54] The witnesses' request concerning Ruth is extraordinary inasmuch as they pray that Yahweh would grant this foreign woman a place among the matriarchs of Israel along with Rachel and Leah. As is well known, Rachel and Leah were the daughters of Laban the Aramean, whom Jacob married and who became the ancestresses of the twelve tribes of Israel. The order of the names, with Rachel before Leah, is striking not only because Leah was the senior and dominant wife but especially because Bethlehem belonged to the tribe of Judah, whose eponymous ancestor was one of Leah's sons. But just as the order of Chilion and Mahlon in v. 9 prepares for the reference to the latter in the following verse, so this order sets the stage for the attention given to Judah in v. 12. By invoking the intervention of Yahweh on Ruth's behalf, the townsfolk are thinking specifically of the matriarchs' fertility. Just as Rachel and Leah had built up the house of Israel, so, they pray, may Ruth build up the house of Boaz. The idiom "to build a house," which means "to have progeny, descendants, to establish a family," derives from the Mosaic Torah concerning the levirate marriage (Deut 25:9), adding further evidence that Boaz's marriage to Ruth is intended as such. But the people's invocation of Yahweh to make this possible is in keeping with the psalmist's notion that "unless the LORD builds a house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps 127:1).

The second part of the blessing was directed to Boaz and is constructed of two parallel lines:

May you prosper (lit. make wealth) in Ephrathah *(waʿăśēh ḥayil bĕʾeprātâ),*
And may a name be called in Bethlehem *(ûqĕrāʾ-šēm bĕbêt lāḥem)*.

Because of the wide range of meanings that may be ascribed to *ḥayil*, the meaning of the first line is difficult to pin down. *ʿāśâ ḥayil* could mean "to act valiantly," "to perform honorably," or "to show great strength," but "to make wealth," that is, "to prosper," seems most appropriate in the context of a blessing associated with marriage.

Typical of Hebrew parallelism, the second line builds on the first. The idiom *qārāʾ šēm*, "to call a name," is normally used of naming a person, the phrase being followed immediately by the name given or introduced by a preposition. The present construction with "in" + geographic name occurs only here.[62] To call/mention a person's name in a place after his death means more than "to keep the name [that is, the reputation] alive" (REB); it also perceives the person as living on in his descendants in the place named. The ancients believed that when a person's name is never mentioned after his death, he ceases to exist (Isa 14:20).

In the third element of their blessing (v. 12) the witnesses prayed that Boaz's house would become like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. This reference to Tamar, Judah, and Perez reinforces the impression that the narrator has been writing the story of Boaz and Ruth with Genesis 38 in the back of his mind. This most celebrated narrative of levirate obligation and betrayal also involved a widow whose husband, Er, had died without producing an heir. Failing to get Er's brother, Onan, to fulfill his levirate obligation and despairing of waiting for Shelah, another younger brother, to grow up, Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and tricked Judah, her own father-in-law, into having sexual intercourse with her. As unlikely as it may seem, she conceived and eventually bore twin sons, Perez and Zerah. Together with Shelah these two sons become the ancestors of the tribe of Judah (Gen 46:12; Num 26:20; etc.) Of these three, Perez's descendants seem to have played the most significant role in Israel's history, but Perez is mentioned here because he was the ancestor of Boaz's clan living in Bethlehem. The point of comparison between Ruth and Tamar is neither their characters nor the manner in which they conceived (Tamar's was the result of incestuous deception) but the common levirate nature of their unions. Through Tamar, whose husband had died childless, Judah had fathered Perez,[66] who became the ancestor of a host of clans, including the clan (*mišpāḥâ*; cf. 2:1) of Boaz. Now the witnesses prayed that through this widow, Ruth, Boaz may father a son and live on through his numerous progeny, even as Judah lives on in his descendants. There is no mention of the men's characters either. However, considering the rabbinic hermeneutical principle of "from greater to lesser," the reader cannot help but think that if Yahweh had given immoral Judah a double blessing in the birth of twins and if Judah flourished through Perez, how much brighter are the prospects for Boaz and Ruth. These two have been presented from beginning to end as persons with the highest ethical standards; they embody covenant *ḥesed*. But the witnesses did not appeal to their characters. Recognizing Yahweh as the source of blessing and family, they assumed that Boaz's having offspring through Ruth depended on the divine gift.

Little did those who uttered these words realize how prophetic the words would be. Ten of them were witnesses to this event because they had been summoned; the rest had simply gathered out of curiosity over what was happening in the gate. Now, inspired by the Spirit of God, they joined in a spontaneous and unanimous pronouncement of

blessing upon Boaz. They had come to witness, but they left prophesying. Had they been around long enough to see the fulfillment of their prayer, they would have observed the establishment of a name and a house far greater than Perez, the house of King David, a name commemorated to this day in the flag of the state of Israel.

Scene 2: The Genealogical Resolution (4:13–17)

The story of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi concludes with a glorious resolution of a fundamental issue in the book: the filling of Naomi's emptiness and the birth of a son through whom the royal line of David will eventually appear. Unlike the formal court scene in the gate, the climax of the story occurs in the home of Boaz and Ruth at least nine months later. The account divides into five parts: (1) a narrative report (v. 13), (2) a speech by the women of Bethlehem (vv. 14–15), (3) a narrative report (v. 16), (4) a speech by the women of Bethlehem (v. 17a, b), and (5) a narrative conclusion (v. 17c).[8]

The "Tribal League"

THE BOOK OF JUDGES presents Israel as constituting some sort of tribal confederacy or league. Such a confederation would facilitate important political, economic, social, and religious purposes. A brief overview of the tribal structure of ancient Israel will enhance an understanding of a number of passages in the book of Judges.

The family or house (hold) (*bêtʾāb*, lit., "house of the father") was the fundamental unit of social structure. This unit was not simply the nuclear family (i.e., husband, wife/wives, and children) but had wider relational connections so that it could be used to designate a more extended family (i.e., husband, wife/wives, married children and grandchildren, all living in relatively close proximity to each other). While an individual male warrior (*gibbôr*) might be the head of his own family (*bêtʾab*), each family usually had a number of male warriors (cf. Josh. 7:14, 17).

ISRAEL'S TRIBAL STRUCTURE

KEY

ʿam	=	"people"
šēbeṭ	=	"tribe" (= *maṭṭeh*)
mišpāḥâ	=	"clan," "maximal lineage group" (*ʾelep*)
bêt ʾāb	=	"family" "father's house"

The term that in most English versions is translated "clan" (*mišpaḥâ*) is more accurately a "maximal lineage group." It was a descent group that established ties of kinship between families or households (*bêtʾāb*) through a common ancestor (who was

[8] Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6*: *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (704–725). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

no longer living), adding a protective and social function. It established vertical kinship solidarity. It appears that it was on the level of the *mišpāḥâ* that the law of the *gōʾēl* (kinsman-redeemer) functioned (see the introduction to Ruth).

The tribe (*šēbeṭ*) is more difficult to define, since social groups can be bound together in so many different ways: by descent, by residence, by common dialect, or by a common religion. In the Old Testament, tribes were generally certainly groups connected to one another by residence and descent as well as possibly dialect (see 12:6, where the Cisjordanian Ephraimites could not pronounce the word "shibboleth"). Studies of modern tribal societies demonstrate that Old Testament tribal culture was not necessarily an evolutionary stage following that of the band and preceding the state stage, but could represent a social form in its own right. The term *šēbeṭ* may be applied to any kind of organization where there is unity at the center but freedom and variation at the periphery. In the Old Testament, therefore, a tribe seems to be the largest social unit for mutual defense against foreigners or other Israelite social units.

Finally, several tribes combined to form the ethnic group, the *ʿam*, "people" (a root that implies internal blood relationship). The book of Judges assumes that common descent from an eponymous ancestor provides the basis for Israel's ethnic unity. Expressions such as "Israel," the "sons of Israel" (or "Israelites"), "all Israel," and so on underscore the basic ethnic unity of the tribal confederation—at least as the book of Judges presents it.

Among numerous characteristics of tribal societies, one of the most important is that of vertical kinship solidarity within a segmentary system (i.e., rights, duties, privileges are inherited along the same segmentary lines that give clan and lineage solidarity). Examples of this from the Old Testament are: an emphasis on remembering genealogies, the kinsman-redeemer (*gōʾēl*) law, and landholding. Another important tribal characteristic is the importance of alliances. The covenant or treaty (*bᵉrît*) functioned not only as a moral and religious document but also as a basis for tribal alliances within the confederacy or league.

In clan ideology, it can be said fairly that the concept of abstract justice is lacking. All actions are based on specific loyalties, the lines of which are structurally determined. One supports one's fellow clansman in a dispute, regardless of moral questions. The only consideration is, "he is my fellow-clansman." This fact concerning clan ideology is important to understand the loyalties in the case of Benjamin in Judges 19–20.[9]

G. The Son of Man (vv.13–14)

Daniel 7:13–14,18,22,27 portray the Son of Man's triumphant and eternal reign. The Old Testament only uses the term 'Son of Man' in Daniel, and it is clearly a messianic title. Indeed, Jewery in general recognized this, which explains their reaction to Jesus who used it as His favorite description of Himself. The title obviously stresses His relationship to the human race, and thus His role as the *'goel'* of Isaiah, the kinsman redeemer who would redeem humanity by paying the price of their redemption from

[9] Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. The NIV Application Commentary (25–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

bondage to sin, the price God requires for forgiveness from sin—sinless blood. The Son of Man will receive His authority from the Father (v.14), so will rule the creation that belongs to the Father with His full approval. By contrast, the pseudo-Christ will attempt to usurp this authority and try to wrest it from the Father's hand.

Verses 18 and 22 teach that the saints (believers) will be vindicated and that the people of the saints (v.27— i.e., a redeemed remnant, a regenerate Israel) will reign eternally with Christ. Saints from every people, nation, and language will willingly submit themselves to this glorious reign, and it will mark the beginning of God's everlasting righteous rule. This, then, will be the final chapter in man's history—the earth will be restored to righteousness, the saints (those whom God classifies as in right relationship with Him, like Adam was at his creation) will rule over it in fulfillment of the mandate given humanity at its creation (Gen 1:28). Their rulership will not be independent of God but in full subjection to the Son of Man, the Son of God. At last, the world will cease to groan (Rom 8:22); at last perfection and peace will prevail; the earth will bring pleasure to its Creator, and man will enjoy his role in this function! Maranatha!!![10]

C. The Kinsman's Change of Mind (4:5–6)

The book's thorniest legal problem concerns the unnamed kinsman's change of mind. After initially agreeing to redeem Elimelech's property, he reversed himself when Boaz stipulated that the fellow must also marry Ruth in order to provide Elimelech with an heir. Though the ancient audience presumably understood the stipulation's validity, the absence of authorial comment (unlike 4:7) or parallel passages leaves the modern reader with several nagging questions. On what legal basis did Boaz link redemption of the field with marriage to Ruth? Why did the other kinsman fail to anticipate the ties binding redemption and marriage? Precisely, why did he, eager to buy only moments before, hurriedly back off from the deal?

To begin, two key assumptions have apparently won a consensus. First, the kinsman's change of mind was due to something unanticipated in his agreement to redeem the land (v. 4b) but revealed in Boaz's second demand (v. 5). Thus the key matter is to identify that unexpected element. Second, Israelite custom understood the duties of land redemption and the provision of an heir for deceased kin as interrelated. To "raise the name of the dead over his inheritance" (v. 5) meant to perpetuate the existence of the dead on his ancestral property. That required the kinsman to redeem the land and to marry the widow in the hope of providing a son to inherit it. Thus, the connection Boaz makes between redemption of land and marriage to Ruth conforms to good Israelite practice and is not an arbitrarily imposed "condition of sale" which only approximated that practice. This explanation implies, further, that the surprise element in Boaz's second demand must be something other than the simple fact of marrying a widow, since that duty was implicit in the duty to redeem land.

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[10] Mills, M. S. (1998). *Daniel: A study guide to the book of Daniel*. Dallas: 3E Ministries.

In addition, several other assumptions must be taken into account. (1) The author intends his story to be understood against the background of the broad *gōʾēl* custom as described above, not that of levirate marriage per se. It is as *gōʾēl* that Boaz's potential importance to Naomi and Ruth first emerged in the story (2:20), and Ruth proposed marriage to him specifically because he was a *gōʾēl* (3:9). Further, technical legal language associated with that practice dominated the gate scene (4:3–7). On the other hand, despite frequent claims to the contrary, the language from the two examples of levirate marriage (Gen. 38; Deut. 25:5–10) plays little if any role in the book. This is not to say that the two practices were totally unrelated. Indeed, in cases like this their purposes overlapped since both aimed to furnish heirs for deceased males lacking them. The point is, however, that it is the *gōʾēl* tradition, not the levirate, which provides the book's backdrop, a fact too often obscured by the haste to align Ruth with Gen. 38 and Deut. 25. In fact, to distinguish between the two practices might provide the complex scholarly discussion with some terminological clarity.

(2) The social value which Israel placed on the survival of ancestors on their property provides the basis for the interrelationship between land redemption and marriage that underlay both the levirate and *gōʾēl* duties. The use of *gʾl* intransitively (lit. "to play the redeemer's role") in 4:4 and 6 seems to suggest this relationship. It is the broad role of redeemer, including both redemption of property and marriage to Ruth, which Boaz proposes (v. 4, and cleverly!) and which the other kinsman declines (v. 6).

(3) Given the need for authorial credibility, one must assume that the additional stipulation introduced by Boaz was based upon legal practice, whether one known throughout Israel or one unique to Bethlehem.

(4) The enigmatic verb *qnyty* (v. 5) is to be read according to the Qere (*qānîṯā*, 2nd masc. sing.); see 4:5.

Before proceeding, however, we must assess the explanation of the kinsman's change of mind proposed by those reading the Ketib (*qānîṯî*, 1st sing.) at 4:5. For example, following McKane's premise, Beattie argued that the surprise element in 4:5 was not marriage per se but its purpose ("to raise up the name of the dead"). By declaring *qānîṯî* ("I am acquiring [Ruth]"), Boaz announced his intention to lay claim to Elimelech's land on behalf of Ruth and her children. This meant that the kinsman's purchase of it was a bad investment since he would own it only temporarily. By a different path Sasson reached a similar conclusion.[38] In 3:9, he argued, Ruth requested two separate transactions—marriage for herself ("spread the edge of your garment over me") and *gᵉʾullâ* for Naomi ("indeed, you are a *gōʾēl*")—to which Boaz also responded separately (marriage: 3:11; 4:3–4; redemption: 3:12–13; 4:5; cf. v. 15). The former fulfilled Naomi's plan (3:1–4), while the latter came from Ruth's own initiative. That distinction holds at 4:5 where, according to Sasson, the Qere must be read as Boaz's decisively dissuasive factor, i.e., his intention to marry Ruth and to pledge their first son as Elimelech's heir. As with Beattie, for Sasson the implied future claim to the latter's property suddenly made the kinsman's purchase of it a waste of his money.

Several things, however, undermine this otherwise formidable proposal. Besides the weighty arguments favoring the Qere, the view assumes that pre-LXX scribes were somewhat ignorant of the text's intricate details. While possible, the assumption is at least questionable. Equally questionable is their assumption that Boaz had the right arbitrarily either to designate his firstborn son as Elimelech's heir (so Sasson) or to

declare his marriage to Ruth to be a levirate one (so Green). Further, the claim that Boaz's announcement would dissuade the kinsman from redeeming the field is doubtful. In actual fact, it might have made the purchase more attractive. It would have permitted the kinsman to reap the land's profits until the child matured without the burden of supporting the widow. More important, the theory seems to conflict with two other statements in the book. In 4:6, the other *gōʾēl* waives his right to marry Ruth "lest I harm my own inheritance." Setting aside the question of Elimelech's property, one must ask how the kinsman's marriage to Ruth would do his own inheritance harm. Beattie's explanation that the kinsman simply means "I cannot afford it" is acceptable but requires more amplification than Beattie provides. More substantially, Sasson explains that as soon as a son was born, the kinsman would face a doubly unattractive prospect. He would have to return the land to Naomi as the child's trustee and yet purchase the land a second time from Naomi as *gōʾēl*. The reason, he claims, is that social custom would regard Naomi and her "son" as impoverished relatives whose survival until the child became an adult was to be ensured by that second purchase. Sasson explained further that if Naomi invoked Lev. 25 to sell the land to another kinsman (even a resident alien), the kinsman would repeatedly have to pay to retain the land for Elimelech's heir without even profiting from its use. In either case, says Sasson, such a burden would, indeed, gamble the man's personal fortune for no gain.

Sasson's hypothetical explanation has two serious flaws, however. First, it ignores the voluntary nature of the *gōʾēl* duties which 3:12–13 and 4:4 assume. If the *gōʾēl* may without shame waive his rights in each case in favor of someone else, then Sasson's conjectured scenario in no way threatens the man's fortune. As in 4:6, so on future occasions, he would simply pass the right to another. Second, it fails to reckon with the unique relationship among Ruth, Boaz, the future "son," and Naomi. Granted, no legal or customary obligations bound Boaz to support Naomi and her "son" financially. But here love decreed duties more stringent than law. Thus, given Boaz's love for Ruth, one would expect that he would gladly initiate care for his new mother-in-law and particularly for her "son," since his own beloved Ruth bore him. This would make Naomi's future appeals for assistance to the other kinsman both unlikely and unnecessary. Even if she did make such appeals, however, Boaz's well-proven generosity would increase the likelihood that the kinsman would gladly waive his rights in favor of Boaz. In sum, the alleged threat to the kinsman's fortune loses the plausibility which Sasson claims for it.

Finally, both Beattie and Sasson assume that land redemption and marriage to a widow were separate transactions. Despite Sasson's lengthy defense, careful examination of 3:9–13 undermines that assumption. One cannot legitimately construe Ruth's petition in v. 9 as treating both subjects. Most telling, however, is that in v. 13 Ruth is the direct object of the verb *gʾl*, "to redeem," three times, clearly implying that she is the object of redemption. If, as I contend, Ruth petitions Boaz to marry her precisely because he is a *gōʾēl* (v. 9), their marriage and the redemption of property must somehow be interrelated. In the light of 4:4–5, 3:9 seems to assume that the marriage and the land somehow go together even though the land is not explicitly mentioned. Indeed, the very use of the verb *gʾl* in 3:9–13 prepares the reader to assume that interrelationship when it reappears in 4:4 with land as its implied object. (For the linguistic links binding 4:4 and 3:13 and their import for this discussion, see the commentary below at 4:4.) Sasson himself concedes the difficulty which v. 13 poses to his interpretation. He argues that, if v. 9 aims to secure

Boaz both as Ruth's husband and as Naomi's *gōʾēl*, it "might have seemed most natural to Boaz to respond in terms that, ultimately, made Ruth the beneficiary of his subsequent activity." Such an explanation, however, is speculative and unpersuasive. In sum, the thesis of Beattie and Sasson seems unlikely.

How then is the kinsman's change of mind to be explained? As noted above, something in Boaz's statement (4:5) unanticipated by the other relative caused the latter's hasty retreat. Also, the surprise element must be something other than the obligation to marry a deceased's widow since the kinsman probably expected that. While certainty is impossible, a careful reading of 4:3–5 suggests that the new information was the sudden, unexpected substitution of Ruth for Naomi as Elimelech's widow. The progression of thought would be as follows. Cleverly, Boaz steered the conversation away from Ruth to focus on legal matters concerning Elimelech and Naomi in vv. 3–4. If the thought of a marriageable widow associated with the land crossed the kinsman's mind at all, he probably assumed her to be Naomi. Advanced in age beyond child-bearing, she posed no threat to his prospective profitable purchase. The alluring proposition offered him double returns for a small investment. He would not only increase the size of his own holdings but also enhance his civic reputation as one loyal to family. Future profits from the land would offset any expense incurred in caring for Naomi; indeed, given her awful suffering, one might not expect her to live much longer anyway. In any case, there was no risk of losing his investment to the claims of a future heir. A required marriage to Ruth (v. 5), however, was a very different matter. Much younger, she might bear several sons, the first eligible to claim Elimelech's property as his heir, others perhaps to share in the kinsman's own inheritance (v. 6). That possibility made the investment all too risky and perhaps even flustered him (so Robertson). The profit to be turned would be his only until the child acquired Elimelech's land, probably on attaining adulthood. Further, the care of a younger, obviously robust wife (cf. 2:17–18) meant considerably more expense than anticipated. Hence, he willingly waived his redemption rights in favor of Boaz (vv. 6–8).

Now one might object that the above scenario rests on a problematic assumption, namely, that in Israelite (or Bethlehemite?) custom another woman could substitute for the legal widow in such a marriage. In reply, one notes that the kinsman raised no objection to it nor did the elders overrule it. Whatever the precise background, neither considered Boaz's premise as improper. Perhaps the custom was akin to that which allowed servants to be substitute wives for infertile patriarchal wives. Certainly, Ruth's substitution for Naomi is analogous to that of Boaz for Elimelech.[52] In any case, the text apparently presupposes some actual, accepted legal practice. In sum, Boaz outwitted his relative to achieve his ends—and all within accepted law and custom.[11]

Aim

In this speech Job laments the grief and shame his friends are causing him. He also complains about how brutally God is treating him. This leads him to deplore his

[11] Hubbard, R. L. (1988). *The Book of Ruth*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (56–62). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

alienation from all his relatives and friends that his suffering has caused him. Depressed by the loneliness that his isolation causes, Job exercises genuine faith by boldly confessing that he has a kinsman-redeemer who will stand up to testify on his behalf. Although he is unsure when God will act as his redeemer, he is sure that it will be a public occasion at which he himself will be present. He is convinced that his experience of God as an enemy is not illusory; he is more certain that God, acting as his next-of-kin, will secure his redemption, in his case a full acquittal with honor. In the words of Vischer, "For the sake of God Job holds fast to his God, of whom he can trace nothing save the fact that he rejects him. He has not allowed his friends to 'convert' him, he has not let himself be turned away from uncaused freedom and fidelity to the 'God' whose reward or punishment one can calculate and merit."

It is clear that Job has charted a specific course to win his acquittal. While continuing to lament his agony he will seek to move God to fulfill his legal responsibilities to him, specifically to verify his confession of innocence. This assurance energizes Job's spiritual search and buttresses him against succumbing in depression to his pain. As his body weakens, his faith rises to keep him from wallowing in self-remorse or seeking an easy avenue of escape from suffering, such as repenting in order to receive blessing. His faith, however, will not be authenticated until God breaks through and reciprocates Job's trust.[12]

11:26–27 Commonly practiced Old Testament mourning customs included weeping (Hb. *bākâ*; cf. Jer 22:10; Ezek 24:17; Joel 1:8; Zech 12:10); wailing—that is, expressing a mournful, high-pitched cry (*ʾābal*; Jer 6:26); rolling in dust (cf. Ezek 27:30); modifying one's diet for a period of time (Jer 16:5; Ezek 24:17); and modifying one's garb, either putting on sackcloth or, in the case of a woman who lost her spouse, wearing garments that identified her as a widow (Gen 38:14; Jer 6:26; 49:3).

The official mourning period for an individual might have varied in duration, depending on the social status of the deceased: Aaron and Moses were officially mourned for one cycle of the moon (cf. Num 20:29; Deut 34:8); Uriah's mourning period would not have exceeded that.

Though David's actions here toward Bathsheba have parallels with his treatment of Abigail (cf. 1 Sam 25:39–42), similar policies and motivations may distinguish the two. As perhaps in the case of Abigail, David may have been acting as a royal, surrogate kinsman-redeemer (Hb. *gōʾēl*). David might have claimed he was taking the *gōʾēl* responsibility on himself since Uriah was a foreigner who had no near kinsman living in Israel. As such, David would have assumed the lifelong responsibility of caring for the needs of Uriah's widow and was obligated to father a child in order to raise up an offspring to preserve the family line of the deceased (cf. Gen 38:8; Deut 25:5–6; Ruth 4:5). Such a pretext would have made David's actions toward Bathsheba following Uriah's death seem truly noble and would have accounted nicely for the birth of the son.

No matter how honorable and magnanimous David's actions may have appeared to some, however, what David had done "was evil in the eyes of Yahweh" [NIV,

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[12] Hartley, J. E. (1988). *The Book of Job*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (298–299). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

"displeased the LORD"]. The Lord had looked at David's heart (cf. 1 Sam 16:7) and seen the king's act for the despicable deed it was. The closest parallel to the writer's description of the Lord's reaction to David's behavior is found in the Torah's expression of the Lord's response to Onan's sexual misconduct (cf. Gen 38:10). Onan died for his misbehavior; and David's penalty—though not yet revealed by the writer—could be expected to be equally severe.[13]

[13] Bergen, R. D. (1996). *Vol. 7*: *1, 2 Samuel*. The New American Commentary (367–368). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.