

# *Ruth Bible Study*

## Chapter 4

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

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print at the end of the “questions” section.**

Read 4:1-12

1. What leadership traits does Boaz show in verses 1-2?
2. In ancient Israel, a family’s real estate was not their absolute possession, but a gift of grace from the LORD, allocated through their tribe and clan to be managed by them (Lev 25:23). The LORD’s original intent for the land he gave Israel was that each family’s portion should inalienably remain within the family through all generations as the physical symbol and guarantee of his covenant with and promises to each Israelite family. Therefore at the Jubilee, land that had been sold was to revert back to the family of the original owner. A purchaser really bought only the land’s use, that is, its harvests until the next Jubilee (Lev 25:13–15). This is practically equivalent to leasing the property. (CC)

The point raised by Boaz, and the one point to be negotiated and resolved, was that Naomi wanted the property in question redeemed. That is, Elimelech must have sold its use before leaving for Moab to someone who was not a close relative, so that it should be purchased from the present owner by a close relative. (CC)

The matter could not be dealt with properly until the end of the harvest season. For Elimelech’s field would have been cultivated by the man who had purchased its usufruct from him, and that current owner would first have to complete its harvest before disposing of it. Thus, none of the Bethlehemites could be blamed for not taking up the matter of caring for Naomi earlier. (CC)

How does Boaz continue to show assertive leadership in verses 3-5?

3. What obligation would the kinsman-redeemer be willing to accept in verse 5?
4. What problem does the kinsman-redeemer point to in verse 6?
5. The gesture of removing a shoe and giving it to another may have been the symbol of selling property. In some passages God promised to give his people the land they would tread with their feet (Deut 1:36; 11:24; Josh 1:3; 14:9), and normally that walking would be done in shoes. (CC)

What legal act was the kinsman-redeemer performing by removing his sandal?

6. In verses 9-10 Boaz announces his act of redeeming Naomi's family which now includes Ruth the Moabitess (a Gentile). How does that point to the redemption that God performed through Christ?
7. The women mentioned in Ruth 4:11–12 represent female destinies. Rachel was loved (Gen 29:17–18) but at first infertile (Gen 29:31). Leah was unwanted but fertile (Gen 29:23–25, 31–35; 30:17–21). Tamar was thwarted from levirate marriages to either of her two brothers-in-law, but bore twins to Judah, her father-in-law (Genesis 38). Ruth was childless and alone, but became the ancestress of David and Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:17, 22; Mt 1:5). In the quest for marriage and children, all these women were involved in schemes that were morally questionable (Gen 29:23–25; 30:3, 9; 38:13–18) or at least could have been misunderstood as immoral (Ruth 3:7–13). (CC)

How does all this ultimately lead to Jesus and our salvation?

Read 4:13-22

Ruth 4:13–22 compares with 1:1–5, where, without dialogue, a long period of about ten years is covered in a short space. The entire intervening narrative (1:6–4:12), replete with dialogue, spanned only a few months, roughly Passover to Pentecost (late April to early June). In contrast, allowing for Ruth's pregnancy and the birth of Obed, nearly a year transpires in the next succinct verse (4:13). Then 4:14–17a may have transpired on the same day as the birth of Obed (4:13b). Finally, the genealogy in 4:18–22 covers the longest span in the book: ten generations, whose number corresponds to that in "about *ten* years" (1:4) in the prologue. (CC)

8. What might we assume about Boaz's earlier family life?
9. How does her grandson Obed become Naomi's redeemer?
10. Obed means "servant," in its full form possibly "servant of the LORD." How does that remind us of what Jesus said about His mission here on earth?
11. Genealogies were of crucial importance in the ancient Near East to ensure property ownership and leadership positions, and so their composition is a very old and highly significant practice. They had even greater importance for the Israelites, since God's promises and acts of redemption were associated with the line from Abraham that would culminate in Jesus Christ. Linear genealogies often began with an important individual. If that individual held an office, the genealogy could legitimate the claim of his named descendants to that same office, for example, the kings descended from David or the priests from the line of Aaron. However, Ruth 4:18–22 begins inauspiciously with Perez, who held no office and was less important than his father, Judah. Yet it concludes with David, who was anointed king over all Israel, and whose dynasty furnished the legitimate Israelite monarchs until the advent of "the King of Israel" (Jn 1:49; 12:13). (CC)

How is the above information comforting to us in our daily life?

12. What is your favorite passage in this study and why?
13. What did you (personally) learn about God from your study of Ruth?

**Some Answers to the above Questions:**

**1. The town gate is where Boaz could best meet the nearer relative for, in a walled town, everyone had to pass through the gate to their morning work in the field or on the threshing floor. Being the largest open space in town, the gate was the center of public life for social intercourse, business, and conducting legal affairs (see Deut 22:15; Ps 127:5; Amos 5:10). Generally, the gate area included spaces with benches both outside and inside the gate proper, where goods could be sold and public legal cases could be settled. (CC)**

**Boaz surely went to the gate (4:1) very early in the morning so that he would not miss the closer kinsman when he left home to go out to his field. Boaz was not disappointed. (CC)**

**When Boaz requested him to take a seat rather than just talk or discuss some private matter standing, the redeemer would immediately have realized that he had in mind a matter of serious import, such as a legal case. This became obvious when Boaz singled out ten elders of the town and also requested them to take seats (4:2). Other men surely began to congregate there, for Boaz's actions in the gate must mean that he intended to present a matter requiring witnesses. Thus, some elders may already have been present before Boaz's counterpart appeared. The kinsman probably discerned right away that this had to do with Elimelech's property, for he was the closest relative and Boaz was the next in line. (CC)**

**2. With precise legal terminology, Boaz made his official request before the ten seated elders, who represented all the elders of Bethlehem (4:4). Boaz's fourfold use of the verb "redeem" heightens this action in bold relief as the matter to be decided. Politely but firmly, he challenged the primary redeemer to make the crucial decision: he should then and there settle the property question, announcing whether or not he will redeem it. In saying to him, "If you will redeem, redeem! But if you will not redeem, declare [that] to me" (4:4). (CC)**

**3. The duty of redemption would apply to this case was that of redeeming property, which would necessarily include the care of the widow (Naomi) of the deceased (Elimelech) who had been the owner of the property. (CC)**

**Essential for understanding the situation of Naomi is that, in the society of ancient Israel—as well as generally throughout the Near East—every woman was under the protection of a male, her father or husband, or whoever would "inherit" this responsibility, such as a son or grandson (see Ruth 4:14–17). Male headship, exercised benevolently, would grant women security against potential dangers. Ruth, who had no male protector in Israel, could obtain one only through marriage. (CC)**

**4. If the nearer redeemer were to marry Ruth himself, their first child would inherit Elimelech's property and, being his own child, also part of the redeemer's own inheritance. That child would take his place beside the other, previous children of the redeemer, who would divide his estate after his death. That dilution of his own estate, as well as the costs he would incur repurchasing the property's usufruct and supporting Naomi and any children of Ruth, would further "ruin" the redeemer's "inheritance" (4:6). (CC)**

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

6. Both “redeemed and acquired” can refer to the LORD saving his people. His promises to the patriarchs and rescuing His people from Egyptian oppression and leading them to the Promised Land prove that both of those verbs carried out by God. Likewise, God in fidelity to his promises (Gen 3:15; Is 53:10–12) has redeemed and acquired for Himself from the slavery of sin and evil all who trust in the rescuing sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18–19). (CC)

7 The “offspring” in the Lord will give” (Ruth 4:12) to Boaz refers to descendants through Ruth. The many offspring would ultimately resolved in the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed her, allowing her to conceive (Mt 1:20–23; Lk 1:34–35). (CC)

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

9. Naomi now had a redeemer, not to buy back her family’s property (which Boaz had done as redeemer [4:9]), but a redeemer who now extended the family’s line to another generation—and likely would father generations to come. (vv. 14-16) (CC)

10. The name Obed reminds us of the injunction of Jesus: “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant” (Mt 20:26) and “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt. 20:28).

11. It is no accident that there are exactly ten generations listed in Ruth 4:18–22, for the number ten in Scripture denotes a perfect and symmetrical whole. (CC)

It is also no accident that God’s plan was fulfilled perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ. That completely assures us that our faith in Jesus is forever firm.