





Outline of Ruth: A Drama of Faithfulness

The history of Ruth clearly divides according to its chapters into four acts. Each act may conveniently be divided into two scenes.

Act I The Dilemma

Scene A—Prologue: Tragedy (1:1–5)

Scene B—Setting: Return (1:6–22)

Act II The Hope

Scene A—Acceptance (2:1–17)

Scene B—Nourishment (2:18–23)

Act III The Risk

Scene A—Strategy (3:1–6)

Scene B—Challenge (3:7–18)

Act IV The Solution

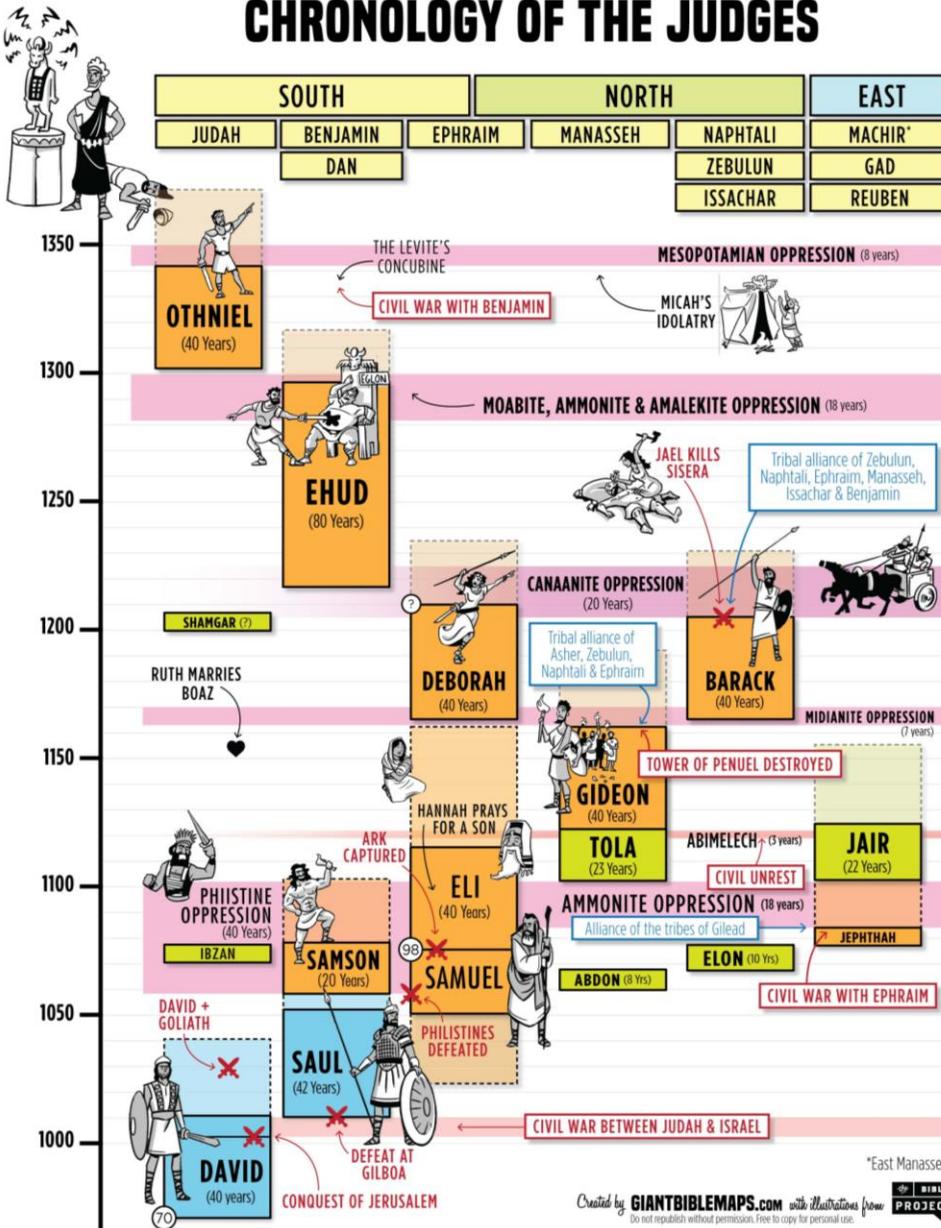
Scene A—Climax: Sacrifice (4:1–12)

Scene B—Epilogue: Heir (4:13–22)

Ruth 1:1

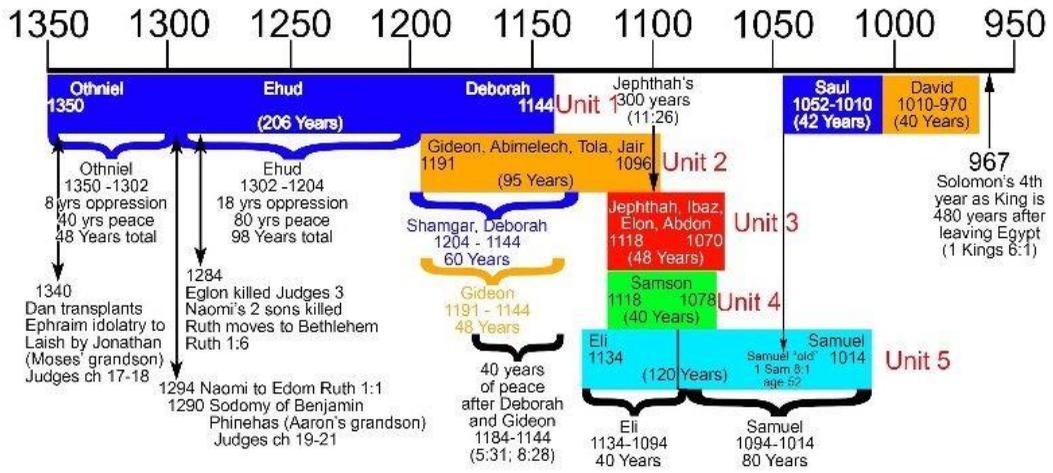
"In the days when the judges ruled..."

CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDGES

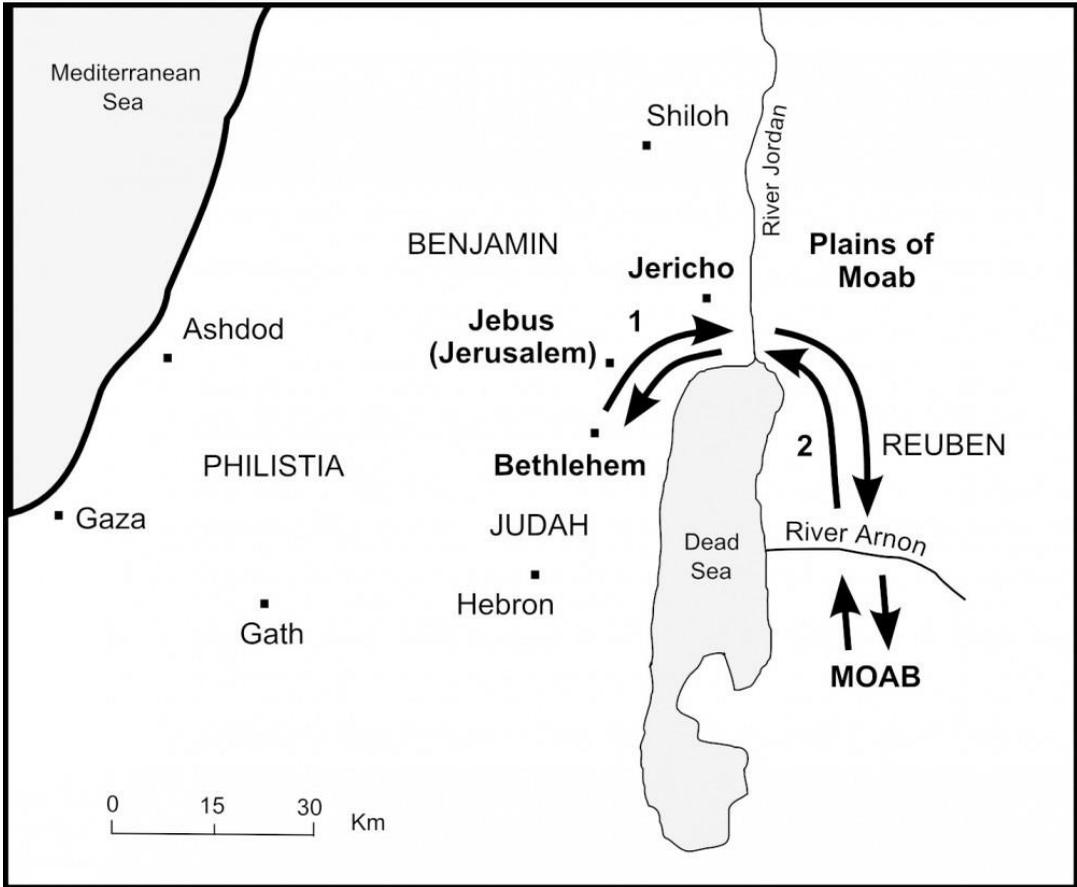


Chronology of Judges Timeline

The five Indivisible Units of Chronology



What was it like when the judges ruled? Look at the very last sentence of the book of Judges, which is right before Ruth – **Judges 21:25**.



Why Moab?

Who is Moab? (Look up **Genesis 19:30-38; Numbers 25:1-3; Deuteronomy 23:2-6**)

Ruth 1:2-5

What's in a name?

Bethlehem (בֵּית לֶחֶם) = "house of bread" But there is no bread in Bethlehem.

Ephrathah (אֶפְרַתָּה) = "fruitful" Without water, there is no fruit for this clan in Bethlehem. Elimelech belonged to the clan of Ephrath, which was the name of Bethlehem when Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin (**Genesis 35:19**). Old Testament genealogies tie Ephrath to Caleb, the good spy, and to Bethlehem.

Moab (מֹאָב) = "from father" Very fitting with the Genesis 19 account.

Elimelek (אֱלִימֶלֶךְ) = "my God is King" What a name in a time when there was no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Naomi (נְעֻמִי) = "she who is pleasant" or "my pleasant" Things were not pleasant for Naomi.

Mahlon and Kilion (מַחְלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן) = their rhyming names seem to be words related to sickness and mortality. Kind of a spooky foreshadowing.

Orpah (עֲרַפְדָּה) = "neck" or "fawn / gazelle" She married Kilion.

Ruth (רוּת) = "friendship" or "companion" She married Mahlon. (**Ruth 4:10**)

If you met Naomi at the end of these ten years, how would you expect her to act? What would you expect her to say?

Ruth 1:6-10

"When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them..." Time and time again the LORD came through for his people during the time of the Judges.

"...she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there." This translation gives us the impression that it was always the plan to have Orpah and Ruth return with Naomi. The closer meaning of this phrase is that they accompanied Naomi. In oriental countries it is rare for good-byes to be said in the home. Good manners require that the person who departs is given company for a while along the road. Naomi took the initiative, not Ruth or Orpah.

"Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.'" When courtesy had served its purpose, Naomi tried to make it clear to her daughters-in-law that she wished to return to Bethlehem alone. She was thinking of their best interests as women. Marriage was about the only occupation available to women in those days. Naomi knew there was little likelihood of a foreigner finding a husband in Bethlehem. The better alternative was to return to the place where they had been raised as children.

What do Naomi's parting words show us regarding her relationship with her daughters-in-law? What does it show about her faith?

Ruth 1:11-14

Why does Naomi urge her daughters-in-law to return home? (See also **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**)

“No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!” Is Naomi blaming the LORD for what has happened to her? Should we? Look up the following verses to help you determine the answer.

- **Job 1:21 & 2:10**
- **Genesis 50:18-21**
- **Hebrews 12:5-11**
- **Romans 5:3-5**
- **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**
- **Romans 8:28**

Ruth 1:15-18

Note the structure of Ruth’s poetic response.

- A Do not urge me to leave. (Plea against separation.)
- B For where you go I will go. (Promise of family loyalty.)
- C Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (Confession of faith.)
- B’ Where you die I will die. (Promise of family loyalty.)
- A’ If anything but death parts me from you. (Oath against separation.)

These verses are often selected for weddings. Given what has happened leading up to these words, do you think these words are fitting in tone and theme with a wedding? What might be another time to use Ruth’s words?

Ruth 1:19-22

What's in a name?

Mara (מָרָא) = "bitter"

The Almighty (שַׁדַּי) = "Almighty" The patriarchs and Job make the most use of this name. The name conveys God's full array of attributes, principally his ability to act in power on behalf of his own (**Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11**). Shaddai is both refuge (**Psalms 91:1**) and terror (**Isaiah 13:6; Joel 1:15**). He is beyond knowing (**Job 11:7; 37:23**), yet a voice to be heard (**Ezekiel 1:24; 10:5**). Most appropriate to Naomi's situation, Shaddai is one who chastens (**Job 6:4**) yet heals (**Job 5:17**).

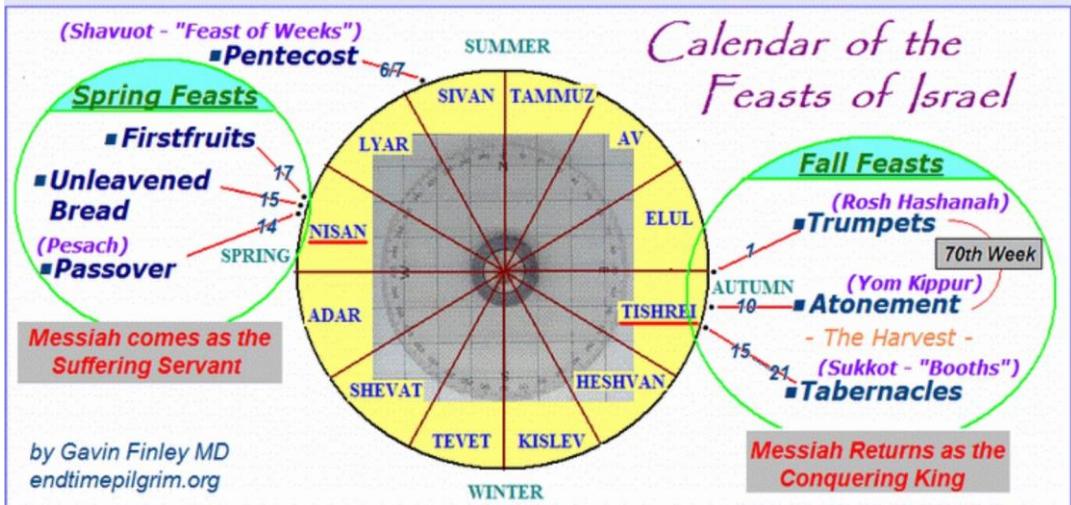
Think about what went through Naomi's mind as she came home after a decade without her husband or either of her sons, but only one widowed daughter-in-law. When your friends and neighbors notice that your husband and sons don't come back, what do you, as Naomi, get ready to say to them? You know they are going to ask. It's going to be an elephant in the room until it's dealt with. What do you prepare?

What would you have said to Ruth – a foreigner, someone you have never met before but comes with someone you do know?

What of these thoughts can you use in approaching someone who maybe was absent from church for a while (for a good reason, like Naomi) but now are back? Or to a new guest coming with this member who has been away for a while?

A little bit about Israel's agricultural cycle...

The Seven Feasts of Israel



Harvesting grain in ancient Canaan took place in April and May (barley first, wheat a few weeks later; see **Ruth 2:23**). It involved the following steps:

- 1) cutting the ripened standing grain with hand sickles (**Deuteronomy 16:9; 23:25; Jeremiah 50:16; Joel 3:13**)—usually done by men;
- 2) binding the grain into sheaves—usually done by women;
- 3) gleaning, i.e., gathering stalks of grain left behind (**Ruth 2:7**);
- 4) transporting the sheaves to the threshing floor—often by donkey, sometimes by cart (**Amos 2:13**);
- 5) threshing, i.e., loosening the grain from the straw—usually done by the treading of cattle (**Deuteronomy 25:4; Hosea 10:11**), but sometimes by toothed threshing sledges (**Isaiah 41:15; Amos 1:3**) or the wheels of carts (**Isaiah 28:28**);
- 6) winnowing—done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks (**Jeremiah 15:7**) so that the wind, which usually came up for a few hours in the afternoon, blew away the straw and chaff (**Psalms 1:4**), leaving the grain at the winnowers' feet;

- 7) sifting the grain (**Amos 9:9**) to remove any residual foreign matter;
- 8) bagging for transportation and storage (**Genesis 42–44**). Threshing floors, where both threshing and winnowing occurred, were hard, smooth, open places, prepared on either rock or clay and carefully chosen for favorable exposure to the prevailing winds. They were usually on the east side—i.e., downwind—of the village.



Ruth 2:1-3

More about names...

Boaz (בֹּאֵז) = “in him is strength” This is also the name of one of the pillars of Solomon’s temple. (**2 Chronicles 3:17**)

We are told Boaz’ social, legal, and economic status. He was “one known” by Naomi’s family, in the sense that they shared social contact. Legally he was a blood relative of Elimelech. Israelite society was organized around tribes, clans, and a father’s house. The social connection here was on the middle level. Economically, Boaz was a man of means, a wealthy landowner. As such he had the income to defend his village if under attack.

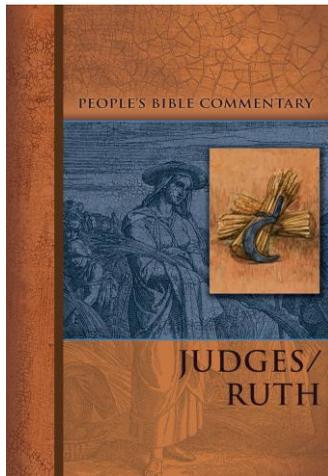
Moabite (מוֹאָבִי) = “one from Moab” Keep note that throughout this book, we are reminded time and time again that Ruth is a foreigner, not an Israelite.

What are the rules about gleaning harvest leftovers? Read **Deuteronomy 24:19-22**.

Ruth 2:4-7

Verse 4 – “The LORD be with you!” “The LORD bless you!” The words may have been customary, like the English farewell “good-bye,” which is a shortening of “God be with ye.” Still, we note with pleasure that the civility exhibited between men of differing social standing was expressed in terms that did not use God’s name in vain. What are some Christian specific greetings that we use?

You probably wouldn’t know this looking at the English translation, but verses 6 and 7 give translators a hard time. Here is the People’s Bible commentary on these verses:



The next two sentences from the mouth of the foreman have challenged interpreters. The foreman informed Boaz that Ruth had asked permission not only to glean, which was her right, but also to gather among the standing sheaves. Some have suggested that the foreman had no right to give such permission and that Ruth was therefore artfully forcing a meeting with the owner of the field.

The second sentence starts out fine but then disintegrates into a collection of grammatical fragments. Literally it reads, “She came and she’s been standing from that time of the morning and till now ... this ... her sitting ... the house ... a little.” Both the KJV and NIV interpret the sentence as a description of nonstop work, interrupted only by a brief break in a nearby shelter. One major problem is that Hebrew has a good

word for a temporary shelter to provide shade. The text, however, uses the word house. A fresh view of this challenging text has been offered recently. It respects the words as written, broken syntax and all, and makes perfect sense out of the words of Boaz that immediately follow.

The new view reconstructs what happened as follows. Ruth came to reap. She politely asked to glean, although permission for gleaning was not necessary. A widow and alien had that right. Ruth, not knowing the fine points of Israelite law or custom, also asked permission to gather among ears of grain standing in the field or just bundled by the reapers. This was a right not provided to a widow or alien. The reapers who stood by noted the blunder of the ignorant foreigner. This started a flow of "field talk" about Ruth, who was, of course, also a young and attractive woman. Things got out of hand. Ruth put up with ethnic and suggestive banter only so long. She finally sat down in tears, ran in the direction of home, but then changed her mind and returned to the field. From morning until the arrival of Boaz, Ruth stood and waited, not knowing what to do. She was afraid to glean. Yet she did not want to return to Naomi empty-handed.

The embarrassed foreman, knowing what had gone on between his young men and the vulnerable woman, got only the first part of his explanation out of his mouth coherently. Noticing Boaz' rising indignation, the young man finished his explanation with gestures and a few muttered phrases about "this" situation, "her sitting" unhappily, her running off to "the house," and the fact that the men were only having "a little" fun.

God gave specific laws to take care of widows – young and old alike – in both the Old Testament and the New. What do we do to help widows? Widowers? What do you think we should do?

Ruth 2:8-16

Note verse 12. (This will relate into the story later.) Who gets the credit for the good things that have come to Ruth? See also **Psalm 57**.



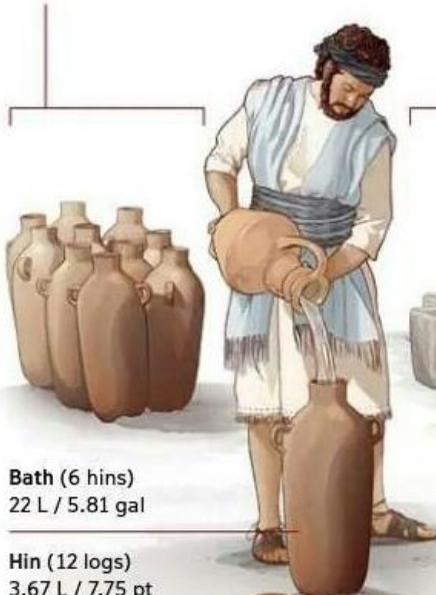
Looking back on the rest of this chapter, what insights do we gain about Ruth's character? About Boaz?

Ruth 2:17-23

How good was the gleaning? To get an idea, know that an ephah of barley would be enough for 20 or so loaves of bread.

Liquid Measures

Cor (10 baths / 60 hins)
220 L / 58.1 gal



Bath (6 hins)
22 L / 5.81 gal

Hin (12 logs)
3.67 L / 7.75 pt

Log ($\frac{1}{12}$ hin)
0.31 L / 0.66 pt

Dry Measures

Homer (1 cor / 10 ephahs)
220 L / 200 dry qt



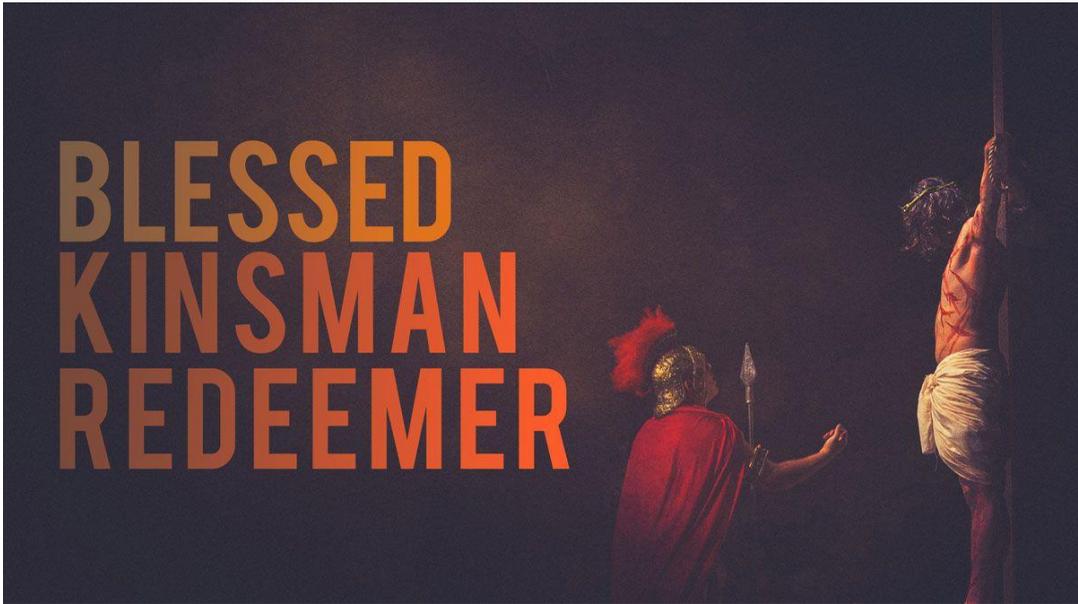
Ephah (3 seahs / 10 omers)
22 L / 20 dry qt

Seah ($3\frac{1}{3}$ omers)
7.33 L / 6.66 dry qt

Omer ($1\frac{1}{3}$ cabs)
2.2 L / 2 dry qt

Cab
1.22 L / 1.11 dry qt

Quart
1.08 L / 0.98 dry qt



Kinsman-Redeemer (גאל) = “redeemer” or “avenger of blood” What is a kinsman-redeemer?

A redeemer’s responsibilities included the following: “**First**, buying back the estate of a deceased relative (**Leviticus 25:24–30; Jeremiah 32:6–15**); **second**, buying back an impoverished relative who had to sell himself into slavery (**Leviticus 25:47–53**); **third**, receiving restitution for a crime whose victim was deceased (**Numbers 5:8**); and **fourth**, avenging the willful, non-accidental killing of his relative by executing the murderer, for whom there was no ransom (**Numbers 35:11–12, 16–21, 31–32; Deuteronomy 19:11–12**), although this fourth practice was probably replaced by due procedures in criminal courts during the monarchy. **Fifth**, as implied in non-legal literature, the redeemer evidently also had the customary duty to assist the relative in a lawsuit.” Cf. **Job 19:25; Psalm 119:154; Proverbs 23:11; Jeremiah 50:34; Lamentations 3:58**.

How is Jesus our kinsman redeemer?



Ruth 3:1-5

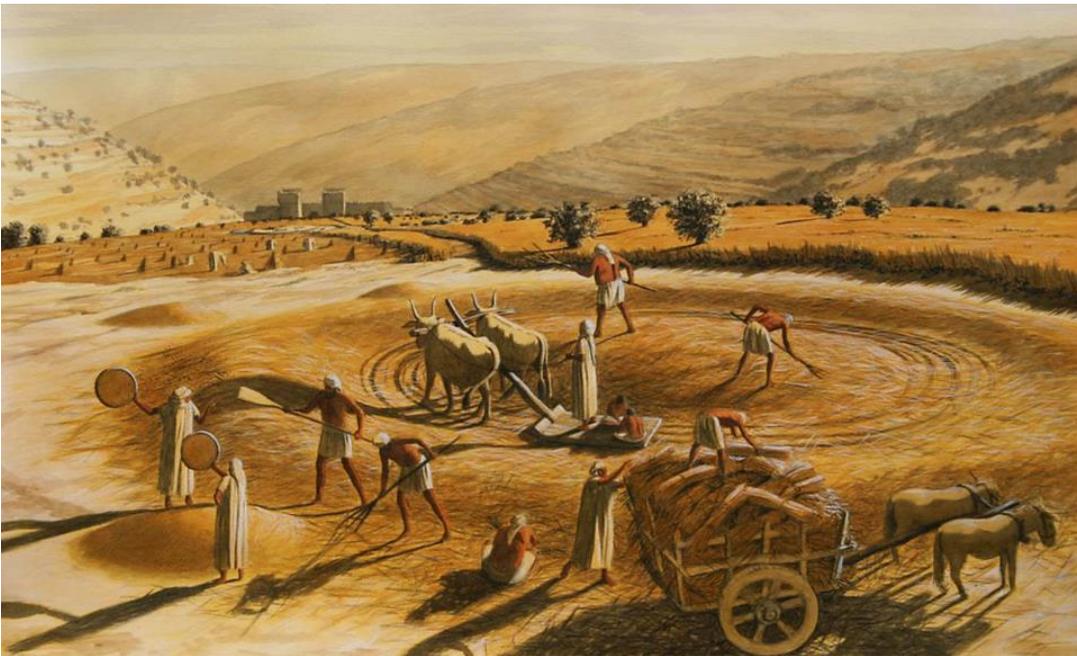
The barley harvest was over. It's now Naomi's turn to take care of Ruth. She plays matchmaker. Naomi suspected that her conscientious kinsman would remain long after the harvesters had gone home, particularly if she knew that this night was his night to guard the harvest. Ruth would appear after everyone else had left. She would make herself as appealing as possible, essentially preparing herself as a bride would.

home (מנוחה) = "find rest" or "resting place" This is the same word used earlier in Ruth 1:9 when, at that time, Naomi thought that she could not provide this rest or home for her daughters-in-law.

What risk was there to Ruth in following Naomi's advice?

The Threshing Floor

Located on a hilltop, c 30 ft in diameter with a compacted clay or rock surface. A sledge of heavy timbers and black basalt stones rolls and crushes stalks of barley against the bleached, concrete-hard earth. Two boys sit atop the sledge, reining an ox, which casually circles the threshing floor. The unmuzzled ox lowers its head often and licks the floor, drawing up its share of the harvest. To the side, young men rake, scoop, and toss the stubble. As wind blows away the lighter chaff, the men catch the precious grain in their wicker scoops and dump it into clay jars for storage. Women and girls approach, bearing fresh flat bread and goat skins sloshing with wine. Eating, drinking, and dancing with family and neighbors will begin at twilight.

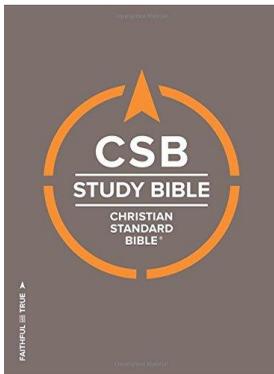


Ruth 3:6-18

וּפְרֹשֶׁתְךָ כְּנֹפֶךְ עַל-אַמְתִּיךָ = "Spread the corner of your garment over me." A request for marriage (c.f. **Ezekiel 16:8**); a similar custom is still practiced in some parts of the Middle East today. There is a play on the words "wings" of the Lord (**Ruth 2:12**) and "corners" (lit. "wings") of the garment (here), both signifying protection. Boaz is vividly reminded that he must serve as the Lord's protective wing to watch over Ruth.



For Those who Think that this was a Sexually Charged Encounter...



Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz when he was asleep and uncover his feet, or, more precisely, "uncover the place of his feet." By this act Ruth was inquiring about Boaz's willingness to fulfill the role of family redeemer, to take her as wife and provide for her. Ruth's action, at Naomi's advice, is ambiguous. The verb uncover is often used in the OT of illicit sexual relations. Thus the word has association with immoral acts, and the threshing floor was notorious as a place of illicit sexual activities. Also, lie down often implies sexual activity (**Genesis 19:33**). Further, "feet" is used in the OT as a euphemism for male sexual organs (**Exodus 4:25; Judges 3:24; 1 Samuel 24:3; Isaiah 7:20**). However, the form of the noun used here is only used one other time, in **Daniel 10:6**, where it clearly refers to the whole of the lower limbs, including the feet, legs, and thighs. On the other hand, Ruth's actions can be interpreted as a humble petitioner seeking Boaz's protection. She uncovered Boaz's feet to the cold night air so it would arouse him from sleep and she could speak to him privately. This chaste interpretation of all these ambiguities is most likely, as Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz are all consistently portrayed as virtuous and honorable persons.

Do these verses give you any new thoughts on the character of Boaz? Of Ruth?

Why would Boaz say, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor”?
(verse 14)

Ruth 4:1-12

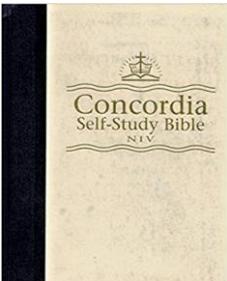


By the gates they would conduct legal business. Boaz went there to make his marriage to Ruth legal, almost like having the marriage license signed after the church wedding ceremony.

The Other Kinsman Redeemer

My friend (פְּלוֹנִי אֶלְמוֹנִי) = When Boaz summoned the other redeemer, he literally said, “Come over here (Hebrew) poloni ‘almoni,” a rhyming phrase equivalent to our “Mr. So-and-So.”

Selling the Land



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

Verse 7 regarding a transaction that involved removing one’s sandal. This had probably fallen out of use by the time the book of Ruth was written. This would be why they explain it. The Nuzi documents (an ancient text relating to the Old Testament) refer to a similar custom.



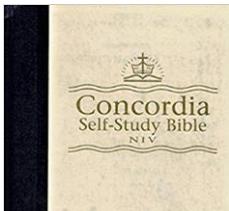
Looking at the Hebrew...

Acquire (קנה) = The Hebrew allows two ways of understanding what Boaz said. The key word is “acquire” in verse 5. When Hebrew was first written, only consonants were used. Punctuation was added in the 8th century A.D. by Hebrew scholars (Masoretes) to prevent a loss of pronunciation. On rare occasions these scholars were convinced the consonants might be wrong. Out of respect for the text as it had been handed down to them, the Masoretes recopied the consonants without change, but put a note in the margin telling the reader to read something else. Acquire is one of these words. The written text says “I acquire.” The note in the margin suggests reading “you acquire” instead.

How could we make sense with the suggested correction of “you acquire”?

Read **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**. If we are meant to read this as “you acquire,” what reaction should we see from the elders of the town?

How does using the record word “I acquire” make more sense in the context?



“Mr. So-and-So” backed away from his earlier enthusiasm. Ironically, his concern to protect his own name rather than committing to raise up heirs to the name of Elimelech led to him being left nameless. In seeking to serve self first, he inadvertently undermined his best interests.

Note the elder’s blessing in **verses 11-12**. The people of Bethlehem, heirs and onlookers, showed their wholehearted approval by uttering a three-part prayer in the Lord’s name. Ruth, they prayed, would follow in the footsteps of Jacob’s two wives, Rachel and Leah. This is a prayer that children would be born to Boaz and Ruth. Next they addressed Boaz and prayed that he would prosper financially and always have a name as honored in Bethlehem as it was on this happy day. Finally, the people prayed that any offspring would be the equal of Perez, the son of Tamar.

We just studied Genesis. So, you know that the nation of Israel rose most prominently from Jacob and his wives. What dynamic is added to the story of Ruth through a blessing that mentions Rachel, Leah, Tamar, Perez, and Judah?

Ruth 4:13-22

Almost all the events in the book of Ruth transpired within the seven weeks of the spring barley and wheat harvest. We assume that verse 13 covers the remainder of the year. Boaz married Ruth as he had pledged. The two conceived a child with the Lord's help. Before the next grain harvest, a son was born. The sequence of marriage, conception, and birth is significant. It assures us that the events of the night on the threshing floor were honorable in every respect.



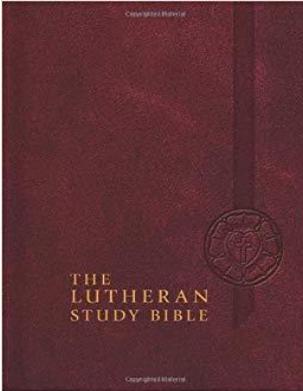
Why use the phrase "the LORD enabled her to conceive"?

How does the conclusion of Ruth balance with the introduction (**verses 1-5**)? Thinking especially of Naomi, how does her story encourage and lift us up?

Obed (עֹבֵד) = "the one who serves" or "the one who worships the LORD"

What amazing truth do we learn with the recording of the family line of Perez? Why record this here?

About this Genealogy in Verses 18-22...



The list is not, nor was it meant to be, complete. The first name is the son of Judah by Tamar. The last is David, who became Israel's greatest before Jesus. The fourth, Amminadab, is the father-in-law of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. The fifth, Nahshon, was Judah's leader during the wilderness wandering. The sixth, Salmon, married Rahab, the woman of Jericho (**Matthew 1:5**). The seventh man is Boaz; the eighth, Obed. The ten generations listed here span more than seven centuries. Ten names emphasize a truth that began in the Garden of Eden and that was emphasized by two other lists of ten names (**Genesis 5, 11**). Both lists end with a new beginning and hope.

Looking Back

Men, how could you be more like Boaz to the women in your life?

Women, how could you be more like Ruth with your mother-in-law? With your husband?

Ruth is one of the five scrolls that was to be read during the Jewish festivals, in particular the Festival of Weeks.

Still today Ruth is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. Why do you suppose that is?

Why have Ruth written down and contained in the Bible?



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