THE BOOK OF RUTH

# The King Who Redeems

*Ruth, Unfiltered*

*For teens who think they've heard it all*

BILL McLEOD

*Papa Bill Books*

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Redeems: The Book of Ruth, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

Copyright © 2026 Bill McLeod. All rights reserved.

Published by Papa Bill Books.

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, which is in the public domain.

All Scripture quotations in this book are from the WEB. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

**AI Disclosure.** This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

# Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” Maybe you know a little about Ruth already. It’s the short book with the woman who said, “Where you go, I will go,” the one people sometimes read at weddings. Maybe you’ve heard it called a love story. It is, sort of. But it’s a lot more than that.

Ruth is a story about grief, loyalty, hard work, kindness, and an outsider who finds a home. It happens during the darkest era in Israel’s history, the time of the judges, when everyone did whatever seemed right to them. If you just read Judges, you know how ugly that time was. Then you open Ruth, and it’s like someone turned on a light. No battles. No villains. Just ordinary people in a small town choosing to be faithful and kind, while God quietly works behind the scenes.

And here’s the twist: this little story about a widow from Moab turns out to be one of the most important links in the whole Bible. By the last page, you’ll see that Ruth’s great-grandson is King David, and that her family line leads all the way to Jesus. God was writing something huge through people who had no idea.

It’s only four chapters. Let’s go.

## How This Book Works

This book walks through Ruth in four chapters, one for each chapter of the Bible book: Naomi’s loss and Ruth’s loyalty (Ruth 1),

Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz (Ruth 2), the night at the threshing floor (Ruth 3), and the redeemer at the city gate and the family line that leads to David (Ruth 4).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book Ruth is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as exactly what was going on at the threshing floor in chapter 3 and when the book was written, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Ruth in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

# A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the eighth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Ruth is gentler than Judges, but it raises real questions. The scene at the threshing floor in chapter 3 is explained in its cultural context, as a bold request for marriage and protection, and I've noted fairly that scholars read some of its language differently, without being sensational. Boaz's protection of Ruth in the fields opens a conversation about harassment, with a safety box encouraging readers to tell a trusted adult. Naomi's grief opens a conversation about loss and being honest with God, with a box that mentions the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees Boaz the kinsman-redeemer, and Bethlehem, the House of Bread, pointing to Jesus, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure Ruth in their own rich ways, including reading it at the festival of Shavuot. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World

English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will see in Ruth a God who notices the grieving, welcomes the outsider, and redeems what looks lost.

*Grace and peace,*

**Bill McLeod**

*Papa Bill Books*

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

# Setting the Scene

## A Light in a Dark Time

Ruth opens with these words: “In the days when the judges judged.” That one phrase sets the stage. The book of Judges ends with Israel at rock bottom, with idols, civil war, and terrible violence, and the verdict that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Ruth happens in that same era. But instead of a nation falling apart, it shows a few ordinary people doing what is right in God’s eyes. It’s proof that even in the darkest times, God hasn’t left, and faithfulness is still possible.

## Where It Fits

In Christian Bibles, Ruth comes right after Judges and right before 1 Samuel, which tells the story of Israel’s first kings, Saul and David. That’s on purpose. Ruth is a bridge. It starts in the time of the judges and ends with the name David. In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is placed among the Writings, often right after Proverbs 31, the poem about a woman of strength and character, and Jewish communities read it every year at Shavuot, the harvest festival Christians know as Pentecost.

## Who Wrote Ruth?

The book doesn’t name its author. Jewish tradition says Samuel wrote it. The genealogy at the end, which stops with David, suggests it was written during or after David’s reign. Some scholars date it later, after the exile, and read it partly as a gentle answer to people

who wanted to exclude foreigners from God's people. Others see it as an older story written down in the time of the kings. Either way, Christians agree it is God's Word, and that its main point is clear: God's kindness reaches further than people expect.

## Bethlehem and Moab

The story moves between two places. Bethlehem was a small farming town in Judah, about six miles south of where Jerusalem would later be. Its name means House of Bread, which makes it ironic that the story begins with a famine there. Moab was a nation east of the Dead Sea. Israel and Moab had a long, bitter history. Genesis traces the Moabites back to Lot. Moab's king hired Balaam to curse Israel in Numbers, Moabite women led Israel into idol worship, and in Judges, Moab ruled Israel for eighteen years until Ehud. For an Israelite, a Moabite was the last person you'd expect to be a hero.

## Widows and Redeemers

In the ancient world, a widow without sons was in serious danger. Women usually couldn't own land or earn much money on their own, so losing your husband and sons could mean losing everything. God's law had protections built in. Farmers had to leave some of the harvest for the poor, the foreigner, and the widow to gather. And a close relative, called a kinsman-redeemer, was expected to rescue family members in trouble: buying back land they'd had to sell, and sometimes marrying a widow to carry on her husband's family name. Ruth's whole story depends on these laws.

## The Map

Chapter 1 (Ruth 1): Empty.

Chapter 2 (Ruth 2): The field of Boaz.

Chapter 3 (Ruth 3): The threshing floor.

Chapter 4 (Ruth 4): The redeemer at the gate.

# Contents

**Setting the Scene** ..... 7

**1** Empty *1* ..... 11

**2** The Field of Boaz *2* ..... 18

**3** The Threshing Floor *3* ..... 24

**4** The Redeemer at the Gate *4* ..... 30

**Where This Points** ..... 36

CHAPTER 1

# Empty

*Ruth 1*

Ruth opens with a sentence that should make you a little nervous if you just finished Judges: “In the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the land.” The days of the judges were the days of the downward spiral, when Israel kept forgetting God, enemies kept invading, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And now, on top of all that, there’s no food.

The famine hits Bethlehem, a little farming town in the hills of Judah. That’s ironic, because Bethlehem means House of Bread. The House of Bread has no bread. So a man named Elimelech makes a hard decision. He takes his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and moves to Moab, across the Dead Sea, where there’s food.

That might sound like a reasonable choice. People still move to find work and feed their families. But for an Israelite, moving to Moab was a big deal. Elimelech’s name means My God Is King, and he’s leaving the land God promised His people to live among people who worshiped a different god. The story doesn’t stop to scold him. It just tells us what happened next, and it isn’t good.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Moab?**

Israel and Moab had a long and messy history. Genesis traces the Moabites back to Lot, Abraham's nephew, in one of the most uncomfortable stories in the Bible: "The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab." Centuries later, when Israel came out of Egypt, Moab's king Balak was so afraid of them that he hired the prophet Balaam to curse them. Moabite women led Israel into idol worship at Peor. The law even said a Moabite couldn't enter the LORD's assembly. And in Judges 3, the king of Moab ruled Israel for eighteen years until Ehud the left-handed judge stopped him. So when the book of Ruth calls its hero "Ruth the Moabitess" again and again, original readers would have raised their eyebrows. A Moabite? Really?

First, Elimelech dies. Naomi is left a widow in a foreign country with two sons. Then the sons marry Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other named Ruth. For about ten years, life goes on. Then both sons die too. The writer sums up Naomi's situation in one heavy sentence: "the woman was bereaved of her two children and of her husband."

It's hard to overstate how devastating that was. Naomi has lost the three people she loved most. But in her world, she has also lost her protection, her income, and her future. A widow without sons had no one to provide for her, no one to inherit the family land, and no one to carry on the family name. Naomi is grieving, broke, far from home, and getting older. She has two daughters-in-law who are also widows, and they're foreigners in Israel's eyes. That's the whole household: three widows and nothing else.

Then Naomi hears news from home. The famine is over. She heard "how the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread." There's bread in the House of Bread again. So she decides to go back.

At first, Orpah and Ruth start the journey with her. But somewhere on the road, Naomi stops and tells them to turn around. "Go, return each of you to her mother's house," she says, and she prays that the LORD will "deal kindly" with them, the way they had been kind to her and to her sons. She wants them to find rest, a new husband, a new home, and a future in Moab.

The young women cry and refuse. "No, but we will return with you to your people." So Naomi argues harder. She points out that she's too old to have more sons for them to marry, and even if she somehow did, would they wait twenty years for those babies to grow up? Her conclusion is painful: "the LORD's hand has gone out against me." She honestly believes God is against her, and she doesn't want them to share her bad luck.

Notice that Naomi still believes in God. She prays for her daughters-in-law in the LORD's name. She just can't see His kindness anywhere in her own life right now. That's what grief often feels like. You don't stop believing God exists. You just wonder whether He's on your side.

They cry again. Then Orpah kisses Naomi goodbye and heads home. And honestly, that's not a bad choice. Orpah isn't the villain. She does what Naomi tells her to do, and what most people would do. She goes back to her family, her country, and her chances. But Ruth "stayed with her." The Hebrew word means she clung to her, the same word Genesis uses for a husband holding tight to his wife.

Naomi tries one more time. "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. Follow your sister-in-law." And that's when Ruth says one of the most famous things anyone says in the whole Old Testament:

"Don't urge me to leave you, and to return from following you, for where you go, I will go; and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried."

Then she makes it a vow, in the name of Israel's God: "May the LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."

Think about what Ruth is giving up. Her country. Her family. Her language and culture. Her gods. Any realistic chance of getting remarried, because who in Israel would marry a poor Moabite widow? She is choosing a future with a bitter old woman who has nothing to offer her. And she isn't just choosing Naomi. She's choosing Naomi's God. She calls Him by His name, the LORD, and puts her whole life in His hands.

People read these words at weddings, and that's beautiful, but remember who said them first: a young widow to her grieving mother-in-law. This is the kind of love the Hebrew word hesed describes. It's hard to translate. It means loyal love, kindness, faithfulness, sticking with someone when you don't have to. It's one of the most important words in the book of Ruth, and it's one of the main ways the Old Testament describes God Himself.

When Naomi sees that Ruth won't budge, she stops arguing. The two women walk the rest of the way to Bethlehem together, probably in silence.

**REAL TALK** **What Real Loyalty Looks Like**

Ruth's loyalty is impressive because it cost her something. Anybody can be a friend when things are fun. It's harder to stick with someone when they're sad, angry, difficult, or going through something that makes everyone else uncomfortable. Think about the people in your life who are hurting. A friend whose parents are divorcing. A classmate whose grandparent died. Someone

> who just got dumped and won't stop talking about it. Loyalty doesn't mean you have to fix their problems. Ruth couldn't fix Naomi's. It means you show up and stay. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can tell someone is simply that you're not going anywhere.

When they arrive, the whole town is buzzing. The women of Bethlehem recognize her and ask, "Is this Naomi?" It's been more than ten years. She left with a husband and two sons. She comes back with a foreign daughter-in-law and nothing else. Grief has probably aged her too.

Naomi's answer is raw. "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." Naomi means pleasant. Mara means bitter. She's saying, my name doesn't fit anymore. My life isn't pleasant. It's bitter. And she doesn't hide who she thinks is responsible: "I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty."

There are a few things to notice here. First, Naomi isn't exactly right. She didn't go out full. She left during a famine, which is the reason they went to Moab in the first place. And she doesn't come home empty. Ruth is standing right next to her. When you're grieving, it's easy to see the past as better than it was, and to miss the good things still in front of you.

Second, and this is important, the Bible doesn't scold Naomi for saying it. Nobody tells her to cheer up or stop complaining. God doesn't strike her down for being honest. The book just lets her say it. The Bible is full of people who were brutally honest with God about their pain, from Job to Jeremiah to the psalms, which include whole songs of complaint. God can handle your honesty. In fact, being honest with Him about how you feel is a form of faith. You only complain to someone you believe is listening.

> **REAL TALK** **When You Feel Like Mara**
>
> Maybe you know what Naomi felt like. Maybe someone you love has died, or your family has fallen apart, or life just feels bitter. If so, here's what Ruth 1 shows: you're allowed to be honest. You can tell God exactly how you feel, even if it's angry or confused. "The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit." But don't carry it alone. Talk to a parent, a pastor, a counselor, or another adult you trust. Grief is normal, but if the heaviness won't lift, or you start thinking about hurting yourself or that life isn't worth living, please reach out right away. In the United States, you can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. You are not too much, and your story isn't over.

The chapter ends with a sentence that seems small but is full of hope. Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem "in the beginning of barley harvest." The famine is over. The fields are full. And in the fields, although Naomi doesn't know it yet, God has already prepared something good.

That's a pattern you'll see through this whole book. God almost never shows up in Ruth with a miracle or a voice from heaven. There are no plagues, no angels, no parting seas. Instead, He works quietly through ordinary things: a harvest, a field, a kind man, a loyal woman, a family law. If you've ever felt like God is silent in your life, Ruth is a good book for you. Silent doesn't mean absent.

**KEY VERSE**

*Ruth said, "Don't urge me to leave you, and to return from following you, for where you go, I will go; and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*

**Ruth 1:16–17 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Orpah went home and Ruth stayed. Do you think Orpah did anything wrong? Why does the story make Ruth the hero?
2. Naomi said she went out full and came back empty. What did she miss about her own situation?
3. Is it okay to tell God you're angry or bitter? What do Naomi's words, and the fact that the Bible records them, suggest?
4. Who in your life needs someone to stick with them right now, the way Ruth stuck with Naomi?

**TRY THIS** *This week, reach out to someone who is going through something hard. Don't try to fix it. Just let them know you're there, and then follow through.*

CHAPTER 2

# The Field of Boaz

*Ruth 2*

Chapter 2 opens by introducing a new character before he even shows up. Naomi has a relative on her late husband's side, "a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz." The Hebrew phrase translated mighty man can describe a warrior, but here it probably means a man of strength, standing, and character. Hold on to that name. Naomi doesn't seem to be thinking about him at all.

Ruth, meanwhile, isn't waiting around. She's a young widow in a foreign town with a grieving mother-in-law and no food, so she comes up with a plan. "Let me now go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I find favor." Naomi's whole answer is three words: "Go, my daughter." She's still in the bitter, quiet stage of grief. Ruth is the one taking initiative.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **The Gleaning Laws**
>
> Gleaning was God's welfare program for the poor, built right into Israel's farming laws. When farmers harvested their fields, they weren't supposed to get every last stalk. Leviticus says, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest." Whatever fell or was left behind belonged to people who needed it: "You shall leave them for the poor and for the foreigner. I am the LORD your God." Deuteronomy adds that if a farmer forgot

> a whole bundle, he shouldn't go back for it. "It shall be for the foreigner, for the fatherless, and for the widow." Ruth was a foreigner and a widow, so the law was written for exactly someone like her. But gleaning wasn't charity you just received. You had to work for it, all day, bent over in the sun, picking up what the harvesters missed. It protected both the poor person's survival and their dignity.

Then comes one of the best lines in the book. Ruth goes out to glean, "and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." She happened to. Of all the fields around Bethlehem, she just happened to pick the one owned by her dead father-in-law's relative. The writer is having a little fun here. He wants you to notice the coincidence and smile, because in the Bible, coincidences like this are rarely just coincidences.

Christians call this providence: God's quiet guidance of ordinary events. Ruth didn't hear a voice telling her which field to choose. She just went to work. But God was steering her steps the whole time. That's how He usually works in your life too. You probably won't get a sign in the sky. But looking back, you may see that the class you got stuck in, the friend you met by accident, or the job you almost didn't take was part of something bigger.

And then, "Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem." He walks up to his workers and greets them: "May the LORD be with you." They answer, "May the LORD bless you." That's a quick glimpse into what kind of boss he is. In an era when everyone did what was right in their own eyes, here is a man whose workplace runs on blessing and respect.

Boaz immediately notices Ruth and asks his foreman, "Whose young lady is this?" The foreman explains that she's "the Moabite lady who came back with Naomi" and that she's been working hard since early morning with only a short break.

What Boaz does next tells you a lot about him. He goes straight to Ruth and tells her to stay in his field with his young women workers. He makes sure she can drink from the water jars his workers fill. And he adds something important: "Haven't I commanded the young men not to touch you?"

That line is a reminder of how dangerous it was for Ruth to be out there. She was a poor foreign woman alone in the fields, surrounded by men she didn't know, in a lawless time. Later in the chapter, Naomi says it's good for Ruth to stay with Boaz's young women "that they not harm you in any other field." In other fields, she could have been harassed, mistreated, or worse, and no one would have stopped it. Boaz uses his power to protect her. He doesn't wait for something bad to happen. He sets the rules ahead of time.

> **SAFETY NOTE** **Nobody Gets to Treat You That Way**
>
> Ruth was vulnerable in the fields, and Boaz made sure no one would bother her. Sadly, harassment still happens: unwanted touching, comments about someone's body, pressure to send pictures, following someone, or messages that won't stop. It happens at school, at work, online, and even at church. If it's happening to you, it is not your fault, and you don't have to just put up with it. Tell a trusted adult, like a parent, a teacher, a school counselor, a coach, or a manager. Keep screenshots or notes if you can. If you are ever in danger, call 911. And if you see it happening to someone else, be like Boaz. Use whatever influence you have to stop it and to protect the person being targeted.

Ruth is stunned. She bows to the ground and asks, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take knowledge of me, since I am a foreigner?" She knows she's an outsider. She expects to be ignored at best.

Boaz explains that he's heard all about her: how she stayed with Naomi after her husband died and left her own father and mother and homeland to come to a people she didn't know. Then he gives her a blessing that's one of the most beautiful lines in the book: "May the LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given to you from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Under whose wings. It's a picture of a mother bird spreading her wings over her chicks. Ruth has come to Israel to take shelter under the protection of Israel's God. Boaz sees it. Keep this image in your mind, because it's going to come back in chapter 3 in a surprising way.

Ruth answers that he has comforted her and "spoken kindly" to her, even though she isn't even one of his servants. Then Boaz invites her to lunch. "Come here, and eat some bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." The vinegar was probably a sour wine sauce, something like a dip. He personally hands her roasted grain. She eats until she is full and has leftovers. For a woman who has been living on almost nothing, that's huge.

But Boaz isn't done. When Ruth goes back to work, he quietly tells his workers to let her glean even among the bundles, the part normally off-limits, and to drop extra stalks on purpose for her to find. And he tells them not to embarrass or scold her. He's generous in a way that protects her dignity. She doesn't have to beg. She just finds more than she expected.

> **REAL TALK** **Kindness That Protects Dignity**
>
> Boaz could have just handed Ruth a bag of grain. Instead, he made sure she could earn it, and he made sure nobody humiliated her. That's a thoughtful kind of kindness. When you help someone, how you do it matters. Do you

> make them feel small, or do you make them feel respected? Do you post about it, or do it quietly? Sometimes the best help is the kind that lets the other person keep their dignity. Think about the kid who can't afford the field trip, or the new student who doesn't know anyone. How could you help in a way that doesn't put them on the spot?

By evening, Ruth has gathered and beaten out about an ephah of barley. Scholars estimate that's somewhere around thirty pounds, maybe more. That's an enormous amount for one day of gleaning, probably enough to feed the two women for a couple of weeks. She carries it home and gives Naomi the leftovers from lunch too.

Naomi's eyes must have gone wide. "Where have you gleaned today? Where have you worked? Blessed be he who noticed you." When Ruth tells her the man's name is Boaz, something wakes up in Naomi. For the first time in the whole story, she sounds hopeful. "May he be blessed by the LORD, who has not abandoned his kindness to the living and to the dead." The word for kindness there is hesed, that same loyal love from chapter 1. A few days ago, Naomi said the LORD had brought her home empty. Now she's saying He hasn't abandoned His kindness after all.

Then she drops the big news: "The man is a close relative to us, one of our near kinsmen." The Hebrew word is go'el, which means redeemer. A go'el was a family member with the right, and the responsibility, to rescue relatives in trouble. Naomi suddenly sees a possibility that hadn't occurred to her.

Ruth works in Boaz's fields through the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest, roughly seven weeks, from about April to June. And through all of it, she goes home to Naomi every night. Ruth's loyalty didn't stop with a speech on the road. It showed up in long days of hard, sweaty, ordinary work.

**KEY VERSE**

*May the LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given to you from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*

**Ruth 2:12 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Ruth "happened" to choose Boaz's field. Can you think of a time something that seemed like a coincidence turned out to matter a lot?
2. What specific things did Boaz do to protect Ruth? What does that tell you about how people with power should treat people without it?
3. Why do you think the gleaning laws required poor people to work for their food instead of just giving it to them?
4. Naomi starts to change in this chapter. What changed her, and what does that say about how God helps people through grief?

**TRY THIS** *Do one act of kindness this week in a way that protects the other person's dignity: quietly, without making a big deal of it, and without telling anyone.*

CHAPTER 3

# The Threshing Floor

*Ruth 3*

Weeks go by. The harvest is ending, and with it, Ruth's daily trips to Boaz's field. Gleaning could keep two widows alive for a season, but it wasn't a future. What happens when the harvest is over? Naomi, who started this story bitter and empty, now starts thinking about Ruth's future instead of her own pain. "My daughter, shall I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?"

Rest is the same word Naomi used back in chapter 1, when she prayed that her daughters-in-law would find rest in the house of a husband. Back then, she thought it would only happen in Moab. Now she sees a possibility in Bethlehem. Boaz is a relative, a potential redeemer. And Naomi has a plan.

> BACKGROUND CHECK **What's a Threshing Floor?**
>
> After grain was cut, it had to be separated from the stalks and husks. Farmers did this on a threshing floor, a flat, hard area of packed earth or rock, usually on a hill or open space where the wind blew. First they beat or trampled the stalks to loosen the grain. Then, in the evening, when the breeze picked up, they winnowed it: tossing the mix into the air with a pitchfork so the light chaff blew away and the heavy grain fell back down. It was hard work, and at the end of harvest it was also a time of celebration, with food and drink. The owner often slept right there next to the grain pile to protect it from thieves.

Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz will be winnowing barley that night. Her instructions are specific: “wash yourself, anoint yourself, get dressed, and go down to the threshing floor.” Anointing meant putting on perfumed oil, sort of the ancient version of a shower and nice cologne. Getting dressed may mean putting on her best clothes, or it may mean taking off her widow’s clothes, signaling that her time of mourning is over. Ruth is supposed to wait until Boaz has finished eating and drinking and has gone to sleep, then quietly “uncover his feet, and lie down.” Then, Naomi says, “he will tell you what to do.”

Ruth’s answer is simple: “All that you say, I will do.” She goes to the threshing floor and follows the plan. When Boaz has eaten and his “heart was merry,” meaning he was relaxed and happy after a good harvest, he lies down by the grain pile. Ruth slips in softly, uncovers his feet, and lies down.

Then, at midnight, Boaz wakes up with a start. Maybe his feet are cold. He rolls over, and there’s a woman lying at his feet in the dark. You can almost hear him gasp. “Who are you?”

Ruth’s answer is the heart of the whole chapter: “I am Ruth your servant. Therefore spread the corner of your garment over your servant; for you are a near kinsman.”

That might sound strange to us, but in her culture, it was clear. Spreading the corner of a garment over a woman was a way of saying, I will marry you and protect you. The prophet Ezekiel later uses the same picture to describe God taking Israel as His bride. And here’s the beautiful part: the Hebrew word for corner is the same word Boaz used in chapter 2 for wings. Boaz prayed that Ruth would find refuge under God’s wings. Now Ruth is asking Boaz to be

the answer to his own prayer. Spread your wings over me. Be the one who protects me.

Notice too that Ruth goes off script. Naomi said Boaz would tell Ruth what to do. Instead, Ruth tells Boaz what to do. She asks him directly to marry her, and she names the reason: you are a redeemer. She's not just asking for a husband. She's asking him to take responsibility for Naomi's family too.

> **REAL TALK** **What Was Really Going On?**
>
> Let's be honest: some people read this scene as romantic, and some read it as sexual. So what was happening? Most scholars, Jewish and Christian, read it as a bold but honorable marriage proposal in the customs of the time. The text says she uncovered his feet, and the next morning Boaz protects her reputation and arranges a public, legal marriage. Some scholars point out that the Hebrew words for feet and for lying down can sometimes carry hints of something more, and they think the writer is creating suspense: will these two do the right thing in a risky situation? Even those readers usually agree on the bottom line. Nothing in the text says they slept together, and everything Boaz does afterward shows he acted with integrity. In a book set in the days of the judges, when men took what they wanted, Boaz is a man who doesn't. Ruth's request was risky and unusual, but the story treats both of them as people of character. This isn't a model for modern dating. It's a picture of two people choosing to do things the right way when they easily could have done the wrong thing.

Boaz's response tells you everything about him. He doesn't take advantage of her. He blesses her. "You are blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, because you didn't follow young men, whether poor or rich." Kindness again is hesed, loyal love. Her first act of hesed was sticking with Naomi. This second one is even greater, because she could have chosen a young husband for herself. Instead she

asked an older relative who could redeem Naomi's family line. Boaz is probably quite a bit older than she is. He's honored that she chose him.

Then he reassures her: "Now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do to you all that you say; for all the city of my people knows that you are a worthy woman." Worthy woman is a big phrase. It's the same phrase used in Proverbs 31, the famous poem that asks, "Who can find a worthy woman?" Remember that Boaz was called a man of strength and standing in chapter 2. Now Ruth gets the matching title. The poor Moabite widow and the rich Israelite landowner are equals in character.

> **REAL TALK** **Your Reputation Gets Around**
>
> "All the city of my people knows." Ruth had only been in Bethlehem a couple of months, and she was a foreigner, which meant people were probably watching her closely. But they saw her loyalty to Naomi and her hard work in the fields every day, and the whole town knew what kind of person she was. Your character gets around too. People notice how you treat your parents, how you work when nobody's checking, and how you talk about others when they're not around. Reputation isn't built by one big moment. It's built by small, faithful choices, day after day. What would people in your school say about you if your name came up?

But there's a complication. "Now it is true that I am a near kinsman. However, there is a kinsman nearer than I." There's another relative with a closer claim. Boaz could have ignored that rule and just married Ruth. But he wants to do things right, publicly and legally. So he promises that in the morning he'll settle it. If the closer relative wants to redeem, fine. If not, "I will do the duty of a kinsman for you, as the LORD lives."

He tells Ruth to stay until morning, probably because it wasn't safe for a woman to walk through the dark alone. Before sunrise, while it's still too dark to recognize anyone, she gets up to leave, and Boaz says, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." He's protecting her reputation. People love to gossip, and a woman leaving a threshing floor at dawn could start rumors that weren't true.

Then he does something generous. He has her hold out her shawl and pours six measures of barley into it, a heavy load. When Ruth gets home, Naomi asks, "How did it go, my daughter?" Ruth tells her everything, and adds that Boaz said, "Don't go empty to your mother-in-law."

Don't go empty. Remember Naomi's bitter words in chapter 1? I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Now a man is sending her a message, through a shawl full of barley: you won't stay empty. The emptiness is ending.

Naomi knows Boaz well enough to know what will happen next. "Wait, my daughter, until you know what will happen; for the man will not rest until he has settled this today." Naomi was looking for rest for Ruth. Now Boaz won't rest until Ruth has it.

> **SAFETY NOTE** **Doing Things the Right Way**
>
> Ruth and Boaz were adults in a culture very different from ours, and the book makes clear they acted with integrity. Today, though, being alone at night with someone, especially someone older, in a private place where there's drinking, can be risky. Nobody should pressure you into a situation like that, and nobody should take advantage of you if you're in one. If someone ever pushes you physically or sexually, or tries to get you alone in a way that feels wrong, it's not your fault, and you can say no and leave. Tell a trusted adult. In the United States, the RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline is 1-800-656-

4673, and in an emergency call 911. Be the kind of person, like Boaz, who protects others instead of taking advantage of them.

**KEY VERSE**

*Now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do to you all that you say; for all the city of my people knows that you are a worthy woman.*

**Ruth 3:11 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. Ruth asked Boaz to "spread the corner of your garment" over her, the same word as wings in chapter 2. How was Boaz the answer to his own prayer?
2. What choices did Boaz make in this chapter that show his character? What could he have done instead?
3. Why do you think Ruth went beyond Naomi's instructions and spoke up for herself?
4. Ruth's reputation was built in just a few weeks. What small, everyday choices build a reputation today?

**TRY THIS** *Pick one ordinary task this week, like a chore, homework, or a job, and do it faithfully and well, even if nobody notices.*

CHAPTER 4

# The Redeemer at the Gate

*Ruth 4*

Naomi was right. Boaz doesn't waste a second. "Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there." In ancient towns, the city gate wasn't just a door. It was the town square, the courtroom, and the business office all in one. Elders sat there to settle disputes and witness deals. If you wanted something to be official, you did it at the gate in front of everyone.

And as if on cue, the closer relative walks by. Boaz calls out to him. The Hebrew phrase Boaz uses is a little bit funny. It's something like, hey, you, so-and-so. The writer never tells us this man's name, and that may be the point. You'll see why in a minute.

Boaz gathers ten of the town's elders as witnesses and lays out the situation. "Naomi, who has come back out of the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's." Naomi apparently had rights to the family land, but as a poor widow she had no way to work it. The closest relative had first right to buy it, keeping it in the family. Would he redeem it?

The man says, "I will redeem it." Of course he would. Buying land was a good investment, and with Elimelech's sons dead, the land would eventually be his family's for good.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Kinsman-Redeemer**

The Hebrew word go'el means redeemer, and it's one of the richest words in the Old Testament. In Israel, a go'el was a close male relative with the responsibility to rescue family members in trouble. If a relative had to sell land because of poverty, the go'el bought it back so it stayed in the family. If a relative was sold into slavery because of debt, the go'el paid to set him free. A related law said that if a man died without children, his brother should marry the widow so the dead man's name and inheritance would continue. Ruth's situation doesn't fit any one law perfectly, but Boaz brings these duties together: buying the land and marrying the widow. Later in the Bible, God calls Himself Israel's Redeemer, the one who buys back His people from slavery and exile. When the New Testament talks about Jesus redeeming us, this is the picture behind it.

Then Boaz adds the fine print. "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must buy it also from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance." In other words, the land comes with a wife. And if Ruth has a son, that son would legally count as Elimelech's family, and the land would go to him, not to the redeemer's own children.

Suddenly the deal doesn't look so good. The man backs out fast. "I can't redeem it for myself, lest I endanger my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption for yourself; for I can't redeem it." He's protecting his own family's future. That isn't evil. But it's the opposite of what Ruth did in chapter 1, and the opposite of what Boaz is about to do. Ruth gave up her future for Naomi's. This man won't risk his for theirs. Maybe that's why the writer never gives his name. He wanted to protect his name, and the story forgot it. Boaz and Ruth were willing to give themselves away, and we're still talking about them three thousand years later.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** **The Sandal**

The writer pauses to explain an old custom, because even by the time he wrote, readers might not have known it. "Now this was the custom in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, to confirm all things: a man took off his sandal, and gave it to his neighbor." Handing over a sandal was like signing a contract. It may have symbolized the right to walk on the land. Deuteronomy describes a harsher version of the custom: if a brother refused to marry his brother's widow, she would pull off his sandal in front of the elders and spit in his face, publicly shaming him. In Ruth there's no spitting and no shame. The man simply hands over his sandal and steps aside. It's a quiet transfer of rights, and it makes Boaz the redeemer.

So the man says, "Buy it for yourself," and takes off his sandal. Boaz turns to the elders and the crowd and makes it official. "You are witnesses today," he says, that he has bought everything that belonged to Elimelech and his sons from Naomi. And he adds that he is taking Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, to be his wife, "to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance."

The people at the gate respond with joy. "We are witnesses." Then they pray a blessing over the marriage. They ask the LORD to make Ruth like Rachel and Leah, the two wives of Jacob who "built the house of Israel," and to make Boaz's family like the family of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah. That's a remarkable prayer. Rachel and Leah were the mothers of Israel's tribes. And Tamar, like Ruth, was an outsider who acted boldly to keep a family line alive when the men around her failed to do the right thing. The town isn't just tolerating Ruth the Moabitess. They're placing her alongside the great mothers of Israel.

The next verse moves fast. Boaz marries Ruth, "and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she bore a son." Remember that Ruth was married to Mahlon for about ten years in Moab without having

children. Now the writer makes clear that this baby is a gift from God.

> **REAL TALK** **God Welcomes Outsiders**
>
> Ruth the Moabitess. The book uses that title again and again, so we never forget she's an outsider. The law said a Moabite couldn't enter the LORD's assembly. Yet Ruth, who chose Israel's God, is welcomed into Israel's family, honored at the city gate, and becomes the great-grandmother of its greatest king. That doesn't mean God's law was wrong. It shows that God's heart was always bigger than the borders. From the beginning, He promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his family. Maybe you feel like an outsider: at school, at church, in your own family, or with God. Maybe you think your background, your mistakes, or where you come from disqualifies you. Ruth's story says otherwise. And it's a challenge too. Who are the outsiders around you, and how can you welcome them the way Bethlehem welcomed Ruth?

Then the spotlight turns back to Naomi. The women of Bethlehem, the same women who asked, "Is this Naomi?" in chapter 1, gather around her and praise God: "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you today without a near kinsman." They say this baby will be "a restorer of life" for her and will take care of her in her old age. And they say something about Ruth that would have been shocking in that culture. Ruth, "who loves you," is "better to you than seven sons."

Seven sons was the ancient picture of the perfect family. Naomi had lost her two sons and thought she had nothing. The women are telling her: you were never empty. This Moabite daughter-in-law who loves you has been worth more than seven sons all along.

Then comes one of the sweetest scenes in the Bible. "Naomi took the child, laid him in her bosom, and became nurse to him." The woman who called herself Mara, bitter, is holding a baby in her lap.

She went out full and came home empty. Now she is full again, not with what she lost, but with something new. The women even say, "A son is born to Naomi." They name him Obed, which means servant or worker.

And then, in the very last line of the story, the writer drops the bombshell. Obed "is the father of Jesse, the father of David."

David. The shepherd boy who killed Goliath. The greatest king Israel ever had. The man after God's own heart. Ruth, the Moabite widow, is his great-grandmother. Naomi's family line, which looked dead in chapter 1, leads to the throne of Israel.

The book closes with a short family tree, from Perez, the son of Judah and Tamar, through Boaz, down to "Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David." It's ten generations. After the chaos of Judges, where there was no king in Israel, this genealogy ends with the name of a king. The answer to the darkness of the judges was already growing quietly in a Bethlehem family, through a foreign widow's loyalty and a farmer's integrity.

And the line doesn't stop with David. About a thousand years later, Matthew opens the New Testament with the family tree of Jesus. And right there, in the list of names, are these words: "Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth." Matthew includes only a few women in his list, and every one is surprising. Tamar. Rahab, the Canaanite from Jericho. Ruth, the Moabite. And the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba. Outsiders, foreigners, women with complicated stories. Matthew wants you to see from the first page that Jesus came from a family full of people God wasn't supposed to welcome, and that He came for people just like them.

**KEY VERSE**

*The women, her neighbors, gave him a name, saying, "A son is born to Naomi". They named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

**Ruth 4:17 (WEB)**

## REAL TALK

1. The closer relative wouldn't risk his own inheritance. Is it wrong to protect your own future? How is he different from Ruth and Boaz?
2. Why do you think the people of Bethlehem compared Ruth to Rachel, Leah, and Tamar?
3. Naomi went from Mara to holding Obed. What does her story say to someone who feels empty right now?
4. Matthew included Ruth and other outsiders in Jesus' family tree. Why do you think that matters?

**TRY THIS** *Read Matthew 1:1–6 and find every name you recognize from the Old Testament. Then pick one outsider in your world and welcome them this week.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

# Where This Points

Ruth begins with an empty woman in an empty town and ends with a baby in Naomi's arms and the name of a king. Along the way, a man named Boaz does something no one else would do. He pays the price to redeem a family that had lost everything, and he brings a foreigner into the people of God.

Jewish readers treasure Ruth as a story of loyal love and of God's care for the widow and the stranger. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw in it a preview of something greater. Matthew puts Ruth right into the family tree of Jesus: "Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth." Centuries later, another child was born in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, who said, "I am the bread of life." Like Boaz, Jesus is our close relative, because He became human. Like Boaz, He paid the price to buy us back. Paul says God sent His Son "that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as children." And like Ruth, outsiders are welcomed in: "you who once were far off are made near in the blood of Christ."

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

### 1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. Like Ruth, you are not too far outside for Him to notice you.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

### 2 We've all gone our own way.

Like Israel in the days of the judges, all of us have done what seemed right to us instead of following God.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

### 3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever. We can't buy ourselves back.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

### 4 Jesus is the true Redeemer.

Boaz paid to redeem one family. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again, to redeem everyone who trusts Him.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

### 5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Ruth didn't earn her place in Boaz's family. It was a gift. Salvation is a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

### 6 Take refuge under His wings.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've gone my own way instead of following You. I've sinned against You, and I can't buy myself back. Thank You for noticing me when I felt far away. Thank You that Jesus, my Redeemer, paid the price for me on the cross, and that You raised Him from the dead. I want to come under Your wings. Forgive me and bring me into Your family. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. Wherever You go, I will go. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## If You Just Said Yes

**Tell someone.** A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

**Read the real thing.** Read all four chapters of Ruth in one sitting. It takes about fifteen minutes. Then read Matthew 1 and Luke 2.

**Find your people.** Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

**Be a Boaz.** Look for the person on the edge, the new kid, the one grieving, the outsider, and be kind to them on purpose.

## Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Naomi was honest with God too. Keep asking. Keep reading. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Ruth is right, the God who noticed a grieving widow and a foreigner gleaning in a field notices you, and He is still in the business of redeeming what looks lost.

*May the LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given to you from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.*

**Ruth 2:12 (WEB)**