

Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz

Borders, Relationships, Law, and *Hesed*

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The book of Ruth presents a particularly fertile field for any exploration about issues of social justice. Its story deals with people crossing geographical, social, economic, and religious borders. Naomi and Ruth both experience the plight of being foreign refugees:¹ Naomi when she and her family fled to Moab to escape the famine in Bethlehem-judah, and Ruth when as a childless widow she chooses to follow Naomi back. For Ruth, in particular, the unspoken question is how will the people of Bethlehem-judah respond to her? Will she be valued as someone who adds to the Israelite culture, or will they fear her as someone who dilutes it?² As they enter Bethlehem-judah, both women are in need of the Mosaic stipulations that required covenant Israel to look after the marginalized in their community. The book of Ruth is also a story of relationships: wealth and poverty, Israelite and Gentile, landowner and laborer, and native and immigrant.³ Moreover, it provides an important example of at least one group's

application of the covenant responsibility in the Mosaic law to care for people who lived on the edges of Israelite society.

As discussed in other chapters in this volume, the Mosaic law emphasizes Israelite responsibility to look after the needy, who are often categorized into three groups: the widows, orphans, and the *gērîm* (translated as “strangers” in the King James Version). This latter group consisted of Israelite and gentile people who lived within Israel’s borders but had, for various reasons, been displaced. These *gērîm*, whether Israelites, resident aliens, or refugees, all enjoyed a protected status under the law of Moses.⁴

All three of these groups were particularly vulnerable, in part, because they usually did not inherit land, which was mostly passed down patriarchally and within an appointed tribe. Widows who had no husband were not provided for in the basic biblical law of inheritance (Numbers 27),⁵ orphans had no father, and the *gērîm* did not have land appointed to them.⁶ Since the Psalmist portrays God as a “helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14), someone who “preserveth the strangers (*gērîm*),” and who “relieveth the fatherless and widow” (Psalm 146:9; compare 68:5), it is only natural that his laws would expect his covenant people to provide for the needy (Deuteronomy 26:11–13). When these people failed to live up to these standards, the prophets repeatedly denounced them and called them to repentance (e.g., Isaiah 1:16–18; Jeremiah 7:3, 5–7; Amos 2:6–7; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4–6), and God declared, “My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword” because they had broken their covenants (Exodus 22:24).⁷

The book of Ruth strongly connects with these covenantal obligations, not by debating legal statutes or condemning their violations, but as a rare biblical text that “provides us with evidence of how biblical law was actually followed in practice, [and] how it was negotiated and modified in accordance with the needs of the moment.”⁸ Both Naomi and Ruth were widows who experienced the pangs of poverty and knew what it was like to be a refugee in a foreign land. Even though these two women worked proactively to become self-sufficient in their pressing time of need, their story took place in a

patriarchal society, and their efforts were fully realized only as they joined forces with Boaz. His actions are examples of how biblical laws could be interpreted in expanded ways and are a reminder that when dealing with social issues, it is often not enough to simply live the letter of the law. Many times, to truly help people in need, it is necessary for covenant people to extend themselves beyond the legal mandates.

Before delving into issues of social justice, it is important to first understand the book of Ruth in its larger context. The book's teachings on social justice are woven into a rich tapestry of biblical, historical, and theological themes. With that context setting the scene, we will then turn our attention to each of the three major players in the book of Ruth: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Each provides an important window for modern readers to see how at least one ancient community applied the legal mandates of the law of Moses to provide for the disadvantaged in their community. While not everything in this book will resonate well with modern readers, it is important to recognize that they lived in a different time and culture than ours, making it unreasonable to try and impose our standards on them. Rather, we should look for the timeless principles that can also provide guidance for our efforts to reach out to those who are marginalized in our communities.

Dating the Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth refuses to reveal its origins easily. Its opening line says that the events took place during the time “when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1), meaning sometime between 1200 and 1000 BC. In the Septuagint, Latin, and English versions, the book of Ruth is found following the book of Judges. In the Hebrew version, however, the book is separated from Judges and found in the Writings section (the *Ketuvim*). One difficulty of dating Ruth to the time of Judges is that the two books present very different environments. In contrast to the book of Judges, which portrays “social upheaval, foreign invasions, lawlessness, and anarchy,”⁹ the book of Ruth is set in a much

more tranquil, pastoral setting. Scholars, therefore, generally argue for a later date. Two popular possibilities are that it was written either during the period of the United Monarchy (ca. 1000–930 BC) as a means to glorify the Davidic dynasty¹⁰ or during the Persian period (ca. 537–332 BC) to oppose a certain interpretation of Deuteronomy opposing mixed marriages, as reflected in the writings of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 10:29–30).¹¹ From a linguistic perspective, there is also a third possibility, which takes into account the development of the Hebrew language from preexilic times, known as Standard Biblical Hebrew, to the language found in the postexilic period, known as Late Biblical Hebrew.¹² The book of Ruth contains elements from both Standard and Late Biblical Hebrew, which means that the text, *in its present form*, could not predate the late sixth century BC. However, the elements of Standard Biblical Hebrew may allow for the notion of an early version of the text that was later redacted into its present form. One theory is that the story may have started as a poem, and “after a period of oral transmission,” it was written down and redacted into the form with which we are familiar.¹³

Setting the Stage: Ruth 1 in Context

The book of Ruth is deeply rooted in the Old Testament theme of covenantal fidelity and reminds readers that the goal of that covenant was always intended to bless *all* the families and nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; emphasis added). In particular, it focuses on the notion that blessings of the Abrahamic covenant could be extended to the Moabites, who had traditionally experienced strained relationships with Israel.¹⁴ This strained relationship between Israel and Moab is highlighted by Deuteronomy’s prohibition on Moabites participating in the Israelite community for up to ten generations (Deuteronomy 23:3–6).¹⁵

Ruth’s ethnicity as a Moabite woman is a central focus throughout the story as readers are constantly reminded of her foreign

identity. Nevertheless, the marriage of Ruth and Boaz ties the two nations together in two important ways. First, the marriage promotes the reunification of Terah's genealogical descendants through Abraham and his brother Haran (Abraham 2:1–4; Genesis 11:27–32). Second, it connects the Israelites and Moabites as the ancestors for both King David (Ruth 4:18–22) and the messianic Jesus (Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:32).¹⁶ Thus the book of Ruth portrays “a social reality that is not envisioned in Deuteronomy.”¹⁷ There is no evidence that the author negatively viewed Elimelech's migration to Moab with his family. Rather, it seems that the people of Moab helped this refugee family for over a decade (Ruth 1:4).

The book of Ruth opens by describing a famine in Judea (1:1). Famines were a frequent reality in the biblical record.¹⁸ They often resulted in the migration of nomadic families and tribes seeking food for themselves and pasture for their flocks.¹⁹ The famine in Judea caused Elimelech and his family, like Abraham and Jacob before them, to migrate as refugees to the pastures of Moab, which had apparently escaped the famine.²⁰ The ensuing story revolves around three major characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. In the remainder of this chapter, we will examine issues of social justice such as gender, poverty, *hesed*, and the place of refugees through the lens of the intertwining lives of these three characters.

Naomi and Ruth

The book of Ruth and the book of Esther are the only books in the Old Testament that are “gynocentric,” meaning they are named after women and focus on the stories of women, despite the fact that those women live in a male-dominated society and the accounts eventually “return to a male story.”²¹ In fact, Ruth is one of the few places in scripture that gives us “a hint of a women's community and social life existing alongside yet distinct from male society.”²² Unfortunately, we do not know who wrote the book of Ruth. Traditionally, it has been assumed that it was written by a man, but increasingly scholars are

entertaining the idea that it may have been written by a woman or, at least, may have come from women's storytelling traditions that were later blended with those of men.²³ The possibility that a male wrote the text always remains, but scholars have identified some elements within the story that support the gynocentric label for the book and at least the possibility of its female voice.²⁴

First, in some important ways, the relationship between Naomi and Ruth starkly contrasts with that of other women in the Bible who are described as being in competition with each other: Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, Hannah and Peninah. As the story opens, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah are all widows and childless in Moab—Naomi because her husband and two sons have died, and Ruth and Orpah because their husbands have died and (even after ten years of marriage) these two women have apparently not given birth to any children (Ruth 1:4). While childlessness is often a source of contention in other paired female stories in the Bible, after Orpah returns to her family, Naomi and Ruth instead tackle their needy circumstances together. Although that relationship should not be viewed as one of equals, the women of Bethlehem emphasize that Ruth loves Naomi and is “better to thee [Naomi] than seven sons” (4:15). Thus, the book of Ruth portrays these two women and their relationship with each other in a more favorable light than do other biblical stories of female pairs.²⁵

Second, the story of the book of Ruth redefines “reality from a women's perspective.”²⁶ For example, when Naomi makes the decision to return to Judah, she implores her daughters-in-law to each return to “her mother's house” so that they could find rest in the “house of her husband” (1:8–9). As many scholars have noted, this phrase “her mother's house” stands out because of its rarity in the Old Testament.²⁷ The story of Tamar in Genesis 38 indicates that widows normally returned to their “father's house,” not their “mother's house.”²⁸

Likewise, in chapter 1 we find that Naomi's perspective on the bearing of sons is very different from the more usual emphasis on

the “father’s house” or lineage. In these latter instances, the birth of sons is stressed in the genealogies that promote the inheritances from father to son. In Ruth 4 this emphasis is found when the elders at the city gate invoke the Lord on Boaz’s behalf: “the Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel” (4:11–12). This blessing is fulfilled when the author (or a later redactor) added the genealogy from Boaz to King David at the close of the book (4:18–22). In contrast, chapter 1 focuses on Naomi’s emphasis on bearing sons, which is not to ensure the longevity of the father’s house, but to ensure the ongoing support of their widowed mothers.²⁹

While these details do not definitively point to female authorship, they suggest that the book was written from a women-centered perspective. They also show how the day-to-day living of the Mosaic law influenced the lives of the women in the covenantal community.

Naomi (and Ruth)

Although the book is named after Ruth, in some ways the story is focused more on Naomi. In the first chapter, Elimelech and his sons are gone by verse 5 and are referred to only obliquely after that (1:8; 2:1, 3, 11, 20; 4:5, 9–10). As the chapter opens, Naomi and her family leave behind the famine in Bethlehem and emigrate to Moab. But while the pastures of Moab were initially a source of sustenance for her family, the story quickly shifts to Moab becoming a symbol of Naomi’s barrenness as she loses her husband and both of her sons before they had produced any heirs. In ancient Israel, as in other ancient societies, marriage and children, particularly sons, were the major factors determining a woman’s status in society.³⁰ With only rare exceptions, women were reliant on their fathers and later their husbands for economic support.³¹ The first commandment God gave in the Bible was for Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). The anguish for a woman who was unable to bear children is highlighted in Rachel’s cry to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die” (Genesis 30:1). Children were not only a means of continuing the family lineage

but also an important source of labor on the family farms that provided the livelihood for most ancient Israelite families.³²

The loss of her husband and sons threatened Naomi's status in Moabite society. Even after her husband died, her sons would have provided for their mother, but when they also died, Naomi was left without anyone to support her, and as a result she became vulnerable. The account does not indicate how long she remained in Moab after the death of her sons, but as soon as she heard that the famine had abated in Bethlehem, she decided to return, presumably because she had extended family connections there.

Both daughters-in-law began the journey with Naomi even though she repeatedly encouraged them to return to their homes, where she felt they would have opportunities to marry again. In encouraging them to return, she pronounced a blessing on them: "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest (Hebrew *mānûḥāh*, "security"), each of you in the house of her husband" (Ruth 1:8–9). The Hebrew word translated here as "deal kindly" in verse 8 is *ḥesed*, a word that describes a divine characteristic but that does not easily translate into English. Petitioners, like Naomi, can invoke God's *ḥesed* on others.³³ The King James Bible variously translates *ḥesed* with words like *kindness*, *grace*, *mercy*, *goodness*, and so forth, but none of these translations quite capture its covenantal aspect, which is emphasized in passages like Deuteronomy 7:12: "Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the Lord thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy (Hebrew *ḥesed*) which he sware unto thy fathers."³⁴ On one level, we might therefore expect a petition for God's *ḥesed* to be extended to other covenant-making people, but Naomi is invoking it upon two non-covenant Moabite women who themselves had each exhibited *ḥesed* for their husbands and were then willing to sacrifice their own happiness to provide for Naomi.³⁵ While it is true that Ruth would later commit herself to Naomi and her God, Naomi also bestowed the blessing upon Orpah, and the text gives no indication that Naomi withdrew

the petition when Orpah chose to follow her advice and return home to her family and, presumably, her Moabite god(s). In Naomi's mind, God's gift of *hesed* was not extended just to Israelites but to all of his children, especially those who acted in divine ways. Naomi's blessing reminds us again that the Abrahamic covenant was intended to bless "all families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3).

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, the personal, economic, and social weight of Naomi's experiences in Moab bubbled to the surface as she exclaimed to the Bethlehemites in Job-like anguish: "Call me not Naomi [Hebrew for "pleasing"], call me Mara [Hebrew for "bitterness"]; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" (Ruth 1:20–21). In this cry we feel Naomi's very real pain and anguish as she struggled to understand why a God of *hesed* had caused this bitterness to come upon her. The contrast between famine and harvest that is woven throughout the narrative parallels Naomi's initial feelings of emptiness as she returns to Bethlehem with the fulness that she experiences when Ruth gives birth to Obed at the conclusion of the story and the women declare him to be "a son born to Naomi" (Ruth 4:17). Thus, God's *esed* was indeed poured out upon her.

When Naomi first returned to Bethlehem, she had two major objectives. First, there was the immediate need to obtain food. Apparently, Naomi still owned land in the region (Ruth 4:3), but she didn't have access to it, perhaps because Elimelech had "sold" it before fleeing to Moab, or "left it in the hands of a relative to look after in his absence," or the land had simply not been prepared and planted, although the author does not give any details.³⁶ Under Mosaic law, land belonged to God (Leviticus 25:23), who allocated parts of Canaan to Israelite families (that is, men) and tribes (Numbers 26:52–54; 33:54; Joshua 13–22). Under those circumstances the ancestral land was to remain within the family through inheritances.³⁷ If a person's economic situation necessitated its sale, then the law allowed for the

land to be leased but mandated that it eventually be returned to the family either by a relative redeeming the land, as Boaz did in chapter 4, or by having it returned during the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8–13, 25–28). Without access to any harvest from Elimelech’s (now Naomi’s) land, the two women needed to take advantage of other provisions in the Mosaic law designed to provide for the poor, the widows, and the strangers in their need.

Naomi’s second objective, as detailed in Ruth 3, was to secure both her and Ruth’s long-term security. She asked Ruth, “My daughter, shall I not seek rest (Hebrew *mānôah*) for thee, that it may be well with thee?” (3:1). Here the word *rest* can refer to absence of work, but it also denotes a freedom from the anxiety that comes from living in exile (Deuteronomy 28:65; Lamentations 1:3), or, as in Ruth and Naomi’s case, someone who was a widow and had no family. In seeking to achieve both of these objectives, Naomi stepped back from the center of the story and worked in the wings, so to speak. Ruth takes center stage, although Naomi will orchestrate meetings between Ruth and one of Elimelech’s kinsmen by the name of Boaz.

Ruth (and Boaz and Naomi)

There is some ambiguity in the story over Ruth’s status as she left Moab behind and entered into her new community in Bethlehem, ambiguity that raises important questions about identity and religious and ethnic affiliations. Up until Ruth 4:10, the author repeatedly emphasizes Ruth’s Moabite identity (Ruth 1:4, 6, 22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). She is never considered to be an Israelite in the story, and Ruth is very aware of her marginal status. In her first dialogue with Boaz, she uses two telling words to describe herself. First, she refers to herself as a *nokriyah* (Ruth 2:10), which the King James Version translates as “stranger.” But this translation masks an important nuance, because the KJV translates both *gēr* (singular of *gērîm*) and *nokriyah* as “stranger.” We have noted earlier that *gēr* refers to both Israelite and gentile peoples who were displaced but enjoyed a protected status within the community. A *nokriyah*, however, emphasizes a foreigner

without the legal protection of the *gērîm*. Thus, it emphasized “the person’s otherness and separateness from the dominant culture.”³⁸ At a later time in her conversation with Boaz, Ruth further emphasized her “otherness” and lack of social status by describing herself as a *šîpəḥah*—a slave girl, the lowest rank of servants³⁹—who doesn’t even have the same status as the other slaves (Ruth 2:13).

This point begs the question of if, and when, as some have argued, Ruth converted to the Israelite religion (Targum of Ruth 1:16; 2:6, 11; 3:10).⁴⁰ The difficulty here is that it is probably anachronistic to talk about “conversion” in this context—at least conversion in the sense that we think about it today. This is because we have very little evidence of gentile conversion in the Hebrew Bible, so we are generally left in the dark about what a “conversion” would even look like in the setting of the book of Ruth. This is not to say that the religious boundaries between Israelites and Gentiles were impenetrable,⁴¹ but only that the boundary was “not always clearly marked,” especially for women.⁴² While men were expected to be circumcised, we don’t know of any set conversion rituals for women until much later. In the ancient world, it was presumed that a woman adopted the god(s) of her husband when she married. This may have been the case with Ruth when she married Mahlon,⁴³ but the Targum of Ruth describes Ruth as a proselyte (or convert) starting from when she declared her allegiance to Naomi and her God. “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:16–17; Targum on Ruth 1.16). This oath of commitment is formalized when Ruth concludes with “the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (1:17).⁴⁴ Even though Ruth was not Naomi’s biological daughter, with this oath she assumed the role of a covenantal daughter, with the inherent responsibility to not just worship Naomi’s God but to also care for her as a daughter would care for her mother. Thus, the oath forged both an emotional and a legal attachment between the two women.⁴⁵

Regardless of Ruth's religious status, Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem in a state of apparent poverty. Their situation was in stark contrast to the wealth of those who owned the Bethlehem fields at harvesttime. Naomi had originally journeyed to Moab because of a famine in Bethlehem. Now she returned in the midst of a bountiful harvest, but she still had no access to food. Naomi and Ruth, in many ways, were no different from people today who starve when the world enjoys a bounty of food. For the second time in the narrative, Ruth comes to the center stage of the story. The Mosaic law made provisions for the poor, the widows, and the *gērîm* by directing Israel to "not wholly reap the corners" of the field and to leave part of the produce for the needy to come and glean (Leviticus 19:9–10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:18–21). These commands implied that in Israel, people with means had an obligation to create opportunities for the poor. Of course, in an agrarian market, such an action would clearly have a negative impact on the economy of the harvest, and it is a reminder that this commandment was just as much a sacrifice for Israelites as was the offering of their animals on the altar.

Whether by design or provident luck—it is unclear in the text—Ruth ended up in one of the fields that belonged to Elimelech's relative, Boaz (Ruth 2:1, 3). Her decision to glean in the fields (Ruth 2:2) highlights both her willingness to work and her commitment to support herself and Naomi, but it also reminds readers of her abject poverty and the economic divide between her status as a gleaner and that of Boaz as a landowner. The economic divide was yet another boundary for her to cross. As Jennifer L. Koosed has explained, "To glean one must transverse a border, step over a property line, enter into a field that is not one's own. Gleaners, almost by definition, are people who inhabit margins; they are also people who cross borders and live in Borderlands. More than racial or ethnic identity, more than nation of origin, the Borderlands in the book of Ruth are those of class difference."⁴⁶

The narrator introduces Boaz as "a mighty man of wealth" (Ruth 2:1). The Hebrew word translated as "wealth" (*hayil*) indicates a

landowner who, because of his landholdings, held a place of honor and responsibility in his community. In the narrative, Boaz is an example of what the Mosaic laws of gleaning look like when they are lived. Because Boaz knew of Ruth's circumstances—how she had left behind her family and homeland to look after Naomi (2:11)—he was generous in his interpretation of the gleaning laws, extending “special protection and privileges”⁴⁷ to her, and he worked to break down some of the barriers that marginalized her from the community. In our reading, we have identified five major ways that he did this.

First, Boaz welcomed her to glean in his field and encouraged her not to seek to glean in other fields (Ruth 2:8). As a result, Ruth could devote all of her time to gathering food without wasting time moving from field to field. Second, he opened up all of his field to her. Not only was she allowed to glean in the “corners of the field” and collect the grain that remained after the initial harvest, but Boaz also gave her permission to remain close to his maidens and to harvest “even among the sheaves” (2:8, 14–15). Both of these invitations meant that she had access to the full field, not just to the leftovers, so she was able to gather more grain. Third, probably understanding the inherent dangers for a foreign Moabite woman to work alone in the fields, Boaz specifically instructed his young men to “not touch” her (2:9) nor to “reproach her” (2:15). The Hebrew words used in both of these warnings (*naga'* and *kālam*) carry connotations of violence, with *naga'* also indicating sexual assault. The fact that Boaz specifically commanded the young men against such actions strongly indicates that the danger of rape and abuse was a real possibility. Fourth, like Naomi before him, Boaz also invoked the God of Israel's blessing upon her. “The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Hebrew *āsāh*, ‘to seek refuge’)” (2:12). The Hebrew word translated as “wings” in the KJV is *kānāp*, which is the same word used to describe the wings of the cherubim that covered the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:20) and is a symbol in Ezekiel for God's love of his covenant people (Ezekiel 16:8). Fifth,

after a full day of work (2:7, 17), Boaz invited Ruth to join in a meal where she sat not in the shadows but beside the other workers (2:14). Boaz's actions in this chapter provide an important model for how refugees can and should be welcomed into a community. Not only did he treat Ruth with respect, but he also insisted that those who worked for him did likewise.

As a result of Ruth's hard work and Boaz's generous concessions that went beyond his legal responsibilities, Ruth took home to Naomi about an ephah of grain (Ruth 2:7–17), which is equivalent to anything between twenty-nine and fifty pounds of grain—more than enough to provide for the two women for an extended period.⁴⁸ That this amount greatly exceeded Naomi's expectations is made clear by her reaction to Ruth's bountiful return, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness (Hebrew *hesed*) to the living and to the dead" (Ruth 2:20). Naomi's use of the word *hesed* reminds readers of the recurring theme of God's lovingkindness to his children, which is often accomplished through the acts of other people. Robert L. Hubbard has noted that "whenever people of faith practice God-like *hesed* toward each other, God himself acts in them."⁴⁹ Naomi understood this bounteous harvest as a confirmation that God had not abandoned her in her time of loss and poverty, as she had charged him in 1:21. Naomi then recognized that Boaz was not just an answer to their immediate need for food, but someone who could also help with her and Ruth's long-term security.

Boaz as Gō'el for Ruth and Naomi

Throughout the story, the King James text frequently refers to Boaz as a "kinsman." The first reference in 2:1 translates the Hebrew word *moda'*, which simply refers to a distant relative. However, beginning in chapter 3, the rest of the citations translate the word *gō'el* (Ruth 3:9, 12, 13; 4:14), which has the more nuanced meaning of a "redeemer." In the Old Testament *gō'el* had both physical and spiritual dimensions. On the spiritual level, God is frequently described as a *gō'el*.⁵⁰ On the more physical level, a *gō'el* was a close family member with a

specific responsibility to “assist impoverished relatives during times of hardship,” such as when they “lost their property, liberty, or lives by buying them out of bondage or avenging them.”⁵¹ In the book of Ruth, *gō`ēl* is always a reference to a human being, but readers would easily recognize the connection with the “familiar epithet for God,” the Redeemer of Israel (*gō`ēl yisrāēl*; Isaiah 49:7).⁵² Thus Boaz acts as a mediator to assist Ruth and Naomi in their physical needs, but in doing so he again becomes the instrument of God’s *hesed* for those in need.

As chapter 3 opens, Naomi identified Boaz as a *gō`ēl* and as the answer to her and Ruth’s long-term needs for security. Since they were in the midst of a harvest, she directed Ruth to go to the threshing floor, where Boaz would work late into the night sorting the harvested barley. Using a stratagem, to be sure, Naomi instructed Ruth to not make herself known until Boaz had finished eating and drinking and had retired to sleep (3:3–4). When he was asleep, Ruth lay down at his feet. The KJV says that at midnight he awoke and was “afraid” (3:8), but this could also mean that he shivered because of the cold or was startled (Hebrew *hāra*) to find Ruth lying at his feet. While scholars debate what actually happened here,⁵³ it seems that the overall intent of verses 6–9 is to describe Ruth’s belief that Boaz himself would be the fulfilment of the invocation he had bestowed upon her in the previous chapter. When Boaz asked her to identify herself, she answered, “I am Ruth, thine handmaid [Hebrew *’āmāh*, ‘servant’/‘slave’].”⁵⁴ She then invited Boaz to “spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid [servant/slave]; for thou art a near kinsman [*gō`ēl*].” The KJV uses the word *skirt*, but the Hebrew word is *kānāp*, the same word Boaz used in his earlier invocation, there translated as “wings.” By using that same symbolic language, Ruth was asking Boaz to be the human conduit of God’s *hesed* that he had invoked upon her. She hoped that he would indeed look upon her with mercy and then act as her redeemer.

Boaz’s response to Ruth shifts her emphasis from God’s and his *hesed* to that of Ruth, a reminder of Naomi’s plea in chapter 1 that

the Lord would bestow *hesed* upon her and Orpah (Ruth 1:8). He declared, “Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness [*hesed*] in the latter end than at the beginning” (3:10). Her “beginning” *hesed* was a reference to her decision to leave home and family so that she could look after Naomi. The context suggests that Ruth’s “latter” *hesed* refers to her actions at the threshing floor. Boaz linked them to her decision to seek Boaz rather than the “young men [Hebrew *bāhūrīm*], whether poor or rich” (3:10). In every other case where the phrase “young men” is used in Ruth, the KJV translates the Hebrew word *nə‘ārīm*, which refers to young men or servants, but in this instance Boaz used the word *bāhūrīm*, which is a little more specific than *nə‘ārīm*—it refers to eligible, and particularly choice, young men. Boaz understood that Ruth could have had her pick of any of the young, eligible bachelors, and yet she (and Naomi) had chosen him. Why?

Some might think that it was simply because of his wealth and standing in the community, but since Boaz connected her choice with the divine attribution of *hesed*, we suggest that Boaz had in mind a more covenantal purpose. He responded to Ruth’s plea for help with “And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11). The word translated as “virtuous” (Hebrew *hayil*) here is the same word used by the narrator to describe Boaz in 2:1. The repetition of *hayil* to describe both Ruth and Boaz serves two purposes. First, since Ruth was not a wealthy woman, its use reinforces that Boaz was not just a man of wealth, but also a man of strength or virtue. Second, it conveys to the reader that this couple would be equally yoked together. Although they came from different social, economic, political, and religious backgrounds, they were both strong in their desires to keep their covenantal obligations to look after those in need of their help. Ruth made an oath to look after Naomi, and Boaz understood his covenantal obligations to look after the poor, the widows, and the strangers in the land.

Boaz committed to help Ruth by redeeming Naomi's land (Leviticus 25:23–30) but acknowledged that there was a *gō'ēl* who was "nearer than I." He promised that if the latter did not step up to help, then Boaz would serve in that capacity (3:12–13). After again providing grain for Ruth to take back to Naomi (3:15), he departed.

In chapter 4 Boaz moves to center stage in the narrative as he examines the best way to redeem Ruth (and Naomi). What is unique in this chapter is that Boaz acts as *gō'ēl* with a combination of legal customs that are usually discussed separately: redeeming Naomi's land and entering into a levirate marriage with Ruth.⁵⁵ Technically, neither of these actions were required of Boaz by law. On the one hand, Boaz knows of a *gō'ēl* who was "nearer than I" (3:12). This *gō'ēl* apparently had the first right of refusal to redeem Naomi's land. Initially he showed interest in the land, but when Boaz tied the transaction to a levirate marriage with Ruth, he withdrew "lest I mar mine own inheritance" (4:3–6). The law of levirate marriage required a man to marry the widow of his deceased brother if there was no heir (Deuteronomy 25:5–10; Genesis 38:1–26). If the living brother refused the levirate marriage, then the widow was free to marry outside the family. The levirate marriage ensured that the deceased man's name "be not put out of Israel" (Deuteronomy 25:6; see Ruth 4:5, 10).⁵⁶ The firstborn child of the levirate marriage legally became the heir of the deceased brother. As a result, the property and lineage remained within the tribal family and the widow was provided for.⁵⁷ The biblical mandate invokes a levirate marriage only for brothers that "dwell together" (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), which may refer to the brothers "living on the same family estate" or simply "living in the same vicinity."⁵⁸ It appears that neither Boaz nor the "nearer *gō'ēl*" qualified as levirate candidates under these precise stipulations. When the "nearer *gō'ēl*" removed his shoe in front of the elders in the gate and gave it to Boaz (4:7), he formally recused himself and passed on the responsibility to Boaz.⁵⁹ In fulfillment of his promise to Ruth, Boaz stepped up and took responsibility both to redeem Naomi's land and to enter into a levirate marriage with Ruth "to raise up the

name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren" (4:10). Once again Boaz has generously interpreted any legal responsibilities he might have had in these cases. As a result of that generosity, the barrenness of both the land and of Naomi and Ruth that was introduced in chapter 1 has been replaced with fruitfulness, both for the land and for Ruth, for "the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son" (4:13).

The Book of Ruth in the Modern World

Unfortunately, the struggles of Naomi and Ruth are still experienced by many people in the world today. We would like to suggest three principles that modern readers can take away from the book of Ruth.

First, both women knew what it was like to be a refugee, to be destitute, and to have to rely on legal statutes to enable them to put food on their family's table. Ruth was willing to work long hours to find food for herself and her mother-in-law. Even so, their lives were enriched by Boaz—someone who chose to use his surplus wealth to help the needy. He did not just live the letter of the law of looking after the poor, widows, and strangers; he was generous in how he interpreted the laws of gleaning, redeeming, and levirate marriage. All of us at times need someone like Boaz in our lives to help us navigate dark times, but we also need to *become* a Boaz so that we can be redeemers for those in our community circles who may be lost, hungry, or poor, or who may feel invisible or marginalized. In every society there are many like Naomi and Ruth and there are many like Boaz—but unfortunately, there are not enough like Boaz to feed *all* those like Naomi and Ruth. In a time and place where many of us enjoy prosperity and wealth, poverty and malnourishment continue even when food is simply thrown away at an alarming rate.⁶⁰ War and famine continue to force people to flee from their homes and families. Amnesty International reports that globally there are 26 million refugees, half of which are children, who are seeking safe places for their families to both live and thrive.⁶¹ Ruth is a reminder

that refugees can, and do, contribute in significant and meaningful ways in their adopted homes, but there is still much for us to do collectively and individually to welcome them and help them integrate into our society before all of God's children can feel safe, can be fed, and can feel loved in this mortal world. As covenant makers, it is *our* responsibility to reach out to those on the margins of our society. We cannot sit back and expect others to take care of them. Just as with ancient Israel, God expects each one of us to dedicate at least some of our personal "harvests" for the needy, even if all we have to give is a widow's mite.

Second, the law of Moses's obligations for covenantal Israel to look after the needy in their communities were not just in force during the Mosaic period but have been incumbent upon covenant-making people in *every* dispensation.⁶² As much as modern transportation, telecommunications, and the internet have united the world in unprecedented ways, there are still political, geographical, economic, ethnic, and religious borders that segregate God's children. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has invited each member of the Church to be "committed to freeing the world from the virus of hunger, freeing neighborhoods and nations from the virus of poverty." He continued to plead that we reach out to those who exist on the margins of our societies: "May we hope for . . . the gift of personal dignity for every child of God, unmarred by *any* form of racial, ethnic, or religious prejudice. Undergirding all of this is our relentless hope for greater devotion to the two greatest of all commandments: to love God by keeping His counsel and to love our neighbors by showing kindness and compassion, patience and forgiveness. These two divine directives are still—and forever will be—the only real hope we have for giving our children a better world than the one they now know."⁶³

Third, undergirding everything in the book of Ruth is the living reality that what brings people of different groups together in unity is God's *hesed*. In the book of Ruth, God is specifically mentioned in only two verses (1:6; 4:13), yet if the reader looks closely, his *hesed* pervades the story. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz are people who are

covenantally committed and loyal to him and seek to show *hesed* in their interactions with others. Naomi and Ruth were destitute as they entered Bethlehem. Naomi thought that God had abandoned her. This story is a reminder that although God's *hesed* will not remove our trials and periods of darkness, it will always be available to us, not usually through divine epiphanies, but through the actions of his disciples who minister to one another. Ruth ministered to Naomi; Naomi ministered to Ruth; and Boaz ministered to the both of them. As a result of each of these people choosing to minister, all of their lives were blessed both temporally and spiritually.

Alicia Ostriker reminds all who read it that the book of Ruth "is deeply optimistic, with an optimism generated . . . by looking at the possibilities of [*h*]esed, or loving kindness—lovingly generous human behavior at the most intimate of levels."⁶⁴ The question for modern readers is how we can actively incorporate that same sense of covenantal *hesed* in our interactions with those on the periphery of our society.

Notes

1. Athalya Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker and the Politics of Exogamy," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 158–62; Agnethe Siquans, "Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to Be Integrated into Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 443–45. See also the chapter in this volume by Elizabeta Jevtic-Somlai and Robin Peterson, "Their Story Is Our Story Because We Were Strangers: The Relevance of Exodus 22:21 and of Leviticus 19:33–34 in Refugee Awareness Work." [page #s?????]
2. Bonnie Honig, "Ruth, the Model Emigrée: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration," in Brenner-Idan, *Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*, 54–56.

3. Gale A. Yee, "Ruth," in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*, ed. Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 351.
4. Later interpretation of the strangers mentioned in the biblical injunctions developed into "righteous stranger" (*gēr edek*), meaning a "converted Jew," but this is not the sense of the biblical text. Leon Sheleff, "The Stranger in Our Midst: The Other in Jewish Tradition—From Biblical Times to Modern Israel," *Israel Studies Bulletin* 14, no. 2 (1999): 6–8. We are grateful to Avram R. Shannon for pointing us to this source.
5. Hiers does argue, however, that "a widow could receive her husband's property by bequest" or other legal means. Richard H. Hiers, *Justice and Compassion in Biblical Law* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 35.
6. The daughters of Zelophehad successfully challenged the practice that only sons inherited land because their father had five daughters but no sons; as a result, the biblical laws were revised (Numbers 26:33; 27:1–11; 36:1–13; Joshua 17:3–6). Apparently, these revised laws were not always followed in practice. Tobit, rather than his wife, inherited his in-laws' wealth (Tobit 14:13–14). Hiers, *Justice and Compassion*, 33–35.
7. For a more detailed discussion, see David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann Seely, "'The Cry of the Widow, Fatherless and the Stranger': The Covenantal Obligation to Help the Poor and Oppressed," in this volume. [page #s??]
8. Bernard S. Jackson, "Ruth, the Pentateuch and the Nature of Biblical Law: In Conversation with Jean Louis Ska," in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on Its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 78.
9. Julie Baretz, "Ruth the Moabitess at Bethlehem, Ruth 1–4," in *The Bible on Location: Off the Beaten Path in Ancient and Modern Israel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 74.
10. The genealogical connection between Boaz and King David at the conclusion of the book suggests that the author/redactor is writing during the time of David and looking back to the time of Ruth as she or he connects David with his Moabite past (Yee, "Ruth," 351).
11. Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther Canticles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981),

86–87; Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 22. However, some have argued that “the whole tone of the work seems to argue that its original composition was not for polemical purposes.” George S. Glanzman, “The Origin and Date of the Book of Ruth,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1959): 204. Further evidence for dating Ruth to the Persian period also includes the thematic connections it has with the books of Esther and Jonah, all of which share a positive view of foreigners and show Jehovah reaching out to people other than Israel. Thus, they argue that Ruth’s “universalist tone” of God loving all people fits well within a fourth-century context (Glanzman, “Origin and Date,” 201).

12. For a discussion of the differences between Standard Biblical Hebrew and Late Biblical Hebrew in the book of Ruth, see Frederic William Bush, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth/Esther* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 25–29.
13. Glanzman, “Origin and Date,” 202.
14. The biblical account traces the Moabite lineage to the illicit union between Lot with his daughter (Genesis 19:30–38). The JST of Genesis 19:37 specifically notes that Lot’s firstborn daughter “dealt wickedly” when she planned the union.
15. When the Israelites traveled through the land of Moab on their way to the promised land, the Moabites refused to supply them with bread and water and hired Balaam to curse them (Deuteronomy 23:4). On another occasion, the Moabites are decried for enticing the Israelites to commit whoredoms with the daughters of Moab and to offer sacrifices to the Moabite gods (Numbers 25:1–5). Lastly, during the reign of the Judges, Eglon, the king of Moab, organized a coalition with the Ammonites and Amalekites that invaded and oppressed Israel for eighteen years (Judges 3:14). Although there is no evidence to support their claim, some of our earliest interpreters of Ruth declared that she was a descendant from Eglon (Targum Ruth 1:4). The later rabbis were aware of the tension between the Deuteronomic prohibition and the story of Ruth. They focus on the fact that the language of the commandment is masculine and so applies only to Moabite men and not women such as Ruth (m. Yevamot 8:3; b. Yevamot 77a:4). Jonathan

- Magonet, "Rabbinic Reading of Ruth," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 40, no 2 (2007): 155.
16. Edward L. Greenstein, "Reading Strategies and the Story of Ruth," in *Women in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999): 215–16. When David flees from Saul, he seeks refuge for his parents with the king of Moab (1 Samuel 22:3–4). The rabbis attribute David's struggle to be accepted as king because of his background, especially of Ruth's Moabite status" (Ruth Rabbah 4:8; 8:1). Magonet, "Rabbinic Reading of Ruth," 156.
 17. Agnethe Siquans, "Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth," 443–44.
 18. For example, Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:27; 2 Samuel 21:1; 1 Kings 18:2; 2 Kings 4:38; Haggai 1:11; Nehemiah 5:3. Where rainfall irrigation is utilized, requiring an annual precipitation of around nine inches a year for crops to grow, even a slight decrease in the rainfall can lead to a famine. L. de Blois and R. J. van der Spek, *An Introduction to the Ancient World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 9–10.
 19. Abraham left Ur and traveled to Haran, then to the land of Canaan, and then on to Egypt—all because of famine (Abraham 3:1, 4, 17, 21); Jacob sent his sons to Egypt because of a famine and eventually moved his family there (Genesis 42–47). These biblical migrations are consistent with other tribal migrations in the ancient Near East. In the twenty-first century BC, possibly also as the result of a drought, Semitic-speaking tribes known as the Amorites infiltrated southern Mesopotamia, establishing important city-states such as Mari and Babylon.
 20. The KJV uses "country" to translate the Hebrew *sādeh*. We translate it as "pastures," which I think reinforces the fruitfulness of Moab that enticed Elimelech and his family to leave Bethlehem-judah. Later commentators attribute the deaths of Elimelech and his sons to a divine punishment either because they left Judah (*Bava Bathra*, 91a:8, 91b:3) or because they married foreign wives (Targum Ruth 1:4).
 21. Alicia Ostriker, "The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land," *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 344.
 22. Ostriker, "Book of Ruth," 348.

23. Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?," in Brenner-Idan, *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, 134–39; S. D. Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres," *Prooftexts* 8, no. 1 (1988): 4; Ostriker, "Book of Ruth," 345–46; Irmtraud Fischer, "The Book of Ruth: A Feminist Commentary to the Torah," in *Ester and Ruth: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 19.
24. Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture," 136–37; Athalya Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the 'Birth of the Hero' Paradigm," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (1986): 259, 66–67; Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture," 136; George Savran, "The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi," *A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 30 (2016): 7.
25. The positive relationship between Naomi and Ruth does not mean that they considered themselves to be equal peers. Ruth uprooted her life to follow Naomi and appears to be her servant. Perhaps it is because of her age, but Naomi does not work in the fields alongside Ruth to put food on their table. Ultimately, the story concludes with Ruth's bearing a child that is identified as Naomi's son. For discussions on some of these issues, see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, "A Son Is Born to Naomi!' Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," in Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible, A Reader*, 233–39; and Yael Shemesh, "The Stories of Women in a Man's World: The Books Ruth, Esther, and Judith," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 1:248–58.
26. Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture," 137.
27. The only other occasions are in the story of Rebekah (Genesis 24:28) and in the Song of Songs (3:4; 8:2).
28. Genesis 38:11; compare Leviticus 22:13. Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 102. The phrase "mothers house" in the Song of Solomon (3:4; 8:2) seems to refer to the mother's bedroom, rather than a separate dwelling place. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 102. In Genesis 24:28, the phrase seems to refer to the mother's family.
29. Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture," 137.

30. For example, see Genesis 16:4, where Sarah's status is affected when her handmaid Hagar bears a son to Abraham.
31. The exceptions were generally servant women, who were provided for by their masters and mistresses, and prostitutes, who had their own source of income. Susan Ackerman, "Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Religion*, <https://oxfordre.com/religion>.
32. Ackerman, "Women in Ancient Israel," 5.
33. *Hesed* was what God showed to Joseph when he was in prison (Genesis 39:21) and to the Israelites when God delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 15:13). For an example of someone petitioning that God would bestow *hesed* upon someone else, see Genesis 24:12.
34. Likewise, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies [*hesed*] of David" (Isaiah 55:3; see also Psalm 25:10). Daniel L. Belnap, "'How Excellent Is Thy Lovingkindness': The Gospel Principle of *Hesed*," in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament: The 38th Annual BYU Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 170–86.
35. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 104.
36. Bernard S. Jackson, "Law and Narrative in the Book of Ruth: A Syntagmatic Reading," *Jewish Law Association Studies* 27 (2017): 102. It appears that Naomi's sons inherited their father's land, but since they had both died without heirs, Naomi inherited it from them; thus Boaz says that he bought "all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi" (Ruth 4:9). See also Ruth 4:5, where Boaz tells the near kinsman that he will buy the land from both Naomi and Ruth. Hiers, *Justice and Compassion*, 36–37.
37. Clearly, this principle of land ownership describes an ideal situation that was not always lived. Isaiah (5:8) and Micah (2:2) both condemn the aristocracy who take control of people's homes and lands.
38. Gale A. Yee, "'She Stood in Tears amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," in *They Were All Together in*

- One Place: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 127.
39. HALOT, s.v. רִיִּשׁוּ.
40. The Targum of Ruth is one of a number of Aramaic translations and interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. For discussions on Ruth's possible conversion to the Israelite religion, see Bernard S. Jackson, "Ruth's Conversion: Then and Now," in *The Jewish Law Annual* 19, ed. Hanina Ben-Benahem and Berachyahu Lifshitz (London: Routledge, 2011), 53–61; Edward Campbell, *Ruth: New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 80, 82; Kristen Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, trans. Edward Broadbridge (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 49. For examples from members of the Church of Jesus Christ who assume that Ruth converted, see Aileen H. Clyde, "Confidence through Conversion," *Ensign*, November, 1992, 89; Thomas S. Monson, "Models to Follow" *Ensign*, November 2002, 61.
41. Initially, those outside the Abrahamic lineage seemed to have been absorbed in the covenant community. An example that hints at this assimilation is when Abram left Haran, he took in addition to his family "the souls that they had gotten in Haran" (Genesis 12:5; compare Abraham 2:15). Likewise, when Moses and the people of Israel left Egypt, "a mixed multitude went up also with them" (Exodus 12:38).
42. In the story *Joseph and Asenath*, Asenath became a proselyte to Judaism by destroying her idols, renouncing polytheism, and fasting and mourning for seven days (9.2; 10:13–17). The *Apocalypse of Baruch* describes a proselyte with language that is remarkably similar to Boaz's invocation for Ruth (2:12), "people who have left their vanities to take refuge under your wings" (41:4). Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (1989): 13–33. Later rabbis indicated that a ritual bath (*mikvah*) and acceptance of the commandments was required for conversion. Jackson, "Ruth's Conversion," 54.
43. Jackson, "Ruth's Conversion," 53–61; Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary," 25.
44. Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 30.

45. Brenner, "Ruth as a Foreign Worker," 159.
46. Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 49.
47. Adele Berlin, "The Book of Ruth," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, Student Edition*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Wayne A. Meeks (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006), 385.
48. Sasson, *Ruth*, 57.
49. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 72. See also Ostriker, "Book of Ruth," 352.
50. Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14; 78:35; Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; Jeremiah 50:34.
51. Yee, "Ruth," 354; Jennifer C. Lane, "The Lord Will Redeem His People: 'Adoptive' Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 49.
52. Ostriker, "Book of Ruth," 351–52.
53. Jackson, "Law and Narrative," 110, 112; Ostriker, "Book of Ruth," 346. Some understand the language to be a euphemistic description of a sexual encounter, but almost immediately Boaz described Ruth as a virtuous/worthy woman (3:11).
54. This is not the same word *šipḥah* that she used to describe herself in 2:13. Both words can be used synonymously to describe a slave status, but technically a *šipḥah* refers to "a girl who is not free but is yet untouched, whose duty was primarily to serve the woman of the house," while an *'āmāh* refers to "a woman who is not free, and who could be a man's secondary wife." HALOT, s.v. שִׁפְחָה.
55. Brad Embry, "Legalities in the Book of Ruth: A Renewed Look," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41, no. 1 (2016): 34.
56. For a discussion on levirate marriage, see Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Excursus 23: Levirate Marriage," in *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 482–83.
57. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.254–56.

58. Tigay notes that “in Genesis 13:6 and 36:7 ‘dwelling together’ means dwelling close enough to use the same pasture land.” He continues, “in either case, this condition is perhaps related to the fact that the offspring of the levirate marriage will inherit the dead man’s property. This may mean that in biblical times the marriage was obligatory only if the levir’s home, where the widow and her future child would reside, was close to that property.” Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 231.
59. According to Deuteronomy 25, it was the widow’s responsibility to take the sandal to the elders in the gate as a sign that the brother refused to participate in a levirate marriage (25:7–9), but in Ruth the nearer *gō’ēl* removes his sandal to “signal forfeiture of his rights as the rights of the kinsman-redeemer.” Embrey, “Legalities in the Book of Ruth,” 35.
60. It has been argued that the United States alone throws away 80 billion pounds of food each year; see <https://www.rts.com/resources/guides/food-waste-america/>.
61. See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/global-refugee-crisis-statistics-and-facts/>.
62. For examples, see Luke 3:7–14; James 1:27; Mosiah 4:26; Doctrine and Covenants 44:4–6; 72:10–12.
63. Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Perfect Brightness of Hope,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 82–83.
64. Ostriker, “Book of Ruth,” 346.