The Steinsaltz Tanakh

Tanakh Translation and Commentary

Megillat Ruth

Commentary by
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This volume pays tribute to the memory of

Mr. Sami Rohr יז"ל
ר' שומואל ב"ר וורשע אליוה יז"ל
who served his Maker with joy,
and whose far-reaching vision, warm open hand, love of Torah,
and love for every Jew were catalysts for revival and growth of
vibrant Jewish life in the former Soviet Union
and in countless communities the world over,

and to the memory of his beloved wife

Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner) ע"ה
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who survived the flames of the Shoah to become
the elegant and gracious matriarch,
first in Colombia and later in the United States,
of three generations of a family
nurtured by her love and unstinting devotion.
She found grace in the eyes of all those whose lives she touched.

Together they merited to see all their children
build lives enriched by faithful commitment
to the spreading of Torah and Ahavat Yisrael.

Dedicated with love by

The Rohr Family
New York, USA
She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue....
Her children arise and laud her; her husband, and he praises her. (Proverbs 31:26–28)
May the Lord reward your conduct, and may your payment be complete from the Lord,
God of Israel, under whose wings you came to find refuge. (Ruth 2:12)

In loving memory of our wife, mother and grandmother,

Geneviève גוֹוד וּרְתַה Werthenschlag

on the 30th anniversary of her passing.

She epitomized the Woman of Valor and
strengthened and comforted many
with her kindness and faith.

We, her family,
continue to sing her praise
and while we long for her every day,
we carry her example of reut, tzedakah,
hesed, and ahavat yisrael in our minds and deeds.

May her neshama have an aliya.
INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

The story of the book of Ruth can be described as a kind of idyll. It unfolds in a quiet Judean community during the era of the judges, in Israel’s early history. No earth-shattering miracles occur in this book, nor any events of historical import. While there is a certain amount of conflict in the story, a sense of calmness and harmony infuses the narrative. The book’s main characters are memorable not for their fastidiously correct behavior, but for their personal decisions to conduct themselves with kindness and generosity toward one another.

The central focus of this book is the personal story of a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law who are left to wander through the world destitute, before they eventually achieve security. Only the final verses, which relate how the eponymous heroine, Ruth, becomes the mother of the royal dynasty of Israel, transform the plot from a personal, human story to one of national significance. The conclusion also shows how God guides events in the world, as He nurtures a person on the margins of society, a female Moavite convert, until she becomes the ancestor of King David himself. One of David’s psalms contains a verse that aptly describes the plot of this book: “The stone that the builders rejected became the cornerstone.”
The story of Ruth begins with a famine in the Land of Israel, which causes Elimelekh’s family to relocate from Bethlehem to Moav. This move is not as strange as it might first seem, as the Moavite nation shared common roots with the Jewish people. The founding ancestor of the nation Moav was a son of Lot, the nephew of Abraham our patriarch. Ancient inscriptions indicate that the Moavite language was very similar to Hebrew. Accordingly, Elimelekh’s family remains within the same broad cultural context, despite the numerous differences between the nations. While residing in Moav, the exiled family is struck by a series of tragedies, and only Naomi survives.

1 It was in the days when the judges judged; there was a famine in the land due to a drought. And a wealthy, prominent man from Bethlehem, which was in the territory of Judah, near Jerusalem, went to reside temporarily in the fields of Moav, where conditions were better, he, his wife, and his two sons. The verse specifies Bethlehem in Judah in order to distinguish this place from the town of Bethlehem located in the Galilee.

2 The name of the man was Elimelekh, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilyon. They were Efratites from Bethlehem of Judah. The region near Bethlehem was named after their family of Efrat, who was a descendant of Hur. They came to the fields of Moav and were there for some time.

3 Elimelekh, Naomi’s husband, died while they were living in Moav, and she and her two sons remained in the fields of Moav.

4 They, Naomi’s two sons, married local Moavite women: The name of the one was Orpa, and the name of the second Ruth; they lived there approximately ten years.

5 Also both of them, Mahlon and Kilyon, died childless; and the woman, Naomi, remained of her two children and her husband.
The Return from Moav to Judah

RUTH 1:6–22

She and her daughters-in-law rose, and returned from the fields of Moav, not only because Naomi had lost her husband and sons, but also because she had heard in the fields of Moav that the Lord had remembered His people to give

BACKGROUND

1:1 | Bethlehem of Judah: This has been identified with the hill that extends eastward from the center of the modern city of Bethlehem, approximately 9 km south of Jerusalem, and 1.5 km east of the ancient road along the central ridge of the highlands of the Land of Israel known as the Way of the Patriarchs. It is possible that the city was named for the fertile plains on its eastern side, where wheat and barley were grown. Bethlehem is also referred to as Efrat, according to the verse “Efrata, the father of Bethlehem” (I Chronicles 4:4).

1:2 | In the days when the judges judged: During this period, the setting for the book of Judges, tribes and families were the most important social units in Israel, although the people were still one nation. There were periodic skirmishes with enemies, but Israel did not engage in any major wars. The Torah and its commandments were generally observed in accordance with the tradition that the people had received. Nevertheless, the stories related in the Judges that span this lengthy period depict Israel as a people with a warped ethical sensibility, along with a corrupt religious and national consciousness.

1:2 | Mahlon and Kilyon: There is a possible allusion to the story of Elimelekh's family in I Chronicles (4:22), although the names that appear there differ from the ones mentioned here. If that verse indeed refers to the same story, Mahlon and Kilyon might not have been their real names, but pseudonyms given to them following their deaths at a young age. While the name Mahlon seems to connote sickness (mahala), it can also be interpreted in a positive sense, similar to Mahli (Exodus 6:19) and Ahlai (I Chronicles 2:31), which mean jewelry (see, e.g., Proverbs 25:12). It could also be related to sweetness, as indicated by the root in Arabic, from which the name for the modern sesame snack halva is derived. However, the name Kilyon, literally “annihilation” (see Isaiah 10:22), bears an unambiguously negative connotation (see Ibn Ezra; Bava Batra 91b; Ruth Rabba 25). Appropriately, as evident from the continuation of the narrative, Kilyon did not merit a lasting remembrance, whereas Mahlon's name was perpetuated and glorified by his widow, Ruth.

1:4 | Orpa and Ruth: The text does not reveal anything about the identity of these two women. According to Jewish tradition, Ruth descended from the royal line of Moav, while Orpa apparently came from an upper-class family.
them bread. In the meantime, the famine had ended and normal life had resumed in the land of Judah.

7 She departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law were with her, as they were her only surviving family members; they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

8 Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law: I am returning to my home and my people, but as for you, go, each return to her mother’s house and family. She added with great affection: May the Lord deal kindly with you and assist you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

9 May the Lord grant you that you find repose, each in the house of her husband. I bless each of you that you should both remarry and live in peace with new husbands. Since nothing remains from our family relationship, there is no reason for you to accompany me. Naomi wished to treat these two women fairly, as they were apparently relatively young, having married a mere few years earlier. She therefore encouraged them to resume their lives elsewhere. She, Naomi, kissed them a farewell kiss; and they, possibly all three of them, raised their voices and wept. This shared weeping is indicative of the profound ties between them, despite the fact that the pair were not Naomi’s biological daughters.

10 They said to her: No, for we will return with you to your people and live among your nation. We are one family, and we will continue to remain a family.

11 Naomi said: Return, my daughters; why would you go with me? There is no reason for you to do so. Do I have more sons in my womb who will be husbands for you? Is there any chance that I will give birth to boys who might later marry you and produce offspring?

12 Accordingly, return, my daughters; go, as I am too old to remarry and have a second husband. Even if I were to entertain an utterly unrealistic idea and say: I have hope, then even if I had a husband tonight, and even if I were to bear sons,

13 would you wait for them, these imaginary sons, until they grow up? For them, would you constrain yourselves and stop your lives, to not have a husband? No, my daughters, for I am embittered on your account that I am unable to assist you or provide you with anything, for the hand of the Lord has been extended against me. I am left wretched and hopeless. Apparently, any property or possessions the family had once owned had been lost over the years.

14 They raised their voices and wept more; Orpa kissed her mother-in-law farewell, as she had been convinced by Naomi’s argument and decided to return home, but Ruth clung to her and would not consent to any separation.

15 She, Naomi, said to Ruth: Behold, your sister-in-law returned to her people and to her god; return after your sister-in-law.

16 Ruth said: Do not implore me to leave you, to return from following you, to abandon you. For wherever you will go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; moreover, your people is my people, and your God my God. You said that Orpa should return to her nation and her gods, but Moav is no longer my nation, and the gods of Moav are no longer my gods. My ties to your family and way of life are not an accident, and I no longer feel any connection to the Moavite nation and its faith;

17 wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. I will remain alongside you until death, and I will be buried together with you. I swear that so may the Lord do to me, and so may He continue, for death will separate between me and you. Note that Ruth takes an oath in the name of the God of Israel.

18 She, Naomi, saw that she was resolute to go with her, despite her best efforts to convince Ruth that she should return home, and she ceased speaking with her and urging her to return.

19 The two of them walked until they arrived in Bethlehem. Since Bethlehem was not far from Moav, they presumably walked for only a few days. It was, upon their arriving in Bethlehem, that the whole city was in a tumult over them; the women said: Is that Naomi? No one was familiar with Ruth, but everyone in the small city knew the distinguished Naomi. At this stage, however, she had not only aged physically, but her dress and her appearance had changed, as the vicissitudes of life had left their scars.

20 She said to them: Do not call me Naomi, meaning pleasant [no’am], as I have not had any pleasantness in my life; rather, call me Bitterness [Mara]. This name is more appropriate, as the Almighty has greatly embittered me and brought much bitterness and suffering upon me.

family as well. The prominent status of these women is consistent with the supposition that Elimelekh and his family did not come to Moav as beggars, but rather as distinguished individuals, and that they traveled there in order to live in an honorable fashion (see Rashi, verse 2; Targum; Ruth Rabba 2; Nazir 23b).

1:15 Returned to her people and to her god: The marriage of Orpa and Ruth to men from Judah would likely have included their acceptance of the commandments of the Torah. Although it is unknown whether any sort of ceremony was performed to mark the occasion, foreign women who married into an Israelite household accepted upon themselves the
the service of God. Even though the process of conversion is ordinarily administered by the court, it is possible that a would-be convert who fulfills the Torah in its entirety may be considered Jewish even without explicit action by a court (see Yevamot 45b). With regard to Orpa, although she had joined the Israelite nation to a limited extent, when her connection was terminated against her will by the death of her husband, she returned home and once again resumed the status of a Moavite who worshipped the Moavite gods (see Alsheikh; Ruth Rabba 2:21; Rambam, Hilkhot Issurei Bia 13:15–17).

1:16 | Your people is my people, and your God my God:

The relationship between Ruth and Naomi began with Ruth's marriage to Mahlon, but over the years Ruth had fully adopted her new family's way of life. For this reason, she serves as a model convert for future generations. Her attachment to God, the Israelite people, and its ways of life has become a symbol of the experience of a true convert.

He or she must feel that the conversion is not temporary, and that it does not depend on location or convenience. Rather, the change of status must be due to total identification with Israel. The transformation that Ruth underwent led her to deny any further connection to her homeland and her past. As far as she was concerned, she had been born anew as a daughter to Naomi. Although there was no longer any formal familial relationship between them, the two remained extremely close.
21 I went full, with a husband, children, and possessions, and the Lord returned me empty, with nothing; why would you call me Naomi, and the Lord has testified against me and rebuked me for my sins; alternatively, He has warned me and the Almighty has harmed me?

22 Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moavite, her daughter-in-law, was with her, who returned from the fields of Moav; they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest, the period after the festival of Passover, when barley is first reaped. Thus, it was relatively easy to find food during this time of the year.

Ruth’s First Visit to the Field of Boaz

RUTH 2:1–23

1 Naomi had an acquaintance of her husband, who was a mighty man of valor, prominent in stature, from the family of Elimelekh, and his name was Boaz.

2 Ruth the Moavite said to Naomi: Let me now go to the field, and glean among the stalks of grain, in accordance with the common practice of the poor, which Ruth had apparently not noticed, following anyone in whose eyes I find favor. I will go to the field of someone in whose eyes I find favor and who will allow me to glean there. Although the Torah requires the owner of a field to leave gleanings of his harvest for the destitute, in practice not every landowner welcomed the poor graciously. Some were concerned that the poor might distract the reapers from their work, while others suspected them of dishonesty, and there might even have been some individuals who did not wish to interact with or assist others at all. She, Naomi, said to her: Go, my daughter.

3 She went, and came, and gleaned the stalks that had fallen or had not been harvested in the field after the reapers; it happened for her that it was the tract of land belonging to Boaz, who was from the family of Elimelekh, without prior knowledge of the landowner’s identity.

4 Behold, at that time Boaz came from Bethlehem to his field outside the city, presumably in order to supervise the harvest. And Boaz said to the reapers a greeting in the form of a blessing: The Lord be with you and assist you. They said to him: The Lord bless you.

5 Boaz said to his lad set over the reapers to ensure that the harvest was performed properly: Whose young woman is this? With whom is she associated? Bethlehem was not a large city, and Boaz, one of the long-standing residents of the city, was surprised to see a young woman whom he did not recognize.
2:1 | **Boaz:** Little is related about Boaz in the book of Ruth itself, although his high social status is evident from the narrative, and his noble lineage appears at the conclusion of the book. Some Sages identify him with the judge Ivtzan of Bethlehem (see *Bava Batra* 91a; *Ruth Rabba* 3:6; Judges 12:8–10, and Radak ad loc.). Furthermore, the book later indicates that he was one of the judges of the city, perhaps even the most senior of them (see 4:1–2, and Ralbag ad loc.).

2:2 | **And glean among the stalks of grain:** The Torah commands the owner of land to give gifts to the poor from his field: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not finish reaping the corner of your field, and the gleanings of your harvest you shall not gather. Your vineyard you shall not harvest completely, and the fallen fruit of your vineyard you shall not gather; for the poor and for the stranger you shall leave them” (Leviticus 19:9–10; see also Leviticus 23:22). According to this commandment, the farmer and his workers must leave the stalks that fall during the time of harvest for the poor. Furthermore, the commandment of forgotten produce (Deuteronomy 24:19) requires a harvester who forgot grain or other crops in the field, whether harvested or not harvested, to leave them there for the needy, rather than returning and taking them for himself. Although there was no centrally organized government in the period of the judges to enforce the Torah, many of the commandments of the Torah were transmitted by tradition and observed. The book of Ruth teaches that at that time the poor did in fact benefit from these philanthropic commandments.

2:4 | **The Lord be with you... The Lord bless you:** Boaz likely did not create this formulation; rather, it was already an accepted greeting, as it appears elsewhere as well (see Judges 6:12; *Berakhot* 63a).
and it, and he,
And she beat a meal Boaz, and came to the city, and her
22 And
You have encouraged me and treated me in a special manner, that I have found favor in your eyes; She said: May I find favor in your eyes, my lord. Boaz understood that Ruth had not converted for merely social or financial reasons, and that she did not come to the Land of Israel just in order to accompany her mother-in-law. Rather, she wished to be close to God. She said: May I find favor in your eyes, my lord. I am grateful that I have found favor in your eyes, for you have comforted me, for you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant. You have encouraged me and treated me in a special manner, though I am not worthy even of a status as one of your maidservants.
Boaz said to her sometime later, at meal-time, when the reapers gathered to sit and eat: Come over here, and eat from the bread shared by the reapers, and dip your piece in the vinegar that is used as a sauce for the bread. She sat beside the reapers, not mingling with them, and he, Boaz, handed her kernels of roasted grain. Some of the starch inside of these kernels is converted to sugar when heated, and the slightly sweet roasted kernels were considered a delicacy. And she ate and was satisfied, and left over. Boaz had given her a sizable portion, which was more than enough to satisfy her.
She rose to glean, and Boaz commanded his lads, saying: You must allow her to glean without voicing any objections; she is permitted to glean in the field not only after you have removed the bound-together sheaves of harvested grain, but let her glean among the sheaves as well, and do not shame her. She fell on her face and prostrated herself to the ground; She is permitted to glean in the field not only after you have removed the bound-together sheaves of harvested grain, but let her glean among the sheaves as well, and do not shame her.
She gleaned in the field until evening. Since Ruth had been given a comfortable place to rest, perhaps in the shade near the reapers, and provided with food and drink, she did not need to return home in the middle of the day. And she beat out that which she had gleaned, in order to separate the kernels of grain from the stalks, and it was approximately an ephah of barley, a sizable dry measure equivalent to roughly 24 L. She took it up, and Boaz commanded his lads, saying: You must allow her to glean without voicing any objections; she is permitted to glean in the field not only after you have removed the bound-together sheaves of harvested grain, but let her glean among the sheaves as well, and do not shame her. She is permitted to glean in the field not only after you have removed the bound-together sheaves of harvested grain, but let her glean among the sheaves as well, and do not shame her.
She took it up, the barley, and came to the city, and her mother-in-law saw that which she had gleaned, and the identity of the man with whom she worked, and said: The name of the man, the owner of the field, with whom I worked today is Boaz. Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: Blessed be he to the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and to the dead. Boaz had maintained close ties with the family when Naomi’s husband and sons were still alive, and he was now honoring their memory by helping Naomi and Ruth.
In the vinegar: In ancient times, vinegar was considered to have cooling features, and it would be used on hot days. This notion appears both in ancient scientific documents, such as Pliny’s encyclopedia, Natural History (first century CE), and in statements of the Sages in reference to this verse: It is derived from here that vinegar is beneficial in hot weather (Shabbat 113b; Pesikta Zutreta, Ruth 2:14).

but the man is also related to us, he is among our redeemers [go'aleinu]. When someone becomes poor and is forced to sell his field, a relative may redeem the field from the buyer if he can afford to do so. Although some Sages maintain that it is obligatory for such a relative to do so, the halakha is that it is optional. This purchase is called the redemption [ge’ula] of the field, and every relative is considered a potential redeemer [go’el].
21 In keeping with Naomi’s excitement and the praises she had bestowed upon Boaz, Ruth the Moavite said in the same vein: Indeed, he said to me: You shall attach yourself to my lads and continue glean ing with them, until they complete my entire harvest.

22 Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law: Since Boaz is treating you so well, my daughter, it is better that you go out with his young women and remain in his field, that you not be accosted in another field.

23 She attached herself to Boaz’s young women to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest. The barley harvest begins in the spring and lasts for some seven weeks. It is followed by the wheat harvest, which generally starts at around the time of Shavuot, which is called the Festival of the First Fruits of the wheat harvest. This harvest concludes approximately three months after the start of the barley harvest.

And she lived with her mother-in-law. During that entire period, Ruth would glean in the field and bring the grain home to her mother-in-law.

Ruth’s Descent to the Threshing Floor
RUTH 3:1–18

In this section, Ruth meets Boaz under different circumstances and for a very different purpose. In contrast to her daily, public visits to his field during the harvest season, this encounter occurs at night when Ruth comes alone to the threshing floor. Whereas Ruth arrived in the field to glean in order to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, she now goes, at Naomi’s initiative, to the threshing floor in order to find a permanent solution for their plight. Naomi’s motive for this stems not only from her role as mother-in-law but also as Ruth’s teacher and mentor, and from her sense of responsibility for Ruth’s future.

1 Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her: My daughter, do I not seek repose for you, so that it may be well for you? You are currently living in a temporary manner; I wish to find a more permanent arrangement for you. Naomi had expressed a similar wish while they were still in Moav (see 1:9).

2 Now, isn’t Boaz our acquaintance and friend, that you were with his young women? Behold, he is winnowing the barley threshing floor tonight. Boaz was not married at that time; some maintain that he was a widower. Naomi sought to arrange a match between him and Ruth.

3 Bathe, anoint yourself with oil in order to enhance your appearance, place your most attractive garment upon you, and descend to the threshing floor; do not make yourself known to the man. Hide in the threshing floor so that Boaz will not discover you until he finishes eating and drinking.

4 It shall be that when he lies down to sleep on the threshing floor that night, in order to guard the grain, or perhaps because he wishes to resume work early in the morning, you shall know the place where he lies, and you shall come and uncover his feet. Even in the summer the evenings in the Judean hills are not particularly hot, and therefore Boaz’s feet would be covered. And lie down near his feet. He will tell you what you shall do. Allow him to proceed in whatever manner he sees fit. Through this unusual act, which is direct and authentic, but at the same time discreet and non-binding, Ruth will issue an unconventional proposition: A request for Boaz’s full protection, which means that in essence she is asking him to marry her.

Discussion
3:3 | Place your garment upon you: The Sages explain that this is referring to the fine garments that are worn on the Sabbath (Ruth Rabba 5:12).
3:2 | **Winnowing:** After barley was gathered in the threshing floor, it was threshed in order to separate the kernels from the stalks, either by beating it with flails or by having an animal tread on it on a hard surface. The kernels were then winnowed in order to separate the grain from the husks by tossing it in the air with a shovel or a fork when there is a wind. The heavier grain fell back down while the husks, called chaff, blew away. Winnowing was usually performed in the late afternoon, evening, or early morning hours, when there is often a breeze in many parts of Israel.

**The threshing floor:** This was a public area that was exposed to the air and the wind, where the harvested grain was threshed and winnowed.
8 It was midnight, and the man was startled and recoiled in confusion, as he had gone to sleep alone, and now he suddenly discerned the presence of another person; behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

9 He said in complete surprise: Who are you? She said: I am Ruth, your maidservant, whom you know; spread the corner of your garment, your patronage, over your maidservant, and take me as your wife, for you are a redeemer. Owing to your familial ties to Naomi, you are also related to me, as I am her son’s widow. Naomi had presumably explained to Ruth the significance of this type of redemption as practiced among the Israelites.

10 He said: Blessed be you to the Lord, my daughter; your latter kindness, when you chose to marry a relative of your deceased husband, is greater than the former, when you left your land and accompanied your mother-in-law; in not going after the lads, whether poor or rich. Had you sought to marry merely in order to reestablish your own life, you would have chosen a young man, closer in age to yourself. By selecting me, a man who is far older than you, because of my formal status as a redeemer, you have revealed the purity of your intentions.

11 Now, my daughter, do not fear, everything that you say I will do for you, for everyone who is found at the gate of my people, the important men of the city, knows that you are a woman of valor, an unusual personality and an exceptional person. The term ‘eshet hayil here parallels the phrase “mighty man of valor” that appeared earlier in reference to Boaz (2:1). It also features as a general expression of praise in the book of Proverbs, which was written by King Solomon, a descendant of Ruth and Boaz.

12 Now it is true that I am a redeemer, as I am part of the family; however, there is a redeemer who is closer than I, and the proper order must be maintained with regard to these matters.

The Redemption of the Field and the Redemption of Ruth

RUTH 4:1–12

Boaz wants to marry Ruth, but he first has to deal with a formal limitation: According to the laws of inheritance and monetary rights, there is another individual who has a closer familial relationship to Elimelekh. Consequently, the right to redeem Naomi’s field and to marry Ruth as a wife belongs to him. For this reason Ruth has not yet received a definite answer from Boaz with regard to her future. The response has to be given the next day in public, after a conversation with the other potential redeemer. The section concludes with the confirmation of the legal action, and with a blessing from the elders and the residents of the city to Boaz on the occasion of his marriage to Ruth.

4 Boaz did not postpone the matter of the redemption. Boaz went up to the gate, the place of judgment, where the dignitaries of the city were present, and sat there, and behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken was passing. He, Boaz, said: Turn aside from wherever you are going and enter, sit here, So-and-So. He turned aside and he sat. The redeemer’s name is not stated here, either because it is not known, or because he acted inappropriately by refusing the redemption.

2 He, Boaz, took ten men of the elders of the city, and said: Sit here to serve as judges; and they sat down.
The gate: The city gate was the center of communal life. Archaeological evidence and various passages from the Bible indicate that the actual structure of the gate, as well as the adjacent area, was used for legal trials (see Genesis 23:10; Deuteronomy 21:19, 22:24; Joshua 20:4; Amos 5:15). In addition, the gate was a place for the sacrificial rites of the shrines, sometimes called “high places,” which were eventually prohibited (II Kings 23:8), as well as economic transactions, announcements, public rebukes (Jeremiah 17:19, 19:2; Amos 5:10), and special gatherings of the people (Nehemiah 8:1). In several ancient cities that have been subject to archaeological research, communal structures unearthed close to the gate might also have been part of this complex. Due to the centrality of the gate, the expression “the gate of the city” sometimes refers to the entire city (see, e.g., Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 15:7, 23:17; I Kings 8:37).

Your latter kindness is greater than the former: The biblical commandment of levirate marriage applies to the brother of a married man who died childless. The Torah commands that the living brother should marry the widow, so that the children who will be born to them will continue the name of the deceased (see Deuteronomy 25:5). This chapter is not referring to a standard levirate marriage, as neither Boaz nor the anonymous man discussed below (verse 12) were Ruth’s brothers-in-law. Rather, it is speaking of an analogous type of redemption based on a more distant relationship.
He said to the redeemer: Regarding the tract of land that belonged to our brother, to Elimelekh, Naomi, who has returned from the fields of Moav, is selling, that is, she has put up the land for sale. Naomi and Ruth could not work the field alone, and the money from the sale would help sustain them financially.

I said: I will inform you, saying: Acquire before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you have not heard about it, I hereby inform you that the field is for sale, and you may purchase it officially in a public manner before all those who sit here. If you would redeem, redeem, as you have the first right to do so. But if you will not redeem, tell me, and I will know. For there is no one besides you to redeem, and I am after you. According to the laws of redemption, there is no other potential redeemer in the family apart from myself. If you refuse to redeem it, I will purchase it instead. He, the man, said: I will redeem it, by purchasing it.

5 The anonymous redeemer agreed to purchase the field belonging to the family of his relatives, but he did not realize that whoever redeems the field must also marry the young surviving widow, and thereby preserve the family by having more children. This is not a biblical obligation, as according to Torah law the redemption of an inheritance of a relative is not automatically accompanied by the obligation to marry his widow. Nevertheless, the practice was that anyone who takes over the inheritance of a relative must also marry his wife, similar to levirate marriage.

6 Boaz said: On the day of your acquisition of the field from the hand of Naomi, and from Ruth the Moavite, you acquire the wife of the dead; the practice of redemption includes marrying her in order to perpetuate the name of the dead upon his inheritance. By marrying the widow of the deceased childless husband and fathering children with her, the name of the deceased will be perpetuated.

7 This was the tradition in Israel, in the ancient past, concerning redemption of fields and concerning exchange of goods, in order to validate any matter: A man removed his shoe, and he gave it to another; that action of removing one's shoe was the testament in Israel. It was a symbolic expression of the completion of a transaction.

8 The redeemer said to Boaz: Acquire it for yourself; I waive my right to the purchase; and he removed his shoe, to indicate that he was prepared to validate the arrangement.

9 Boaz said to the elders and to all the people: You are witnesses this day that I have acquired everything that was Elimelekh's and everything that was Kilyon's and Mahlon's from the hand of Naomi.

10 And Ruth the Moavite, wife of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife, similar to the levirate marriage discussed in the Torah. Here too my intention is to perpetuate the name of the dead upon his inheritance, both by buying his field as well as through the descendants of his widow, and thus the name of the dead will not be eliminated from among his brethren and from the gate of his place. Any children from the match will be named after the deceased, and in this manner his existence will be continued in this world in a certain sense. You are witnesses today. Boaz thereby invited the elders and the people to validate the proceedings.

11 All the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said: We are witnesses, and we all affirm your statement. Since Boaz intended to marry Ruth, they also blessed him: May the Lord grant that the woman who is coming into your house be like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel. Prosper in Efrat, and proclaim a name in Bethlehem. Some explain that the last phrase means that you should merit...
curse you” (Deuteronomy 23:4–5). The Oral Law teaches that this prohibition applies only to Moavite men, not women. This halakha was not well known at the time, and was not accepted in practice on a regular basis (see Yevamot 77a).

The redeemer's refusal to marry Ruth may have been out of his misunderstanding of this law (see Ruth Rabba 7:10).

Like the house of Peretz whom Tamar bore to Judah: Although Peretz was not Judah's firstborn, the sons of Tamar continued the legacy of Judah, and the leaders of the tribe of Judah came from this lineage for many generations. The mention of Tamar and Judah in the people's blessing highlights the similarity between the match of Ruth and Boaz and that story. Just as the marriage of Boaz to Ruth did not involve a simple case of levirate marriage, Judah and Tamar's relationship was also not a standard levirate marriage, as Judah was the father, not the brother, of the deceased.

There are other dimensions to this comparison to Judah and Tamar. In both stories, pure God-fearing women are placed in difficult circumstances, and they must devise unusual plans of action that breach the standard norms in order to maintain their ties to the family of Judah. Ultimately, both Tamar and Ruth successfully build the future royal family of David (see Alsheikh; Malbim).

Discussion for Ruth 4:12

May your house be like the house of Peretz, your ancestor, whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the descendants that the Lord will give you from this young woman.

offspring from this marriage in Bethlehem, which was near Efrata, or the very same place (see 1:2).
The hopes that have been placed upon Ruth and Boaz and the blessings bestowed upon them indeed come to pass. Naomi is not abandoned either, as the son born to Ruth is considered a redeemer for her as well. His birth preserves the name of her deceased son, and in her old age she helps to raise the child and serves as a kind of mother and nurse for him.

13 Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he consort- ed with her, and the Lord granted her pregnancy, and she bore a son.

14 Following the birth of a son to Ruth, the women said to Naomi: Blessed be the Lord, who did not leave you today without a redeemer. He is considered the heir of your deceased son, as he preserves his memory and existence in this world, like the child born from a levirate marriage. In this manner, he redeems you, as though you had given birth to an additional son. And let his name be called in Israel. Now your family lineage will be continued.

15 Furthermore, may he be for you a restorer of life merely by virtue of his existence, and one to sustain your old age. When he grows up and you grow old, you can rely upon him to care for you. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better for you than seven sons, bore him.

16 Naomi took the child, and she placed him in her bosom, despite the lack of any direct blood relationship between her and the boy, and was a nurse for him. She felt an unusual affinity to this boy for two reasons: First, he carried her deceased son’s legacy, and in a certain sense, his very existence. Second, he was the son of Ruth, who was like a daughter to her, and perhaps even closer than that, as Naomi considered Ruth her successor.55

17 In fact, Naomi was treated as the mother of the child by those in her immediate surroundings. The women neighbors called him a name, saying: A son is born to Naomi.56 They called his name Oved; he is the father of Yishai, who was the father of David.

The Lineage of the House of David

18 These are the generations of the family of Peretz: Peretz begot Hetzron;

19 and Hetzron begot Ram, and Ram begot Aminadav;

20 and Aminadav begot Nahshon, the prince of the tribe of Judah at the time of the exodus from Egypt, and Nahshon begot Salmon;

21 and Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Oved;

22 and Oved begot Yishai, and Yishai begot David.55
And the Lord granted her pregnancy, and she bore: This conception occurred with divine assistance. After all, Ruth was previously married to a man younger than Boaz, yet did not bear him any children. According to the Sages, this event was especially miraculous, as they state that Boaz passed away on the night after Ruth became pregnant (see Alsheikh; Malbim; Midrash Ruth Zuta 4).

And she bore a son: The narrative involving Ruth concludes here. Nothing is stated about the remainder of her life. However, the Sages say that she lived to a very old age, and merited to see not only King David, her grandson, but also his son, King Solomon (Bava Batra 91b).

And Yishai begot David: It is unclear whether this is a complete family lineage covering every generation, as many years separate the generation of Peretz from that of David. If this is in fact a full list, each of the individuals mentioned here must have lived to a very old age and fathered children very late in life (see Ibn Ezra; Yalkut Shimoni; Bereshit Rabba 96:4; Ramban, Genesis 46:15). It is more plausible that certain individuals of lesser importance were omitted from this list (see Ibn Ezra; Yalkut Shimoni; commentary on I Chronicles 2:51).
Notes

1. Psalms 118:22.
2. Rashi; see also Rashi, Ezra 2:2; Midrash Tanhumot, Shemini 9.
4. See Rashi’s second interpretation; commentary on I Samuel 17:12.
6. See commentary on Song of Songs 5:4.
7. See Ruth Rabbah 2:15.
8. Rashi; Ibn Ezra.
10. Ibn Ezra.
11. Rashi.
12. Rashi.
13. Rashi; Ibn Ezra.
14. See Rashi.
15. Rav Yosef Kara.
16. See Ibn Ezra; Gra; Malbim.
17. See Malbim.
19. See Rashi; Ibn Ezra.
20. See Rav Yosef Kara; Ralbag; Malbim.
21. See Rashi; Rashbam, Exodus 3:5.
22. See Gra; Malbim.
25. See Rambam, Hilkhot Shemitta 11:18; Rashi and Rav Yeshaya of Trani on 3:9.
27. Ruth Rabbah 5:11.
28. See Ketubot 7a.
29. See Ibn Ezra; Malbim.
30. See Alshekh; Malbim.
31. See Ibn Ezra; Ralbag.
32. Rashi.
33. See Rashi.
34. See Malbim; Ruth Rabbah 6:2.
35. See Alshekh.
36. See Proverbs 12:4; 31:10.
37. See Kiddushin 21a.
38. Ibn Ezra; Bekhor Shor.
40. See Rashi; Ralbag; Malbim; Ruth Rabbah 6:4.
41. See Rashi.
42. See Pesikta Zutreta; Rav Yeshaya of Trani; Malbim.
43. See Pesikta Zutreta; Malbim.
44. See Malbim.
45. Rashi; Rabbi Yosef Caspi; see commentary on Ruth 3:13.
46. See Malbim; Ramban, Leviticus 25:33.
47. See Targum; Rav Yeshaya of Trani, 3:9; Ramban, Genesis 38:9.
48. Rashi.
49. See Ibn Ezra; Rav Yeshaya of Trani.
50. See Rashi; Ibn Ezra; Bava Metzia 47a.
52. See Rashi; Bekhor Shor; Ralbag on I Chronicles 10:13; Deuteronomy 25:6, and Ramban ad loc.
53. Rav Yosef Kara; see Alshekh.
54. See Rashi.
55. See Alshekh.
56. See Sanhedrin 19b.
57. See Numbers 1:7.