

Ruth 4

Overview

In Ruth 4, Boaz goes to the city gate, where city business was transacted. While the word “gate” does not appear before this point in Ruth, it would have been where Naomi first encountered her old friends in Ruth 1. The allusion to the gate, Naomi’s dialog with the women of the town, and the details on the end of one family and the beginning of another make this chapter a fitting conclusion to the events that began in chapter 1 (Figure 1).

1-12, Boaz and the Elders

1 Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: *Figure 1: Lau's Analysis of Ruth (modified)*
 —The gate was important for two reasons. First, everyone had to pass through it on their way to the fields in the morning, or on their way home in the evening, so it was a good place to wait for a desired person. Second, it was the usual place for the elders to conduct city business. Here criminals were brought for trial (chart):

Deu 21:18 If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: 19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and **unto the gate of his place**; 20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. 21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

It was where a groom complained about deception in a marriage contract:

Deu 22:15 Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto **the elders of the city in the gate**:

After David mourned for Absalom, it is where he resumed his royal duties:

2Sa 19:8 Then the king arose, and **sat in the gate**. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth **sit in the gate**. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

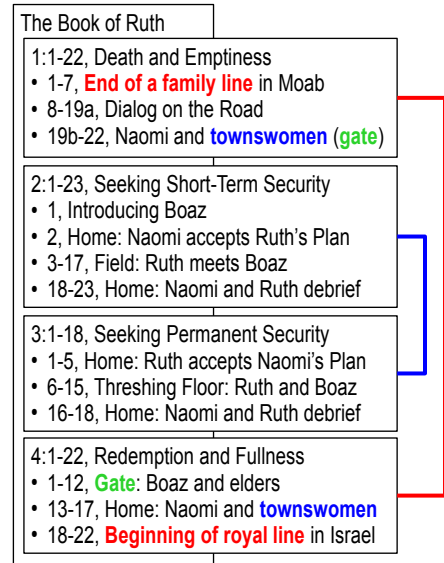
It is where commercial disagreements were settled:

Pro 22:22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted **in the gate**: 23 For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Generally, it is where justice was administered:

Amo 5:15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment **in the gate**: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

The gate was attractive for such purposes for at least two reasons: it offered protection from the sun, and everyone had to go through it to enter or leave the city. A typical city gate consisted of



multiple doors, one after another, with space between them where defenders could lie in wait. An enemy who breached the first door would be facing defenders, and another door to attack.

Archaeological remains from the OT period at numerous sites, including Shechem, Hatzor, BeerSheba, and Megiddo (Figure 2, chart), show this structure. The remaining foundations show the piers from which

doors were hung, and the spaces between them. The walls would have extended from these piers to an overhead ceiling, making several enclosed rooms.

The verse begins, “Boaz went up to the gate.” We saw in 3:3, 6 that the threshing floor was lower than the town, so Boaz apparently goes directly from the threshing floor to the gate, verifying Naomi’s intuition of 3:18 that he would not rest until he dealt with the matter.

and, behold, the kinsman *goʔel* of whom Boaz spake came by;— Kinsman” is *goʔel*. This is the nearer redeemer of whom Boaz told Ruth in 3:12.

unto whom he said, Ho, such a one!—The Hebrew expression is used to conceal the name of a person or place (1 Sam 21:3; 2 Ki 6:8). The phrase is literally, “Pelsoni Almoni,” where the first word is derived from the root describing something that is mysterious or unknown, and the second from the root describing dumbness, the inability to speak. Thus it describes a person or place whose name is unknown and cannot be spoken. We might use the expression “so and so,” or “John Doe.”

Throughout the book, the narrator has been careful to give us the names of the characters. Boaz certainly knew the man’s name, but the narrator deliberately conceals it. We’ll see why in 4:6.

turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.—The individual chambers of the gate were often furnished with benches, where the elders would sit.¹

3 And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land,² which was our brother Elimelech's: 4 And I **אני thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If**



Figure 2: Gatehouse foundations. From upper-left clockwise: Shechem, Hatzor, Megiddo, BeerSheba. Note bench in the BeerSheba gate. Photos by Van and Anita Parunak, 1974-1975

1 https://madainproject.com/tel_beersheva_gate#gallery-6 offers a clear picture of such benches at Beersheba.

thou wilt redeem $\sqrt{g\text{?l}}$ it, redeem $\sqrt{g\text{?l}}$ it: but if thou wilt not redeem $\sqrt{g\text{?l}}$ it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem $\sqrt{g\text{?l}}$ it beside thee; and I אֲנִי am after thee.—

An interesting alternation in 1ps pronouns reflects the spirit of oriental bargaining.³ Boaz begins with the peer form אֲנִי, but after acknowledging the priority of the near kinsman, he switches to the deferential form אֲנִי. This heightened sense of politeness in bargaining is seen also in Abraham's negotiations for the cave of Machpelah in Genesis 23. There as here, the purchaser comes with the deferential form of the pronoun (Gen 23:4), and the buyer offers to give the cave away. But this is the cultural expectation; in fact, Boaz will show himself a clever and determined bargainer.

As described in Lev 25:25, the redeemer stepped in to recover property that an impoverished relative had sold out of the family. But this text suggests that the redeemer could also intervene to purchase the property in the first place, before another family became involved. This form of the transaction has a close parallel in Jeremiah 32 (chart).

Jer 32:6 And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 7 Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption $\sqrt{g\text{?l}}$ is thine to buy it. 8 So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for **the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine;** buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. 9 And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. 10 And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.

His cousin needs to sell a family field. To keep it from passing out of the family, a close relative must redeem it, and Jeremiah is called upon to provide this service. In Jeremiah, as here, the right of redemption is closely linked to the right of inheritance. In both cases, the person taking on the responsibility must be a “near” relative.

Here, centuries earlier, the same situation arises, and Boaz and his relative are discussing who will take responsibility for keeping the property in the family.

And he said, I will redeem it.—The near kinsman responds courteously, using the deferential form of the pronoun “I.” He does not grasp jealously at the opportunity, but expresses appreciation for Boaz's recognition of his prior position. His courtesy, like that of Ephron the Hittite to Abraham in Genesis 23 (in offering the cave for free), is the expected conduct in this culture, and may not reflect his deep interest in the property.

5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead,—But there is a complication. Naomi is acting as trustee for Ruth. The fact that Naomi has title to the field shows that a wife could inherit her husband's property.

to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.—This clause reminds us initially of the law of levirate marriage:

2 The exact nature of the transaction is a matter of discussion. Lipinski (TDOT *mkr*; VT 26:1,1976, 124-127) argues that the verb *mkr* deals not with transfer of property, but of the right to *redeem* property. See Bush for extensive survey.

3 We follow the analysis of Revell in Journal of Semitic Studies XL/2 Autumn 1995 199ff.

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Deu 25:5 If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. 6 And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth **shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.**

But this is not levirate marriage, because Boaz was not the brother of Mahlon. Note the different purposes of preserving the name in the two cases. In Levirate marriage, it is maintaining the family continuity, but here, it is to associate the property with Mahlon's family. One focuses on people, the other on property. And in fact, in 4:18, the genealogy of David is reckoned, not through Elimelech and Mahlon, but through Boaz:

Ruth 4:21 And Salmon begat **Boaz**, and **Boaz** begat Obed, 22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

6 And the kinsman *goʻz̄l* said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.—Figure 3 (chart) illustrates the impact of Ruth on the reasoning of the other redeemer. John Doe must divert some of his initial wealth (say, \$2k out of \$10k) to purchase the field. If he does not marry Ruth, the full \$10k still passes to his own sons by his current wife, and the rest as Naomi's field, which is now his.

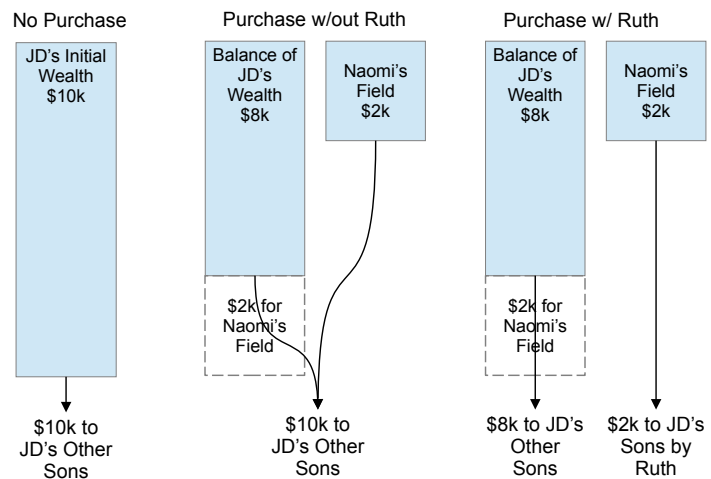


Figure 3: How Ruth Mars John Doe's Inheritance

But if he does marry Ruth, he is purchasing the field only to hold it in trust for his sons by Ruth, and be associated with the name of Elimelech. John Doe wants his name to be associated with all of his estate, and so is unwilling to redeem the property.

We have been calling the nearer redeemer “John Doe,” because in 4:1 the narrator, who has been very careful to record the names of the other characters in the story, has concealed it. Now we see why. He has refused to redeem Naomi's field in order to keep his own name attached to his property, and now his name is forgotten entirely.

7 Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. 8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.—Some Bible students attempt to align this transaction with the shoe with that in the case of the levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25 (chart):

Deu 25:7 And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her; 9 Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe

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from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. 10 And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed.

But the details differ (Table 1). The right to property is often demonstrated in Scripture by walking over it. God commands Abraham,

Gen 13:17 Arise, **walk through the land** in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

	Deut 25	Ruth 4
Who brings the case to the elders?	The widow	Boaz (Ruth and Naomi are absent)
Who takes off the shoe?	The widow	The near kinsman
Is shame imputed?	Yes (spitting)	No

Table 1: Two different shoe ceremonies

And he promises Israel, on their return from Egypt,

Dt 11:24 Every place **whereon the soles of your feet shall tread** shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.

Jos 1:3 Every place **that the sole of your foot shall tread upon**, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

The figure is part of his specific promise to Caleb:

Dt 1:35 Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swear to give unto your fathers, 36 Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land **that he hath trodden upon**, and to his children

Jos 14:9 And Moses swear on that day, saying, Surely **the land whereon thy feet have trodden** shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God.

So it would certainly be appropriate for the sandal to represent the right to the property.

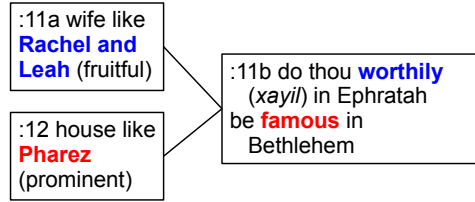
9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought [acquired] all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.—Now Boaz summarizes the details of the transaction. He is acquiring the rights to all the property of the family of Elimelech.

10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased [acquired] to be my wife, 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, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.—As in 4:5, he intends to keep Mahlon's name associated with the property, but the response of the people shows that they distinguish this from maintaining the family line.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses.—They agree with what Boaz has said about the property.

They next proceed to pray for God's blessing on "thine house," through Ruth. They certainly do not understand the marriage as levirate: Ruth is building up the house of Boaz, not that of Mahlon or Elimelech. This blessing by the men of the city to Boaz is balanced in 4:13-17 by a blessing from the women of Bethlehem to Naomi.

Their blessing has three components. The first and third compare the marriage of Boaz and Ruth with that of Jacob and his wives, and of Judah and Tamar. The central blessing links these (Figure 4, chart).



The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel:—The first family comparison is with Jacob’s marriage to Rachel and Leah, in Genesis 29-30. This family was noted for giving rise to the twelve tribes of Israel, and the blessing suggests that Boaz will similarly have many offspring from Ruth.

Figure 4: 4:11b as summary of the elders' blessings

Let’s consider next the third blessing, which compares Boaz’s new family to that of Pharez.

12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.—Next they invoke the memory of Judah’s offspring from Tamar, in Genesis 38. This is the clan from which Boaz himself is descended (4:18). The tribe of Judah was represented by five clans, and three of them were Pharez and his sons, making Pharez the most prominent of the Judean clans (Figure 5):

Num 26:20 And the sons of Judah after their families were; of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites: of Pharez, the family of the Pharezites: of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites. 21 And the sons of Pharez were; of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites: of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites.

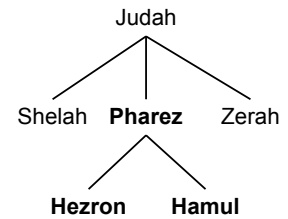


Figure 5: Prominence of Pharez in the tribe of Judah

The situation is analogous to that of Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, whose sons Ephraim and Manasseh were elevated to the status of tribes along with the other eleven sons, thus giving Joseph a double portion.

The elders pray that Boaz’s descendants may be similarly prominent.

11b and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:—The central blessing can be seen as a summary of the outer two. “Worthily” חַיִּיל *xayil* H2428 is the word for wealth and power which introduced Boaz:

Ruth 2:1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of **wealth**, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

By fathering a large family, Boaz would “do worthily.” And in being like Perez, he would become famous.

13-17, The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.—The Lord’s agency is evident in two ways. First, Ruth was unfruitful in her marriage to Mahlon, so there might be some question of whether she would produce a child with Boaz. Second, there is no reference to any other children of Boaz. Unless he was single (an exceptional condition in that culture), he and his wife had themselves been barren. Thus Ruth’s conception, like that of Sarah, and Rebekah, and Rachel, and many other biblical matriarchs, showed the Lord’s gracious intervention.

14 And the women said unto Naomi,—In the previous scene, the men pray for the Lord’s blessings on the new couple. Now the women of Bethlehem visit and bless Naomi (chart).

Blessed be the LORD,—The book began with Naomi’s heaped-up complaints, first to her daughters-in-law and then to the women of Bethlehem, against the Lord for his cruelty to her:

1:13 the hand of the LORD is **gone out against me**.

1:20 call [feminine] me Mara [bitter]: for the Almighty hath **dealt very bitterly** with me.

1:21a I went out full, and the LORD hath **brought me home again empty**:

1:21b why then call [feminine] ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath **testified against me**,

1:21c and the Almighty hath **afflicted me**?

The women have been out of the picture up to this point, but now they appear again, and their speech directly rebuts and rebukes her earlier disappointment. She complained against the Lord, but they bless him. Recall from our study of the Psalms that we *thank* God for his attributes, while *blessing* him for his gifts to us, and this is the force of their summary.

which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman *goʔel*,—Who is this redeemer? We think initially of Boaz, but “this day” suggests that the women have mind the child, who has just been born. And 4:15 identifies him with the baby whom Ruth has just borne.

Now they describe how this child is in fact a blessing from God.

that his name may be famous in Israel.—Literally, “his name shall be proclaimed in Israel.” This is the same blessing that the elders prayed for Boaz. Like the elders in the gate, the women desire that the offspring of Ruth and Boaz may become renowned. Naomi thought that the Lord had wiped out her family, but in fact her name will be associated with great fame.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer *מְשִׁיב* of thy life *נַפְשׁ*,—Naomi was on the verge of perishing—not only physically, for lack of food, but in a family sense, with her sons dead. Now her family will continue, through the baby.

and a nourisher *כֹּלֵל* *kalkēl* H3557 of thine old age:—The earliest instances of this verb in the OT, and ones that the women of Bethlehem ought to have known, are in Genesis, and describe Joseph’s care for his family in Egypt in a time of famine (chart). Joseph was careful to emphasize that God engineered this provision, and the book of Ruth similarly shows the Lord’s gracious care through apparent disaster.

Gen 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance: 8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. 9 Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: 10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: 11 And there will I **nourish** thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

Gen 47:12 And Joseph **nourished** his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.

Gen 50:19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day,

to save much people alive. 21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will **nourish** you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.—Not only has the Lord provided her with Obed as her redeemer, but he has also given her Ruth as a daughter in law more faithful than any son could be.

16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.—So Naomi undertakes the care of the child, as though it were her own flesh and blood.

Now we read two remarkable things about the women who are blessing Naomi.

17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name,—It's usually the parent who names the child. Abraham names Isaac in Gen 21:3; Rachel and Leah name their children in Genesis 29. But here the women of the town assume this privilege, almost as though the baby is not just the child of Boaz and Ruth, but of the entire city. It's not an accident that Israel's royal dynasty, which culminates in the Messiah, should be born in Bethlehem. The whole city claims Obed and his descendants.

saying, There is a son born to Naomi;—This is another remarkable expression. Typically, a child is born by the mother to the father: Enos is born to Seth (Gen 4:26), Isaac to Abraham (Gen 21:3); Rebekah to Bethuel (Gen 24:15). In considering the legal basis for the transaction in 4:1-12, we have distinguished between a levirate marriage, in which case the child would be deemed "born to" Mahlon, and the case here, where Obed is reckoned to be the son of Boaz. But the women encourage Naomi to think of the baby as her own child. The Lord has sent Obed to take the places of Mahlon and Chilion.

and they called his name Obed:—The name means "servant, worshipper," and is the basis of names like Obadiah (servant of Yahweh) or Obededom (servant of the god Edom). But here, the name may refer to the service that he will render to Naomi.

he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.—Both the elders and the women have expressed their wish that the new baby may become famous, and this prayer is fulfilled in the founding of the royal family.

18-21, A New Family

How could Ruth, a Moabitess, have Israelite children? (chart)

Deu 23:3 (MT 4) An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD **for ever:**

This verse must refer to men converts. Membership in the nation was passed by the father, and so Boaz's children would be reckoned as Israelites, though their mother was Moabite.

18 Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron, 19 And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, 20 And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, 21 And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, 22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.—It is interesting to compare this genealogy to Matthew 1:

Mat 1:3 ... and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; 4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; 5 And Salmon begat Booz **of**

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Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; 6 And Jesse begat David the king; ...

Note the addition: “Salmon begat Boaz *of Rachab*,” the harlot of Joshua 2. Boaz may have been open to marrying a non-Israelite because his (grand-)mother Rahab also was not Israelite. Because of these women, the Messiah was born with Gentile as well as Jewish DNA, and is the Savior of both Jew and Gentile.

Summary

It is always worthwhile to think back over a book and try to summarize it in a single sentence. Let's build up to it by chapters.

Chapter 1: After the death of a family in Moab, two women return to Bethlehem, an Israelite complaining about the Lord's faithlessness, and a Gentile clinging to him in faith.

Chapter 2: The Lord works through apparent accidents to guide Ruth to Boaz, who feeds her and Naomi.

Chapter 3: Boaz agrees to redeem and marry Ruth.

Chapter 4: The Lord restores Naomi and founds the line that leads to King David (and the Messiah).

Overall: The Lord restores an Israelite's faith and honors that of a Gentile by raising up a faithful redeemer and establishing the Messianic family.

Notes

Syntax of 4:5

וַיֹּאמֶר בַּעַז בְּיוֹם-קְנוֹתָהּ הַשְּׂדֵה מִיַּד נְעָמִי 4:5
וַיֵּמָּאֵת רוּת הַמוֹאָבִיָּה אֲשֶׁת-הַמֵּת קְנִיתִי [קְנִיתָהּ] לְהַקִּים שְׂם-הַמֵּת עַל-נַחֲלָתוֹ:

MT has *athnach* on נְעָמִי, breaking as indicated.

וַיֵּמָּאֵת gets lots of discussion, and there is a tendency to try to make Ruth the object of the second קנה, but Holmstedt persuasively notes other uses of this compound preposition with קנה: Gen 25:10; 49:30; 50:13; Lev 25:15; 27:24; Josh 24:32; 2 Sam 24:24; 1 Kgs 16:24, leading to the AV translation.

The main awkwardness of the AV is that the second קנה has no explicit object.