

אש מן-השמים  
*the heavenly fire*

*Ruth*  
רות



*David Colo*

אש מן־השמים

*the heavenly fire*

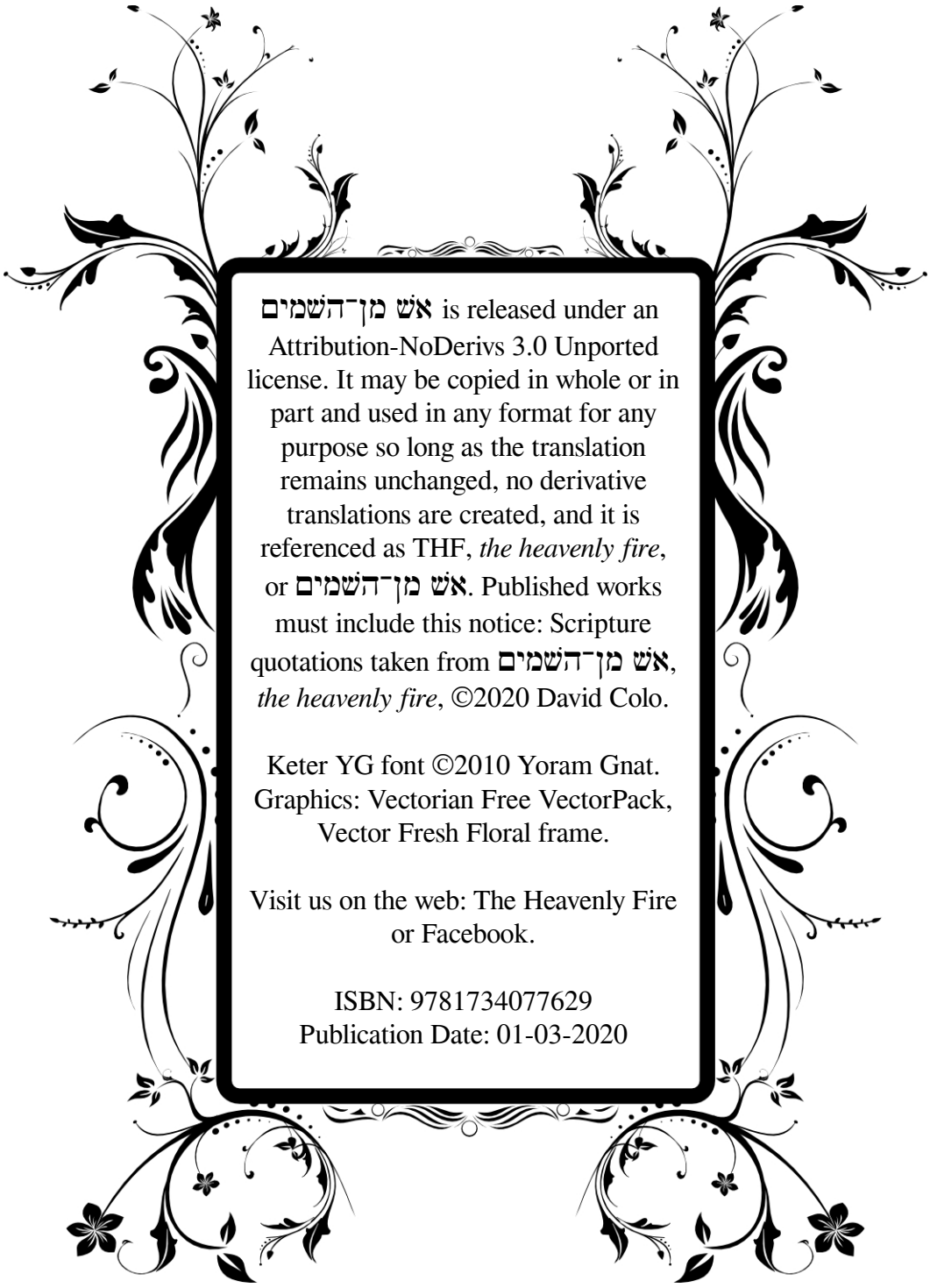
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ר' יהודה אומר המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בדאי  
והמוסיף עליו הרי זה מחרף ומגדף

Rabbi Judah says: “The one who translates a verse equivalent to its form—  
that person is a liar. But the one who adds to it—  
that person is a reviler and defiler.”

—*b. Kiddushin 49a*



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## Sigla and Abbreviations

## GENERAL

√	Verbal root
Ⲛ	Jacob ben Ḥayyim's printed compilation (Second Rabbinic Bible, 1524)
Ⲓ	Septuagint: Old Greek
Ⲓ <sup>A</sup>	Septuagint: Codex Alexandrinus
Ⲓ <sup>B</sup>	Septuagint: Codex Vaticanus
ⲙ <sup>A</sup>	Masoretic Text: Aleppo Codex (AD 920)
ⲙ <sup>L</sup>	Masoretic Text: Leningrad Codex (AD 1008)
Ⲥ	Syriac Peshitta
ⲡ	Targum of Ruth
ⲱ	Vulgate (Stuttgart)
α'	Aquila
σ'	Symmachus
b.	Babylonian Talmud tractate
1CS	first-person common singular
2FS	second-person feminine singular
2QRuth <sup>a</sup>	Ruth scroll from the Dead Sea (1 <sup>st</sup> century BC)
2QRuth <sup>b</sup>	Ruth scroll from the Dead Sea (1 <sup>st</sup> century AD)
3FS	third-person feminine singular
3MS	third-person masculine singular
4QEn <sup>c</sup> ar	Aramaic 1 <sup>st</sup> Enoch scroll from the Dead Sea
4QRuth <sup>a</sup>	Ruth scroll from the Dead Sea (1 <sup>st</sup> century BC)
4QRuth <sup>b</sup>	Ruth scroll from the Dead Sea (1 <sup>st</sup> century AD)
Ant.	Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews
BH	Biblical Hebrew
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll(s)
HB	Hebrew Bible
m.	Mishnah tractate
Mek.	<i>Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael</i>
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
NE	Near East
OT	Old Testament
O-V	Object-Verb
S-V	Subject-Verb
V-S-O	Verb-Subject-Object

## REFERENCE

AYB	The Anchor Yale Bible
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs's <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BHQ	<i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i>
CAL	Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project
COS	William H. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger's <i>The Context of Scripture</i>
De Rossi	<i>Variae Lectiones Veteris Testamenti</i>
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (28 <sup>th</sup> edition)
GLS	Takamitsu Muraoka's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i>
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner's <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
IBHS	Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor's <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i>
Jastrow	Marcus Jastrow's <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature</i>
JM	Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka's <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i>
Kennicott	Benjamin Kennicott's <i>Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum Variis Lectionibus</i>
KTU	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit: einschließlich der keilalphabetischen Texte außerhalb Ugarits. Teil 1, Transkription</i>
LEH	Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and K. Hauspie's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i>
LS	Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott's <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## TRANSLATIONS

AAT	J. M. Powis Smith's <i>The Old Testament: An American Translation</i> (1927)
Alter	Robert Alter's translation in <i>Strong as Death is Love</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
Bishops'	Bishops' Bible (1568)
Brenton	Lancelot C. L. Brenton's <i>The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament</i>
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
Fenton	Ferrar Fenton's <i>The Holy Bible In Modern English</i>
Geneva	Geneva Bible (1560)
GNB	Good News Bible
Goldingay	John Goldingay's <i>The First Testament</i> (2018)
GW	GOD'S WORD translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Bible (1917)
KJV	King James Version
Lamsa	George Lamsa's translation of the Aramaic Peshitta
LEB	Lexham English Bible
Leeser	Isaac Leeser's translation of the Hebrew Bible (1853)
Moffatt	<i>The Bible: James Moffatt Translation</i>
NAB	New American Bible (3 <sup>rd</sup> Edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1997)
NET	New English Translation (NET Bible), 1 <sup>st</sup> Edition
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPST	New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
Rotherham	Rotherham's <i>The Emphasized Bible</i> (1902)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SET	Stone Edition Tanach
TVB	The Voice Bible
YLT	Young's Literal Translation



## Preface

Scholars have long described Ruth<sup>1</sup> as a countryside idyll with characters full of purity, virtue, or charm. Paulus Cassel, writing in the mid-1800s, described the text as “a garden of roses, as fragrant and full of mystic calyxes, as those which the modern traveller [sic] still finds blooming and twining about the solitary ruins of Israel and Moab.”<sup>2</sup> At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Wolfenson offered a similar appraisal: “The atmosphere of the Book of Ruth is redolent of ripening corn, mown grain, and merry shouts of reapers as they gather the golden harvest. And so it has come about that the story of Ruth and Boaz has become typical of the restful quiet of country life and of harvest-time and plentiful crops.”<sup>3</sup> Even the great 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar Samuel R. Driver echoed these sentiments: “The narrative is told with much picturesque and graceful detail, and affords an idyllic glimpse of home life in ancient Israel.”<sup>4</sup> As for the main characters, Driver called them “amiable, God-fearing, courteous, unassuming.”<sup>5</sup> Such statements continue to appear through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into present times. In 1974, Robert Gordis opined: “In this charming tale, the tragedies of life are muted, being bathed in a gentle melancholy.”<sup>6</sup> Most recently, in his translation and commentary, Robert Alter said, “Unlike the narratives from Genesis to Kings, where even pastoral settings are riven with tensions and often punctuated by violence, the world of Ruth is a placid bucolic world” filled only with good, virtuous characters.<sup>7</sup> For multiple pages, Alter effuses praise upon the “charming” and “beguiling” quality of Ruth’s “harmonious world.”<sup>8</sup>

Virtually none of those statements are true. As is customary in Hebrew narrative, Ruth spends almost no time on atmosphere or the details of nature and, instead, proceeds by means of scenes composed entirely of dialogue. It is no wonder that Schipper would declare that “dialogue dominates in the book of Ruth” and that “Ruth’s narrator provides a very selective representation of the setting.”<sup>9</sup> As for the type of atmosphere described by the text, it does not,

1 It is important to note that when we speak of “Ruth,” we speak either of a canonical, textual entity to which we have direct access or the character described within that text, not any flesh-and-blood person in the ancient past to which we do not.

2 Paulus Cassel, *The Book of Ruth*. Translated by P. H. Steenstra. New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1872, pp. 3-4.

3 Louis Bernard Wolfenson, *The Book of Ruth: Introduction, Critically-Revised Text, Critical Notes, Translation, and Explanatory Notes*. Baltimore: University of Chicago Press, 1911, p. 2.

4 Samuel R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*. Revised Edition. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, p. 453.

5 Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 456.

6 Robert Gordis, “Love, Marriage, and Business in the Book of Ruth: A Chapter in Hebrew Customary Law.” Page 241 in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob Myers*. Eds. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974.

7 Robert Alter, *Strong as Death is Love: The Song of Songs, Ruth, Esther, Jonah, and Daniel. A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015, p. 58.

8 Alter, *Strong as Death*, pp. 58-60.

9 Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AYB 7D. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2016, pp. 27, 24.

in any sense, depict the “restful quiet of country life” in “picturesque and graceful detail” with “gentle melancholy” in a “harmonious world” where “the tragedies of life are muted.” Instead, it is harsh and oppressive, flinging its female characters into the realms of death, debt, and deprivation, where the only help that comes to them comes by chance, the upturning of social conventions, and through bold encounters that push against stagnant forces so that they might be impelled to move in a favorable direction. And this countryside locale could not, in any way, be called “idyllic.” As a poor Moabite woman among Israelite harvesters, Ruth is constantly imperiled. Boaz must instruct his men not to *assault* her and, throughout the harvest period, Ruth is warned to stay with Boaz's young women in order to avoid *attack*. Tribble explains the context well: “The book of Ruth presents the aged Naomi and the youthful Ruth as they struggle for survival in a patriarchal environment. These women bear their own burdens. They know hardship, danger, insecurity, and death. No God promises them blessing; no man rushes to their rescue. They themselves risk bold decisions and shocking acts to work out their own salvation in the midst of the alien, the hostile, and the unknown.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, while the virtues of “faithfulness” and “valor” shine through Ruth and Boaz, the text's characters hardly fit the categories typically assigned them. No'omi is not charming, pure, virtuous, or God-fearing. She is bitter and strident—blaming God for her misfortunes and attempting to sever ties with those closest to her. When she urges Ruth to go down to the threshing-floor, not only does she place Ruth in a situation that could be detrimental to her in the long run (see the discussion in Introduction section B1), but she acts apart from any belief in or dependence upon the Israelite deity (a fitting description for the time when people did what Judges derogatorily calls “what was right in their own eyes”). As for Boaz, when he goes out of his way to honor and provide for Ruth, it is only because Ruth was bold enough to go where she didn't belong and do what would not ordinarily be done. Again, Tribble explains it well: “Ruth has accomplished here what she set out to do. The favor which Boaz gives her is the favor which she has sought. Therefore, she, not he, is shaping her destiny. That a patriarchal culture restricts her options makes her initiative all the more remarkable.”<sup>11</sup> When Boaz acts to bring restoration to Ruth, it is only because Ruth has challenged his piety by turning the words of his blessing back against him. Apart from Ruth and No'omi's bold initiative(s), there is no reason to believe Boaz would have done anything on their behalf even though he clearly knew about their plight ever since they returned. Ruth, the hero of this story, has also been misunderstood. Her refusal to leave No'omi and her willingness to leave her land and people does not arise out of a sudden commitment to the Israelite deity or some extraordinary devotion to her mother-in-law. In that time and culture, Ruth would have left her own family and god(s) behind when she married into No'omi's family and has had a decade to form personal and familial bonds with No'omi. Despite this, No'omi attempts to disown her by treating her like a mere servant whose services are no longer required. No'omi dresses it up as something done in the best interests of her daughters-in-law, but Ruth sees through it. Such brazen disregard from No'omi requires an equally strong declaration of what is right and true from Ruth.

10 Phyllis Tribble, “Two Women in a Man's World: A Reading of the Book of Ruth.” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59.3 (1976), p. 251.

11 Tribble, “Two Women in a Man's World,” p. 261.

Coloring Ruth as a blissful, charming, and pious idyll smooths over or ignores those parts that make it so profound and engaging (such as No'omi's bitter denunciations, Ruth's bold subversions, the ambiguity in each character's intent, or the dangers that lurk within the fields). And that does more than damage its image—it has a deleterious effect on the text's translation and message. Perhaps Rauber summed it up best: “If we accept Ruth . . . as high art and look at it directly and without condescension, we find very quickly that it is far more than a palely fragrant flower in the garden of the pastoral.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, aspects of dialogue that distinguish characters from each other have often been overlooked by translators. Few attempt to capture the alliteration that Boaz spins into his lengthy dialogues. Though scholars long recognized No'omi's use of word-play, few have tried to capture any but the most blatant. And only in recent years have translators tried to reproduce the shifts from prose to poetry in No'omi's and/or Ruth's speeches.

Issues like those above are the impetus for this and subsequent publications. Each one is based around a brand-new English translation (אֵשׁ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם, *the heavenly fire*), which attempts to capture aspects of the Hebrew texts that have been overlooked, ignored, or misunderstood by translations both ancient and modern. Translation Notes dissect the process into easily digestible fragments. The Hebrew text is subjected to a comprehensive treatment in order to bring out its semantic nuances, reveal interpretive cruxes, explain the choices of other English versions, and, ultimately, advance a totally new type of biblical translation.

Throughout the process, we hope not only to confront longstanding prejudices, but offer alternative possibilities to capture, in unprecedented fidelity, both the form and content of biblical texts. The *raison d'être* for this project is to help students, scholars, and translators to better understand the artistry and tapestry of Israel's ancient scrolls. Its *desideratum* is the progress and advancement of biblical translation.

12 D. F. Rauber, “Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth.” *JBL* 89.1 (1970): 27-37.





## Introduction

A translation is just that. We do not presume to replace the original text with our own. Yet we do not believe the original so lofty or sacrosanct that it cannot be represented vividly and accurately in another language. If the biblical texts are to be believed, YHWH both *spoke* and *wrote*—the purpose of which must surely be *understanding*. The Rabbis, without anticipating its greater application, left us a saying that illustrates this well: דְּבַר־הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם, “Scripture speaks in human language.” What follows, therefore, is a discussion of human language and its comprehension. We begin with a look at the various names and terms that are most pertinent.

### (A) Names and Terminology

#### 1. Of the Translation

אֵשׁ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם (*’ēš min-haššāmayim*) means “the fire from heaven” or, more simply, *the heavenly fire* (THF). Such language is drawn from theophanic imagery, which likens the presence of YHWH to various manifestations of fire, and from an ancient Jewish conception of YHWH’s word as fire. Early Rabbinic tradition equated the fire that fell from heaven on Sinai with scripture itself. This can be seen, for instance, in the following midrash, which uses word-play to phonetically link “Torah” (תּוֹרָה) with “its flame” (אֵשׁ): “Because YHWH descended upon it in fire (Exod 19:18). This shows that the Torah [is] fire, was given from fire, and is comparable to fire. . . . One can do nothing but warm himself [with] its flame” (*Mek. Bahodesh* 4).

#### 2. Of the Israelite Deity

By way of piety and tradition, the scribes who placed vowel points in the Hebrew manuscripts obscured the name of God by placing under its consonants the vowels of words like Elohim (God), Adonai (My Sovereign/Lord), and Ha-Shem (The Name). Some translations create the hybrid “Jehovah” out of this heterogeneous mix, while others translate the vowels. Still others trace the name back to a hypothetical form of the verb “to be” (Yahweh). Like translations of other religious texts, THF replicates the deity’s name when that name is used. Since, however, its pronunciation was lost, we render the name as we have it and how scribes have written it for the last three millennia: **YHWH**. Much like how ancient Jews might use the paleo-Hebrew script to indicate the name’s sacred status, we use a font quite different than the rest of the text. So too we use “**Elohim**,” “**El**,” and “**Eloah**” instead of “God,” but “**The One God**” when a definite article precedes it. Where the text intends to communicate something other than the deity’s name or title, we follow intently.

#### 3. Within Ruth

A number of specialized words or phrases occur in Ruth, which warrant initial comment. They are provided below with their English rendering as used herein and a discussion of their respective meanings.

TERMS	DESCRIPTION
נעמי	<b>No'omi</b> — Occasionally, THF will veer away from traditional renderings of Hebrew names when it is felt that those renderings are too far removed from the original and/or the more original name is easily recognizable. In both Hebrew and Greek, the first part of the name is pronounced “no,” not “nay.” Thus “No'omi.” The name “Naomi” is a corruption based on a confusion of <i>qamets</i> (long-a) and <i>qamets chatuf</i> (long-o). ⚙ gives the name as νοεμιν (Noemin).
עם	<b>clan</b> — Often, עם has no other meaning than “people.” As used, however, many times in Ruth, it refers more specifically to the family or group of families to which a person belongs. It is true, for instance, that Orpah and Ruth, in 1:10, say they are going back with No'omi to the people of Judah. But, more narrowly and specifically, they are going back with her to be among the <i>Ephrathites</i> . In such circumstances, therefore, עם is better rendered “clan.” As Schipper (AYB) says, “One also finds this use of 'am in texts outside of Ruth . . . . Leviticus 21:14 requires a priest to marry a woman 'from his people' ( <i>mē'ammâw</i> ), meaning within his own clan.” <sup>13</sup>
חסד	<b>faithfulness/allegiance</b> — Contrary to the elaborate and lengthy explanations often given by scholars and theologians for חסד, the meaning is quite simple: “faithfulness/loyalty/commitment/allegiance.” Some translations reflect that simplicity (NET, REB, Goldingay, etc.); most do not. ⚙ rendered it ελεος, which means “pity” or “compassion.” This appears to be the basis for renderings like “mercy,” “love,” and “kindness,” or combinations like “faithful love” or “loving-kindness.” We find no textual motivation for such renderings. Some read “covenant” into every use of the term. While it is true that covenant requires <i>hesed</i> , <i>hesed</i> does not require covenant.
חיל	<b>valor</b> — Or “boldness.” חיל has a wide semantic range. It can refer to wealth, power, military might, or valor. It describes both Boaz (2:1) and Ruth (3:11; 4:11). Since Ruth has no power, wealth, or military might, חיל must, in her case, refer to valor. Whereas some interpreters turn to Prov 31:10-31 in order to make sense of the phrase “woman of חיל,” it seems evident that the picture painted by Proverbs represents an ideal within a particular context, not a universally applicable, nor even realistic description. Thus, the best understanding of חיל should come, generally, from its larger usage in the canon of scripture and, specifically, in the limited context of Ruth. When חיל and גבור occur together, “valor” is usually the meaning (as, for instance, in Judg 6:12, 11:1; 2 Kgs 5:1; 1 Chr 12:29). Thus, Alter says “The original meaning of <i>gibor hayil</i> is 'valiant warrior'.” <sup>14</sup> Though Boaz is certainly portrayed as a wealthy individual, חיל functions as a keyword linking him to Ruth. When we find out that Ruth was known as חיל by everyone, it is obvious that Ruth and Boaz belong together and it makes sense

13 Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 65.

14 Alter, *Strong as Death*, p. 66.

to view the expression as conveying the same meaning: “We dare not detach this description of Boaz from the expression *’ēšet ḥayl* which he (Boaz) will himself use to compliment Ruth.”<sup>15</sup> It is possible that “man of חַיִל” and “woman of חַיִל” are idiomatic expressions, much like the English phrase “a strong woman,” which indicates firm resolve or determination (not physical strength). But if so, we have no way of verifying that nuance.

גאֵל/√

This is one of the most thematic verbal roots in the text. It refers to the social role played by a male who “restores” a close male relative from a dire situation. In Lev 25:25, for instance, when a man is forced to sell his property to raise money for some necessity, this root is used to describe how a close male relative pays off the debt he incurred and, thus, “restores” the property to him. Although the verb and participle are traditionally translated “redeem,” we feel that “restore” fits the context better. Hubbard (NICOT) describes it this way: “Redemption’ . . . constituted the restoration of . . . tribal wholeness.”<sup>16</sup> English translations vary in their rendering of the participial form, though most revolve around statements of relation. Note, for instance, NRSV (nearest kin), NAB (next of kin), KJV (next kinsman), ASV (near kinsman), NASB (closest relative), NJPST (redeeming kinsman), and NIV (kinsman-redeemer). These renderings are based more on ג (propinquus, “kinsman/relative”) and ג (αγγιστευοντων, “one who is next of kin”) than the Hebrew. The fact that the participle doesn’t mean “relative/kinsman” can be seen by looking at Ruth 2:20, which would be incoherently repetitive otherwise: “Close to us (i.e. a “relative/kinsman”) [is] he. One of our relatives/kinsmen [is] he.” We agree with Meek that “The author of the book of Ruth could never have written a sentence like that.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps Beattie said it best: “One who acted in the juridical capacity of *go’el* was certainly a kinsman, most likely the next-of-kin, but the person and the function should not be equated to the point of confusion.”<sup>18</sup> No such confusion exists in פֶּרֶק: (one who rescues/recovers/redeems). Neither does it exist in our rendering “restorer.” Fenton and Goldingay also prefer “restorer.”

לקט

The general sense of the verb is “to gather.” In the context of Ruth, however (gathering in a field of barley at harvest time by a poor woman), it clearly indicates gleaning as opposed to any general sort of gathering. Thus, we prefer “to glean.”

דבק

This verb occurs four times in the first two chapters—twice with ד and twice with ע. The question is whether the verb, in either situation, means “stick to” as in “hold on to” or “stick with” as in “remain with.” In 1:14, most translations prefer the former. Since “holding on to” makes no sense in all three other instances, however, we believe דבק has a relational meaning as opposed to a physical one. Contrary to the Hebrew text in

15 Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. AYB 7. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 90. Parenthetical added.

16 Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 189.

17 Theophile J. Meek, “Translating the Hebrew Bible,” *JBL* 79.4 (1960): 334.

18 Derek R. G. Beattie, “Ruth III,” *JSOT* 3.5 (1978): 43.

1:14, **6**, **7**, and **8** all say that after Orpah kissed No'omi, she left. The point of this expansion would be to show explicitly how Orpah's action contrasts with Ruth's. If Ruth's action is described as **דבק** and the opposite is “leaving” or “returning,” **דבק** must mean “stay/stick with,” not “cling/stick to” (the opposite of “cling/stick to” would be “release/let go of”). Thus, the ancient versions support our interpretation. **6**'s support is explicit: *ρουθ δε ηκολουθησεν αυτη* (but Ruth accompanied her). As for the change in prepositional use, it merely follows the change in speaker. Where the narrator speaks (1:14; 2:23), the preposition linked with **דבק** is **ב** (a more typical construction). Where Boaz speaks or where his words are summarized (2:8, 21), the preposition linked with **דבק** is **עם**.

## (B) Interpretive Frameworks

What kind of story does Ruth tell? What is the point of it? What are the characters of Ruth, Boaz, and No'omi trying to accomplish? The answers that scholars and translators give to these questions influences how they render the text and, therefore, how it is read and understood by English audiences. For the sake of our discussion, we call those answers **interpretive frameworks**. By their very nature, they give shape and meaning to a text. They give a reader or hearer expectations about what a text should say or how a text should say it. Since they usually exist on the periphery of awareness, interpretive frameworks often go unexamined, yet their effects can be seen and documented. This does not mean that interpretive frameworks are problematic. There is no way to approach a text except through an interpretive framework. This does mean, however, that there are frameworks that adequately deal with the text and frameworks that do not.

In the following pages, we identify two frameworks that result in distorted translations of Ruth. Those frameworks are so common that many readers may be surprised by our judgment of them. There are, after all, reasons why people find the frameworks compelling and textual queues that provide validation for them. It will be necessary, therefore, to show several examples of how words and phrases are co-opted by these frameworks and to discuss the rationale supporting them. It is not enough, however, only to expose inadequate frameworks. A better one must be provided. In the final part of this section, therefore, we attempt to do so using a methodology adopted from the social sciences called Social Identity Theory.

### 1. Ruth as Erotic Encounter

The third chapter of Ruth contains one of the most dramatic moments in the story. The scene at the threshing-floor is where the storyteller's skill becomes most evident. By weaving ambiguity into the characters' words, actions, and intent, the tension of the scene is heightened and the potential for disaster becomes imminent. Those ambiguities leave the reader or hearer with several questions: (1) Why did No'omi tell Ruth to go to Boaz this way (alone, at night, with no witnesses)?, (2) What, precisely, did Ruth do (or what did she ask Boaz to do)?, (3) How, exactly, did Boaz respond to her words and/or acts?, (4) What actually happened between Ruth and Boaz that night (or why did Boaz ask her to stay overnight)?, and (5) Why was Boaz concerned that someone might see Ruth?

Readers and hearers have answered those questions in various ways. Some believe that one or more only make sense if the story involves an **erotic encounter**. Thus, they may respond with some or all of the following answers: (1) No'omi wanted Ruth to seduce Boaz, (2) Ruth exposed Boaz's genitals, asked Boaz to have intercourse with her, or both, (3) Boaz welcomed her sexual advances, (4) Some type of sexual act occurred, and (5) Boaz was afraid that someone might find out about what they had done. When interpreted within that framework, the story of Ruth takes on new meaning, and that meaning can influence translation. The following are a few key examples where that framework has distorted translations of Ruth.

Example 1: ורחצת וסכת ושמת שמלתך עליך (Ruth 3:3)

When separated into its component parts, the phrase above consists of three verbal statements. The first is ורחצת, a 3FS inverted perfect of the verb רחץ, meaning “to wash.” The second is וסכת, a 3FS inverted perfect of the verb סך, meaning “to oil.” The third is ושמת שמלתך עליך, a 3FS inverted perfect of the verb שם, meaning “to put/place/set,” followed by the accusative noun שמלה, meaning “mantle/garment,” with 2FS pronominal suffix (your) and a verbal complement (upon you). Taken together, the whole means, “Wash, oil, place your mantle upon you.” In other words, clean up, freshen up, and put on a large garment. Nothing could be simpler or clearer, and there is nothing controversial or questionable about these verbal statements, yet translators routinely provide a more elaborate rendering involving perfume and fancy dress:

Hebrew:	וסכת	Hebrew:	שמת שמלתך
NJB and NIV:	perfume yourself	NJPST, ISV, GW:	dress up
Schipper:	apply perfume	Hubbard and NET:	get dressed up
Hubbard, ISV, GW:	put on some perfume	HCSB:	wear your best clothes
Bush and HCSB:	put on perfumed oil	NRSV, NASB, NIV:	put on your best clothes
Goldingay:	put on your make-up	NAB:	put on your best attire
NET:	rub on some perfumed oil	NKJV:	put on your [best] garment

Suddenly, the act of washing and dressing becomes an elaborate episode with particular intent:

—Hubbard: “Ruth was to make herself attractive, . . . to look (and smell) her most alluring.”<sup>19</sup>

—LaCocque: “These preparations by Ruth, clearly intending to seduce Boaz . . .”<sup>20</sup>

—Green: “The sequence of actions . . . suggests sexual readiness.”<sup>21</sup>

Such interpretations make perfect sense within an erotic encounter framework. Concerned about her family's “emptiness” (childlessness) and the possibility that her husband's property would be forever lost to the family, No'omi prepares Ruth to lure in Boaz with the hope that he might provide Ruth with a child and her family with an heir. Boaz has, after all, sent Ruth home before with his “seed” (perhaps a metaphorical image of his desire to impregnate her). Also, on such a night as this (the end of harvest

19 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, pp. 201-2.

20 André LaCocque. *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, p. 91.

21 Barbara Green, “The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth.” *JSOT* 7.23 (1982), p. 61.

when everyone is celebrating and food and drink flow freely), perhaps even a formal and proper man like Boaz can be “persuaded.” In fact, such renderings are even supported by some of the versions! **ט** renders **וסכת** as “spray on perfume/fragrance” and **שמלה** as “ornaments/jewelry.” In place of **שמלה**, **ע** says *cultioribus vestimentis* (fancy/ornamented clothes).

But none of that is present in the Hebrew, and there is nothing in such tasks that indicate either an act of beautification or a purpose to seduce, allure, or marry. In 2 Sam 12:20, for instance, David performs the same actions, but no one has ever suggested that, by doing this, he is beautifying himself or trying to entice someone (he is simply putting himself back together after a week of mourning). Ezek 16:9 describes the same actions as well. There, however, we know that beautification and allure is in view because the person is being clothed in fine linen and silk and adorned with silver, gold, jewelry, bracelets, chains, a nose ring, earrings, and a crown (vv. 10-13). No such items appear here. While it may be true that whatever oils one ordinarily used smelled nice and might even contain perfume, there is nothing about the act of using such an oil that either requires or implies what so many translators suppose. As for **שמלה**, Bush (WBC) rightly states, “It is very clear that it does not in *any* context mean 'dressy clothes' or 'best clothes'.”<sup>22</sup> Such renderings have no textual motivation. They are inspired solely by the framework that reads preparation for seduction or marriage into the scene:

“Once the sexual or erotic aspect has become the hermeneutic key to reading the Book of Ruth, the choices made in translation will be affected. Under the influence of such a key, 'anoint yourself' could become 'perfume yourself,' and 'put on your mantle' could be rendered as 'dress in your nicest clothes' . . . washing and dressing becomes enticement and seduction.”<sup>23</sup>

#### Example 2: **וגלית מרגלתיו** (Ruth 3:4)

This phrase consists of a 3FS inverted perfect in the Piel stem of the verb **גלה**, meaning “to bare/uncover/reveal,” followed by the noun **מרגלת** with 3MS pronominal suffix (his). As discussed in our Translation Notes, though the precise nuance of **מרגלת** is beyond our grasp, its reference to the “legs” is certain. The question is whether it functions as the object of the verb or a dative of place. Since the Piel of **גלה** is characteristically transitive (intransitive usage occurs in the Hithpael and Niphal stems), **מרגלת** most likely functions as the object. The sense of the phrase is, therefore, “uncover his legs.” With this rendering, virtually all scholars and translators agree (though many use “feet” instead of “legs”). What this means in terms of the story, however, is a different matter. Is No'omi telling Ruth to uncover his legs so that he will be awakened or does her instruction hint at or even intend for a sexual encounter? The word “foot” (**רגל**), after all, which is closely related to **מרגלה**, can also refer to “genitals.” Could the same euphemism be implied here? Could “uncovering” the “legs” be sexual?

—Trible: “Just how much of the lower part of the body she is to uncover remains tantalizingly uncertain in the text. That sexual overtones are present, is however, patently certain.”<sup>24</sup>

22 Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth-Esther*. WBC 9. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1996, p. 151. No italics added.

23 Schadrac Keita and Janet W. Dyk, “The Scene at the Threshing Floor: Suggestive Readings and Intercultural Considerations on Ruth 3.” *BT* 57.1 (2006), pp. 31 and 25.

24 Trible, “Two Women in a Man's World,” p. 266.

—Bush: “That sexual overtones are present in the action of a woman uncovering a man's legs in the dark of the night and lying down, there can be no doubt.”<sup>25</sup>

With this sentiment, many modern, Western readers might agree. Thus, most of them explain the text as definitely or probably involving a sexual encounter and a few go so far as to produce translations that make that interpretation more explicit. Schipper (AYB), for instance, translates this phrase “undress [at] his feet.” Aschkenasy supports his rendering and explains its rationale as such: “An alternative reading of the Hebrew verb *וּגְלִית* would be ‘she uncovered herself,’ with *מִרְגְּלָתוֹ* indicating where this action takes place, at his feet, . . . Ruth makes a bold physical move: she uncovers her body and exposes herself to the man.”<sup>26</sup> In support of this idea, many have argued that nouns formed with preformative *mem* often indicate a place. If this noun functions as a dative of place, the verb is free to function intransitively (for the reasons why we think these arguments unlikely, see the Translation Notes). Similarly, Sasson translates this phrase “bare his ‘legs.’” By putting quotes around the word for *מִרְגְּלָת*, Sasson intimates that something more than legs is implied. Though his translation leaves it to the imagination of the reader, it is not difficult to presume what he intends his readers to imagine.

Two questions, therefore, present themselves: how would Ruth's early audience interpret this text and is it necessary or even likely that what we presume is correct? In both cases, it is impossible to tell. Our earliest exposition on the story of Ruth, for instance, goes all the way back to the first century AD. In it (Ant. 5.328), Josephus provides us with an interpretation of what No'omi hoped Ruth and Boaz would do. The Greek verb he used was *ὁμιλέω*. In some contexts, *ὁμιλέω* means nothing more than “to be in company with” or “converse with,” but in others, it refers to “sexual intercourse” (LS). Thus, one translator, writing in the early 1700s, rendered it one way (When Naomi was informed of this circumstance, she contrived it so that Ruth should lie down by him, for she thought it might be for their advantage that *he should discourse* with the girl)<sup>27</sup> while a different translator, writing in the early 2000s, rendered it another (When she found out about this, Naamis devised a plan to have Routhe lay down beside him—for he would be kind towards them once *he had intercourse* with the girl).<sup>28</sup> One is explicitly sexual, the other explicitly asexual. Which is correct? Josephus' account was written at least 500 years after the text of Ruth as we have it. Much had changed in Israel over that time—particularly perceptions and interpretations of the texts we call “biblical.” So even if we could be sure what Josephus meant, we only know how one particular reader, far removed from the origin of the text, understood it.

25 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 153.

26 Nehama Aschkenasy, “Reading Ruth through a Bakhtinian Lens: The Carnavalesque in a Biblical Tale.” *JBL* 126.3 (2007), p. 450.

27 William Whiston, *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus; Translated by William Whiston, A.M. Containing Five Books of the Antiquities of the Jews. To Which are Prefixed Three Dissertations. Vol 1.* New York: William Borradaile, 1824. No pages. Cited Aug 2, 2018. Online: <https://pace.webhosting.rug.nl/york/york/showText?book=5&chapter=9&textChunk=nieseSection&chunkId=328&text=anti&version=whiston&direction=&tab=&layout=split>.

28 Christopher T. Begg, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Steve Mason; Brill 2000-present. No pages. Cited Aug 2, 2018. Online: <https://pace.webhosting.rug.nl/york/york/showText?book=5&chapter=9&textChunk=nieseSection&chunkId=332&down.x=11&down.y=10&text=anti&version=english&direction=down&tab=&layout=split>.

We may forever be forced to read this text through the veil of our own time and culture. But the view of one time and culture may be diametrically opposed to another. Keita and Dyk, for instance, have written about a West African people-group called the Bowa, who have cultural practices quite similar to those described in Ruth. It is worth quoting several sections of their article at length:

“The Bowa culture has an interesting type of dating system for young people. When a young woman comes for a visit, whether she is looking for a partner or not, . . . The young women are invited to spend the night and share the bed with two or more young men. This occurs without sexual intercourse. It is not a secret practice: considering the type of houses involved—open and attached to one another—it would be impossible to hide oneself. . . . The time spent together is for making contact; many things are talked about during the night. An interest in a particular individual may develop. If a man wants to marry one of these 'honored' women, he must request this publicly from the elder at the gate, at the *boro*. At dawn the young people separate before it is possible to recognize one another from afar. . . . it would be embarrassing to be clearly recognized as coming from spending the night in this manner, for it is a private matter with which one would rather not be confronted publicly.

Once a more specific interest develops between two young people, . . . A man can have the woman called to come for a meeting, but he does not himself go to her family or to her bedroom. On the other hand, the woman can take the initiative and look for where the man is sleeping. The end of harvest season and other celebrations are popular occasions for such encounters. In such a case, the woman finds the man and waits until he asks her who she is. She may lie down at his feet or next to him. She could wait for him to awaken, or hasten the process by asking him whether he is asleep. The night is spent together, but the context is not conducive to sex: one's own pleasure is not uppermost in one's mind, but rather procuring a partner and continuing the family line. Marriage can be proposed and plans for the future discussed.

In Bowa culture, groups spend the nights together in harvest time under the full moon, but sex in such a situation is not imaginable because of the cultural taboos . . . and because of the strict prohibition of sexual relationships outside of the village.

When a woman seeks a man's resting place and waits for him to notice her, it is logical that she should lie down at his feet and wait. In the Bowa context the woman could also lie next to the man, though not with sexual intent. Uncovering the feet presents no dubious connotations; she could even have taken off his cover completely, but baring his private parts would be totally unimaginable.”<sup>29</sup>

To recap, it is customary in Bowa culture for men and women to spend the night together at harvest time in the fields. Any kind of sexual activity in that locale is strictly forbidden. It is even customary for young women to be invited to sleep next to young men when they visit a village or to seek out particular young men with whom to spend the night in order to talk and get to know each other. The goal is never sexual. Any kind of sexual activity would go strongly against cultural norms and have strict consequences. Since such activity is a private matter, it is customary for the two to separate in the

29 Keita and Dyk, “The Scene at the Threshing Floor,” pp. 27-30.



morning before others can see them. For the Bowa, it would be obvious that nothing sexual was intended by No'omi and no sexual implications would be discernible in the story. If, therefore, it is obvious to Tribble and Bush that sexual overtones are present, it is probably “due to his or her own cultural background” that “the Western reader is unable to conceive of such a nocturnal context without sexuality playing a large role.”<sup>30</sup> The question then is whether there is anything other than the reader's own context that provides rationale for viewing the text as an erotic encounter.

### Lot's Daughters and Tamar

As it turns out, there are reasons for suspecting that the storyteller wanted to evoke a sexual or erotic encounter in the story of Ruth. Those reasons are not found in Ruth itself, but in other stories that were passed on from generation to generation within Israelite scribal culture. One is the story of Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38). The other is of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:6-30). The first explains the origin of the Ammonites and Moabites. It is relevant because it shows how some Israelites must have viewed the Moabites—the people-group out of which Ruth had come: a people born out of sexual impropriety (if not sexual sin). Though we can't be sure that the seduction of Lot by his daughters as it exists in Genesis was anything like the story known to the early audience of Ruth, there are a surprising number of parallels, both thematic and linguistic, between them. Schipper (AYB) gives a brief overview: “Both Ruth and Genesis 19 depict intimate encounters at night between a woman whose husband had died (Gen 19:14–16; Ruth 1:4–5) and an intoxicated man (Gen 19:33–35; Ruth 3:7–8). . . . all of the women are referred to as 'daughters' during these encounters (Gen 19:30, 36; Ruth 3:10, 11; although the nature of the respective relationships is very different). Both texts use the same term (*wattiškāb*) to depict a woman 'lying' with or near a man while he is either initially or completely unaware of her presence (Gen 19:33; Ruth 3:7–8; note the rare use of the feminine imperative *šikēbī* in Gen 19:34 and Ruth 3:13).”<sup>31</sup>

If something of Gen 19 is in the background of Ruth, it is possible that the composer of Ruth deliberately crafted the associations between them so that readers or hearers would think that sexual impropriety was imminent. By so doing, tension would be heightened in this last and pivotal encounter between Ruth and Boaz. Of course, all this is speculation. Scholars have found just as many parallels between other stories (such as the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah in Gen 24), which makes the association with Gen 19 questionable. Even if the story in Gen 19 is in the background, some believe that it should be read positively as a survival story, which would fit the context of Ruth, perhaps, even better. Thus, while the seduction of Lot provides rationale for the framework of an erotic encounter, we are still left with the question whether such a reading is even appropriate.

The story of Judah and Tamar also has numerous parallels with Ruth. Like Ruth, Tamar loses her husband and remains childless, she is told to go back to the house of her birth (though, unlike Ruth, she actually does so), she is informed about what a leading tribal figure is going to do and where such actions will be performed, she seeks out that man undercover, the man is not a brother-in-law, but an older man more distantly related, and that man ends up producing offspring for her, which are prominent figures of the tribe. Unlike the story of Lot and his daughters, a direct connection is made within Ruth to the story of Judah and Tamar (4:12). Thus, the reader or hearer is intended to view the

30 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

31 Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 61.

Ruth story in light of the Judah and Tamar story. Since the story of Tamar involves a sexual encounter between the wife of the deceased and the leading tribal figure, this provides rationale for reading Ruth through the framework of an erotic encounter.

There are, however, several things that make that reading unlikely. First, the text of Ruth does not make the connection between Ruth and Tamar, but between Boaz's house and Judah's house through Perez (the pronominal suffix on **בֵּיתָךְ** and **לְךָ** is marked masculine singular, referring to Boaz, and the reference to Ruth as **הַנְּעִרָה הַזֹּאת** clearly identifies her as part of the content of the discussion, not its recipient). The comparison is clearly one between male offspring in a male house, not between sexual encounters. Second, nothing in the association describes or implies anything negative (though some view the erotic encounter in a positive light). Finally, as Schipper (AYB) notes, "Boaz and Ruth never verbally express any love, affection, or sexual attraction toward each other."<sup>32</sup> In fact, when the text wants us to know that a sexual act occurred, it tells us, though not, perhaps, explicitly (4:13). All this makes the conclusion of Keita and Dyk inescapable: "A neutral reading is required by the linguistic data."<sup>33</sup> Thus, translations like those above that make a sexual reading implicit or explicit should be rejected.

## 2. Ruth as Jane Austen

In 1948, Margaret Crook wrote an article on Ruth that sought to uncover the history of its formation. Her article began with a viewpoint that has been held in common and without controversy by interpreters for centuries: "THE book of Ruth is the most exquisite romance in the Old Testament."<sup>34</sup> The text has long been interpreted as the kind of romance that one might find, for instance, in one of Jane Austen's novels. Within Austen's narrative world, one or more female protagonists find themselves caught within perilous circumstances, where their personal value, economic stability, and future prosperity are shaped by and dependent upon their ability to find and marry a well-to-do man. Often, that man is much older and from a very different social stratum, which places both characters in tension with prevailing social mores and provides the opportunity for satire and comedy. The satirical social perspective underlying these romances is, perhaps, captured no better than in the opening line of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife"<sup>35</sup> (i.e., *any single woman* should always be on the lookout for a wealthy, upper-class man to marry).

For the purpose of our discussion, we will call the aforementioned perspective a **Jane Austen framework**. Within this frame, the quest for marriage is a controlling theme and, as with any romance, love (or desire) is one of its driving forces. When the story of Ruth is read within that framework, Ruth's presence within Boaz's shelter can be interpreted as an attempt to meet and encounter a wealthy landowner, Boaz's extraordinary kindness toward her can be viewed as an attempt to show his interest in her and win her affections, No'omi's reason for sending Ruth to Boaz in the night can be seen as an attempt to gain a pledge from him for

32 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

33 Keita and Dyk, "The Scene at the Threshing Floor," p. 24.

34 Margaret Crook, "The Book of Ruth: A New Solution." *JBR* 16.3 (1948): 155.

35 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice. With a Preface by George Saintsbury and Illustrations by Hugh Thomson*. London: Chiswick Press, 1894, p. 1.

marriage, Ruth's request on the threshing-floor can be taken as a marriage proposal, and the final scene at the gate between Boaz and the restorer becomes a dramatic moment in which the love that was found might be lost because, as Hubbard (NICOT) describes it, "If the man (so-and-so) took the field, he might also take Ruth. . . . romance would surrender to regulation, love capitulate to legality."<sup>36</sup>

While there are certainly points of contact between Austen's novels and Ruth, the text of Ruth is not a 19<sup>th</sup> century romance. By reading it in such a way, severe distortions are introduced into the text and those distortions are manifest in translation. Though many examples could be produced, we have limited our discussion to a few key passages that make that distortion evident.

#### Example 1: דְּבַרַת עַל-לֵב (Ruth 2:13)

When those of us who have been born and raised in a modern scientific society think of the "heart," we think first about a particular organ in the human chest with a specific biological function (the pumping of blood through one's body). We may then consider, secondarily, how that organ is used as a metaphor for feelings, emotions, passions, love, or desire. As scholars have long noted, however, the terms לֵב and לִבָּב in the HB, which are often referred to as the "heart" by English scholars and translators, were not understood by ancient peoples in such a way. Carolyn Leeb provides a wonderful survey of the semantic realm in which these words function:

"We have long known that Hebrew לֵב designates an amorphous interiority that was not specifically understood as an emotional, much less romantic, locus. BDB describes לֵב and לִבָּב as 'inner man, mind, will, heart,' with its first description of the human heart as '*the inner man* in contrast with the outer' . . . . It lists such things as mind, knowledge, thinking, reflection, memory; inclinations, resolutions, and determinations of the will; conscience, moral character; seat of appetites; the man himself; and 'seat of the emotions and passions.'" . . . That the word . . . does not principally reference the seat of *romantic* feelings, or even of feelings generally in contrast to thoughts or reasoning, has been pointed out consistently."<sup>37</sup>

In other words, the לֵב (or לִבָּב) is the *core* of a person and refers to the abstract concepts we associate with the *mind* and locate in the *brain*. It has almost nothing to do with the heart as we think of it. Thus, when a text says that one speaks (דְּבַר) to (אֶל) one's לֵב or in (ב) one's לֵב (see Gen 8:21 and 17:17, respectively), it means "to say to oneself" or "speak in one's mind" (i.e., to think). In other words, it describes a *mental process*. There is nothing controversial about this. Scholars have long said this about such passages and translators routinely translate them in precisely those ways. A virtually identical expression occurs ten times in the HB: to speak (דְּבַר) about/concerning (עַל) one's לֵב.<sup>38</sup> The only

36 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 243. Parentheses added.

37 Carolyn Leeb, "Translating the Hebrew Body into English Metaphor." Page 110 in *The Social Sciences and Bible Translation*. Ed. Dietmar Neufeld. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.

38 Gen 34:3; 50:21; Judg 19:3; Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:13; 2 Sam 19:8 (Eng 19:7); Isa 40:2; Hos 2:16 (Eng 2:14); 2 Chr 30:22; 32:6.

difference between the former idiom and this one is the use of **על** instead of **אל** (or *bet*). By using a different preposition, the sense of **לב** does not change. Rather, the focus shifts from a mental process to a state of mind.<sup>39</sup> Leeb explains it like this:

“It means to reason with, argue with, persuade, or, perhaps better, dissuade. It means to talk into or out of something. The phrase surely also means addressing an individual in a way that reaches that inner core, volitional center, mind, will of the person being addressed. In other words, it means, at the very least, to *get through to* them. When we say in English that we plan to have a heart-to-heart talk with someone, we don't mean that we will address them romantically.”<sup>40</sup>

Despite the consensus on **לב**, when scholars and translators render **דבר על-לב**, everything changes. Ruth is not thankful because Boaz told her he will provide for her beyond all her *expectations*, but because *he said nice things to her*. In other words, Ruth “emphasizes the effect he has on her emotional state.”<sup>41</sup> A survey of translations is revealing:

“to speak kindly” (NRSV, NASB, NIV, etc.)  
 “to speak gently” (NJPST)  
 “to speak friendly” (KJV)  
 “to speak comfortingly” (AAT)  
 “to encourage” (HCSB, NET, NJB, etc.)  
 “to speak to the heart” (JPS, Leeser, YLT, etc.)

Such renderings are used in virtually every place where the phrase **דבר על-לב** occurs. Part of the reason is because, when one thinks of the **לב** as the “heart,” it “encourages English-speaking interpreters to import into the texts, anachronistically, all those things which the word *heart* signifies in English.”<sup>42</sup> Leeb's article is ultimately concerned with discerning the reason for scholars' and translators' inconsistent shift in meaning when it comes to **דבר על-לב**. She concludes that people “prefer 'nice talk' to 'straight talk,’”<sup>43</sup> especially when such language comes from the Israelite deity or occurs in contexts involving rape and/or humiliation. Neither, however, is the case here. More likely, the shift arises in this place because the text is viewed as a romance with Boaz playing the part of an older bachelor from the noble class and Ruth as the downtrodden young outsider looking for a husband. Within the Jane Austen framework, the expectation is that Boaz, being a person of outstanding character and having heard such great reports of Ruth (2:11), would, despite Ruth's lowly class and despised ethnicity, consider her highly enough to speak and act toward her in such a way as to indicate his

39 In 1 Sam 1:12-13, there seems to be either a merging or confusion of the expressions (“to speak to/in” and “to speak about/concerning”). **ש**'s rendering (εν τη καρδια αυτης), which treats the expression as though it were **בלבה**, certainly favors the latter. It may be that the expression, in that particular instance, does both things at once (speaking within while also speaking *about* what is within).

40 Leeb, “Translating the Hebrew Body,” pp. 121-22. No italics added.

41 Peter H. W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach*. BZAW 416. New York: De Gruyter, 2011, p. 103.

42 Leeb, “Translating the Hebrew Body,” p. 110. No italics added.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

attraction. In other words, he would begin the process of winning her “heart” as we understand the term. Within that framework, it also makes sense that Ruth, coming from a sphere where there is little hope of winning such a wealthy and noble husband, should be flattered and encouraged when he speaks “kindly/gently/tenderly” to her.

In no place, however, does the text tell us that Ruth was looking for a husband or that Boaz was “available” (more on that below). As a person in four ways vulnerable (a Moabite, a woman, a widow, and a pauper), Ruth had reason to believe that her act of gleaning would place her in perilous circumstances. It is no wonder that she wished to do so under the aegis of one who regarded her favorably (2:2). When Boaz granted her request, not only was she “reassured,” she was thankful that Boaz had *addressed what was on her mind*. It is only by reading this scene through a Jane Austen framework that Ruth's words are interpreted as an indication of Boaz's attraction toward her and of her favorable response to it.

#### Example 2: מְנוּחָה (Ruth 3:1)

At the start of the third chapter, No'omi tells Ruth to put herself together and go to the threshing-floor where she can expect to find Boaz. We have already discussed and dismissed the view that No'omi was prepping Ruth to allure or seduce him (see section B1). No'omi's motivation, however, remains ambiguous. What did she hope to achieve? The words that No'omi uses to explain herself are our best indicators: “I must certainly pursue for you whatever מְנוּחָה is best for you” (more literally, “Must I not pursue for you a מְנוּחָה that is best for you?”). The problem, however, is the meaning of מְנוּחָה (*mānôah*). The word comes from נָח, meaning “to settle/rest/be still.” Interpreters usually think of it as a location due to the fact that it is used several times as part of the longer idiom “the *mānôah* for the sole of your foot” (Gen 8:9; Deut 28:65) and because the ark of the covenant is said to have a *mānôah* in YHWH's temple. Its traditional rendering, therefore, is “resting-place.” Elsewhere, however, one's “life” or “being” (נֶפֶשׁ), which is rescued from death, returns to its *mānôah* (Ps 116:7), which describes a state of being more than a location. There must be more to the term *mānôah* than a “place of rest.”

The synonymous counterpart of מְנוּחָה is מְנוּחָהּ (*menûhāh*). This can be demonstrated, for instance, through their interchangeability. In 1 Chr 6:16, whereas the ark has a *mānôah* in YHWH's temple, 1 Chr 28:2 says the ark has a *menûhāh*. The reason why *mānôah* is used in Ruth 3:1 instead of *menûhāh* comes down to syntax. Since the verb in 3:1 is masculine (יָטָב), it requires a masculine subject (*menûhāh* is feminine). Thus, one may better understand *mānôah* by looking at *menûhāh*. *Menûhāh* also references a state of being. That state may be inner or outer. In the former, it refers to the “rest/relief/stillness” of a mind or body formerly ruled by turmoil, grief, fear, or fatigue. In the latter, it refers to the “rest/relief/stillness” that replaces a former condition of geographical, social, and/or political instability. In Chronicles, *menûhāh* (and, thus, *mānôah*) refers to an outer state of being. We would render it as “haven” or “sanctuary.” In Ruth 1:9, however, *menûhāh* is ambiguous. It could refer to an inner state of being, an outer state of being, or both. Translators typically render it as “rest” (NASB, KJV, NIV, etc.) or “security” (HCSB, NRSV, NET, etc.). We prefer “peace” or “stability.” In either case, something along those lines must be indicated by *mānôah* in 3:1.

In Ruth 1:9, however, No'omi refers to *menûḥāh* in relation to *the house of a husband*. Now, it is obvious, of course, that just because *menûḥāh* may involve marriage does not mean that it must. In fact, no other instance of *menûḥāh* in the HB has anything to do with marriage. But when the text is read within a Jane Austen framework, that phrase becomes the controlling feature for both *menûḥāh* and *mānôaḥ*. It is no longer rest, security, peace, or stability that No'omi wants for Ruth, but a “home”—not just any home, of course, since Ruth already has one, but a place where she resides with a *husband*. Note the following translations of *mānôaḥ* in Ruth 3:1:

- “a home” (NET, NIV, NAB, etc.)
- “a home and a husband” (Bush)
- “a husband and place of rest” (TVB)
- “a husband” (CEV and GNB)

Bush (WBC) explains his translation as such: “The word מְנוּחָה, . . . refers to the condition of security and rest afforded a woman in Israelite society by marriage.”<sup>44</sup> This view is held by many commentators. Thus, Hubbard (NICOT) thinks “Naomi had in mind a new marriage”<sup>45</sup> and Sasson says “*Mānôaḥ* implies all the security and benefits which accrue to a woman as she enters married life.”<sup>46</sup> No other instance of *mānôaḥ* in the HB refers to marriage. Suddenly, however, it can only be understood in the context of marriage in this single place! Considering that No'omi had just called Boaz “one of our restorers” who is “close to us,” the text gives us good reason to believe that No'omi set Ruth up with Boaz in the hope that he, as a near kin, *might restore her*. As we shall see below, there is nothing in such restoration that requires or even implies marriage. It is only by reading the text through a Jane Austen framework that מְנוּחָה can become “a husband” or “a husband and a home.”

### Example 3: ופרשת כנפך על-אמתך (Ruth 3:9)

In 3:9, Ruth makes a bold and daring statement (quite in line with her character elsewhere): “Spread your fringe over your slave since a restorer [are] you.” The statement is bold for numerous reasons: (1) it is a demand, not a request, (2) it is directed at an older and well-respected man by a younger woman with a despised ethnicity, (3) it is jarring in its direct and immediate deliverance, and (4) it occurs within a highly unusual and provocative setting. The statement is daring in that Ruth has taken part of Boaz's blessing to her in 2:12 (May YHWH [so] repay your deed that what you earned is [returned] replete by YHWH, Israel's god, [to] whom you came for sanctuary beneath his fringes) and reused it in a way that turned those words against himself (i.e., “if you really want me to find sanctuary beneath someone's fringes, do the deed yourself”).

But what, exactly, did Ruth mean (or what was the audience supposed to think) when she said “spread your fringe over your slave”? Those who read that phrase within an erotic encounter framework are convinced that Ruth is telling Boaz to sleep with her. We have already seen why that is unlikely (see section B1). Those who read it within a Jane Austen framework come to the inescapable conclusion that

44 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 147.

45 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 198.

46 Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p. 63.

these words refer to marriage. Campbell (AYB), for instance, says the statement “amounts to saying . . . 'Your redeemer responsibility calls for you to marry me.'”<sup>47</sup> That interpretation then works its way into translations of Ruth 3:9:

“Take your maidservant in marriage” (AAT)

“please marry me” (GNB)

“marry your servant” (NET)

That particular interpretation is substantiated by most scholars almost entirely on the basis of a single text. The following argument is representative of most commentators: “There is a question here whether 'wing' is singular or plural; . . . The singular is almost certainly correct, if we are guided by Deut 22:30[Hebrew, 23:1], 27:20; and Ezek 16:8, all of which pertain to marital custom. Especially significant is the Ezekiel passage, . . . . The exact correspondence of terminology between Ezek 16:8 and Ruth 3:9 is strong evidence that Ruth's request of Boaz is marriage.”<sup>48</sup> Such arguments use Ezek 16:8 as the definitive evidence that Ruth's demand relates to marriage. A few other verses (usually the same ones) are often provided without further discussion. Note, for example, Hubbard's analysis: “That the idiom (*pāraś kānāp 'al*) means 'to marry' is evident from its use in Ezek. 16:8 (cf. Deut. 23:1 [Eng. 22:30] 27:20; Mal. 2:16).”<sup>49</sup>

A closer look at Ezek 16 shows that such statements are tenuous. The oracle begins by depicting the nation of Israel as an aborted infant that YHWH brought back from the edge of death and imbues with life. The nation then flourishes into a young woman. Ezekiel 16:7 ends by noting that this woman was **ערם ועריה** or “stark naked” (an example of poetic hendiadys—the use of synonymous words joined by a conjunction to create a singular, more emphatic statement). Thus, the first thing YHWH does in v. 8 is “spread his fringe over her” and “cover her nakedness.” The two phrases exhibit synonymous parallelism—that is, they restate the same idea in different ways to give a more complete picture. YHWH is not “marrying” Israel. He is providing one of her most basic needs and covering up what would be a shameful display. The opposite act would be “to expose her nakedness” or “uncover his fringe,” an action that would correspond precisely with the statement in Deut 23:1 that scholars like Campbell and Hubbard reference as part of the marriage custom! After this, the text says that YHWH “swore to her” and “entered a covenant with her” so that “she became his.” It is at this point that marriage enters the scene. Had there been anything inherent in the act of spreading one's fringe over someone that indicated marriage, there would have been no need for three additional phrases to make that notion clear. By adding them, the fringe-spreading becomes associated with the marriage metaphor.

The Ezekiel passage shows us that fringe-spreading relates primarily to protection or guardianship, but may involve marriage if other statements make that relationship evident. In Ruth 3, however, there is no other indication of marriage. No'omi does not tell Ruth she is looking for a husband for her daughter-in-law. The fact that, in 3:9, Ruth designates herself an **אמה** instead of a **שפחה** has no special meaning (see Translation Notes). The act of washing, applying oil, and draping a cape over oneself (3:3) has nothing to do with beautification, seduction, or preparation for marriage (section B1).

47 Campbell, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 132.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

49 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 212.

None of the marriage indicators in Ezek 16 appear in this chapter. So flimsy is the ground on which interpreters stand that they sometimes appeal to modern-day Jewish marriage practices as if they reflected ancient customs and without bothering to ask whether such practices became customary due to the influence of this text on religious tradition (not *vice versa*). When we expand the net of inquiry wider, we find that protection or guardianship is characteristic of the expression “to spread one's wing(s)/fringe(s) over” or “be covered/under/in the shade of one's wing(s)/fringe(s).” See Exod 25:20, 1 Kgs 8:7, and 2 Chr 5:8; Deut 32:11; Ps 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 91:4. No other meaning could even be intended when Boaz originally used the expression in his blessing for Ruth.

The primary meaning we should get out of Ruth's statement, therefore, is the quest for protection and/or guardianship. The idea of being under the fringe of a lord was not unknown in the ancient NE. It signified not only protection and stability, but status. In the Egyptian iconography below, for instance, two officials stand prominently, with the hem of their skirts flaring out in front (a sign of their nobility), while positioned beneath is a figure who not only benefits from their lord, but may share some of his authority and power as well (indicated, perhaps, by a hand closed around the same staff). Note that the place of the wife, as shown in the picture on the left, is not under the fringe, but behind.



**Left:** Relief portion on the funerary stela of the royal sealer Indi and his wife, ca. 2100-2090 BC.

**Right:** Relief detail on the west wall of the chapel of Nikauhor and Sekhemhathor, ca. 2465-2389 BC.

Photos taken at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2017.

One may also test how closely the Jane Austen framework adheres to the text by looking at how it was understood by ancient translators. Instead of “spread your fringe over,” the Aramaic Targum says “declare your name over,” which is an act that signifies ownership. 2 Sam 12:28, for instance, refers to one's name being declared over a city as signifying their possession of and/or authority over it—certainly not their *marriage* to it. As we will see below, it is precisely this idea that lies at the heart of the events in Ruth 4. **¶** then inserts “by taking me in marriage.” By adding that phrase, **¶** makes it clear that, in this particular place, the act of fringe-covering involves marriage—a statement that would not be needed if the phrase already meant such a thing.

We will say more on this verse in section B3, example 4. For the moment, however, it suffices to say that the phrase “spread your fringe(s)/wing(s) over” can be interpreted in three ways: (1) “to become protector/guardian of” or “take ownership of,” (2) “to have intercourse with,” and (3) “to take in marriage.” The first is characteristic and, without any further description, the preferable interpretation. The second is a possible, but unlikely interpretation that helps create tension in the narrative. The third is not inherent or required by the act, but is certainly a possible outcome of it. The clever trick the oral composer or scribal artisan has pulled on us as readers is to place us in a position where we don't quite



know what Boaz will think of Ruth's demand or how he will respond to it. The one meaning that is most certainly *not* intended is the hyper-literal one proposed by Beattie: "The phrase 'spread your skirt over your maidservant' would appear to mean exactly what it says. It is a suggestion by Ruth that Boaz should cover her with the edge of the garment which he was either wearing or using as a blanket."<sup>50</sup> Reading the phrase in this manner is akin to someone at the dinner table who answers "Yes" to the question, "Do you have the salt?" (instead of passing it to them).

### Levirate Marriage

In the examples above, we saw how the Jane Austen framework has influenced interpretation and distorted translation. Scholars and translators would not have read the text in such a way, however, if there had not been something that supported and validated their framework. That thing, as innumerable articles and commentaries will attest, is **levirate marriage** (the marriage between a widow and her *levir*, the Latin term for "brother-in-law"). As the term implies, scholars assume a direct link between marriage and the duty of a *levir*, which was to provide a widow with offspring if her husband died without an heir. Interpreting the events in Ruth as a levirate marriage has ancient roots. It can be found, for instance, in the Targum, which uses textual expansions to link marriage and the duty of a *levir* together. In 4:5, for instance, the Targum says "you are obliged to redeem and required to act as her brother-in-law and to marry her"<sup>51</sup> even though the Hebrew text says only "I do hereby purchase her." Deuteronomy 25:5-10 is the textual origin for "levirate marriage." We summarize it as follows:

- "Levirate marriage" involves a widow and brother of the deceased, who is called a *yabam* (יָבָם).
- No one besides a brother of the deceased is said to carry out the duty of a *yabam*.
- Only a brother who "dwells with" the deceased is said to carry out the duty of a *yabam*.
- The duty of a *yabam* is legally binding.
- That duty involves "going to her," "taking her to him," and "acting as her *yabam*" (sexual intercourse is implied).
- The point is to provide the widow with offspring so that the *yabam* would "re-establish the name of his deceased brother" in Israel.
- If a *yabam* refused his duty, the widow must confront him before the elders at the city gate.
- That confrontation involves a shaming ceremony.
- The ceremony has three parts: withdrawing the *yabam*'s sandal, spitting in his face, and cursing his name and the name of his house.

The story of Ruth is routinely read and interpreted as if it involved the situation above. After all, Ruth is a childless widow, Boaz is a close relative, he confronts the restorer before the elders at the city gate, the restorer removes his sandal, and Boaz ends up marrying Ruth and providing her with offspring that enables the "name of the deceased" to be "re-established" in Israel. But if one looks closer, it becomes evident that there are significant divergences and outright contradictions between "levirate marriage" and Ruth:

50 Beattie, "Ruth III," p. 43.

51 Derek R. G. Beattie and J. Stanley McIvor, *The Targum of Ruth, Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes; The Targum of Chronicles, Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*. The Aramaic Bible, Vol. 19. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994, p. 30.

- Boaz is not a *levir* (he is neither Machlon's brother, nor did he dwell with him).
- Neither Boaz nor so-and-so are ever called a *yabam*.
- The verb *yabam* does not occur in Ruth.
- There is no hint of a legal obligation for Boaz or so-and-so to do anything for Ruth or No'omi.
- The widow is entirely absent at the city gate.
- There is no shaming ceremony before the elders.
- There is no spitting.
- The “sandal removal” is a regular commercial transaction (not part of a shaming ceremony).
- The “restorer” remains nameless instead of having his name cursed.
- There is no indication that so-and-so's actions were perceived to be detrimental or shameful.
- The situation involves “buying” Ruth (no such verb or situation occurs in Deut).
- The situation involves “buying back” land (no such verb or situation occurs in Deut).

It is no wonder that some scholars, like Samuel R. Driver, would say unequivocally that “The marriage of Bo'az and Ruth . . . is not a Levirate-marriage.”<sup>52</sup> Boaz does not even qualify for the part! But even if, for the sake of argument, one were to grant that the levirate situation is the best context in which to understand the events in Ruth, “It is probable that levirate marriage was not normally thought of as marriage in the full sense. The woman was still considered the wife of the dead man, and the brother was merely a substitute for him for a single purpose. . . . The brother-in-law had completed his duty when he had provided the dead with a single heir.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, once the widow bore a male child, the duty of a *levir* was complete. One is left with the distinct question of whether “marriage” is even an appropriate term to use for that situation.

A better place than Deut 25 to look for commonality is Gen 38. In that story, Tamar's husband dies without providing her with a son. Thus, Judah, her father-in-law, tells Onan, the brother of Tamar's deceased husband, to act as her *levir*. There is no mention of marriage. Only of “going” to Tamar and “giving rise to an heir.” When Tamar is unable to become pregnant and Onan dies, she sets her sights on her father-in-law. She does not marry him either. Instead, she lures him to her bed and becomes pregnant through him. When Judah finds out about this, he attempts to have her killed for adultery, which means that he still considered her the wife of the deceased as opposed to his own. Judah, Tamar, and her son Perez are explicitly mentioned in Ruth (4:12), which makes that story—or something like it—a far more likely backdrop from which to view the events in Ruth. But if that story is more relevant here, then it makes marriage as a controlling theme in Ruth even less likely.

It is in the events at the gate where scholars locate levirate marriage. In that place, the verb used to describe what Boaz does to Ruth is קנה, meaning “to buy/purchase.” Campbell (AYB) explains it as such: “The verb *qnh* . . . , and the verb *mkr*, 'to sell,' in 4:3 are according to their primary connotations terms belonging to commercial transactions involving money or goods, almost always in relation to land or to persons (slaves).”<sup>54</sup> The verb קנה is, in fact, used nowhere else in the HB with reference to

52 Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902, p. 285.

53 Harold H. Rowley, “The Marriage of Ruth,” *HTR* 40.2 (1947): 91.

54 Campbell, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 145. Parenthetical not added.

marriage. As Bush (WBC) observes, “It is highly doubtful whether a conception of marriage by purchase, in which the woman was acquired in a manner analogous to a commercial transaction of buying and selling, was known to either the OT or any ancient Near Eastern society.”<sup>55</sup>

The language that Boaz uses does not indicate the acquisition of a wife; it indicates the acquisition of a slave: “But your male or female slave (עֶבֶד and אִמָּה)—whoever belongs to you—from the nations that surround you [all], from them [alone], you [all] may purchase (the verb is קָנָה) a male or female slave” (Lev 25:44). In fact, the name of the son born to Ruth (עֹבֵד) is the participial form of the verb עָבַד, meaning “to serve/labor/work as a slave.” As a substantive, Obaid would mean “server/laborer/slave-worker”—a term virtually synonymous with עֶבֶד (male slave). Thus, when Josephus explains what Obaid's name means (Ant. 5.336), he uses the Greek word δουλεω, which comes from δουλευω, meaning “to be a slave” (LEH and LS). It would only make sense that a “slave-worker” is born from the kind of woman who is “purchased” (a slave). In fact, Ruth actually refers to herself as Boaz's “female slave” (אִמָּה). According to the law quoted above, it is only from “the nations that surround you [all],” such as *Moab*, that Boaz could legally purchase a slave. Legal conditions are, therefore, satisfied in Ruth, but not those pertaining to “levirate marriage.”

There are even more reasons to believe that marriage was not the issue throughout Ruth. In 3:10, Boaz explicitly praises Ruth for coming to him instead of following after “eligible” or “single men” (see Translation Notes), which implies that he was not, himself, “eligible.” Though the text is silent on the issue, there is every reason to presume that a man of Boaz's age would already be married. Rowley says it well: “It is improbable that he was a bachelor, since bachelors do not seem to have been common in Israel, and it is apparent that Boaz was well past the usual age of marriage.”<sup>56</sup> And, when the narrator steps in (4:7) to explain the significance of the events in ch. 4, marriage does not seem to play a part: “The narrator in Ruth clearly states that this custom concerns redemption . . . and substitution . . . and never mentions a connection with marriage.”<sup>57</sup> To read a levirate marriage into this situation, one must ignore the most probable social context for Boaz, shift Boaz's words about not going after eligible men to not going after *other* eligible men, invent a marriage ritual that did not exist (marriage by purchase), require a usage of קָנָה that cannot be substantiated in the HB, and assume that Boaz qualifies as a *yabam* **despite** the criteria established for one in Deut 25.

We are far better off viewing the situation in Ruth by means of the title *goel* (restorer), which it features prominently. Elsewhere in the HB, the duty of the *goel* is to “restore” the honor of a relative by killing the one who murdered him. This person is called גֹּאֵל הַדָּם (the blood restorer). Furthermore, Leviticus 25:48-49 uses the same verb to describe a brother, uncle, or cousin who “restores” the liberty of his close relative who was sold into slavery. In both situations, a male figure must set right the dire situation of a close male relative. Neither situation deals with marriage. In Ruth, the male that can set things right is Boaz (or “so-and-so”), the close male relative is Elimelek, and the dire situation is Elimelek's family and inheritance. Thus, the events in ch. 4 actually concern Boaz and Elimelek. Boaz does not go to the gate to marry Ruth; he goes to the gate to restore Elimelek and Machlon. That is why

55 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 217.

56 Rowley, “The Marriage of Ruth,” p. 97.

57 Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 186.

Ruth disappears in the final chapter. She has done her part by remaining faithful to her dead husband and his family. Now Boaz must do his part, which involves purchasing the land and Ruth and seeding both until there is fruitfulness. Nowhere in the HB does an act of “restoring” involve the levirate situation. Neither do any passages relating to the levirate situation refer to the *yabam* as a “restorer.” It is merely accidental that Ruth's restoration involves marriage. Thus, it is only by reading the text through a Jane Austen framework that marriage figures prominently in interpretation and translation.

### 3. Ruth as Identity Formation

In the sections above, we discussed two interpretive frameworks that distort both text and translation. Here we provide a different framework that can better explain the text and, therefore, provide more accurate translations. That framework is based on **Social Identity Theory** (hereafter **SIT**), which seeks to understand how individual and group identity is formed and maintained. The theory has its foundation in the work of social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner.<sup>58</sup> There are two ways that SIT may be used with regard to Ruth. One is to inquire into the way that a narrative shapes the identity of its audience. We might, for instance, identify the implied hearer<sup>59</sup> of the text as an ancient Israelite and then ask how the text functioned to give that Israelite a sense of identity.<sup>60</sup> Another way is to ask how SIT may help us interpret the meaning of the narrative and arrive, thereby, at a more adequate translation. The second literary usage of SIT provides an alternative framework to the two discussed above. In the rest of this section, therefore, we will use insights from SIT to illumine the meaning of Ruth and provide several examples of how it influences translation. For the sake of discussion, we will call this an **identity formation framework**.

According to SIT, people perceive of themselves as belonging to some groups (in-groups) and not others (out-groups) in order to make sense of themselves and their place in the world. “Ancient persons routinely understood themselves in terms of their embeddedness in social relations such as ethnic group, family, place of origin, trade, etc.”<sup>61</sup> Identity is partially constructed, therefore, through membership and participation within one's particular social groups. The difference between groups is made evident through boundary markers and what Tajfel and Turner call social stratification: “The relations between social groups is characterized by marked stratification, making it impossible or very difficult for individuals as individuals, to divest themselves of an unsatisfactory, underprivileged, or stigmatized group membership.”<sup>62</sup>

Boundaries and social stratification are evident throughout Ruth. In the fields around Bethlehem, for example, the text goes out of its way to distinguish the “young men” (נערים) from the “young

58 One of the earliest and most influential publications is Henri Tajfel's *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic, 1978.

59 Before the advent of Hellenism, only an elite and specially trained minority group (scribes) had access to biblical texts. Most people, therefore, would become familiar with Ruth by hearing it recited, not by reading it.

60 This is the method utilized by Peter H. W. Lau in *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth*. He believed that Ruth was composed in order to encourage Israelites to go above and beyond what the Deuteronimistic Law required of people in their everyday lives.

61 Coleman A. Baker, “Social Identity Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” *BTB* 42.3 (2012): 133.

62 Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior.” Page 278 in *Political Psychology*. Key Readings in Social Psychology. Eds. John T. Jost and Jim Sidanius. New York: Psychology Press, 2004.

women” (נערות). Each occupies their own place in the social and agricultural sphere. Compelled by social forces perhaps more than any personal interest in Ruth, Boaz urges her to stick with and follow after his “young women” as opposed to his “young men” (2:8)—a suggestion with which even No'omi urges her to comply (2:22). Furthermore, Ruth's status as an outsider is continually affirmed throughout the narrative by the repeated use of her ethnic designation “the Moabite.” Through gendered and ethnic terminology, the text makes evident the boundaries between social groups and how (seemingly) impermeable they are since they are based on accidents of nature and upbringing.

Sometimes, however, the line between in-group and out-group may become blurred. Gleaning in the field “among” the grain stalks signifies just such an event. Ruth is not on the sidelines (the arena of the outsider) picking at what is left. She is in the center of the action, gathering what is purposely “seized” for her by Boaz's workers. This would illustrate to anyone watching (hearing) that Ruth was a participant of the in-group. No one would believe, however, that Ruth's status had actually changed just because she behaved like one of Boaz's people. Not even Ruth would believe such a thing. In fact, Tajfel and Turner explain exactly why Ruth would say, despite her treatment, that she was “not equivalent to” (2:13) Boaz's workers: “Subordinate groups . . . internalize a wider social evaluation of themselves as 'inferior' or 'second class,' and this consensual inferiority is reproduced as relative self-derogation.”<sup>63</sup>

If one approaches the text through an identity formation framework, it appears that one of its primary goals is to convince its audience that Ruth the Moabite is a member of the Israelite in-group. To do this, the text highlights similarities between Ruth and the in-group (or, *vice versa*, distinctions between Ruth and the out-group) and finds creative ways to apply distinctive markers of the in-group to Ruth herself. Ruth the Moabite, for instance, shares two distinct character traits with Boaz, a respected and authoritative elder of the in-group: both are חסד (faithful) and חיל (valorous). Boaz and Ruth also use the same turn of phrase “Whatever you might think [is best], I will do” (3:5, 11). Perhaps Lau said it best: “As Ruth relates to Boaz and Naomi within this society, her personal character traits are manifest, in particular her initiative and her חסד. These, as aspects of her personal identity, are central to the transformation of her social identity.”<sup>64</sup> On the other side of the coin, several texts in the HB depict Moabite women as willing partners in sexual deviancy. We have already discussed Lot and his daughters. There is also the story in Num 25 about how Israel “went whoring after Moab's daughters” and fell under YHWH's wrath. If these stories reflected negatively on Moabite women in ancient Israel, Ruth can be distinguished from them in that, contrary to the erotic encounter framework, she did not attempt to seduce or allure Boaz and we have no evidence of any sexual activity occurring on the threshing-floor (see section B1). Furthermore, Ruth is continually portrayed as one with true and stalwart allegiances, whose actions eventually lead not to corruption and divine judgment, but restoration and divine blessing. If there was a negative stereotype for Moabite women, Ruth stands above it.

Other examples of positive association between groups could be noted. Within Israelite lore, for instance, the eponymous ancestor of Israel (Jacob) had many sons (such as Judah) who, because of famine, were forced to leave their land. Having gone into a type of exile in a foreign country (Egypt), they returned to reclaim their inheritance and became the people-group “Israel.” The story of Ruth shares these identity markers. An Israelite family, which originally lived in the land, is forced to leave

63 Tajfel and Turner, “The Social Identity Theory,” p. 280.

64 Lau, *Identity and Ethics*, p. 118.

due to famine. That family then returns from a type of exile in a foreign country (Moab) to reclaim its inheritance. If such a pivotal correspondence with Israelite identity begins the narrative, another ends it: “May YHWH establish the woman who enters your home like Rachel and Leah, who built, between them, the house of Israel” (4:11). Thus, the family of Elimelek, and Ruth in particular, is aligned at beginning and end with foundational characters of Israelite identity. Ruth's foil is Orpah, who proves that she does not belong because she “went back to her clan” in Moab (1:15). Ruth, however, shows that she belongs to the Israelite in-group by going back to her clan: Ephrathah of Judah.

Scholars have long wondered why Ruth ends not just with the claim of Davidic ancestry through Boaz, but with an extended genealogy that traces David's line back to Perez. Bush (WBC), for instance, said that the “important appositive in 17d, 'he is the father of Jesse, the father of David,' provides the fulfillment of the prayer of the women for the newborn infant in 14c, 'May his name be renowned in Israel.’”<sup>65</sup> That is certainly true. Within an identity formation framework, however, it becomes evident that far more is involved than blessing and fulfillment—identity itself is at play:

“To embody their identity, groups attribute the role of prototype to some ideal person(s) from the past through the vehicle of social memory. Prototypical ingroup members, and thus the identity of the group, are not static but are capable of change depending upon the situation of the group as the group remembers its prototypical figures in new ways to address new situations. This process of reinterpreting prototypical ingroup members from the past in order to address present group situations may be especially useful in the process of recategorizing two groups (or subgroups) into a common superordinate identity.”<sup>66</sup>

The recategorization of two groups into a common identity explains both the end of the story and its concluding genealogy. David, as the legendary king of a united Israeli nation-state, would be viewed by in-group members as a shining example of the prototypical Israelite. The story of Ruth casts a Moabite not just as an ancestor of this prototypical Israelite, but as the *de facto* reason for his existence (without Ruth “the Moabite,” there would be no David). This bridges ethnic and cultural divides to bring two different people-groups together into the shared social identity of “Israel.” And as for a genealogy going back to Perez, it could not escape the attention of anyone familiar with the story of Tamar and Judah that a situation much like Ruth's defined part of Judah's ancestry (see section B1). Perez is even named in the narrative itself (4:12), where the particle of comparison (*kaf*) provides a direct link between the house of Judah through Tamar and the house of Boaz through Ruth.

Another aspect of the Ruth narrative that has puzzled readers is the purpose of the final chapter. The Jane Austen framework would predict that the events at the gate are all about “levirate marriage.” Yet, as we have already seen (section B2), there is very little that corresponds to it and a great deal that contradicts it. One has to wonder why the fourth chapter is even relevant. Why not end the story in the third chapter with Boaz accepting responsibility for restoring Ruth and, consequently, move to the news spreading to the women, the giving of their blessing, the taking of Ruth, and the birth of Obed? Why are the events at the gate *necessary for this story*? Many scholars seem to believe that the point of the final chapter—and, perhaps, the entire story of Ruth—is legalistic (an attempt to make sense of events in terms of Mosaic law). Others think that the point is to explain how Ruth's circumstances fit into

65 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 251.

66 Baker, “Social Identity Theory,” p. 132.

religious practice. Some argue that, since law and religious practice were intertwined in the ancient NE, it is both.<sup>67</sup> The identity formation framework, however, provides new rationale for events at the gate:

“If identities require boundaries, boundaries require boundary-crossing customs (rituals) for newcomers. Anthropologists refer to these boundary-crossing customs as rituals. Boundaries and boundary-crossing rituals are an important aspect of social identity, particularly with reference to the development of a common ingroup identity.”<sup>68</sup>

The events at the gate are the boundary-crossing ritual that reifies identity, which is why the final chapter is so important to the story. Without it, Ruth would remain an outsider who is only peripheral to a story about how a purely Israelite family was broken and then restored. Now, however, since Ruth has been “purchased,” she quite literally “belongs to” Israel and represents a key piece of *real estate* on which the *nation-state* will be built. Hubbard (NICOT) hit the nail on the head when he said, “What had been up to now a private matter among Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi must now receive public settlement. Only thereby can Ruth become a full-fledged Israelite.”<sup>69</sup> Having looked at how SIT can make sense of the Ruth narrative and shape one's expectations, we now examine a few passages to see where this can aid in the translation process.

#### Example 1: להכירני ואנכי נכריה (Ruth 2:10)

One text that clearly points to boundary markers separating in-group from out-group is Ruth 2:10. Boaz had just given Ruth permission to glean with his young women in the field and to drink from his own provisions of water. Ruth responds by prostrating herself before him and exclaiming at the fact that he would regard her favorably enough to do the following: להכירני ואנכי נכריה. Virtually all English translations render the infinitive construct as “to take notice of” and נכריה as “foreigner” or “stranger.” The implication is that no one would take notice of someone like Ruth because she was a foreigner. Yet the text tells us otherwise. When Ruth returned with No'omi, we are told that “the whole town was abuzz over *them*” (1:19). Boaz goes on to say, “Firmly affirmed to me was every [way] that you conducted [yourself]” (2:11). Even though he had never met her till that moment, Boaz already heard all about her! In fact, Boaz says in the next chapter that “everyone knows [at] my clan's gate that a valorous woman [are] you” (3:11). So it is evident that many people in Bethlehem took notice of her and thought that everyone else should take notice of her as well. If, then, there is nothing out-of-the-ordinary in “taking notice” of a “foreigner,” either Ruth's words are vacuous flattery or she actually meant what she said and was responding to something else entirely.

As seen in section B2, we may dismiss the idea that Ruth was responding favorably to Boaz's attempt to show his interest in her and win her affections. By using SIT as an interpretive framework, however, the whole interaction takes on new meaning: Ruth is overwhelmed with gratitude not just for the way Boaz has responded to her needs, but for the way he has valorously crossed over all normal social boundaries by treating her as though she were part of the Israelite in-group. The key term here is

67 See Bob Becking and Anne-Mareike Wetter, “Boaz in the Gate (Ruth 4,1-12): Legal Transaction or Religious Ritual?,” *ZABR* 19.1 (2013): 253-265.

68 Baker, “Social Identity Theory,” p. 131.

69 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 231.

נכריה, which isn't meant to tell us how “foreign” or “strange” she is, but is an identity marker that “can describe a woman of a different, non-Israelite ethnicity (1 Kgs 11:1, 8; Ezra 10:2, 10–11, 14, 17–18, 44; Neh 13:26–27).”<sup>70</sup> In other words, נכריה establishes Ruth not just as someone who is *different*, but as someone *who does not belong* to the Israelite in-group.

The composer or scribal artisan has paired נכריה with להכירני (from the verb נכר) in order to create a fantastic word-play. The verb נכר means “to recognize” or “appreciate.” In the Hiphil (the causative stem), it would equate with “bringing about acceptance.” Thus, Ruth is not responding to the mere fact that someone has “noticed” her, but that someone has “accepted her in” even though she is נכריה (someone not accepted in). Though the verb stands in contrast with the adjective, they both ring with assonance, which links their contrasting ideas together. Thus, both we and she are made to marvel at the way Boaz transgresses ethnic and cultural boundaries to treat a Moabite “stranger” like an Israelite friend. To capture both the assonance of the words and their clashing semantics, we render the verb “to make an insider” and the adjective, “outsider.”

Rauber may also be right when, perceiving the larger body of Israelite literature, he says, “Our imaginations at once expand to draw into this outwardly simple story large portions of the total experience of the people Israel. Surely *the stranger* is one of the most important images of the OT, one especially prominent in the central experience of the exodus and the intense reflection upon that experience solidified in the Torah.”<sup>71</sup> If Israel's own literature perceived of its people as having been “strangers” (outsiders) then, again, Ruth's identity and that of the Israelite in-group would be brought into alignment.

#### Example 2: אלהיך אלהי (Ruth 1:16)

Despite appearances to the contrary, one of the most difficult interpretive cruxes occurs in 1:16. Becking and Wetter phrase the problem as follows: “The general appreciation of the story veils a set of exegetical problems such as: (1) the question how to render 'elohîm in the vow of Ruth: 'god,' 'gods,' or 'ancestor deities'?”<sup>72</sup> Virtually all translators and commentators view Ruth's statement (אלהיך אלהי) as a shift in religious affiliation (from the god Kemosh to the god YHWH). Thus, they render it “your god [is] my god.” Bush (WBC), for example, says, “Ruth's devotion to Naomi caused her . . . to break the bonds even of community and religion.”<sup>73</sup> Hubbard (NICOT) agrees: “She renounced her ethnic and religious roots and adopted the nationality and religion of Naomi. Henceforth, her kinfolk would be Israelites, her god Yahweh.”<sup>74</sup>

Such an interpretation, however, is fraught with difficulty. First, polytheism was the norm. Although the chief deity of the Moabites was Kemosh, Ruth and Orpah's Moabite families would have served and worshiped other deities as well. The HB also makes it clear that, despite YHWH's claim to superiority and/or exclusivity, the ancient Israelites served many gods. So if there was a shift in religious

70 Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 138.

71 Rauber, “Literary Values in the Bible,” p. 31.

72 Becking and Wetter, “Boaz in the Gate,” p. 253.

73 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 87.

74 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 117.



affiliation at this point, it would have been from the *gods* of Moab to the *gods* of Israel. Second, in that time and culture, Ruth and Orpah would have left behind both their families *and their gods* when they married into Elimelek's family. Thus, any shift in religious affiliation would have happened 10 years prior! That situation is presupposed by No'omi's blessing in vv. 8-9. If neither Ruth nor Orpah followed the Israelite deity, invoking his name over them would be a meaningless gesture. More to the point, however, virtually all English translators agree that, in 1:15, Orpah "turned back/returned to her people and to her god(s)." But if Orpah had just then returned to Moab's god(s), this means that while she was with No'omi, *her god was YHWH*. And if Orpah's god was YHWH, there is every reason to believe that Ruth's god was YHWH as well, which means that her statement in 1:16 could not signal a transition from either "my god" to "your god" or "my gods" to "your gods."

If one approaches the text through an identity formation framework, however, Ruth's statement makes a lot more sense. As Lau states, the story of Ruth "shows how Ruth becomes a member of the ingroup. The first and most crucial step in her incorporation is her pledge to Naomi" in vv. 16-17.<sup>75</sup> No'omi was trying to push Ruth out of the kinship group to which she currently belonged. She made the case that this was for Ruth's own "peace" or "stability" since she, herself, had nothing to offer. The question then is whether Ruth, like Orpah, would abandon her mother-in-law. Instead, she affirmed, as strongly and with as much resolve as No'omi, that she belonged to the family of Elimelek of the clan of Ephrathah of the people of Judah. She did this by taking No'omi's words and tone and dishing them back in full measure. Just as No'omi had said "May YHWH deal with you" (from the verb עֲשֶׂה) as she dismissed Ruth (v. 8), so Ruth responded, "So be it [that] YHWH deals with me" (from the verb עֲשֶׂה) as she affirmed her family membership (v. 17). Just as No'omi broke into a more expressive register (poetry) to convince her daughters-in-law to leave (v. 13), so Ruth broke out into a more expressive register (poetry) to stand firmly against an attack that threatened her identity and devotion (vv. 16-17). And just as No'omi used the forceful rhetoric of an imprecation (I swear that) to end her bitter diatribe (see Translation Notes), so Ruth took up the forceful rhetoric of an imprecation (So be it that . . . yes, so be it utterly) to end her bold and assertive defense.

None of this is about gods or religious devotion. This is about maintaining family affiliation in the face of someone *who was presently trying to destroy it*. To do so, Ruth affirms her allegiance not just to No'omi, but to No'omi's "people." That is the context in which we find her state אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֱלֹהֵי. As it turns out, אֱלֹהֵי also refers to deceased ancestors! Thus, when Saul went to a "mistress of the pit" to have her raise a man from the underworld, that man, identified explicitly as Samuel, is called an 'ēlōhîm: "The king said to her, 'Don't be afraid! What, in fact, do you see?' The woman said to Saul, 'An [ancestral] spirit (אֱלֹהֵי), I saw, rising from the earth'" (1 Sam 28:13). Just as the reference to Samuel as an אֱלֹהֵי takes place within the context of death and the grave, so Ruth's reference to an אֱלֹהֵי takes place within the context of death and the grave. If Ruth's statement had to do with devotion to the Israelite deity, her final assertions about death and burial would be entirely out-of-place. If, however, it had to do with *ancestral* devotion, it fits neatly into the surrounding context. Schipper (AYB) says it well: "The context of kinship, death, and burial with one's relatives suggests that 'ēlōhîm refers to ancestors rather than gods. Ruth intends to join Naomi's ancestors upon her death and be buried in the

75 Lau, *Identity and Ethics*, p. 92.

same place as Naomi and her ancestors . . . . Her oath that even death will not separate her from Naomi further reflects this idea”<sup>76</sup>

An identity formation framework enables us to see that, in 1:16, Ruth is affirming her bonds of kinship. Only by remaining devoted to No'omi does she have any chance of crossing from the Moabite out-group to the Israelite in-group. This is, therefore, the first step in her journey of identity within the story, but certainly not the start of it! She had already joined the family and taken its god or gods as her own when she married Machlon. Now, faced with the possibility of its dissolution, she chooses to remain faithful. Unlike Orpah, who “went back to her clan and to her *[ancestral] spirits*,” Ruth affirms that “your clan *[is]* my clan and your *[ancestral] spirits*, mine.”

Example 3: **לֹא יִפְגְּעוּ-בְךָ** (Ruth 2:22)

Tajfel and Turner helped lay the groundwork for understanding the social forces at work within inter-group conflict. They wrote that “An unequal distribution of objective resources promotes antagonism between dominant and subordinate groups.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, as soon as someone within a subordinate group starts to go after resources controlled by or perceived to be controlled by a dominant group, the dominant group will do everything it can to maintain their dominance. In fact, “The mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, even in the absence of any creditable threat to resources, the mere presence of an outsider would be enough to provoke negative responses from members of the in-group.

A good place to look for this situation would be in Boaz's field. Boaz gives Ruth the authority to eat and drink in the midst of his own Israelite harvesters as if she were one of them and to freely glean—that is, to take for herself whatever resources she can lay her hands upon. As a Moabite, however, she is clearly not a part of Boaz's retinue nor of the dominant ethnic group in that region. When Ruth tells her mother-in-law about this special treatment, No'omi says, “Better, my daughter, if you go out with his young women, then they (Boaz's young men) will not **פגע** you” (2:22). Since the verb **פגע** typically refers to “meeting,” “encountering,” or “coming upon” a person or thing, many early English translations (Geneva, KJV, Lesser, etc.) and even some later ones (Rotherham, Fenton, Goldingay, etc.) render it that way. By reading the text within an identity formation framework, however, it becomes clear that this would not be a neutral “meeting.” Any encounter is likely to be antagonistic and adversarial—meant to protect the in-group's identity and to enforce the in-group's dominance over resources.

To test the hypothesis, one can survey the use of **פגע** in the HB to see whether it contains that semantic nuance. The result is enlightening. When accompanied by prepositional *bet*, **פגע** means “to come strongly against” in a physical sense (to attack/assault), a verbal sense (to contest/contend/challenge/advocate), or both. In 1 Kgs 2:25, for instance, Solomon sends someone to **פגע + ב** a man so that he dies. And when Samson asks people not to **פגע + ב** him, they respond by saying they will not kill him (15:12-3). In such cases, **פגע + ב** signals a *violent physical attack*. In Jer 7:16, the prophet is told not

76 Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation*, p. 111.

77 Tajfel and Turner, “The Social Identity Theory,” p. 281.

78 *Ibid.*

to pray for the people, not to cry out, and not to **ב + פגע** the deity because he will not listen. In that case, the action is verbal since, of course, Jeremiah could not do violence to the deity: Jeremiah must not “contend” with God’s justice or “badger” him with requests that he cannot accept. A similar nuance is found in Ruth 1:16, where No’omi is trying to coerce Ruth into leaving her family. Ruth responds with **ב + פגע** to tell her to stop “bullying” her. So we see that this is the kind of language one uses if they were feeling physically, emotionally, and/or psychologically threatened. In Ruth 2:22, then, the use of **ב** with **פגע** verifies the meaning anticipated by the identity formation framework: No’omi is concerned that Boaz’s young men might “attack,” “assault,” or “harm” Ruth. Many translations now communicate that sense, though typically for reasons that have nothing to do with an identity formation framework:

- “to be harmed” (NET and NIV)
- “to be ill-treated” (NJB)
- “to be molested” (RSV, GW, AAT, etc.)
- “to be assaulted” (ESV)
- “to fall upon” (NASB)
- “to attack” (ISV)

Example 4: **וּפְרִשֶׁת כִּנּוֹף עַל-אַמְתֶּךָ** (Ruth 3:9)

In section B2, example 3, we saw how the phrase “spread your fringe over me” was akin to saying “become my protector/guardian” or “take ownership of me.” If read within an identity formation framework, one can see why that request is so meaningful. In order for Ruth to become a full member of the Israelite in-group, there must be a change in her social status. In the ancient NE, the **כִּנּוֹף** (“hem” or “fringe”) served as a powerful symbol of a person’s change in status. In 1 Sam 24, for instance, David cuts the fringe off of Saul’s robe. Seeing the fringe in David’s hand, Saul says, “Now I know clearly that powerfully will you come to power. Established in your hand will be the kingdom of Israel” (v. 21). Thus, David has undergone a symbolic change in position, power, and authority by removing and taking possession of Saul’s fringe. K. Lawson Younger Jr. has also noted that to “grasp the hem” of a garment was a highly symbolic act: “A suppliant beseeches, or indicates his submission to, his superior by grasping the hem of the superior’s garment. . . . It establishes a closer relationship between suppliant and superior, especially between vassal and suzerain.”<sup>79</sup> One ancient inscription (COS 2.137), for example, records how a prominent man is told by his lord (Abbael) that he forfeits his town and lands if he “lets go of the hem” of Abbael’s garment. In other words, by taking hold of the hem/fringe of a lord, that person gains new status and position within his community, but by letting go of it, his status is lost. In order to uncover Boaz’s legs, Ruth would have to take hold of his fringe. Though the passage is silent on the issue, it is quite possible that she was still holding the fringe when Boaz awoke. In this manner, she could use it as a prop by which to communicate her intent: since I have now given my allegiance to you, you must become my lord/master. Boaz accepts her allegiance, purchases her as a slave-wife, and brings her into the fold of Israel.

79 William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., “The Panamuwa Inscription.” Page 159, note 24, in *The Context of Scripture: Volume II: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*. Boston: Brill, 2000.

## (C) Understanding Gender

### 1. Grammatical

Unlike English, Hebrew is gender-inflected. The purpose of gender inflection is to show the relationship between grammatical units (syntax). Any correspondence between grammatical gender and the actual gender of a person or creature is usually coincidental. The word “father,” for instance, is an unmarked masculine (אב), whereas “fathers” is a marked feminine (אבות). If “fathers” had a masculine plural form, it would be אבים. Since grammatical gender does not necessarily reflect real-world gender, the feminine ending on “fathers” is unremarkable. To complicate matters, a verb’s gender may conflict with its subject’s. As a rule, masculine gendered terms receive preferential treatment whether the text means to say something about the gender of its subjects or not. It is important, therefore, to treat gender as nothing but an indicator of syntax when that is the case, but to mimic the gender of the language when and where it is semantically significant. “Formally equivalent” and “paraphrase” translations may follow the former, but ignore the latter. “Literal” translations may follow the latter, but ignore the former.

One example of **grammatical gender** can be seen in Ruth 3:14, which uses the expression “a man [insert verb] his fellow/neighbor.” In this instance, “man” (איש) functions distributively (see JM §147d) to refer to any person, regardless of gender, standing in a reciprocal relationship with another person (referred to as “his fellow/neighbor”). Masculine forms are utilized not because the text means to say something about male beings, but because they are grammatically preferred by the language. It would, therefore, be more accurate to translate the expression “one [insert verb] another” than to include male-gendered language. Even the oldest English translations agreed. The Geneva, Bishops', and KJV bibles all rendered the phrase “one could know another.” In fact, virtually every translation that gives male-gendered renderings in that verse is historically recent (NJB, NAB, Alter, etc.).

### 2. Semantic

In some cases, the gender reflected by the grammar actually serves a real semantic purpose. One example comes from Ruth 3:8, where Boaz discovers Ruth lying next to him: “right there [was] a אשה lying [at] his [lower] coverings!” אשה refers to a “woman.” Virtually all translators render it that way. Some, however, believe it has a more generic sense. Bush (WBC), for instance, thinks that “'Woman' is here equivalent to the Eng. indefinite pronoun 'someone.'”<sup>80</sup> Though Hubbard (NICOT) does not translate it that way, he shares Bush's sentiment: “Since the audience knew the person was Ruth, the expected masc. form gave way to the fem. one to avoid an obvious incongruity.”<sup>81</sup>

With such statements, however, we must disagree. It would certainly be a surprise for Boaz to find anyone lying next to his legs in the middle of the night, but the fact that it is an unknown *woman* places them both in a circumstance where their character traits may be undermined. This gives the scene its tension. What is Boaz going to say? Will he invite her to bed? If he does, what will Ruth do? If she declines, wouldn't she go back on her word to No'omi? Wouldn't she break her חסד? What about Boaz's חסד? Would he do something in the dark, in secret, that he wouldn't have done otherwise?

80 Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, p. 159.

81 Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, p. 207, note 8.

Through such actions, Ruth could receive an heir for her deceased husband. But would that be “best” for her? Isn't all of this more like a quick fix that may, in fact, fix nothing and could have unintended and undesirable consequences? As in almost any time period, Ruth is far more vulnerable to criticism and violence than Boaz simply because she is a woman. It is the high art of the storyteller that brings this tale to a climax at this juncture. The fact that Boaz discovers this to be a “woman” is integral to it.

Note also how the composer or scribal artisan juxtaposed “the man” (הָאִישׁ)—not “Boaz” or an unstated masculine subject within the verb—with “a woman” (אִשָּׁה)—not “Ruth” or an unstated feminine subject within the participle. When Boaz asks “who are you?” in the following verse, he does not use the masculine form of “you” (אַתָּה), but the feminine one (אַתְּ), which indicates that he was aware, even in that brief moment, that this was a “she,” not simply a “person” for which the masculine form would have precedence. It is important, therefore, to communicate the gender of the word in English translation. For more on gender in Biblical Hebrew, see Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor's *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*.

## (D) Format

### 1. Lineation

**Lineation** is the arrangement of the lines of a text according to content and/or strophes. Although, by the time of the Masoretes, many poetic texts were written in a special format, it was not so in antiquity. The lineation herein is an interpretive measure meant to differentiate poetry from prose and to better elucidate textual content. It usually follows the accentual divisions used by the medieval synagogues and documented by the Masoretes. When it does not (the accents were placed in the texts to aid in oral recitation, not to demarcate distinct units of poetry or narrative), the reason(s) for that deviation are often indicated in the Translation Notes.

### 2. Separation

Ancient scribes divided their texts into smaller sections called *parashot*. One was referred to as “open” due to the fact that either a large space was left open at the end of one section while a new section began on a different line or an entire blank line was left open between the end of one section and the start of the next. The other was referred to as “closed” because one section ended and another began on the same line with only a small, enclosed space between them. The open section differentiated between larger literary units (pericopes) and the closed section differentiated between smaller literary units (paragraphs). Both types of *parashot* can be found in the DSS. Even among the standardized manuscripts copied and preserved by the Masoretes, however, there are differences in the placement and type of *parashot*. In the texts that formed the “Writings” in the ancient Jewish canon, many section indicators were not even created until very late in time. In Ruth, for instance, only one *parashah* is preserved by  $\mathfrak{M}^L$  and  $\mathfrak{M}^A$ . This “open” section separates the narrative itself (1:1-4:17) from the concluding genealogical list (4:18-22). Like the ancient scribes, we separate those literary sections by inserting a space between them. Since the Hebrew manuscripts of Ruth lack “closed” sections, but English narrative requires them, we separate the text into paragraphs. Those divisions can be somewhat arbitrary. While we may explain our choices in Translation Notes, that is not always the case.

### 3. Versification

**Versification** refers to the division of the text into verses. That division is ancient, but it was oral long before it was written. The earliest Rabbinic literature utilized verse division. By the time of the Masoretes, verse divisions were already standardized. Copiers counted the verses within a text in order to guarantee that the text was copied precisely. THF follows the verse division as documented in the Hebrew manuscripts. Most translations instead follow the verse divisions created by Christians for the Vulgate half a millennium (or more) later.

### 4. Italics

In narrative texts like Ruth, italics are used primarily to highlight words or phrases with special significance (such as word-play or oral devices that provide emphasis to the story or help establish character). See Translation Notes for more details.

### 5. Parentheses

Parentheses are used primarily to indicate where an **editorial insertion** has taken place within the body of a text (see, for example, Ruth 4:7). This is done for literary purposes. No judgment is intended as to the value or authority of the original or secondary portions. Sometimes our parentheses correspond to marks made by the scribes themselves in their manuscripts. Other times, it is based on our own textual analysis. Occasionally, parentheses are used to further explain something within the text that would otherwise escape the reader (as, for instance, the word-play in Ruth 1:1).

### 6. Brackets

Square brackets indicate words that are not present in the Hebrew text itself, but which, nevertheless, are represented by the tone or context of the language, are required by English, or are included for reasons of style. One of the most common uses of square brackets is to accommodate the linking verb or **copula**. In Biblical Hebrew, a noun or phrase is often juxtaposed with another in order to indicate predication; as such, the use of a copula is unnecessary. English, however, requires the verb “to be” in order to signal predication. Thus, it must be inserted. Curly brackets are employed in places where there is a high probability that a scribe accidentally duplicated part of the text (see, for example, Ruth 2:21).

### 7. Masoretic Notes

Sometimes in the Translation Notes, reference will be made to Masoretic notes that appear in the margins of the Leningrad Codex (or other manuscripts). Usually, these notes indicate that ancient Jewish tradition read (*Qere*) the consonantal text differently than it was written (*Ketiv*). Reasons for different readings include, but are not limited to: a different pronunciation, the existence of a variant, reinterpretation of a passage, or the correction of what was presumed to be a scribal error.

At the end of every text or scroll, the Masoretes kept notes of things such as the total number of verses, the number of sections according to the triennial reading cycle, or the number and types of paragraphs. These are called **Masorah Finalis**. Since each manuscript differs in the way it records that information, THF reproduces the notes at the end of every biblical text according to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. The following notes, for example, appear at the end of Deuteronomy:

*the heavenly fire*

Aleppo Codex	Leningrad	Oriental 4445
The total number of verses in this scroll [is] 955.	The total number of verses in this scroll [is] 955.  The total number of verses in Torah [is] 5,845. 8 100 40 5.  The total number of words in Torah [is] 79,856.  The total number of letters in Torah [is] 400,945.	The total number of verses in this scroll of Moses in Torah [is] 955.  All the verses in Torah [equal] 5,845. 8 100 40 5.  The amount of open sections in Torah [is] 290 and the amount of closed sections in Torah [is] 379.  The [section] total [is] 669.

For more on the Masorah, see Page H. Kelly, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford's *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary*.





## Background

### From Great Ruin Comes Great Restoration

Life and death. Curse and blessing. Emptiness and fullness. Hope and despair. Lineage and identity. The struggle to survive and the miracle of restoration. Despite its brevity, Ruth teems with meaning. It invites its audience to follow YHWH regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religious background. The text sympathizes with our suffering and offers us hope. Like Ruth or No'omi, we may dwell in the day-to-day desolation of the empty, the forsaken, the cursed, or the forgotten, but YHWH rewards faithfulness and valor. From death, he brings life. From ruin, he brings restoration!

### Who Belongs To Israel?

The opening verse indicates that Ruth was composed in a different historical period than the one described. In 4:7, the reader is informed of customs no longer practiced when the text was written. It also presumes a Davidic dynasty. Since that dynasty ended in 587/6 BC, it is reasonable to assume that a story concerned with its origin and not its demise would predate the exile. By scandalously claiming that David had Moabite roots, the text challenges assumptions about Israelite ethnicity and identity. For that reason, some date it to the post-exilic period when, like the author of Malachi, voices rose in opposition to Ezra's exclusionary policy of divorce and disinheritance on the basis of race. Ruth brings things back to the beginning: the house of Israel is built on the outsider (4:11).

### Form & Genre

Ruth is a folktale with a clear plot-line. It is composed, as first noted by Rauber, using a highly sophisticated bracketing device. Four acts play out within the story—each bracketed at beginning and end by introductory and concluding matter, which propels the story along from one key scene to another. As aptly schematized by Porten (“The Scroll of Ruth: A Rhetorical Study”), the two inner acts (ch. 2 and 3), parallel each other by taking place within related contextual realms (Boaz's field and Boaz's threshing-floor) and by involving the same dramatic encounter (Boaz showing favor to Ruth). Furthermore, the first and final acts (ch. 1 and 4) bracket the whole text by beginning with ten years of death and ending with ten generations of birth. In this manner, the story moves from tragedy to triumph. Unlike other biblical texts, the main characters are women and its perspective is fundamentally feminine. It opens with the

loss of No'omi's offspring and ends with her gaining another. Ruth fills the role of seven male heirs. Her house is blessed in the name of Rachel and Leah—not Jacob. It is the women who survive, act, and impel the men. Through a woman, Israel receives its kingdom. The story features several common folkloric tropes such as the youth outsmarting the elder, the inversion of social norms (such as a woman going after a man or men drawing water), and the use of comic characters (like the vitally important restorer, who is so unimportant that he is simply called So-And-So; the noble and admired patriarch, constantly speaking of blessing and virtue, who is caught drunk with his flap up; and a pair of brothers who could not have been named worse by loving parents). As in any good story, characterization is created not just by action, but dialogue. Both Boaz and No'omi show their age by speaking a formal and flowery language. No'omi peppers her speech with puns and often breaks out in poetry. Boaz is too long-winded for poetry, but constantly uses words that ring with alliteration. Ruth tailors her speech to her interlocutor. She cleverly reuses words spoken by her interlocutors in a way that subverts and reinterprets their application. In such a way, she boldly challenges the utterances of those around her to bring about the end she intends.

In the Masoretic codices, Ruth comes after Proverbs with its poem about the “valorous woman.” The Septuagint, however, put it after Judges, which is, perhaps, a more fitting placement. By setting its scenes within the time of the “Judges” (Deliverers) and ending with a genealogical list that shows how Ruth's actions led to the coming of the great King, Ruth is identified as another Deliverer of Israel. Additionally, Porten has shown that the opening of Ruth makes use of the same kind of introductory formula utilized several times by the scroll of Judges: “there was a man from A and his name was B” (Manoah in Judg 13:2, Micaiah in Judg 17:1, and, with a slight variation of the formula, a Levite in Judg 17:7). Unlike the Deliverers of Judges, however, it is neither armies nor enemies against which Ruth stands, but death and deprivation. And she does not bring peace by means of war, but through faithfulness and valor, which makes her, perhaps, the greatest “Judge” of all.

# Ruth



## Act 1

## 8

<sup>1</sup> During the time of deliverance [by] the deliverers, there was famine in the land, so a [certain] man set out from the Bread-House (Bethlehem) of Judah to settle a while in the country of Moab—he and his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup> Now, the *name* of the man [was] Elimelek, the *name* of his wife [was] No'omi, and the *name* of his two sons [was] Machlon and Kilion. [All these were] Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah. They entered the country of Moab. That's [where] they *came*.

<sup>3</sup> Elimelek, No'omi's husband, died. She, herself, [however], was left with her two sons,

<sup>4</sup> who got themselves Moabite wives. The *name* of the first [was] Orpah and the *name* of the second Ruth. They settled the *same* about ten years. <sup>5</sup> Both Machlon and Kilion also, [however], died. So the woman was left without her two little boys and her husband.

<sup>6</sup> Having, herself, started out—her daughters-in-law alongside, she turned away from the country of Moab because she heard in Moabite country that YHWH had righted his people[']s plight] by bringing to their [breadth] bread. <sup>7</sup> She departed from the place to which she had come—her two daughters-in-law, [who were] in her [keep], alongside. They set out on the road to go back to the land of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> No'omi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Come [now], each [of you] go back to her mother's keep. May YHWH deal [as] faithfully with you both as you both did with those [now] deceased and with me. <sup>9</sup> May YHWH reward you both. That is, find peace—each [in] her husband's home.” [After] she kissed them [good-bye], they [all] wailed aloud.

<sup>10</sup> They told her, “With you [alone] will we go back—to your clan.”

<sup>11</sup> No'omi insisted, “Go back, my daughters. Why go with me? I certainly have no more sons in

my innards to be husbands for you both. <sup>12</sup> Go back, my daughters. Scat! Because I am too old for a man to have me.

If I thought there was hope for me . . .

even if I were a man's tonight . . .

if even, indeed, I bore sons,

<sup>13</sup> for both, then, would you abide

till when they were grown;

for both, then, be penned up

[so as] not to become a man's?

Never, my daughters!

[I swear] that this marring of mine

far exceeds you both

since against me has swung

the [very] hand of YHWH!”

<sup>14</sup> They [all] wailed aloud a while. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law [good-bye], but Ruth stuck with her.

<sup>15</sup> “Look!” she protested. “Your sister-in-law went back to her clan and to her [ancestral] spirits. Go after her!”

<sup>16</sup> “Stop bullying me to abandon you,

to turn back from your wake,” Ruth replied,

“because to whatever [place] you go, I will go,

and in whatever [place] you spend the night,

will I.

Your clan [is] my clan

and your [ancestral] spirits, mine.

<sup>17</sup> In whatever [place] you die, I will die,

and there be interred.

So be it [that] YHWH deals with me—

yes, so be it utterly—

if death itself forces you and me apart!

<sup>18</sup> Having seen that fortified [was] she to go on with her, she stopped [trying] to dissuade her.

<sup>19</sup> The two of them went on till arriving [at] Bethlehem.

At the time of [their] arrival, the whole town was abuzz over them. The women exclaimed, “Is that [really] No'omi?” <sup>20</sup> She told them,

“Do not call me No'omi.

Call me *Mara*

because Shaddai *marred* me harshly.

<sup>21</sup> I [was] full [when] I left,  
but with nothing was I brought back  
[by] YHWH.

Why call me *No'omi*  
when YHWH gave *no omen me* [but ill],  
when Shaddai maltreated me?"

<sup>22</sup> So No'omi returned with Ruth the Moabite,  
her daughter-in-law, [who was] in her [keep]—she  
who turned away from the country of Moab. Both  
of them arrived [at] Bethlehem at the start of  
barley harvest.

## Act 2



<sup>1</sup> Now, [as] for No'omi, [there was] a relative of  
her husband—a powerful, valorous man from  
Elimelek's family—whose name [was] Boaz.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth the Moabite said to No'omi, "Please let  
me go [to] the field that I might glean among the  
grain stalks [in the] wake of one who regards me  
favorably."

"Go [ahead], my daughter," she replied.

<sup>3</sup> So she went in to glean in the field [in the]  
wake of the harvesters. [By] chance, [she] chanced  
[upon] the part of the field owned by Boaz—the  
one from Elimelek's family.

<sup>4</sup> Now, quite suddenly, the fellow [himself]  
followed from Bethlehem! Boaz said to the  
harvesters, "YHWH [be] with you [all]."

"May YHWH bless you," they replied.

<sup>5</sup> Boaz then said to his young male [attendant],  
the harvesters' foreman, "Who owns that young  
woman?"

<sup>6</sup> The young male [attendant], the harvesters'  
foreman, said in reply, "A young Moabite woman  
[is] she—the one who turned away from the  
country of Moab in No'omi's [keep]. <sup>7</sup> She said,  
'Please let me glean [and] gather among the  
bundles [in the] wake of the harvesters.' Then she  
came [and] took her place [ever] since the  
morning. But up to this moment, she has been

resting [in] the shelter a while."

<sup>8</sup> Boaz then said to Ruth, "Haven't you heard  
[the saying], my daughter, 'Don't go gleaning in  
someone else's field' or even 'do not pass beyond  
this [point]'? In such a way, then, stick with my  
young women. <sup>9</sup> [Fix] your eyes on the field.  
Where they harvest, go after them. Be assured, I  
have ordered the young men not to assault you  
should you thirst, go to the buckets, [and] drink of  
what the young men draw."

<sup>10</sup> She dropped face-forward in obeisance to the  
ground [and] replied, "How is it [that] I am  
regarded by you favorably [enough] to make me an  
insider—even I, an outsider?"

<sup>11</sup> Boaz said in reply, "Firmly affirmed to me  
was every [way] that you conducted [yourself] at  
your mother-in-law's side after your husband died:  
you abandoned your father and your mother and  
the land of your descent to go to a clan [with]  
which you were not acquainted [in] a prior day.

<sup>12</sup> May YHWH [so] repay your deed that what you  
earned is [returned] replete by YHWH, Israel's  
god, [to] whom you came for sanctuary beneath  
his fringes."

<sup>13</sup> "Let your favorable regard for me continue,  
my lord," she appealed, "since you have reassured  
me and since you have addressed [what is] on your  
slave's mind, though I, myself, may not be  
equivalent to one of your slaves."

<sup>14</sup> At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come right  
up here. Taste some of the bread [and] baste your  
piece in the [wine] vinegar." So she sat beside the  
harvesters [and] he grabbed for her roasted [grain].  
She ate plenty, saved [the rest], <sup>15</sup> then got up to  
glean.

Boaz ordered his young men as follows: "Even  
between the bundles may she glean—and you must  
not denounce her. <sup>16</sup> Even more, please seize for  
her some of the takings, forsaking [it] for her to  
glean—and you must not rail against her."

<sup>17</sup> She gleaned in the field until the evening,  
then threshed what she had gleaned—[the] barley

came to about a [full] *sack*.<sup>18</sup> Having loaded up, she arrived [at] the town.

When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned [and] she brought out [and] gave her what she had saved of her plenitude,<sup>19</sup> her mother-in-law said to her,

“What [field] did you *sack* today?

“Where, indeed, did you conduct [yourself]?

May he who made you an insider  
be blessed!”

She affirmed to her mother-in-law the one in whose [keep] she conducted [herself]: “The name of the man in whose [keep] I conducted [myself] today,” she said, “[is] *Boaz*.”

<sup>20</sup> No'omi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by YHWH because his faithfulness is *as boundless* with those who live as with those [now] deceased!”

No'omi [then] told her,

“Close to us [is] that man.

One of our restorers [is] he!”

<sup>21</sup> Ruth the Moabite said, moreover, that “He told me, ‘With the young men, my [very] own, stick, up until they have finished the whole harvest{, my [very] own}.’”

<sup>22</sup> No'omi replied to her daughter-in-law Ruth, “Better, my daughter, if you go out with his young women, then they will not attack you in someone else's field.”

<sup>23</sup> So, in order to glean, she stuck with Boaz's young women until the finish of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, but stayed with her mother-in-law.

## Act 3

1

<sup>1</sup> No'omi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “My daughter, I must certainly pursue for you whatever peace is best for you. <sup>2</sup> Now then, Boaz [is,] in fact, our relative—the one with whose young women you have been. When he is winnowing the barley threshing-floor tonight, <sup>3</sup> wash, apply oil,

drape your cape over you, [and] get down [to] the threshing-floor. Remain unbeknownst to the man until he finishes feasting. <sup>4</sup> But let it be, when he lies down, that you are aware of the place wherein he lies. Go in, uncover his [lower] coverings, [and] lie low. Then he, himself, will tell you how to conduct [yourself].”

<sup>5</sup> She replied to her, “Whatever you might think [is best], I will do.”

<sup>6</sup> So she went down [to] the threshing-floor to act in conformity [with] everything that her mother-in-law had instructed her. <sup>7</sup> When Boaz had eaten, drank, [and] his state was well-[effected], he went over to lie at the edge of the [grain] pile. She then went in under wraps, uncovered his [lower] coverings, [and] laid down.

<sup>8</sup> Then, in the middle of the night, the man shivered, stretched out, and right there [was] a woman lying [at] his [lower] coverings! <sup>9</sup> “Who [are] you?” he asked.

“I [am] Ruth, your slave,” she said. “Spread your fringe over your slave since a restorer [are] you.”

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed be you by YHWH, my daughter,” he said. “[With] your later allegiance, you have surpassed by far the former [by] not going after single men, whether destitute or whether prosperous.

<sup>11</sup> So now, my daughter, don't worry—whatever you might think [is best], I will do for you, since everyone knows [at] my clan's gate that a valorous woman [are] you.

<sup>12</sup> And now, even though, in matter of fact, a restorer [am] I, there is also, however, a restorer closer than I. <sup>13</sup> Stay the night. Then, at first light, if he restores you, great! Let him! But if he does not want to restore you, then I, myself, will restore you. [By] the life of YHWH, [I swear it]! Lie down till the morning.”

<sup>14</sup> So she laid down [at] his [lower] coverings till the morning, but got up [at] break of day before one [person] could identify another.

He thought, “It must not be known that this woman entered the threshing-floor.” <sup>15</sup> So he said, “Bring the apron that you [have] on and grip it.”

She gripped it.

He measured [and] placed upon it six [shares] of barley, then went into the town.

<sup>16</sup> She went in to her mother-in-law, who said, “How [are] you, my daughter?”

She affirmed to her every [way] that the man had conducted [himself] on her behalf: <sup>17</sup> “These six [shares] of barley, he gave to me,” she said, “when he stated, ‘Do not go in with nothing to your mother-in-law.’”

<sup>18</sup> “Stay here, daughter dear,” she said, “till the time you know how thing[s] fall, since the man will not rest unless he finishes this thing today.”

#### Act 4

#### 7

<sup>1</sup> Now, Boaz had gone up [to] the gate and stayed there when, quite suddenly, the restorer was passing by—the one Boaz had mentioned! So he said, “This way! Sit here, so-and-so.” He went that way and sat.

<sup>2</sup> Then he fetched ten men—some of the town elders—and said, “Sit here.” They sat.

<sup>3</sup> He said to the restorer, “The part of the field that is owned by our clansman—by Elimelek—No'omi sold—she who turned away from the country of Moab. <sup>4</sup> So my aim, I exclaim, is to implore [in] your hearing ‘Purchase [it back]!’ before those [now] sitting and before the elders of my clan. If you can restore [it], restore [it]. But if one [such as you] cannot restore [it], let me know for certain, because there is no one to restore [it] except you and myself after you.”

“I, myself, can restore [it],” he replied.

<sup>5</sup> Boaz then said, “At the time you purchase the field [debt] held by No'omi, so [al]so Ruth the Moabite, the deceased's wife, do I hereby purchase in order to re-establish the name of the deceased on his inheritance.”

<sup>6</sup> The restorer replied, “I am unable to restore [it] for my [sake], otherwise I could ruin my inheritance. Restore [it] for your [sake]—you with my [right of] restoration—since I am unable to restore [it].”

<sup>7</sup> (This then [was] [the] precedent in Israel regarding the [right of] *restoration* or regarding the [way of] *commutation*—to establish any [such] matter: one [person] would draw forth his sandal [and] give [it] to the other. This then [was] its *validation* in Israel.)

<sup>8</sup> The restorer said to Boaz, “Purchase [it back] for your [sake]” [and] he drew forth his sandal.

<sup>9</sup> Boaz said to the elders and the whole clan, “Witnesses [are] you today that I hereby purchase [back] all that Elimelek owns and all that Kilion and Machlon own [as] held [in debt] by No'omi.

<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Ruth the Moabite, Machlon's wife, do I hereby purchase as my own, as a slave-wife, in order to re-establish the name of the deceased on his inheritance. Then the name of the deceased will not have ceased among his kinsmen and from the gate of his [ancestral] establishment. Witnesses [are] you today!”

<sup>11</sup> The whole clan that [was] in the gate—including the elders—said, “Affirmative! May YHWH make the woman who enters into your house like Rachel and like Leah, who built, between them both, the household of Israel.

So, act valorously in Ephrathah.

Yes, invite acclaim in Bethlehem!

<sup>12</sup> And may your household be like the household of Perez—he whom Tamar bore to Judah—from the offspring that YHWH will give you from that young woman.”

<sup>13</sup> So Boaz fetched Ruth, she became his own as a slave-wife, [and] he went to her. YHWH then rewarded her [with] a pregnancy [and] she bore a son.

<sup>14</sup> The women said to No'omi, “Blessed be YHWH because he did not *withhold* restoration



for you today. May his name, therefore, be proclaimed in Israel! <sup>15</sup> May he serve on your behalf as a life *upholder* and to mitigate your *old* age since your son's mate, who loves you, bore him—who, herself, [is] better for you than *seven-fold* sons!”

<sup>16</sup> So No'omi fetched the little boy, set him in the hollow of her [arms], [and] became his own as a nanny.

<sup>17</sup> The townswomen acclaimed him as follows: “Born is a son on No'omi's behalf!” They called his name “Obaid.” He [was] the father of Yishai, the grandfather of David.

<sup>18</sup> Now, these [are] the descendants of Perez.  
Perez fathered Hezron.

<sup>19</sup> And Hezron fathered Ram.  
And Ram fathered Amminadab.

<sup>20</sup> And Amminadab fathered Nahshon.  
And Nahshon fathered Salmah.

<sup>21</sup> And Salmon fathered Boaz.  
And Boaz fathered Obaid.

<sup>22</sup> And Obaid fathered Yishai.  
And Yishai fathered David.

The total number of verses  
in this scroll [is]  
85.

And the half-way point [is]  
“Ruth the Moabite  
said.”

And [there are] 2 reading  
sections.





## Notes





- 1:1 The boundary of the first textual unit or paragraph is indicated by the use of *inclusio* (the repetition of a word, phrase, or idea at the start and end in order to provide a conceptual framework for the content inside). In this case, the paragraph opens with the family setting out from Bethlehem of Judah and ends with them entering the country of Moab. The journey has both beginning and end—point of departure and point of arrival.

**During** — וַיְהִי is an inverted imperfect (*wayyiqtol*). The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (literally, “it/there was”). For the *waw*-copulative form of this verb (the form *with* a conjunction), see 4:12. Many translations understand the difference. Some older ones, however (YLT, ASV, Leeser, etc.), and a few newer ones (such as LEB), insert “and” based on the old assumption that the inverted verbal form always indicates succession (thus the name “*waw*-consecutive”). We now know that to be mistaken. Inverted verbs may, for instance, begin texts (as in this case) and, therefore, cannot possibly indicate succession. Blau (*Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*) lays it out clearly: “We reject the pretentious name ‘consecutive *waw*’ because it simply is not true that the action is represented as a consequence of a preceding action.” The impulse of some translators to render every *waw* as “and” (like Robert Alter) betrays a fundamental linguistic misunderstanding. When the *waw* is bonded to a verb, it ceases to have its normal semantic meaning and becomes grammaticalized. An example of this can be seen in the word “less.” Used on its own, “less” signifies that something is small in quality, quantity, or degree. When suffixed to a word, however, it ceases to have that meaning and instead serves a purely grammatical function (indicating a lack or absence). Thus, “honorless” does not mean that there is *less* honor; it means there is *no* honor. To treat the word “honorless” as though it were a combination of “less” and “honor” is to do linguistic violence. Though verbs in BH are primarily aspectual, the *wayyiqtol* is used almost exclusively in narrative texts to indicate past tense (technically speaking, *wayyiqtol* preserves the archaic use of *yiqtol* as a preterite). Inverted verbs have a multiplicity of semantic functions—only some of which indicate succession. Context, therefore, is the only indicator of meaning. Since וַיְהִי is often used to introduce a temporal phrase and, in this particular case, functions as a scene-setter, we believe “during” makes the best sense of the word (as in HCSB, NET, and Goldingay), though one could also render it “when” (as in NIV, ESV, and GW). Some translations compete to see how many ways they can render וַיְהִי. NASB renders it as a temporal expression (now), a verbal phrase (it came about), and another temporal expression (when). So do KJV (“Now,” “it came to pass,” and “when”) and ISV (“Now,” “there came,” and “while”). In our view, such wordy renderings are pointless. We agree with Sasson (*Ruth: A New Translation*) that one should not render וַיְהִי with “Once” (as in NAB) or “Long ago” since those are marked expressions in English for the opening of a fictional story and nothing suggests that ancient Israelites believed this text to be fictional.

**the time of** — Literally, “in the days of,” but an idiom meaning “in the time of.” When speaking of kings or rulers, for instance, בִּימֵי refers to the time of their rule. Thus, when Esther opens with וַיְהִי בִּימֵי, it means “During *the reign of* (Xerxes).” ו collapses בִּימֵי into nothing more than the preposition and then affixes it to the following infinitive, but 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> supports וַיְהִי.

- deliverance [by] the deliverers** — Literally, “the judging of the judges.” In English usage, however, a “judge” is a government official or lawgiver, whereas these were famous warriors and tribal heroes who delivered Israel from its enemies. Holmstedt (*Ruth: A Handbook*) explains it this way: “The שופט leads during military crises.” Thus, “judges” is misleading. This is about “deliverers/champions/battle leaders” (or, as Moffatt prefers, “heroes”). Better is the rendering “the delivering of the deliverers.” In this instance, however, we understand the genitive construction as dative or instrumental (the delivering *by means of*). We also view the infinitive as a noun or gerund (deliverance)—a view also held by Wright (*The Book of Ruth*): “The inf. const. used as a noun.” S seems to have viewed the infinitive as unnecessary and, therefore, dropped it. HCSB, NAB, and NET do likewise. The phrase שפט השפטים, however, is by no means redundant. Such a highly assonant phrase is an oral and/or literary device meant to facilitate the recollection and recitation of the story. In other words, it is purposeful. Therefore, we stick with מל<sup>L</sup>, which is supported by 4QRuth<sup>a</sup>, 6<sup>A</sup>, and 9. The renderings “deliverance” and “deliverers” mimic that assonance. A similarly assonant phrase occurs in Gen 36:31: לפני מלך-מלך (“before a king was king” or “before a ruler ruled”). Like שפט השפטים, that phrase refers to the pre-monarchic period. Note, however, the difference between the verb in Gen 36 (מלך) and Ruth 1 (שפט). The former means “to be king” or “rule,” and is applied to those who came after the “judges,” whereas the latter refers, generally, to making or enacting judgments, and specifically, in the case of the “judges,” to inflicting YHWH’s judgment upon Israel’s enemies. Thus, rendering the verb “to rule” or “govern,” not only confuses the verbs, but misses the point. שפט השפטים is rendered in 7 as נגיד נגדיא (“the chieftain of chieftains” or, more simply, “the greatest chieftain”). In other words, 7 interprets this as a reference to one particular “chieftain” who is perceived as the greatest of them all (not to a specific time-period). 7 identifies this chieftain as Ibzan of Bethlehem (see Judg 12:8-10) and associates him with Boaz (see also *b. Baba Bathra* 91a).
- so** — We interpret the wayyiqtol (וילך) as resultative—it represents the logical consequence of the previous verbal situation (*there was famine, so/thus he set out*).
- a [certain] man** — Literally, “a man.” The use of “man,” however, is specific. It is not just *any* man, but *the man* Elimelek. Furthermore, Ruth is making use of a stock introductory formula that occurs several times in Judges and Samuel: “there was a certain man (ויהי איש אחד) from such-and-such a place whose name was so-and-so” (see Judg 13:2 and 1 Sam 1:1). Thus, even though “certain” (אחד) is not present, since a hearing audience would likely be familiar with the formula, it wouldn’t be necessary to include it. We, however, as 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, do not expect it. Therefore, it is better to include it. Many commentators (Sasson, Holmstedt, Campbell, etc.) agree. Translations that insert it include KJV, NJB, and NASB. 7 says “a great man,” which is clearly exegetical.
- set out** — Or “departed/left.” Contextually, הלך has the same nuance as יצא (to go out), which is why 7 used the verb נפק (to go out) instead of איל—its usual rendering for הלך. For a similar use of הלך, see Gen 18:33.

**from the Bread-House (Bethlehem) of Judah** — We render **בֵּית לֶחֶם** as “Bread-House” to represent the irony inherent in the name's meaning, but put the name itself in parentheses so that readers know that “Bread-House” refers to Bethlehem. For a long time, scholars were hesitant to say that “Bethlehem” is in construct with “Judah.” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, several eminent scholars who were analyzing the divine title **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, and who believed that **יְהוָה** was a proper noun (as opposed to a verbal form), came to the conclusion that proper nouns either did not exist in the construct state (or, on principle, rarely did). Their conclusions influenced later generations. In places, therefore, where a proper noun appeared to be in construct, interpretations were sought that could explain the text differently. The following arguments have been proposed to explain the relationship between Bethlehem and Judah without appealing to the construct: “Judah” exits in a dative relationship with “Bethlehem” (Bethlehem *in* Judah), “Bethlehem Judah” is the elided form of a longer expression like “Bethlehem, a city of Judah,” and “Judah” is part of the city's name: “Bethlehem-Judah” (see KJV, ASV, and Rotherham). Through the progression of scholarly analysis and debate, as well as the discovery of ancient inscriptions showing the divine name in construct with other words (such as “YHWH of Teman” or “YHWH of Samaria”), the underlying conclusion has now been overturned: proper nouns can and do exist in construct states. Thus, there is no reason to view the phrase “Bethlehem of Judah” as problematic. The construct state is utilized in order to locate and differentiate this Bethlehem from others (such as “Bethlehem of Zebulun”). The prepositional *mem* affixed to “Bethlehem” is a helping particle of **הֵלֵךְ**. It refers to motion “out of” or “away from.” For the same use of **מִן** as a helping particle with a verb of motion, see v. 7. For examples outside of Ruth, see Gen 12:1 and 1 Sam 10:2. Contrary, therefore, to numerous translations (NRSV, NASB, KJV, etc.), **מִן** does not indicate the place where the man originated (a [certain] man *from* Bethlehem of Judah set out). If that were the case, the phrase “Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah” would be redundant in the next verse. Such a phrase would be a necessary addition to the story only if the phrase in this verse didn't say the same thing. Along with Bush (WBC), we believe that “a [certain] man set out from Bethlehem of Judah” functions along with “so they entered the country of Moab” at the end of v. 2 to create a structural boundary for the first unit or paragraph of the narrative. Thus, narrative form also argues against the use of this phrase as an indicator of the man's hometown (a man *from*).

**to settle a while** — The verb **גִּיר** is traditionally rendered “sojourn,” which we consider “Biblish.” Thus, we render it “settle a while.” The infinitive initiates a purpose clause (in order to). See IBHS §36.2.3.

**the country of Moab** — As explained by Bush (WBC), “Whenever **שָׂדֵה** occurs in construct with a geographical name it means . . . 'region, territory, domain.' . . . Hence, our narrator informs us only that they went to live in the 'territory' or 'region' of Moab.” In other words, this is not about a “field.” Some translations prefer “plain” or “plateau,” which is perfectly acceptable. Though **שָׂדֵי** looks like a construct plural, it is actually an archaic variant of the construct singular **שָׂדֵה**. As noted in JM §96f, “In the word **שָׂדֵה** the primitive form *saday* is

preserved in the rare and poetic form שָׁדַי. Schipper (AYB) is correct, therefore, to say, “Both Hebrew words convey the same meaning.” In support of this is the fact that מְּ arbitrarily switches between forms without a change in meaning (1:6) and 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> renders this שָׁדַי as שָׁדָה (see also v. 2). שְׁ also treats both forms the same.

**his two sons** — As noted by Holmstedt, שְׁנֵי בָנָיו could be rendered “two of his sons” or “his two sons.” The second is universally favored. No other sons are mentioned and, as explained by Sasson, it is a common narrative device “to limit the spectrum of choice to two alternatives, only one of which will be correct. . . . Other examples include Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Ishmael and Isaac, and so forth.” LaCocque (*Ruth: A Continental Commentary*) also notes that the use of two brothers mirrors “the motif of the two daughters-in-law of Naomi.” Though שְׁ and שְׁ lack “two,” 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> supports מְּ.

1:2 **name . . . name . . . name . . . came** — This verse contains a string of words that, except for their vowels, are identical: שָׁם, שָׁם, שָׁם, and שָׁם. The threefold occurrence of “name” would not have any special significance except that, in this case, the third use of “name,” as applied to the two sons, is a collective singular, not a plural (שְׁמוֹת). English translations overlook or ignore this by rendering it as a plural (names). Furthermore, at the very end of the verse, the same consonants reappear in a phrase that is contextually redundant “they were *there*.” Clearly, the words in this verse were carefully crafted in order to ring with strong phonetic association. Porten noted this in his “Rhetorical Study”: “The most striking combination of words in assonance [in the opening unit] is שָׁם-שָׁם, occurring together seven times.” The final word, with a slight shift in vocalization, is close enough to provide continuity, but different enough to stand out and provide an emphatic conclusion to the opening of the story. To mimic that sound-play and its dramatic ending, we render them “name,” “name,” “name,” and “came” and put them in italics to make their oral association more evident. THF is the only English translation to capture that dramatic aspect of the text.

**Now** — We interpret this *waw* as explicative. It introduces the answer to the question “who is that particular man, his wife, and his two sons?” Thus, we render it “now.” So does NET. It is possible that the *waw* was accidentally duplicated from the pronominal suffix at the end of the previous word (בָּנָיו)—a common scribal error called “dittography.” If so, the *waw* should be ignored. This could find support from 4QRuth<sup>b</sup>, which lacks the conjunction. It is also possible, however, that 4QRuth<sup>b</sup> accidentally dropped the conjunction—another common scribal error called “haplography.” In that case, מְּ should be retained. Since 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> agrees with מְּ, we stick with מְּ.

**Elimelek** — אֱלִימֶלֶךְ (my god [is] king) was a common ancient Semitic name. It appears, for instance, on several tablets from Ugarit as one of the King's royal scribes (Ilmilku). Instead of “Elimelek,” שְׁ says “Abimelek” (אֲבִימֶלֶךְ), meaning “my father [is] king.” 4QRuth<sup>a</sup>, however, supports מְּ.

**the name of his two sons [was]** — The subject of this clause is singular, not plural, even though the predicate contains two names. The point is to identify the two sons as a pair (not as individuals). In the ancient NE, one's “name” was equivalent to one's role and existence. Since



Machlon and Kilion have the same “name,” they play the same part and share the same fate. Holmstedt noticed this: “It is quite possible that this lack of Subject-Predicate agreement was deliberately employed as a rhetorical device, whereby the two sons were presented as a unit.” Thus, we do not follow English translations by rendering the phrase “the names of his two sons were.” The use of “name” instead of “names” is also part of the word-play in this verse (see above). Both aspects of the text are destroyed by rendering the word as a plural.

**Machlon and Kilion.** — These two names rhyme. We agree with Sasson that there is mnemonic purpose behind it. The primary reason for such phonetic similarity, however, is to indicate something more significant. Neither has an independent existence. They are, without differentiation, No'omi's and Elimelek's “two sons.” What happens to one happens to the other. They share a single collective “name.” The use of rhyme is another way to indicate their conjoined identity. That is why their names are not given the same way as Ruth and Orpah (the name of the first was X and the name of the second was Y). Scholars have often noted that the names may come from roots that mean something like sick, weak, sterile, dead, destruction, or the like. Thus, their tragic end seems coded into their very being. Whatever the etymology, the fact that they function as a pair is essential. It is only as an afterthought that we learn that Ruth was the widow of Machlon (4:10).

**[All these were] Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah.** — The antecedents of “Ephrathites” are the whole family of No'omi—not just Machlon and Kilion. For that reason, we add “all these.” Two other ways of rendering the text are “Machlon and Kilion—Ephrathites” or “Machlon and Kilion. [They were] Ephrathites.” The ancient name of Bethlehem (or something in close vicinity) appears to have been Ephrathah as evidenced by the poetic parallelism in 4:11 (see also Gen 35:19; 48:7; 1 Chr 2:50-1). As used here, however, it functions as a clan name, not a place-name. This is reflected in NET (the clan of Ephrath), Sasson (the Ephrathite clan), and GW (descendants of Ephrathah).  $\mathfrak{C}$  says “lords” instead of “Ephrathites”—a clear exegetical alteration.

**They entered** —  $\text{וַיָּבֹאוּ}$  is an inverted imperfect (*wayyiqtol*). The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (they *entered*). Inverted verbs have a multiplicity of semantic functions. Context, therefore, is the best indicator of meaning. In this case, there is no possibility for coordination between this phrase and the previous one. Therefore, any rendering that begins with “and” must be rejected. For more on inverted verbal forms, particularly the *wayyiqtol*, see 1:1.

**the country of Moab** — 4QRuth<sup>b</sup> has  $\text{מִלְּשֹׁרֵי}$ 's archaic  $\text{שֹׁרֵי}$ . The word is updated, however, to  $\text{שָׂרָה}$  in 4QRuth<sup>a</sup>. See notes on v. 1.

**That's [where] they came.** — Literally, “They were there” ( $\text{וַיְהִי־שָׁם}$ ). Most translators explain the presence of this phrase as an indicator that Naomi's family “remained,” “stayed,” or “settled” in Moab. Such a rendering is probably based on the assumption that the phrase was meant to tell us something about the extent of the stay (i.e., they did not intend to leave). We believe that something else is intended by the use of this phrase and the sound-play gives it away. What is significant is not that they chose to stay, but *where* they stayed: *there*, that is, Moab, territory of the enemy; a place that gave neither food nor drink to Israel when she wandered in the desert (Deut 23:5); a people who, according to Mosaic Law, must have no

part in the Israelite assembly (Deut 23:4). Since it is the location that is significant, the word for it (there) is phonetically emphatic (see notes above). 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> has וישבו (they lived/dwelt/resided) instead of ויהיו (they were). So does S. 6, however, agrees with מזל, which makes it likely that ישב is an intentional change meant to harmonize this verse with 1:4, which says “they dwelled there (וישבו שם) about 10 years.” Instead of harmonizing this with v. 4, interpreters should be asking why a scribe chose היה instead of ישב. If there is semantic significance in the choice of wording, they should be asking what the significance would be for that choice here (see “to which she had come” in v. 7). ויהיו is an inverted imperfect meaning “they were.” Contrary to most English translations, the waw is not a coordinating conjunction. See 1:1. In parallel with “lords,” ט adds that they were “high officials” (CAL).

- 1:3 Like 1:1-2, the next textual unit or paragraph is defined by use of *inclusio*. It begins by mentioning “Naomi’s husband” and “her two sons” (v. 3) and closes by taking the same two referents and reversing them: “her two little boys” and “her husband” (v. 5). Though 6 harmonizes the order, מזל is supported by 4QRuth<sup>a</sup>.

**Elimelek, No’omi’s husband, died.** — Literally, “Elimelek, husband of No’omi, died.” וימת is an inverted imperfect. Contrary to many English translations, the waw is not a coordinating (and), consecutive (then), or adversative conjunction (but). Rather, it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he died). See 1:1.

**She, herself, [however], was left** — Three things are noteworthy about the phrase ותשארה היא. First, the verb is an inverted imperfect (*wayyiqtol*). The bonded waw is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she remained). Syntactically, the second half of the verse has either an adversative or sequential relation to the first. Our use of “however” reflects the former. NET’s “so” reflects the latter. Second, the verb is feminine singular. Its subject is No’omi. It should not, therefore, be rendered “she and her two sons were left.” Though we agree with Holmstedt that היא ושני בניה is not the syntactic subject of the verb, we disagree that it functions as a semantic unit. So do the Masoretes, who placed a disjunctive accent (*tifḥa*) beneath היא, separating it from the rest of the phrase and providing the final major break before the *silluq*. It should not, therefore, be read with ושני בניה as a single phrase (she was left, she and her two sons). Third, the independent personal pronoun היא is neither grammatically nor syntactically necessary. If its inclusion serves a purpose, it must be one of emphasis. Therefore, we render it “herself.” The Niphal verb means “to be left” or “remain [alive],” which is reflected in our rendering. ט makes the text more explicit: “was left a widow.” REB follows ט.

**with** — We interpret this as a conjunction of accompaniment (the *waw concomitantiae*).

- 1:4 **who got themselves** — Literally, “They took for themselves.” The *lamed* and pronominal suffix (להם) function as an ethical dative used colloquially (see GKC §119s) as in “I bought me some.” Note how נשא is used instead of לקח to mean “to take/get a wife.” This is probably to distinguish the kind of marriages here from the one in 4:13, which does not involve a wife in the typical sense (see notes there).

**name . . . name . . . same** — Here, as in v. 2, there is use of assonance in the string of words שָׁם, שָׁם, and שָׁם, which we recreate in English and italicize to make their assonance more obvious to the reader. Unlike v. 2, however, there is no special, structural use of שָׁם.

**They settled** — וַיִּשְׁבוּ is an inverted imperfect (*wayyiqtol*). The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (they *settled*). See 1:1. Some interpret the verb as temporal (when/after). Thus, they treat the end of this verse as the first part of the next.

**about** — Holmstedt says it best: “The preposition כֹּ, which is mostly used for comparison or correspondence, is in a few cases used for the related notion of approximation; thus, ‘about ten years.’” Alter’s rendering (some) is a good alternative. See 2:17.

1:5 **Both Machlon and Kilion** — We have simplified the syntax, which is two different phrases in apposition: “The two of them—Machlon and Kilion.”

[**however,**] — Though the inverted imperfect וַיָּמָוּתוּ (they died) follows immediately from וַיִּשְׁבוּ (they settled) and וַיִּשְׂאוּ (they took), it breaks from those verbs and relates back more directly to v. 3’s וַיָּמָוּת (he died). For that reason, we treat it as adversative and add “however.”

**So the woman was left** — We interpret וַתֵּשָׂאָר as resultative (so/thus/therefore). Note that the verb is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1.

**without** — This *min* is privative. See GKC §119w.

**little boys** — The terminology is very specific. No’omi lost her “little boys” at the beginning, but she will gain a “little boy” at the end (4:16).

**and her husband** — Literally, “and *without* her husband.” We drop the second occurrence of “without” since it is superfluous in English.

1:6 **Having, herself, started out** — This verb is feminine singular—referring only to No’omi. It should not be rendered a plural (as in HCSB, NIV, ISV, etc.). In fact, the first three verbs in this verse are all feminine singular, having No’omi as their sole subject. The independent personal pronoun הִיא is neither grammatically nor syntactically necessary. Its inclusion must serve a purpose. We believe that purpose is one of emphasis. Therefore, we render it “herself.” See also v. 3. Use of the verb קָם indicates more than mere standing/getting up. קָם is often paired with other verbs of motion to indicate a sudden commencement or shift in activity. In combination with the verb שָׁב, therefore, one might render this “started to turn away/return from” (RSV), “prepared to leave” (HCSB), “prepared to return” (NIV), “made ready to go back” (NAB), or “started home” (Moffatt). The next verse, however, which clarifies the meaning of the pieces of this verse, explains קָם as יָצָא (to go forth/depart). Thus, this means more than “she started/commenced.” It means “she started out/got going/embarked.” Translations that render it “she arose” (NASB, ESV, KJV, etc.) miss the point. Translations that render it “she decided” (NJB and NET) are paraphrastic. Sasson’s rendering (she arose [from mourning]), which takes its queue from Gen 23:3 (where Abraham is said to rise from mourning his dead) is clever, but unlikely in light of the bouts of

wailing that occur frequently thereafter (vv. 9 and 14). Furthermore, there is no indication of mourning in this or previous verses. Gen 23:3 actually supports our interpretation since קום is used there, as here, to indicate a sudden shift in activity. Note that ותקם is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. It is possible, however, to interpret the verb in a consecutive sense (as do many translations).

**her daughters-in-law alongside** — We interpret the conjunction as one of accompaniment. Literally, “with/together with her daughters-in-law.” ו and ש, however, say “her *two* daughters-in-law,” which is a clear case of harmonization with vv. 7 and 8. ו supports the Hebrew, which we follow.

**the country of Moab** — For our rendering of שׂר as “country,” see notes on v. 1.

**Moabite country** — Literally, “the country of Moab.” Since the phrase occurs twice in this verse, we have altered the wording to make the result more pleasing in English. For our rendering of שׂר as “country,” see notes on v. 1.

**righted his people[’s plight]** — One of the least understood roots in BH is פקד. The strongest analysis comes from Creason (“*PQD Revisited*”), who noted that פקד gets its meaning from what happens to its object, not what its subject does. Virtually all English translations base their rendering on the latter, which is why the text at this point is usually rendered something like “he visited” or “he considered/took note of/had concern for.” Though פקד identifies a change in the status of its object, its meaning changes slightly with every stem. The Qal means “to put object in the proper place/order/position/status.” The Niphal is the passive form of the Qal; it means “for object to be assigned to the proper place/order/position/status.” The Hiphil means “to make object an authority over another.” The Hophal means “for object to already be in authority over another.” The Piel is an intensive form of the Qal. The Pual is an intensive passive of the Qal. The Hithpoel is reflexive (to put oneself in the proper place/order/position/status). The Hothpaal is its passive form (to have oneself put in the proper place/order/position/status). Other verbs or imagery are often utilized to flesh out a more precise meaning. The Qal is used here. Thus, the verb means “he righted the condition of his people” or more simply, “he righted his people’s plight.”

**by bringing to their [breadth] bread** — Alternatively, “to place for [his] populace provision.” More simply, “to give to them bread/food.” Bush (WBC) agrees with our choice: “This use of the infinitive construct of נתן, ‘to give,’ plus the preposition ל is the equivalent of the English gerund with the preposition ‘by,’ expressing means, i.e., ‘by . . . -ing.’” The text strings together three short words in rapid succession, which are so similar that they carry an undulating, repetitive alliteration: לַתֵּת לָהֶם לֶחֶם (*lāṭēṭ lāhem lahem*). Such alliteration serves a strong rhetorical and literary purpose: to announce, with climactic finality, the end of Judah’s famine and the coming of its fullness. The motion of the story from ruin to restoration begins with this utterance, yet THF is the only English translation to bring out its forceful and dramatic resonance.

1:7 The purpose of this verse appears to be exegetical—either to explain parts of the previous verse that were ambiguous or expand upon previous statements with more detail. The verb קום (to

stand/rise) is explained as semantically synonymous with יָצָא (to leave/go forth). The phrase וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׂדֵּי מוֹאָב, which could be taken to mean she came back to her dwelling after being out in the fields, is further elucidated to mean she left the land in which she had settled (מִן־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִתְחַלְּתָה שָׁמָּה) to go back to Judah (לְשׁוֹב אֶל־אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה). The grammatically and syntactically curious statement וְכִלְתִּיהָ, is expanded and/or explained with עִמָּהּ. One might be tempted to view this verse as secondary to the story since it repeats so much of what was already said. Since, however, it shares the same terms used throughout Ruth and is intimately linked with the next verse by use of a fascinating word-play (see **in her [keep]**), we consider this verse original to the story.

**to which she had come** — Literally, “that [one] thereto she had come.” To interpret הָיָה in both this instance and v. 2 as “to stay,” “settle,” or “reside,” results in semantic and syntactic bewilderment as made evident by Holmstedt: “The use here of שָׁם with the directional הָ suffix instead of שָׁם without the directional הָ does not seem to serve a syntactic or semantic purpose. Not only is it hard to understand what the semantic nuance of ‘to remain toward there’ would mean, but the comparison with the combination of הָיָה and שָׁם in v. 2 suggest strongly that the same force is meant in this verse, simply ‘she stayed there.’” We agree that this verse is picking up its language directly from v. 2 and using it to the same effect. Since, however, we interpret הָיָה as “to be/be present/come to be,” our rendering not only accounts for, but incorporates the directional *heh*. Holmstedt, who interprets הָיָה as “to stay/remain/settle,” has no way to account for the directional *heh* and must disregard it. Campbell (AYB), interprets הָיָה like we do, but believes the *heh* does nothing more than introduce “a little variety”—so little, in fact, that it disappears entirely from his translation.

**her two daughters-in-law . . . alongside** — We interpret the conjunction as one of accompaniment (with/together with/alongside).

**in her [keep]** — Literally, “with her.” As stated, however, by Schipper (AYB), “Scholars have recognized that *’im* has more technical nuances. Although Jacob Milgrom does not cite any examples from Ruth, he argues convincingly that one may translate *’im* as ‘under the authority of’ in a variety of texts elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible . . . . Milgrom translates *’im* with this technical sense in Lev 25:6, 23, 35-36, 39-41, 47, 50, 53. Both Ruth and Lev 25:23-55 frequently use the words ‘redeem’ or ‘redeemer(s)’ with a similar technical sense . . . . Also, both texts discuss redemption performed by a close (*qrb*) relative . . . . That both texts use similar technical language in regard to an impoverished relative increases the likelihood that they also use *’im* with a similar technical sense.” We think that makes good sense of עִמָּהּ here in Ruth. Note that both this and the next verse use two different words to create a fascinating word-play: “with her” (עִמָּהּ) sounds virtually identical to “her mother” (אִמָּהּ) in v. 8. Schipper (AYB) noticed this also: “The use of ‘her mother’s household’ (*’immāh*) results in rhyme, assonance, and alliteration with the term ‘under [Naomi’s] authority’ (*’immāh*; 1:7a).” In order to capture that word-play, we render the phrase here as “in her keep” (meaning, “in her care”) and the other as “her mother’s keep” (meaning, “her mother’s dwelling”).

**they set out** — Or “they went/walked/journeyed.” Note that this is the first time in vv. 6-7 that a verb appears with plural subjects. Thus, this is the first verb in the paragraph that we render a plural. Note also that וּתֵלַכְנָה is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (they *went*). See 1:1. It is possible, however, to interpret the verb in a consecutive sense, as do many translations. Contrary to the verbal form, GW (began to walk) and NET (began to leave) presume an imperfect.

**to go back** — With Bush (WBC) and Holmstedt, we believe the infinitive construct with affixed *lamed* is modifying the verb וּתֵלַכְנָה (they set out) and creates a purpose clause (in order to). See JM §124l. Contrary, therefore, to HCSB, NIV, NJB, and others, it is not a gerund modifying the noun “road” (“the road *heading back*” or simply “the road back”).

1:8 **two daughters-in-law** — Though some early manuscripts of **ש** do not have “two,” **ש**<sup>L</sup> is supported by **ש**<sup>A</sup> and **ש**<sup>C</sup>; therefore, we follow the Hebrew. Note also the use of archaic dual in the notes below, which supports the use of “two.”

**Come [now] . . . go back** — As accented by the Masoretes, the double imperatives לֵכְנָה and שֻׁבְנָה appear to function as a single utterance: “Go back” or, more forcefully, “Return at once.” Sometimes, however, as noted by BDB, הֵלֵךְ can function as an introductory interjection equivalent to our “come on,” “come now,” or “come here” when used in combination with other verbs. Despite the Masoretic accentuation, we believe the word functions the same way here. So do Bush (WBC), Campbell (AYB), and Hubbard (NICOT).

**each [of you]** — As with אִישׁ, אִשָּׁה can function in a distributive sense (each/every), which is the sense it must have here.

**her mother's keep** — Literally, “her mother's house/dwelling/household.” Both this and the previous verse use two different words to create a fascinating word-play: “her mother” (אִשָּׁה) sounds virtually identical to “with her” (עִמָּה) in v. 7. To capture that word-play, we render the phrase here as “her mother's keep” (“keep” is a synonym of “dwelling”) and the one in v. 7 as “in her [keep]” (that is, “in her care/under her authority”).

**May YHWH deal** — We interpret יַעֲשֶׂה as a modal imperfect, which gives it the same nuance as a jussive. As Holmstedt explains, “The *yiqtol* can be used indicatively or modally, and in the case of the latter, there is little discernible difference from the jussive.” This is supported by the traditional Jewish recitation, which reads it explicitly as a jussive (יַעֲשֶׂה). Though No'omi uses the verb עָשָׂה in the invocation of a blessing, Ruth will later reuse the same verb as part of the invocation of a curse.

**with you both . . . you both did** — עֲשִׂיתֶם and עֲמַכֶּם are curious in that they contain what appear to be masculine plural forms. Campbell (AYB), with help from Francis Andersen, noted that in all the places where Ruth uses the “masculine” plural forms with regard to women, it always references *two* of them (1:8, 9, 11, 13, 19; 4:11). One can see the same phenomenon with regard to Rachel and Leah in Gen 31:9 and the two midwives in Exod 1:21. There is good reason, therefore, for Campbell to say, “There must have been an early Hebrew feminine dual suffix which ended in *-m* just as the masculine plural ending does but

contrasted with the feminine plural *-n*. . . . As texts containing this old form were transmitted across the centuries, it was generally forgotten and was replaced by the standard masculine and feminine plural forms. . . . Since the Ruth text as we have it is quite scrupulous in its correct use of gender, these relics must be regarded as a distinct mark of archaic composition or at least of composition in a dialect retaining an otherwise lost grammatical feature.” To indicate that something different from the norm has been used, we render each instance of the theoretical dual with “both.” It should be noted, however, that Ruth also used the feminine plural to speak of two women (see the next verse). Why then should a “dual” form be used at all? Holmstedt suggests it might “give the book a foreign or perhaps archaic coloring,” though “the number of cases could not have been too many” otherwise “the language would have interfered with the narrative rather than contributing to it.” We find that answer satisfying. Though one might explain the forms as an example of “gender neutralization,” the “archaic dual” theory fits the context and makes perfect sense of the text.

**[as] faithfully as** — As Hubbard (NICOT) says, “Here the *hesed* petitioned corresponds . . . to the earlier kindness done by the two young widows. Yahweh is to treat them *as kindly as*.” Sasson agrees. For our rendering of חסד as “faithfulness,” see section A3. Since the noun functions as an adverbial accusative, we render it “faithfully.”

**those [now] deceased** — Or “the dead ones.” המתים is *plural*, which is a significant change in that, previously, the two sons of No'omi were treated as a collective *singular*. THF, unlike other English versions, reflects those differences.

1:9 **May YHWH reward you both. That is, find** — The phrase יתן יהוה לכם ומצאן is one of Ruth's many textual and interpretive cruxes. For our rendering of the pronominal suffix כם as “you both,” see notes on v. 8. Scholars come up with various ways to make sense of the rest. One is to read יתן as a verb standing alone without an object and as an incomplete statement. That is preferred by Holmstedt (May YHWH give you . . . Find rest) and Schipper (May YHWH give to you . . . [oh, forget it!]). Support for this could be found in other verses (1:12 and 2:7) if those verses represent broken speech. Another way to understand the syntax is to interpret מנוחה as doing double duty as an object of both verbs, which would seem to find support from the versions that insert a synonym of מנוחה in the first phrase. Note, for instance, 𐤓 (May YHWH give you *a good/complete reward*) and 𐤔 (The LORD grant you *favor*). If that is the case, then we have a text very much like poetry, where parallel words are elided and conjunctions take an asseverative nuance (May YHWH give you [peace]. Yes, find peace). Campbell (AYB) believes that the object has been lost. We agree with Bush (WBC), who explains that “it seems quite unlikely that the object of the verb 'grant' would have disappeared from the whole Hebrew tradition.” A third way is to take the imperative with *waw* as a complement of יתן, which is suggested in JM §177h: “Occasionally a clause introduced by *Waw* is equivalent to an object clause . . . Ru 1.9 יתן יהוה לָכֶם וּמָצָאן. *Would that Y. enabled you to find.*” Campbell objects to this because an imperative with *waw* following a jussive typically carries a sense of consequence (so that). See GKC §110i.

Literally, יתן יהוה לכם means, “May YHWH give to you both.” Instead of saying that this phrase is missing an object or that מנוחה does double-duty for both verbs, we think that יתן יהוה לכם contains within it the very content of the blessing: the deity acts charitably or benevolently. Thus, נתן means “to give favorably” or “reward.” No’omi then expands upon her statement by giving an example of what that might entail. Therefore, we render the conjunction as explicative (namely/specifically/that is).

**Peace** — When referring more to an inner state of being, מנוחה refers to “peace” or “stability.” When referring more to an outer state of being, it refers to a “haven” or “sanctuary.” See section B2, example 2.

**each** — See notes on v. 8.

**[in] her husband's home** — Literally, “a home of her husband.” Since we interpret this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “in.” See JM §133c. Hubbard (NICOT) views the entire last clause as epexegetical. Thus, he renders it “namely, a home with a husband.” Fenton renders this “the home of her Husband.” The word “husband” is not capitalized elsewhere by Fenton. One can only surmise that, in Fenton's view, No’omi was wishing that her god would become a “husband” to her daughters-in-law. This will not be the last of Fenton's curious, if not comical, renderings (see 1:11, 2:14, 3:2, 7, and 4:17).

**[After] she kissed them [good-bye]** — Literally, “She kissed them,” but, as noted by Wright, this is done “according to the usual custom in bidding farewell.” Thus, many translations add something like “good-bye.” What is the relation of this first inverted imperfect clause to the second? We believe the second clause stands in temporal succession to the first. Thus, one could render the second clause “[then] they [all] wailed aloud” or begin the first clause “[After] she kissed them [good-bye].” Sasson prefers a contemporaneous situation (As she kissed them goodbye). So does Geneva (when she kissed them).

**they [all] wailed aloud** — Literally, “They raised their voice. They wailed.” Contrary to many English translations, there is no coordinating conjunction (and) in this whole verbal clause. The affixed *waw* in ותשאנה and ותבכינה indicates that each verb functions with a perfect aspect or past tense (“they raised” and “they cried/wept,” respectively). Bewilderingly, some (such as NAB and NJB) interpret the second verb as adversative to the first (*but* they wept). Syntactically, we interpret the use of the two inverted imperfects as the creation of hendiadys. Thus, “they raised their voice” functions adjectivally to tell us how they “wept/cried” (out loud). It is also possible to interpret the second inverted verb (ותבכינה) as resultative: “They raised their voice *to* wail.” 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> reads קולם instead of קולן. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know if 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> represents an earlier version of the text or altered it to correspond with previous departures from the feminine plural. If 4QRuth<sup>a</sup> represents an earlier form of Ruth, it is possible that this reflects an “archaic dual,” in which case the text would be saying that only Ruth and Orpah wailed aloud, not all three women (see notes on v. 8). We stick with מ<sup>L</sup> and insert “all” to make it evident that all three are wailing. Bush (WBC) does so as well. GW (began to cry) and NJB (began weeping) base their renderings on ו (flere coeperunt).



1:10 **They told her** — וַתֹּאמַרְנָה is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (They *said* to her). See 1:1. One could interpret the use of the inverted verb as one of temporal or adversative succession (“*Then* they said” or “*But* they said,” respectively). It is evident, however, that the many translations that start the verb with “and” are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function.

**With you [alone]** — Two things are worth mentioning about this text. The first is the position of this phrase within the speech. By shoving it to the front, the composer subverts normal word order and, thus, creates emphasis. The result is a statement like “only if you go back with us, will we go back.” Thus, we render the phrase “with you alone” and leave it at the start of the speech. Our use of “alone” is supported by אִלְהֵן עִמָּךְ (Only with you). Sasson (We want *only* to return with you) uses it as well. Moshavi (“The Discourse Functions of Object/Adverbial-Fronting in Biblical Hebrew”) describes the situation this way: “There is widespread, though not universal, agreement that verb-first (VX) is the *basic*, or *unmarked* word order in the verbal clause, and verb-second (XV) the *marked* order. On the basis of this view, the preverbal clausal element in an XV clause is said to be *fronted* from its normal position, or *preposed*. . . . The unmarked order is *pragmatically neutral*, having no particular discourse function, while the marked order is used to achieve a specific discourse function or functions” (no italics added). Few translations attempt to capture the emphatic nature of the fronting (see, however, Rotherham and Alter). The second thing of note is the כִּי. Most translations interpret it as a particle of negation (no). If this were a particle of negation, one would expect No’omi to use the same one she uses moments later in 1:13 (אֵל). Since she does not, we find that interpretation unlikely. So does Wright: “Nay, . . .” is not to be followed.” Others (like Geneva, KJV, and YLT) take it as an asseverative (surely/certainly/truly). A few more (like Alter) prefer an adversative (but/yet). ט treats it as causal (for/since/because). Absurdly, some translations render it multiple times. JPS renders it twice (“nay” and “but”). Leeser renders it thrice (“no,” “for,” and “truly”), as does NASB (“no,” “but,” and “surely”). When כִּי is used with verbs of speaking in narrative texts, however, it often functions as a marker of direct speech—the כִּי *recitativum*. See GKC §157b and JM §157c-ca. For a few examples, see Gen 21:30 and Exod 3:12. This syntactic function was noted by Davidson as early as the mid-1800s in his volume on *Hebrew Syntax* (§146). The entry for כִּי in BDB lists this very verse as an example of the כִּי *recitativum*. Thus, Wright says, “כִּי is not to be translated here, as it is used . . . merely to introduce the direct speech.” All this is supported by ו, which renders the Hebrew without a negative, asseverative, adversative, or causal particle. Contrary, therefore, to virtually every English translation, this כִּי appears to have no semantic value. If one absolutely needed to represent it with an English word, a few options present themselves: “they told her *the following*” or “they replied to her *like this*.”

**we will** — Some interpret the imperfect with the sense of “wanting.” In our opinion, that flies in the face of the emphatic nature of the text. This is not a matter of desire, but of resolute determination.

**clan** — For עַל as “clan,” see section A3.

- 1:11 **insisted** — Literally, “said.” Since the type of speech that follows is both commanding and reprimanding, we render the verb “insist.” So does REB. Note that **וַתֹּאמֶר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is neither a coordinating nor adversative conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Though it is possible to interpret the use of the verbal clause in a coordinating or adversative sense, it is evident that most English versions are simply reacting to the presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function.
- why go** — Or “why would you go.” The verb is a modal imperfect. Since, however, the modal quality is effectively communicated by use of the interrogative (why?), the use of “would” or mention of the second person “you” is unnecessary. We agree with Bush (WBC) that the question is rhetorical. The point is not to question them, but to correct them. This is made explicit by NET (There is no reason for you to return).
- with me** — Schipper (AYB) believes that this **עִמָּי** continues the idea of being “under the authority” of No'omi (see notes on v. 7). Such would be the case if Orpah and Ruth had used **עִמָּי** with the sense of being “under authority” in their previous declaration. Since, however, No'omi responds directly to what the two said (v. 10), and **עִמָּי** does not have that meaning there, we reject Schipper's conclusion here.
- I certainly have no more sons** — Literally, “Do sons still belong to me?” Or, more simply, “Have I more sons?” No'omi's question is not a real question—it is rhetorical. It not only anticipates the answer, but acts either as a statement of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). For multiple examples, see GKC §150e. See also 2:8.
- innards** — Or “guts/bowels/uterus.” The word **מֵעָה** typically refers to the fleshy insides of a person or thing. In this instance, it refers to No'omi's womb. Virtually all translations render it that way. The more common term, however, is **רֶחֶם** (womb) or **בֶּטֶן** (belly). Campbell notes that “in three poetic passages, Gen 25:23; Isa 49:1; and Ps 71:6,” the word **מֵעָה** “appears in parallelism with *beten*, . . . Of importance is the fact that in each of these three passages, *beten* is in the first or 'A' position, our word in the second or 'B' position. . . . and it is the poetic, often archaic words which are in the 'B' position.” In other words, the word-choice here is both particular and unusual. The composer of the text must have chosen this word in order to further characterize No'omi. Therefore, we chose a less common word than “womb” or “belly,” which also represents the commanding and somewhat coarse voice of No'omi: “innards.” YLT did similarly (bowels). NJPST (body) takes the word as synecdoche for the whole. Oddly, Fenton has No'omi ask “Are there any sons in my breast?” For more Fenton oddities, see 1:9, 2:14, 3:2, 7, and 4:17.
- to be husbands for you both** — Literally, “in order to become, for you both, husbands.” For the pronominal suffix **כֻּם**- as “you both,” see v. 8. We interpret the use of the inverted perfect **וַהֲיִי** as resultative. As Hubbard says, “The clause expresses the result of the preceding clause.” See also JM §119iN2. The *lamed* attached to “husbands” is a helping particle for the verb. In contrast with the *lamed* in the following verse, it has no semantic value.
- 1:12 No'omi's exhortation, which begins in v. 12 as prose, turns into poetry as it goes. Alter describes it this way: “Naomi's relatively long speech to her daughters-in-law abounds in loose parallel

structures and emphatic repetitions, culminating in one parallelism that actually scans as verse.” We represent that shift as it happens in our translation—beginning with the short, unfinished iterations “If / even if / if even, indeed.”

**Scat!** — As vocalized by the Masorettes, לִכֵּן is the defective form of the same imperative used in v. 8 (לִכְנֶה). In v. 8, when No'omi makes her first plea to Orpah and Ruth, the imperative functioned as an introductory interjection. Here, however, after their refusal, No'omi has become more commanding. The use of this terse imperative almost immediately after No'omi's previous order to “Go back” functions to heighten and elevate the force of the command. Thus, we render it “Scat!” Sasson prefers “just go.” The KJV, Bishops', and Geneva bibles added “your way” to the imperative. Though many modern translations adopt that addition, we consider it both unnecessary and contrary to the terse and emphatic tone of the text. 6 lacks the second imperative, though it is present in some manuscripts (misread as “thus/therefore”). 7 supports the Hebrew.

**I am too old for a man to have me** — A few things need to be explained here. First, the affixed prepositional *min* creates a “comparison of capability” against that to which it is affixed. Thus, מִהְיוֹת means “more/less than she who is.” The prepositional *lamed* indicates possession and is affixed to the owner or possessor. לְאִישׁ, therefore, means “belonging to a man/husband.” This is particularly true when combined with the verb הָיָה. Thus, זָקַנְתִּי לְאִישׁ מִהְיוֹת means “I am older than she who belongs to a man.” Both Schipper (AYB) and Goldingay render it that way. It may offend modern Western sensibilities to say a woman belongs to a man, but that is precisely the perspective within the text. English translators, faced with a perspective either alien to their own or one that offends their principles, usually alter the text to reflect their own cultural, moral, or social norms. Thus, they render it “to have/take a man” (as in HCSB, NASB, KJV, etc.) or “get married” (as in NJPST, NAB, NET, etc.). 7 interprets it as too old “to have intercourse” (CAL).

**If . . . even if . . . if even, indeed** — This verse contains a string of opening particles that build in intensity as they progress: כִּי, גַם, and וְגַם. Thus, we represent each one in a way that builds on what came before. כִּי introduces the hypothetical situation by opening up the protasis of a conditional statement (the “if” part of an “if-then” statement). The first גַם is concessive; it builds upon the previous hypothetical situation: “if also/even.” The וְגַם is then repeated with an asseverative *waw* (yes/indeed/certainly/surely) in order to provide a third, climactic hypothetical: “yes, if even.” It is not until the next verse that we see the apodosis and the completion of the thought, which is why we insert ellipses. GW does this as well. Campbell (AYB) prefers em dashes. Some interpret the כִּי as concessive, which is certainly possible. Contrary to numerous translations, we do not view the *waw* on וְגַם as coordinative (and). Since the text is about to break into poetry, and it is precisely in poetry where asseverative *waw* is most utilized, it makes sense to find it at the start. We disagree with those who take the כִּי as causal. No'omi is not providing Orpah and Ruth with reasons to turn back (Go back, my daughters, *for/because*); rather, she is using absurd situations to rebuke them.

**I thought** — Literally, “I said.” What follows, however, is not what No'omi might “say,” but what she might “think” (interior monologue). **אמרתי** (I said) is the elided version of **אמרתי בלבי**, meaning “I said in my mind” or “I said to myself.” Translations like NET, NRSV, and HCSB reflect this.

**I were a man's** — Or “belonged to a man.” The *lamed* indicates possession. It is affixed to the owner or possessor. See notes above.

**I bore sons** — 4QRuth<sup>b</sup> appears to say “I bore, again, sons” (literally, “I bore, a second [time], sons”). This appears to be an exegetical expansion. **ו** and **ע** support **נ**<sup>L</sup>. Note that the verb is **ילד** (to bear/beget), not **הרה** (“to become pregnant” or “conceive”) as in NET.

1:13 **For both, then,** — Within the HB, **לָהֵן** has both an adversative (except/only/but) and consequential (so/thus/therefore) sense. The latter is clear in Daniel 2:6, 9, and 4:24. For this reason, many translations render it “therefore” or “then” (see ESV, NASB, NRSV, etc.). The word would literally function as the opening particle in each iteration of the apodosis. The ancient versions, however (**Ϝ**, **Ϛ**, **Ϝ**, and **Ϝ**), unanimously render it “for them.” In that case, the text would be fronting the subject for emphasis: “for them, then, would you wait?” (see NIV, KJV, HCSB, etc.). The problem with that interpretation is the use of what appears to be a feminine suffix (**הֵן**) for a masculine plural or dual (sons). Thus, some propose amending the text to **הֵם**. Since 4QRuth<sup>b</sup> supports **נ**<sup>L</sup>, we stick with **נ**<sup>L</sup>. Such a problem is best addressed by looking at the language of No'omi's addressees. One of the primary things that distinguishes Moabite from Hebrew is the use of final *nun* in place of *mem* as a masculine termination. We see this in the Mesha inscription (KAI §181), for instance, in nouns like “the kings” (**המלכִן**, as restored from what appears to be a corrupt **השלכִן**) and “days” (**ימִן**), or numerals that would normally end with *mem* in Hebrew such as “thirty” (**שלשִן**). The problem, however, is that the masculine plural independent pronoun “them” actually terminated with *mem* as seen in line 18 of the Mesha inscription (**ואסחבִם**, “I hauled them off”). Thus, one would expect the suffixed form to have the same termination. If, however, **הֵן** represents a dual, the problem disappears. As seen in line 20 of the Mesha inscription, the dual ended with *nun* (**מאתִן**, meaning “two hundred”). Thus, what appears to be a confusion of gender is probably an accommodation to the language of Orpah and Ruth—but only in the *dual*. For that reason, we render it “both.” As Hubbard (NICOT) says, “Only Moabite evidences a masc. dual absolute ending.” If it is true that a dual is used here, then that makes it more probable that all the uses of the pronominal suffix **כֶּם**- are dual as well (see notes on v. 8). As for our inclusion of “then,” it seems evident that the apodosis begins at the start of this verse and is reiterated with each instance of **לָהֵן**. In both places, therefore, we include “then.”

**abide** — The sense in which we use this verb is “to wait patiently for.” The verb **שָׁבַר** is rare in BH. The typical verbs for “to wait/hope for” are **קָוָה** and **יָחַל**. No'omi's use of this verb instead of the others characterizes her speech as poetic and peculiar. Therefore, we render it “abide” instead of “wait.”

**till when** — Or “till the point/time that.” Had the composer of the text wanted to say “till” or “until,” she or he could have simply used עַד. The longer and more unusual word choice necessitates a longer and more unusual rendering.

**penned up** — Or “imprisoned/confined/detained.” In the HB, the verb עָנַן is a *hapax legomenon*. 6 understood it to mean “keep back/refrain/restrain,” which makes sense of the context and is followed by most English translations. Better, however, is the evidence from the DSS. 4QEn<sup>a</sup> ar (1 Enoch 22:4) uses the term to refer to a place of imprisonment for the dead: אֵלֶּן אַנּוֹן פַּחְתִּיא לְבֵית עֲנָנָן (these very ones, these pits, are a prison house). Nickelsburg (1 Enoch 1) refers to it both as a “place of confinement” and “house of seclusion.” Since this is a Niphal, we render it in the passive or reflexive sense: “be penned up.” The Masoretes either did not fully recognize it or, to serve the interests of pausal length in recitation, purposely did not double the *nun* and wrote the word with a long i-vowel instead of a short a-vowel. The meaning of the root as shown in the DSS is reflected in later MH: “to press/tie/bind/seclude/imprison/abandon” (Jastrow). JPS (shut yourselves off), Rotherham (shut yourselves up), and SET (tie yourselves down) provide similar renderings.

**[so as] not to become a man's** — Or “[by] not belonging to a man.” See v. 12.

**Never** — Alternatively, “No [way],” “[Absolutely] not,” “[Of course] not,” or “Enough” (Sasson). Such renderings reflect the emphatic and forceful nature of the negative adverbial expression. Bush (WBC) explains it rightly: “It is normally thus used to reject a demand . . . This reveals the force with which Naomi viewed Ruth and Orpah's determination to go with her.”

**[I swear] that** — The widespread confusion about this כִּי results from a common misunderstanding of No'omi's rhetoric. Throughout her response, No'omi is neither reasoning with her daughters-in-law nor explaining the reasons for her rejection. She is forcefully and emphatically rebuking them. She leaves her most emphatic expression for the end—swearing an oath that, in no uncertain terms, identifies herself as one accursed and a target of God's hostility. כִּי acts as a complementizer for the verb “to swear” (I swear *that*). As in many oath statements, however, the opening of the oath is elided because the fact of the swearing is carried forward by the כִּי itself (for an overview of oath expressions and the use of כִּי within them, see Conklin's *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*). Such forceful rhetoric will be repeated by Ruth, ending with an equally vivid oath at the end of her discourse (v. 17).

**this marring of mine** — Literally, “the marring of mine.” The shorter and more simple way to say it would be מֵרִי (my marring). Since, however, the composer of the Hebrew text chose an alternate and more unusual expression, so have we. Note that, even though translations usually render מֵרִי as “bitter,” we render it “marring” in order to mimic the word-play that appears in v. 20 (see below). NASB also choose a word other than “bitter” (hard). NET renders מֵרִי as “intense suffering.” Some translations take it in the sense of “grief” (Geneva, KJV, ISV, etc.). Leeser chose “bitter pain.” Since there is no reason to think that No'omi is apologizing to her daughters-in-law for God's action against herself, the rendering of NJB (bitterly sorry) should be rejected.

**far exceeds you both** — Literally “more than you both.” The preposition *min* in מִכֶּם is comparative, meaning “more than.” With the addition of מְאֹד, it means “far more than.” If the text meant to say “for your sake” or “on account of you” (as in Geneva, KJV, NJB, etc.), the Hebrew would be עֲלֵיכֶם. We regard the idea that this means “for you to share/bear” (as in HCSB, NAB, and NET) as grammatically possible, but contextually improbable. With Campbell (AYB), we agree that such an interpretation “overburden[s] the usual sense of *min*.” For the reason we render the suffix as “you both,” see notes on v. 8.

**since** — We agree with Bush (WBC) that this כִּי “must inevitably be construed as giving the grounds or reason for the statement in the preceding sentence. Hence, the כִּי, whose meaning is regularly causal, can only be so understood here.”

**against me has swung** — Literally, “it has extended/stretched out against me.” An idiom for striking with one's hand (in punishment). Thus, Isa 5:25 uses this verb in parallel with the verb “to strike.” This action is usually carried out by YHWH or his agent against YHWH's enemies. When performed by a human towards YHWH (Job 15:24-5), rebellion is indicated. Note that when this expression is used without עַל or בִּ (against) or with the preposition אֶל instead (to/toward), the sense is very different. We communicate both the idea of extension and striking by our rendering “swung.”

**the [very] hand of YHWH** — We represent the emphatic and poetic nature of the declaration by maintaining the word-order and inserting “very.” Hubbard (NICOT) does similarly: “Yahweh's own hand.”

1:14 **They [all] wailed aloud** — Literally, “They raised their voice. They wailed.” Contrary to many English translations, there is no coordinating conjunction (and) in the clause. The affixed *waw* in וַתִּשְׁנֶה and וַתִּבְכֶּינָה indicates that each verb functions with a perfect aspect or past tense (“they raised” and “they cried/wept,” respectively). See notes on v. 9. As in v. 9, we insert “all” to make it evident that all three are wailing. The loss of the expected *aleph* (וַתִּשְׁנֶה) instead of וַתִּשְׁאֲנֶה does not influence meaning (see also 2:9).

**a while** — עוֹד has multiple semantic nuances. One relates to repetition (again/once more). Virtually all translations interpret it in that manner. It also carries a sense of permanence or continuance (always/still). Thus, Bush (WBC) renders it: “they continued to weep.” Finally, it may indicate extent or duration (a while/some time/a long time) as seen in Gen 46:29 and Ps 104:33. We believe that the sense of extent or duration is intended here.

**Then kissed [good-bye]** — Literally, “She kissed,” but referring to the custom of bidding farewell (see v. 9). The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. It is evident that most versions that begin the verb with “and” are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. Since we believe the inverted imperfect functions in a subordinating relationship to the previous clause, we insert “then.”

**her mother-in-law** — 𐤄 adds “and returned to her people.” NJB follows 𐤄. 𐤅 adds “then went on her way.” 𐤆 adds “and left.” REB (and took her leave) follows 𐤆 and 𐤅. 4QRuth<sup>b</sup>, however, seems to support 𐤍<sup>L</sup>. Therefore, we stick with 𐤍<sup>L</sup>.

**but Ruth** — Since the subject has now switched to Ruth, her name is fronted before the verb, whereas, typically, her name would follow it. The *waw* functions, in this case, in an adversative sense (but/yet/however/whereas).

**stuck with** — For קָבַץ + כּ as “stick with” as opposed to “stick to,” see section A3. Campbell (AYB) notes the powerful effect communicated by Orpah's action: “The kiss in 1:14 goes from Orpah to Naomi, while in 1:9 it was Naomi who kissed the young women. This is just the signal needed to say that the relationship between Orpah and Naomi is here terminated; we need no further words (although the versions tend to supply them) to make clear that here Orpah takes her leave.” When one elevates the physical aspect of Orpah's act (kissing) ahead of its inherent meaning (a parting of ways), it leads to a focus on Ruth's action as one that is physical (clinging) instead of one that is relational (staying). Schipper (AYB) provides a pertinent example: “In 2 Sam 20:2, the verb with an object with a *b-* prefix describes how the people of Judah stuck with David while the people of Israel left to follow Sheba.”

1:15 **she protested** — Literally, “she said.” Since the type of speech that follows is both commanding and reprimanding, we render the verb “protest.” See v. 11. וְהִיא־אָמְרָה is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is neither a coordinating (and) nor subordinating (then) conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). See 1:1. Though it is certainly possible to interpret the verbal clause as consecutive, it is evident that many early English versions and some modern ones that insert “and” are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. ⚙ makes the text more explicit by identifying No'omi as the speaker. Some English translations do likewise (HCSB, NET, NIV, etc.). Campbell (AYB) notes that “one senses a tendency throughout Ruth not to name the speaker, but rather to let the content of the speech identify him or her. This imparts an even greater importance to the speeches and urges the audience to focus attention on every word.” The text in מִן־הַיּוֹם is, therefore, preferable.

**went back** — By accenting שָׁבָה on the first syllable, the Masoretes marked this verb as a perfect, which is usually rendered as a simple past (she *went back/returned*), but could also be rendered with the past tense and present aspect (she *has gone back/returned*). One might read the same consonants as a feminine singular participle with the accent on the final syllable (she *is going back/returning*). The latter is preferred by NIV and NET. Since the use of an aorist indicative active by ⚙ supports מִן־הַיּוֹם, we see no reason to deviate from the ancient oral tradition preserved by the Masoretes.

**[ancestral] spirits** — For אֱלֹהִים as “ancestral spirits,” see section B3, example 2.

**Go after her!** — Literally, “Go back after your sister-in-law!” Since “sister-in-law” is redundant in English, we replace it with “her.” To capture the brevity of the Hebrew (and since nothing is lost in meaning) we reduce the translation from “Go back after” to “Go after.”

1:16 Ruth's first dialogue begins here and ends in v. 17. Her speech is direct, forceful, and poetic—mimicking No'omi's voice and tone. Alter describes her speech as cadenced, lyrical, and with “parallel structures that have strong rhythmic quality and sound rather like verse.” We render her speech with poetic lineation to represent that poetic structure and rhythm. The first part of her speech begins with an ABC / BC couplet. In this type of parallelism, the initial verb (to come strongly against) is dropped in the second line, but governs the content in both lines.

**stop bullying me** — For **פגע** + *bet*, as “to attack” or “assault” (and thus “to bully”) see section B3, example 3. Many English translations ignore the negative sense and, thus, obscure part of Ruth's forceful tone and rhetoric. Instead, they give a value-neutral rendering like “entreat me not” (KJV), “do not urge me” (NASB), or “do not press me” (NRSV).

**from your wake** — Or “from behind/after you.” **אחרי** indicates the space and location where No'omi has gone, not the action of the one who is behind No'omi. Thus, we render it “wake.”

**Ruth replied** — **והאמר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). See 1:1. Though the verb begins the sentence in Hebrew, we have repositioned it to provide a smoother flow in English.

**to whatever [place] / in whatever [place]** — Our translation reflects the shift between **אל־** **אשר** and **באשר**. Geneva, KJV, and their derivatives do likewise (*whither / where*). Most translations eliminate the difference by rendering both phrases the same.

**spend the night** — The verb **לון/לין** denotes a momentary stay, not the more permanent act of “living” or “dwelling” in a place (that would be **ישב**).

**[so] will I** — Literally, “I will spend the night.” To reflect the economy of language utilized by Ruth (and because a repetition of “spend the night” is unnecessary), we compress the phrase.

**your clan [is] my clan** — For **עם** as “clan,” see section A3. Virtually all interpreters view this statement as the intent to convert from Moabite to Israelite. For that reason, they render both this and the following verbless clauses with “will be,” “shall be,” or “will become.” As noted by Schipper (AYB), however, “The nominal clauses in this couplet do not indicate on the basis of this syntax alone whether Ruth means that Naomi's people and ancestors will become Ruth's people and ancestors or will *remain* Ruth's people and ancestors” (italics added). In the ancient NE, No'omi's people and ancestors would have become Ruth's once Ruth joined her family by marrying her son. According to vv. 7-8, Ruth and Orpah were already “in No'omi's keep” (i.e., “under her authority”) and were told to return to their father's and mother's “house.” This makes it clear that Orpah and Ruth's familial and ancestral identities were already firmly fixed in line with No'omi's. When Ruth makes this statement, therefore, she is not telling No'omi something new. Rather, her statement is a speech act that seals the deal already in place: Ruth's clan and ancestors *are* No'omi's. Thus, we render each verbless clause with “is.” So does Holmstedt, SET, and Alter. To translate these declarations “will be,” “shall be,” or “will become” loses the performative force of her statement (see Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* and Searle's *Speech Acts*) and treats Ruth's identity in a modern individualistic sense instead of one more appropriate for her context.

**mine** — Literally, “my [ancestral] spirits.” For **אלהים** as “ancestral spirits,” see v. 15. To reflect the economy of language utilized by Ruth (and because a repetition of “[ancestral] spirits” is unnecessary), we compress the phrase to “mine.”

1:17 **So be it** — When used in the opening of an oath, **כה** functions as an exclamative, illocutionary force indicator (see Searle's *Speech Acts*). The closest English equivalents would be “Let it be thus,” “So be it that,” or “I swear as follows.” Unlike “amen,” which stands at the end of a statement and affirms what was said by someone else, **כה** stands at the start of a statement



and affirms what a person is about to declare. Since כֹּה was known to operate that way, the oath could be elided—especially if it was declared once already. Thus, כֹּה functions (like כִּי) as the opening force indicator in an oath statement.

**YHWH deals with me** — As made explicit by 2 Sam 3:35 and 1 Kgs 2:23, this phrase constitutes part of an oath statement. The question, however, is what part it plays. Many believe it functions as an illocutionary force indicator (see Searle's *Speech Acts*). What follows, therefore, is the protasis (the first part of the conditional statement). In that case, however, the apodosis (what would happen if the condition is not met) would be missing. NET, therefore, provides it: “May the LORD punish me severely *if I do not keep my promise*.” Since the negative part of an oath statement is often elided, that makes sense. Our view, however, is that כֹּה is the illocutionary indicator (see note above) and יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי is the apodosis. Thus, “YHWH deal with me” or “YHWH act towards me” is the negative part of the oath. The mere use of the statement indicates punitive or detrimental action. For that reason, we agree with renderings like HCSB (May Yahweh punish me) or GW (May the LORD strike me down) except to say that the Hebrew is more euphemistic; it doesn't define what YHWH is going to do. The lack of specificity may also reflect a simple reality: no one knows how YHWH might exact retribution (especially toward the deceased). One important point, however, is provided by Jotūn (*Ruth: Commentaire philologique et exégétique*): “The verb forms are indicative.” This is neither will nor wish (*May YHWH deal with me*). By making the oath, a punitive or retributive act of YHWH is not simply affirmed as a potential outcome—it is given power. So long as the conditions for the outcome have been met, the oath, as a *performative*, actually creates the outcome. This is particularly true of cultures and societies that perceived of the spoken and written word as magical or divine. Thus, the rendering “*May YHWH*” must be rejected as a misunderstanding of the creative and effective power of oaths. Note also that Ruth reuses the same verb spoken over her in blessing by No'omi in v. 8 (עֲשֶׂה), but subverts it by using it as part of a curse. Thus, Ruth not only mimics No'omi's rhetoric by taking an oath like she did (v. 13), but uses her own words against her.

**yes** — We interpret this *waw* as emphatic (yes/indeed). The point is to add to what was previously said with more intensive force. Such use of the conjunction is usually limited to poetry.

**so be it utterly** — Literally, “so be it [that] he intensifies.” For our rendering of כֹּה as “so be it,” see notes above. When used with another verb, יִסַּף has an adverbial sense that indicates either intensification or continuation of the previous action. Thus, NASB and NJB render it “worse.” NET and NIV render it “severely.” Most translations render it “and more.” In our view, since the language of an oath is already heightened, the type of intensification intended by this statement is the creation of a superlative. Thus, we render it “utterly.” Since the previous action has already been stated, there is no need to repeat it: “so be it that he intensifies *his dealing with me*.” The secondary part is simply elided.

**if death itself** — The phrase **כִּי הַמּוֹת** is usually understood either to include death (if *even* death) or exclude it (if *anything but* death). Since Ruth has just vowed to be buried where No'omi is buried, we see no reason to exclude death from her assertion and every reason to include it. Furthermore, Ruth is purposely and emphatically reusing No'omi's words against her. She mimicked No'omi's invocation of an oath (v. 13) by doing the same. And she subverted No'omi's first blessing (v. 8) by taking the same verb (**עָשָׂה**) and referent (YHWH) to invoke a curse upon herself. In that blessing, No'omi praised Ruth and Orpah for their faithfulness to “the dead ones” (**הַמֵּתִים**). Ruth continues to subvert No'omi's words by taking her statement of faithfulness to the dead and applying it to herself and No'omi. Therefore, we reject renderings like “if anything but death” or “only death.” Ruth's faithfulness will extend all the way up to and include death. Note that “death” is fronted before the verb to produce emphasis and that an article is attached to make it more dramatic. This is the reason for our rendering “itself.” For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. There is also a question about the function of **כִּי**. It is not a complementizer of the verb “to swear” as in v. 13. Some argue that the protasis of a negative oath statement begins with **אִם**, not **כִּי**. Therefore, **כִּי** should be an asseverative (surely/indeed). Holmstedt, for instance, says, “Although **כִּי** can introduce a conditional clause . . . , it does not appear to be so used in oaths or curses.” In **כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה** oath statements, however, **כִּי** and **אִם** are clearly interchangeable. In 1 Sam 3:17, 25:22, 2 Sam 19:14, and 2 Kgs 6:31, **אִם** inhabits the exact same syntactic position as does **כִּי** in this verse (as well as 1 Sam 14:44; 20:13; 2 Sam 3:9, 35; 1 Kgs 2:23). Thus, assertions like Holmstedt's must be rejected.

**forces you and me apart** — Literally, “should cause a split/division between me and you.” Contrary to numerous translations, there is no “from”—just a coordinating conjunction (and). Since the use of a conditional **כִּי** (see note above) makes this statement hypothetical, we see no need to give a modal rendering of the verb. Some translations, however, prefer it.

1:18 **Having seen . . . , she stopped** — There are many ways to view the relationship between the first and second inverted imperfect clauses. One could, for instance, take the second as consecutive (She saw . . . , and so she stopped) or subordinating (She saw . . . , then she stopped). One could take the first as causal (Because she saw . . . , she stopped) or temporal (When/after she saw . . . , she stopped). Whatever the case, it is important to note that, contrary to some English versions, the bonded *waw* on each verb is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1.

**fortified [was] she** — In order to understand **מִתְאַמֶּצֶת**, we must examine the other places where the Hithpael of **אָמַץ** is utilized: 1 Kgs 12:18 (repeated in 2 Chr 10:18) and 2 Chr 13:7. In the first, Rehoboam sees that his life is in danger and, in order to flee in his chariot, does the action of this verb. Virtually all translations render it “managed to,” “had to,” or “hurriedly/made haste to.” Cogan (AYB) renders it as “with effort” (sans explanation). None of those meanings work in our verse. In the second, Abijah, as leader of the people of Judah, speaks to the other eleven tribes and tells them how wicked men did the action of this verb

against Rehoboam. Virtually all translations render it something like “to assert oneself,” “withstand,” “hold one’s own,” “stand up to,” or “resist.” Such renderings would align better in the context of our verse, but have nothing in common with 1 Kgs 12:18. Here in Ruth, most translations render the verb “determined” or “steadfastly minded,” which doesn’t work with the Kings passage and is a stretch for the Chronicles one. Clearly, translators and interpreters are either blindly adopting each other’s renderings or making things up as they go without recourse to the use of the verb in other contexts. Appeals to the root (to be strong/hard) and characteristic functions of the stem (reflexive, iterative, reciprocal, and estimative) are helpful in determining a basic sense (to strengthen oneself), but ultimately useless without testing the results against passages where the verb appears. We suggest that the meaning is “to fortify [against assault].” In other words, within a situation of conflict, the verb describes someone who hardens or strengthens their defenses so that they are either resistant to assault or able to launch a counterattack. This meaning is applicable in all three contexts. In Kings, when Rehoboam finds out that his emissary is stoned to death, he doesn’t simply go up into his chariot and flee—he shields his body with armor or “fortifies himself [against assault].” Otherwise, stones or arrows might take him down from his chariot as easily as he went up into it. In Chronicles, the verb is used to describe how wicked men strengthen their defenses to resist or counterattack Rehoboam. In that instance, the particle **עַל** (against) specifies exactly what entity is the perpetrator of assault and/or object of retaliation. In our text, No’omi realizes that Ruth is fully equipped to rebuff her forceful directives. Her use of the participial form gives the word a durative sense: “a woman who stays fortified.” A personal pronoun is used to produce emphasis. We mimic that emphasis by maintaining the syntax (“[was] she” instead of “she [was]”).

**to go on** — As noted by Hubbard (NICOT), the use of the infinitive has the nuance of “to go forward, proceed ahead.” Thus, we render it “go on” instead of simply “go.”

**to dissuade her** — Or “to proscribe to her [what to do].” The point is not that she “said no more to her” (NRSV, NASB, ESV, etc.), “left [off]/stopped speaking to her” (KJV, ASV, NKJV, etc.), or was “silent,” but that she stopped trying “to persuade her” (HCSB), “dissuade her” (NET), or “argue with her” (NJPST and SET). Contrary to Hubbard’s view (NICOT) that “The storyteller wants the audience to feel . . . alienation between the two women,” the point is simply to settle the issue. No’omi attempted to alienate Ruth by disassociating herself from her. She failed. What more can then be said on the matter? Nothing. It is for good reason, therefore, that ISV and GW say “she ended the conversation.” It might be the case that they continued talking amiably during the rest of the voyage or were completely silent, but the narrator does not tell us. Bush (WBC) says it well: “Our narrator has used the scene exclusively to report this series of dialogues . . . . About all else he leaves us totally unformed.” Such a dearth of information is characteristic of Hebrew narrative. Holmstedt rightly notes that “This infinitive phrase is the semantic opposite of **לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ** in v. 16.” Thus, the text before us is structurally opposed not to speaking in general, but to the command “to turn back from her wake.”

1:19 **The two of them** — Notice the third-person plural pronominal suffix *-hm* referring to a dual (see notes on v. 8).

**arriving** — Or “coming/entering.” The feminine singular participle functions collectively to refer to the “two of them.”

**[at] Bethlehem** — Since this is an accusative of place, we insert “at.” Most translations prefer “to” or “in.”

**At the time of [their] arrival** — Or “Now, as [they] arrived [at] Bethlehem.” Since the repetition of “[at] Bethlehem” is superfluous, we drop it. The use of וַיְהִי signals a new direction in the story, which is why we begin a new paragraph at this point. Though the separation of content is evident in the Masoretic accentuation by use of an *athnach* under “Bethlehem,” we would have ended v. 18 with “Bethlehem” and begun v. 19 with וַיְהִי.

**was abuzz over them** — Or “was abuzz because of them.” Whether from הוּם or הַמּוּם, the same verbal form (וַתְּהִי), identically vocalized by the Masoretes, appears in 1 Sam 4:5 to describe the loudness of the land and in 1 Kgs 1:45 to describe the loudness of the town. Clearly, the verb refers to a ringing/resounding/reverberating of sound across a large area. Thus, **6** rendered it ηχησεν (it rang/pealed/resounded). We agree with Sasson that the verb was probably onomatopoeic. Whether the sound was one of joy, confusion, astonishment, outrage, or something else is not clarified by the text. The fact that the verb refers to joyful exclamation elsewhere tells us nothing about the sound here. The text is clearly ambiguous. Therefore, we render it simply “abuzz.” Leeser (was in commotion) treats it similarly. **S** (they rejoiced) explains the meaning. **9** (the news was spread wide) is paraphrastic. Most English translations render וַתְּהִי as “excited,” “stirred,” “astir,” or “moved” even though, in 1 Sam 4:5 and 1 Kgs 1:45, they understand it as nothing more than the sound of commotion. Those that want to communicate both senses include Sasson (hummed with excitement), REB (buzzing with excitement), and Hubbard (echoed with excitement).

**The women exclaimed** — Literally, “they (the feminine ones) said.” We add “the women” to highlight that this is something only the women say—not the whole town. Our use of “exclaimed” instead of “said” follows from the sense of the verb “abuzz.” Note that וַתֹּאמְרָנָה is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (they *said*). See 1:1. Though it may be possible to interpret the use of the verbal clause as coordinative (the whole town was abuzz over them *and* the women exclaimed), it is evident that most translations that insert an “and” before the verb are simply reacting to the presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function. In this instance, the inverted verb probably functions as explicative: it further defines what was meant by “the whole town was abuzz over them.” If one were to represent that in translation, the text could be rendered “that is, the women exclaimed” or “in that the women exclaimed.”

**“Is that [really] No'omi?”** — Numerous translations treat this phrase as nothing more than a question (Is this No'omi?). The interrogative particle, however, is used for rhetorical effect. It points to a state contrary to expectation and thus, perhaps, even indicates astonishment. Holmstedt agrees: “Context suggests that the women of Bethlehem were not seeking an answer to No'omi's identity but were rather surprised to see her.” To capture that sense, we use the phrase “is that really?” Other translations prefer “Can this be?” GW turns the expression around: “This can't be, can it?”

1:20 **She told them** — Literally, “She said to them.” וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). See 1:1.

**Mara . . . marred** — At this point in the narrative, the Hebrew introduces a fantastic word-play in which No'omi's name (and thus her character) is transformed. No'omi rejects her previous name and renames herself according to her misfortune. This re-identification is introduced primarily through poetic word-play. She asks to be called “Mara,” which means “bitter [one]” (feminine adjective from מָרַר) because Shaddai “caused her bitterness” (a Hiphil from the same root). The use of a final *aleph* instead of *heh* in “Mara” does not change the meaning. Through the use of language itself, the moment of despondency is heightened and No'omi's role is changed. To capture this, we depart slightly from the literal meaning (as in v. 13) so that the name itself is contained in the action. So does Moffatt: “call me Mara, for the Almighty has cruelly marred me.” We also italicize the words to further emphasize their poetic connection. See the next verse for another dramatic word-play.

**Shaddai** — Like “El,” “Eloah,” and “Elohim,” we prefer to transliterate this divine appellation. A few translations do likewise (NJB and LEB). Most render it “Almighty,” a meaning derived from שׁ, which usually represents שׁ with παντοκράτωρ (a combination of *pan*, meaning “all,” and *kratos*, meaning “power” or “might”). שׁ usually represents that with *omnipotens* (the Omnipotent). In both this and the next verse, however, שׁ renders שׁ as κἄνος—a title that is probably derived from MH (a combination of relative שׁ + ה), meaning “[He] Who [is] Sufficient.” If one were, therefore, to represent the Greek rendering here in Ruth, the appellation should be something like “the Sufficient One,” not “the Almighty.” As for the Hebrew term, scholars agree that any interpretation is obscure and problematic. Outside of biblical texts, for instance, the name appears as a plural (*Shadayyin*) in the Balaam Text from Deir Alla, which would seem to argue against the rendering “All mighty” (surely there can be only one!). For some time, scholars sought to understand the appellation by means of numerous possible etymological associations. W. F. Albright's article “The Names Shaddai and Abram” was, perhaps, the most influential in shaping scholarly discourse. As argued well, however, by Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language*), etymology tells us about the history of a word, not its meaning. Meaning is determined by usage. Albright himself acknowledged that any “original” meaning for Shaddai would have been forgotten by the time the biblical texts were composed. When we look at those texts, we find the Israelite deity referred to as “Shaddai” in four ways: one, like the Balaam text, uses the term as a synonym for a divine being; another uses it in the context of war and destruction to refer to the deity as either a warrior or a defender; a third relates the deity to blessings of fertility and progeny; a fourth highlights the deity's supreme power and/or authority. That final context, which comes closest to the rendering of Shaddai as “Almighty,” is limited to select parts of Job and should not, therefore, be taken as the normative understanding. The best parallel to Ruth 1:20-1 comes from Job 27:2. In that verse, Job swears by “El, [who] threw out my case, yes, Shaddai, [who] made my life bitter.” In other words, Job blames the Israelite deity not only for rejecting his claim of injustice, but inflicting him with punishment. Clearly, “Shaddai” is a synonym for “El” in Job 27:2 in the same way that “Shaddai” is a synonym for “YHWH” in Ruth 1:21.

Furthermore, Job uses the same verb to describe his predicament that No'omi uses to describe hers (a Hiphil of  $\sqrt{\text{מרר}}$ ). The use of “Shaddai” as a synonym for “God” continues in Job 27:10-13. Both **S** and **T** seem to have recognized these parallels, which would explain why they rendered the phrase “call me Bitter” as “call me Bitter of Life” (adding **נפש** in order to mimic Job's statement that Shaddai made his **נפש**, or “life,” bitter). In Ruth, No'omi laments the fact that her children have been taken from her by death and claims “Shaddai” as the cause. In Job 27:13-14, Job says that “Shaddai” causes the wicked one's children to be slain. We already saw No'omi's strong use of rhetoric when speaking to Orpah and Ruth. Here, she uses it again in a powerfully subversive way to tell the women of Bethlehem that the same name that is sometimes invoked to bless people with offspring has, instead, taken hers away (just like Job 27)! The concept of Shaddai as “Almighty” is entirely absent here—even in **G**.

**harshly** — Literally, “very [much so].” **מאד** functions adverbially to describe Shaddai's action. Since that action is clearly negative, we use a negative descriptor.

1:21 **I [was] full [when] I left** — The Hebrew includes an independent pronoun (**אני**) in order to provide emphasis to the verbal statement. Bush (WBC) contends that this is not the case because such use “is a standard feature of spoken Israelite Hebrew.” Since, however, in all of No'omi's dialogue throughout this and the following chapter, such pronoun duplication only occurs here, it stands out as an emphatic expression as opposed to a “standard feature.” Unlike most English versions, therefore, THF mimics the Hebrew by duplicating the subject. Note how the first half of the verse begins with **אני** and ends with **יהוה**. THF also mimics that structural opposition by beginning the sentence with “I” and ending it with “YHWH.” Rotherham (I was full when I departed, but, empty, am I brought back of Yahweh) duplicates both features as well.

**but** — This seems, quite self-evidently, to be an adversative *waw*. Therefore, we avoid treating it as a simple coordinating conjunction (and) as in the KJV and its derivatives.

**with nothing** — Though most translations render the word here as “empty,” **ריקם** is usually rendered elsewhere as “empty-handed” (see 3:17). Literally, it means “with nothing” or “with no effect.” Since **ריקם** has been fronted for rhetorical emphasis, we render it “but with nothing was I brought back” instead of “but I was brought back with nothing.” For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10.

**was I brought back [by] YHWH** — Literally, “YHWH brought me back.” We have altered the typical English word order in order to mimic the structural opposition of subjects within the Hebrew (“I” begins the sentence and “YHWH” ends it).

**Why** — **G** says *καὶ τὰ τὶ* (and why then?). **D** says *cur igitur* (why therefore?). Both seem to be reading **למה** with a subordinating *waw*. Some English translations do likewise (KJV and NJB). We stick with the Hebrew.

**when YHWH** — The *waw* at the start of this clause explains the circumstances for No'omi's rebuttal. Therefore, we render it “when.” Other good renderings include “seeing that” (NET), “seeing” (KJV), and “after all” (ISV). Some translations render the conjunction as “since.”

One uses “since” in order to give the reason for an assertion, not to provide the rational for an interrogative. But what came before is an interrogative. Therefore, “since” should be avoided. Had the text began “Do not call me No'omi,” “since” would work perfectly well to introduce the subordinate clause.

**gave no omen me [but ill]** — Following the accents of ancient tradition, we read ענה as a Qal of the root “to answer/respond.” With prepositional *bet*, it means “to pronounce against.” But what does *that* mean? It can be interpreted in a judicial sense, which is what we find in ט. Translations that prefer that interpretation include HCSB (pronounced judgment on), NASB (witnessed against), and the KJV and its derivatives (testified against). NET reads it more generally as a statement of opposition (opposed me), which is probably correct. Alternatively, one could read the verb as a Piel from the root “to oppress/humble/humiliate,” which is what we find in ו. Translations that prefer that interpretation include RSV (afflicted me), NRSV and NJPST (dealt harshly with me), and Geneva (hath humbled me). Such a verb, however, does not use prepositional *bet* anywhere else. Thus, we follow the Masoretic identification, but with a slightly different nuance: deities usually gave positive or negative judgments by means of oracles or divination. Thus, we interpret it “gave ill omens.” Note how No'omi gives new meaning to her existence through poetic word-play. Her name (*no'ōmî*) is redefined by use of a phrase specifically chosen for how it alliterates with that name (*‘ānāh bî*). Thus, the fact that YHWH is nowhere else said to “pronounce against” someone with this verb is a moot point (see also the word-play between “Mara” and “marred me” in v. 20). To capture the same phonetic re-identification, we switch the phrase “gave ill omens” to “gave no omen me [but ill].” We then italicize both words to better emphasize their connection.

**when Shaddai** — Like “El,” “Eloah,” and “Elohim,” we prefer to transliterate the divine appellation שדי (see note in v. 20). We also view the whole clause as parallel to the previous clause (when YHWH gave *no omen me* [but ill]). The *waw* both here and there introduces clauses that explain why it is unfitting to call her “No'omi.” Since Shaddai is the same deity as YHWH, it makes no sense to interpret the *waw* as coordinative (it is not YHWH *and* Shaddai who are doing these things!). In both cases, the *waw* should be rendered the same. Few translations, however, do so. NJPST is one exception.

**maltreated me** — Since ענה can mean “to answer” or “to afflict,” the Hebrew could have used the verb ענה twice for more stunning poetic effect, but it did not do so. Instead, it used a verb from רעע (to be bad/wrong/evil/harmful). Thus, one should probably avoid rendering the verb “afflicted me” (as in HCSB, NASB, KJV, etc.). As noted by Linafelt (“Narrative and Poetic Art in the Book of Ruth”), there is a sound-play at work in the final colon of both this and the previous verse: “The third lines of each triplet are tied together by the repetition of the Hebrew term for God, . . . in the subject position, by the first-person preposition *lî* . . . , and by the sound-play between the two verbs, *hēmar* . . . and *hēra'* . . . , which share two of their three letters.” Since we rendered המר as “to mar” (see notes on v. 20), we try to mimic some of that poetic alliteration here by rendering הרע as “to maltreat.”

- 1:22 **So No'omi returned** — Literally, “No'omi returned.” The bonded *waw* in וַתָּשָׁב is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. The purpose of the inverted verbal form in this place, however, must be to give “a final summing up of the preceding narrative” (GKC §111k). See also JM §118i. Thus, we begin the verse with “So.”
- with Ruth** — As in vv. 3, 6, and 7, we interpret the conjunction here as one of accompaniment. Unlike those other verses, however, we render it “with” and keep it up front. The change is purely for stylistic reasons (so the text will not be broken by an unnecessarily long string of subordinate clauses).
- in her [keep]** — Meaning, “in her care” or “under her authority.” See v. 7.
- she who turned away from the country of Moab** — The phrase הַשֹּׁבָה מִשְׁרֵי מוֹאָב is repeated two other times (2:6; 4:3). It describes Ruth in 2:6, but No'omi in 4:3. In this verse, however, the text is ambiguous about who “she” is. Thus, we leave it ambiguous in our translation. The *heh* at the front of הַשֹּׁבָה is an example of the so-called “relative article” (who/that), which is sometimes attached to a finite verb (thus, הַשֹּׁבָה means “she who turned away”). For our rendering of שְׂרֵי as “country,” see v. 1.
- Both of them arrived** — For our rendering of what appear to be masculine plural pronouns as feminine dual, see notes on v. 8. Previously, No'omi alone was the subject (*she* returned). Now, it is both No'omi and Ruth (*they* arrived). To indicate such a shift, the new subject is fronted before the verb and introduced by *waw*. There is no need, therefore, to render the conjunction. The whole point is to draw attention to the new subject.
- [at] Bethlehem** — Since this is an accusative of place, we insert “at.” Most translations prefer “to” or “in.”
- barley harvest** — Literally, “harvest of barley.” “Barley” is a collective plural. Note that, contrary to 2:23, there is no definite article. Since, however, “barley harvest” refers to a specific seasonal time, the article is not required. We have dropped it in this place while including it in the other in order to show the narrator's orthographic inconsistency.
- 2:1 **Now, [as] for No'omi** — We interpret this use of *waw* as introductory (it opens up a new part of the story) and the *lamed* as one of specification (regarding/concerning/as for). The text is changing focus from “both of them” (No'omi and Ruth) in the previous verse to No'omi herself, which occasions this specification. The same construction with the same purpose can be seen, for example, in Gen 17:20. Abraham requests that Ishmael might become the recipient of Elohim's covenant promise, but Elohim says that Abraham's wife will bear a son (Isaac) and the covenant promise will be established with him. In order to shift the subject back to Ishmael, the text begins with an introductory *waw*, a *lamed* of specification, and the name of the new subject shoved to the front: וְלִישְׁמַעֵאל (Now, [as] for Ishmael). After וְלִנְעָמִי, the text describes a relative of Elimelek. Even though the significance of the relation has to do with No'omi, the emphasis of relation is toward Elimelek (see note below). Thus, we depart from all English translations that make the emphasis of relation toward No'omi instead: “No'omi had.” Sasson's rendering (Naomi knew of an acquaintance of her husband) stays faithful to the relational direction established by the text.



[there was] a relative of her husband — Or “a relative belonged to her husband.” The text of מ<sup>L</sup> and מ<sup>A</sup> features the Pual participle מִידֵּעַ (one who is known), which, as shown by its occurrences elsewhere (2 Kgs 10:11, Ps 31:12, etc.), means something like “friend/companion/supporter/confidant.” The traditional oral reading, however, is מוֹדֵּעַ, which is used in the context of biological relations (it is parallel with “sister” in Prov 7:4). Since מוֹדֵּעַ describes Boaz in 3:2, the oral tradition probably preserves the correct form. What makes Boaz a suitable “restorer” is his biological relation—not the fact that he is a “friend” of the family. Thus, מוֹדֵּעַ must certainly mean “relative.” JM §89b provides a more traditional rendering: “מוֹדֵּעַ kinsman.” ט supports our conclusion. The current text probably resulted from an accidental *waw-yod* interchange (a common scribal error). Though numerous medieval Hebrew texts feature מוֹדֵּעַ instead of מִידֵּעַ, those texts probably represent an intentional alteration meant to correct the text (just as we do in our translation). The oldest attested reading is the errant one. Some translations stay with the consonantal text regardless of its inconsistency (such as YLT and Rotherham).

**powerful, valorous man** — Literally, “powerful man of valor.” גִּבּוֹר is often used to describe a warrior or battle hero. Thus, some translations render it “mighty.” Goldingay renders it “strong.” There is nothing in the text, however, to suggest that Boaz was a man of war or was superior in strength. In this context, it describes someone of high social status and, therefore, “powerful” in the sense of authoritative, respected, and/or influential. Boaz's characterization in the rest of the story (one who commands many servants and speaks authoritatively with the elders at the city gates) bears out that interpretation. Hubbard (NICOT) says it well: “In short, he was a ‘powerful person’.” Other translations prefer “prominent.” ESV ignores גִּבּוֹר entirely. For חַיִּל as “valorous,” see section A3.

2:2 **Ruth the Moabite said** — וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. Contrary to numerous English translations, the bonded *waw* is not a conjunction (and); it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). See 1:1. Since Ruth's gender is obvious, we feel no need to render this “Ruth the Moabite” as do some translations (consider how silly it would be to call an Israelite woman an “Israelite”).

**Please let me go** — The context clearly indicates that this is a cohortative of request, not of intent. Bush (WBC) agrees: “The idiom is used with *the cohortative form of the first person*, which regularly functions as a polite request, frequently addressed to someone in a position of authority or respect” (italics original). Therefore, we render it “let me go.” Attached to the cohortative is the emphatic particle גַּם, which we render “please.” Geneva and other early versions preferred the longer expression “I pray thee.” ט rendered it δη (now/then), which is followed by KJV and others.

[to] the field — Since this is an accusative of place, we insert “to.” It is possible that הַשָּׂדֶה functions as a collective singular referring to any or all fields around the town, which is why numerous translations render it as a plural. We feel no need, however, to change it to a plural because the use of the article designates a particular geographic category (“the field” as

apposed to “the forest,” “the yard,” “the lake,” or whatnot), the next verse is clear that Ruth had no specific field in mind, and it is quite common, in English usage, to use the singular with definite article to refer to an unspecified location with a particular makeup (saying one is going to “the neighbor’s” says nothing about which neighbor the speaker intends to visit). Note that the same word used in ch. 1 to refer to the general “country” of Moab is used here to mean a particular category of countryside. Thus, we have altered our rendering to “field.”

**that I might glean** — Or “in order that I might glean.” Note that וְאֵלֶּקְטָהּ is *wayyiqtol*, not *w-qatalî* (the cohortative, not the suffix-form). The inverted imperfect is used here in order to continue the sense of the previous cohortative. Most English translations treat the bonded *waw* as a conjunction regardless of its verbal function (see 1:1). We interpret the use of the verb as the intentional creation of a purpose clause. So do Bush (WBC), Hubbard (NICOT), Schipper (AYB), and others. For “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3.

**among the grain stalks** — It is possible that *bet* marks the object of the verb and, therefore, should not be translated. Given, however, that it does not follow the Piel of לָקַט elsewhere, we feel obligated to find another purpose for its usage. In this case, it appears to express a locative or spatial sense (in/among). That interpretation is supported by 𐤁. We see no evidence for a “partitive *bet*” as proposed by some scholars (that I might glean *some* of the grain). It is possible that an original partitive *mem* was accidentally read as *bet*, but if so, there is no evidence for it. Holmstedt thinks that this may be an example of the storyteller using slightly different grammar in order to highlight Ruth’s foreignness. Such an idea is attractive and would support the interpretation of *bet* as spatial (Ruth, as a foreigner, would be using the preposition in a context in which it was not normally employed without quite knowing it). Since שְׂבִלִים is marked as a plural, we render it as a plural. The switch from a feminine marker in the singular to a masculine marker in the plural doesn’t effect meaning. Whether the term refers, in this context, to cut stalks or stalks left standing is not clarified by the text. One would presume, however, that most of what was left behind was unintentionally dropped. This presumption is reflected by HCSB (fallen grain), NIV (pick up the leftover grain), and GW (the grain left behind). Though most translations prefer “ears” to “stalks,” we find that too limiting (the ears would still be attached to the upper portion of the stalk even after they were cut). Geneva, Bishops’, KJV, and others call this “corn,” which simply meant “grain” back in the day, but would be an anachronistic rendering today. Virtually all modern translations have rightly abandoned it (note, however, NJB).

**one who** — In this instance, אִשָּׁר functions as a headless relative pronoun (one/someone/anyone who). Uncomfortable, perhaps, with no specific referent, S added one: “the worker/laborer.” 𐤀 and 𐤁 support the Hebrew.

**regards me favorably** — Literally, “in whose eyes I might find favor.” Since “favor” is an adverbial accusative of the verb “to find,” we render it “favorably.” And since to “find in one’s eyes” means to have an impression of someone or see someone in a certain way, we render it “to regard.” We agree with Bush (WBC): “The simplest understanding of Ruth’s words is that she ‘wants to glean behind someone who would benevolently allow it’ (Keil, followed by Rudolph).”

**“Go [ahead], my daughter,” she replied.** — Literally, “She said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’” To make the sentence flow better in English, we have switched the order of the quote. Since No’omi’s response to Ruth is permissive, not commanding, we render לָכִי as “go ahead” instead of “go.” Many translations do likewise. See JM §114n. Though 𐤄 only has “daughter,” 𐤅 and 𐤆 support the Hebrew.

2:3 **So she went in to glean** — Literally, “She went, she entered, she gleaned.” Since the inverted imperfect וַתֵּלֶךְ gives a resultative sense to the flow of the narrative, we begin the verse with “so.” We are not treating the *waw*, which inverts the aspect or tense of the verb, as if it were a conjunction. It is evident, however, by the repeated use of “and,” that numerous early translations (and some modern ones) are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* in all three verbs regardless of its verbal function. See 1:1. Note that we are treating the first two inverted verbs as an idiomatic expression in hendiadys (“she went in” as opposed to “she went, she entered”). Bush (WBC) does similarly (she went [on] her way). Though 𐤅, 𐤆, and 𐤄<sup>B</sup> do not feature the second verb, it is present in 𐤅 and 𐤄<sup>A</sup>. Therefore, we stick with the Hebrew. As for the third inverted verb, we believe it functions, precisely like v. 2, to create a purpose clause. First, Ruth asked No’omi if she could go to the field “to glean” and now she goes to the field “to glean.” It is certainly possible, however, to take it as a simple summary statement. For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3.

**the harvesters** — Or “those who are harvesting/reaping.” Like most translations, we treat the active participle with definite article as a substantive. Note that, even though the masculine plural is used, the masculine form is the default marker for all those who have a part in the harvesting/reaping, regardless of their gender.

**[By] chance, [she] chanced [upon]** — Literally, “Her fate befell.” The words מִקְרָה and וַיִּקַּר share the same root, have similar meanings, and sound similar. We try to recreate the word-play with “by chance, she chanced.” See also 2 Sam 1:6; Qoh 2:14, 15. 𐤄, likewise, tries to recreate the word-play: περιεπεσεν περιπτωματι. The phrase “by chance” simply means “without intent.” And to say she “chanced upon” is simply to say she “happened to come upon.” We disagree strongly with those who, like Hubbard (NICOT), think “The sentence smacks of hyperbole—striking understatement intended to create the exact opposite impression. . . . The writer offered a brief peek at Yahweh’s hidden, providential hand behind the accident.” The storyteller is not making a theological statement either about God’s action or inaction; rather, the storyteller is telling us about *Ruth’s* action: when Ruth went to the field, she did not purposely go to Boaz’s field. How could she? The text gives us no reason to think she knew anything about Boaz. The use of assonance makes the point explicit. The fact that she goes to Boaz’s field is a fate imposed by the storyteller outside the story—not by the deity within it. Holmstedt agrees: “There is no compelling reason . . . to suggest . . . an assertion of God’s control.” At the same time, however, one must not treat the Qal as a Hiphil and pretend that “fate” is a non-personal force that propelled Ruth to the field as in SET (her fate made her happen upon). Note that וַיִּקַּר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. It is certainly possible to interpret the use of the inverted verb as the purposed creation of a coordinating clause, but it

seems evident that many translations that start the verb with “and” are simply reacting to the presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function.

**the one from Elimelek's family** — Since the narrator informed us moments ago that Boaz was from Elimelek's family (v. 1), the point of the phrase here is not to inform us once again. The repetition serves as a structural device to close the introductory part of this scene and move the story forward. Just as the opening narration mentioned a man “from Elimelek's family” named “Boaz,” so the end of the opening names the man who owned the field and points out that he is the very same one previously mentioned. Thus, we move from mere description of an important figure to the scene in which that figure is encountered. For that reason, we render the relative particle “the one” instead of “who [was].” Such a structural device was noted by Porten: “The opening unit . . . is enclosed by the chiasmically arranged phrases 'from the family of Elimelech' – 'Boaz' – 'Boaz' – 'from the family of Elimelech.’” Such a device makes it improbable that the relative phrase refers to the field rather than Boaz (the part of the field owned by Boaz *that [was]* from Elimelek's family).

2:4 The second scene begins here. Not only was the opening unit bracketed by a structural repetition (see note above), but the text now shifts away from its former use of inverted imperfects to make the new movement of the story explicit.

**Now, quite suddenly** — We interpret the *waw* as introductory—it opens up a new part of the story. Typically, הנה functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is”). Most early English translations, therefore, rendered it “behold!” There are, however, numerous other usages of הנה. When used with participles or finite verbs, it often gives that verb or participle vivid immediacy (see IBHS §40.2.1b and next note). Therefore, we render הנה as “quite suddenly.” A few translations attempt to do the same: NET (at that very moment), NRSV (just then), NJB (had just). The vivid immediacy is one provided by the narrator to the reader, not one that takes place within the story itself. Bush (WBC) makes the distinction clear: “The point of view expressed here is not that of one of the characters of the narrative . . . . Rather, the point of view is that of *the narrator to his reader*” (italics original).

**the fellow [himself] followed** — If interpreted as a perfect, this would literally be “Boaz arrived.” If interpreted as a participle, it would be “Boaz was arriving.” One can read בא either way. We can presume, by ו's use of an imperfect, that Jerome interpreted בא as a participle. ו's use of an aorist shows that its interpreter took בא as a perfect. Like most translations, we favor the perfect. Rotherham, GW, and REB favor the participle. Regardless of which one is chosen, there is nothing that tells us what interval of time existed between Ruth and Boaz's respective arrivals. Note the S-V word-order. BH is a V-S language. The normative order, especially in narrative, would be בא בעז. Syntactically, however, in the constructions הנה + participle or הנה + finite verb, which create vivid immediacy, the subject is fronted (see examples in IBHS §40.2.1b). This is done so that the subject participates in the emphatic nature of the construction. To bring out that emphasis, we add “himself” to the subject. So does REB. Note the alliteration in the phrase בעז בא מבית לרחם. As Porten says, “The opening clause resonates with a threefold alliterative *beth*.” Since

we are unable to mimic that alliteration using Boaz's name and the verb “to come/arrive,” we shift the language to “the fellow followed,” which makes use of an alliterative [f] and [o]. With the inclusion of the phrase “from Bethlehem,” we have a threefold f-sound to match the threefold b-sound in Hebrew. Why would the author use such emphatic and alliterative constructions at this point? We believe it corresponds with the use of the emphatically assonant phrase “By chance, she chanced” in the previous verse: the narrator is picking words that tell us, in no uncertain terms, that, within the story, nothing of what happens was orchestrated. Just as Ruth only happened to come upon the part of the field owned by Boaz, so Boaz only happened to come from Bethlehem while she was there. It also echoes the use of highly alliterative and/or assonant phrases elsewhere (see, for instance, **שפט השפטים** in 1:1).

**Boaz said** — Literally, “He said.” Since we dropped Boaz's name from the previous verbal phrase in order to mimic its highly alliterative character, we reinsert it here. **וַיֹּאמֶר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *said*). See 1:1.

**YHWH [be] with you [all]** — This phrase is verbless. It is not possible to tell exactly how the copula functions. One could render it “YHWH [is] with you” (as seen in 2 Sam 7:3), “YHWH [will be] with you” (an elided version of the longer expression seen in Num 14:43), “YHWH [was] with you” (an elided version of the longer expression seen in Gen 26:28), “[May] YHWH [be] with you” (an elided version of the longer expression seen in 1 Chr 22:11), or “YHWH [be] with you” (perhaps a greeting as well as a performative). The phrase may even be something of a title: “YHWH [Who Is] With You” or, more simply, “YHWH, Your Companion” (2 Chr 20:17). **S** seems to have interpreted the phrase as nothing more than a greeting, which is why it exchanged the divine name for “peace” (Peace be with you). The Rabbis also viewed the phrase as a greeting (*m. Ber* 9:5). **℣** changed the saying from a verbless to a verbal clause and shifted it to an expression concerning Torah: **יְהֵא מִמְרָא דִּיִּי בִסְעֻדְכוֹן** (May YHWH's Word be your support). As with most English translations, we prefer “YHWH [be] with you.” It makes sense that Boaz, standing in a position of authority and respect, would give a more resolute or powerful declaration to his laborers than they to him (May YHWH). Since the sense of the second-person masculine plural pronominal suffix is “you all” (the masculine gender encompasses the totality of male and female people serving under Boaz), we add “all.”

**“May YHWH bless you,” they replied.** — Literally, “They said to him, ‘May YHWH bless you.’” To make the sentence flow better in English, we switched the word-order. Since the blessing is a wish, not a statement, we bring out the modality of the jussive. Though a masculine plural verb is used for the response, the masculine gender is the default marker for all who replied to Boaz, regardless of gender. **וַיֹּאמְרוּ** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. While an inverted verb can have a coordinating function, it is evident that the many translations beginning the verb with “and” are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. See 1:1.

- 2:5 **Boaz then said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *said*). See 1:1. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the verb in a subordinating (then) or coordinating (and) relationship to the previous verse. We prefer the former, which is why we insert “then.”
- young male [attendant]** — נַעַר usually refers to a “boy,” “adolescent,” or “young man,” but may also refer to a young male helper or attendant (as here). We avoid using the term “servant,” however, since the more typical word for that is עֶבֶד.
- the harvesters' foreman** — Literally, “the one appointed over the harvesters.” In other words, the one placed in charge of them. Note that the participle is a Niphal (passive). It does not denote what a person *is doing*. Thus, active renderings like SET (who was overseeing) must be rejected. הַנֹּצֵחַ is regularly used for “officer,” “supervisor,” “steward,” or “courtier” (see, for instance, Gen 45:1; 1 Kgs 4:5; 5:30; 2 Chr 8:10). Thus, 𐤓 rendered it “the one accounted *chief* over the harvesters.” In this context, therefore, we render it “foreman.” So do Hubbard (NICOT), ISV, and Moffatt.
- Who owns that young woman?** — Or “To whom does that young woman belong?” Boaz is not inquiring about Ruth's identity. Neither is he asking about any general person with authority over her (No'omi). Rather, in this time and culture, Ruth would be considered the property of a man. Thus, Boaz is asking about the identity of the male (father, husband, head of family, or other) who owns her. Bush (WBC) says it well: “A woman had no independent status and identity in Israel's patriarchal world.” To harmonize Boaz's question with the foreman's response, 𐤓 shifts the question to one about her race or nationality: “To which *nation/people* does that young woman belong?” It is possible that Boaz's question is a round-about way of saying something else. If so, however, the story would be appealing to a culturally defined use of language to which we no longer have access. Thus, it seems best to stick with the sense of the text as we have it. Note that both grammatically and syntactically, הַזֹּאת (this/that feminine one) is an adjective of הַנַּעֲרָה (the young woman). Thus, הַנַּעֲרָה הַזֹּאת means “this young woman,” not “a young woman [is] this.”
- 2:6 **the harvesters' foreman** — Literally, “the one appointed over the harvesters.” See note in previous verse. HCSB and REB drop this phrase. So do 5 and 6.
- said in reply** — Literally, “he answered, he said.” Some translations simplify the double expression to one verb. Others render both and insert a conjunction. We attempt to find a place somewhere between.
- A young Moabite woman [is] she** — Note how the predicate is fronted for emphasis (“A young Moabite woman [is] she,” not “She [is] a young Moabite woman”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. Since Ruth is called a “young woman,” we feel no need to render מוֹאֲבִיָּה as “Moabiteess.” 𐤓 expands on the reply: “The young woman [is] *from the people of Moab*.” 6 adds articles to both nouns: “The young woman, the Moabite, is she.” So do NJB (The girl is the Moabiteess), NIV (the Moabite), KJV (the Moabitish damsel), and others. We follow the text, which is indefinite (*a* young Moabite woman). Quite perplexing is the genderless, non-personal “it” used by some translations for הִיא (Geneva, KJV, ASV, etc.).

**the one who turned away from the country of Moab** — See notes in 1:22 for analysis of the phrase **השבה משרי מואב**. The difference here is orthographic (**שרה** instead of **שרי**). In order to avoid an awkward rendering in English ([is] she—she who), we have opted to render **השבה** as “*the one* who.” Such a rendering presumes that Boaz had heard about a Moabite coming back with No'omi, which would certainly be the case if the whole town was “abuzz.” **ט** (She turned away and became a convert . . . from the country of Moab) displays a trick of Rabbinic midrash: taking the same word or phrase and reading it in two different ways. It interpreted the verb “to turn/return” first as a turning away from Moab and second as a turning in devotion toward the God of Israel (conversion). **מ**<sup>L</sup> is clearly original.

**in No'omi's [keep]** — Meaning “in No'omi's care” or “under No'omi's authority.” See 1:7.

2:7 The second half of this verse contains the most difficult interpretive crux in Ruth—particularly the section, marked by the Masorettes, as **זה שבתה הבית מעט** (this / her sitting / the house / a bit). The spectrum of interpretation runs wide among both ancient and modern translators. Some, like Campbell (AYB), are so perplexed that they just leave the space blank. Instead of offering a deluge of possibilities, we have simplified our analysis with the following principles:

- (1) If at all possible, it is better to make sense of the text as we have it than depend upon a form of text with no attestation in Hebrew manuscripts (i.e., conjectural emendation).
- (2) Masoretic accentuation and vocalization are important guides for interpretation, but may, at times, tell us more about the tradition of recitation and/or late Jewish perspectives than the narrative structure of the earliest attested text and/or its intended meaning. Thus, we feel bound to follow the accentuation and vocalization only so far as it makes grammatical, semantic, and/or syntactic sense.
- (3) A good test of the grammatical, semantic, and syntactic sense of any particular word or phrase is whether it occurs elsewhere, how close it matches those other usages, whether it makes sense of the context, and if it sheds further light on the rest of the story.

**She said** — **והאמר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Though it is possible to interpret the use of inverted verbs in a coordinating (and) or consecutive (then) manner, there is no reason to do so here. It does not follow that Ruth came from Moab “and” said what follows. Neither does it follow that she came from Moab “then” said what follows. Rather, the young male foreman first told us about her identity and then switched topics to tell us what she said. Curiously, Geneva expands the text at this point (she said *unto us*). Some interpreters, like Grossman (“Gleaning among the Ears”—‘Gathering among the Sheaves’), argue that this should be rendered “She thought” because the foreman is reporting his observations about Ruth, not what Ruth actually said. The reason for Grossman's interpretation is predicated upon the assumption that we as the audience would think Ruth's request to glean “among the bundles” beyond the bounds of custom and/or etiquette and, therefore, an improbable request. Two things argue against this. First, Ruth already told No'omi she intended to glean “among the grain stalks.” Therefore, having this be the foreman's observation of Ruth and not her request does not save her in any way from a negative assessment on the part of the audience. It would, in fact, compound the

problem since not only would she be going beyond the bounds of custom and/or etiquette, but she would now be doing so without having sought permission at the start. Second, we believe the point of Ruth taking such extraordinary measures is meant, by the author, to illustrate her boldness or bravery; her חַיִּל, not her presumptuousness. The fact that Ruth would act in such a way *on behalf of her mother-in-law* makes her a hero figure willing to go above and beyond normal social parameters to provide for the one who, not that long ago, had tried to disown her. The fact that she is a “Moabite” is not a detriment to this situation, but another element of חַיִּל. For an “insider” like an Israelite to make such a request would not be that valorous, but for an “outsider”—a Moabite—that would be *wondrous*.

**Please let me glean** — We believe that this is a cohortative of request. Therefore, we render it “let me glean.” Attached to the cohortative is the emphatic particle נָא, which we render “please.” See 2:2. Some interpreters (like Grossman) prefer to take this, instead, as a cohortative of intent and the emphatic particle as indicating determination or immediacy: “I will now glean.” Such an argument is predicated on the belief that Ruth would not have actually made such a request. For the reason why we discount that argument, see our discussion above. For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3.

**[and] gather** — Literally, “Let me gather.” וְאִסְפַּתִּי is an inverted perfect. As a 1CS verb, it can be distinguished from the *waw*-copulative by its placement of accent. The accent falls on the ultima (*w-qatalṭi*) instead of the penult (*w-qatalṭi*). Thus, this continues the sense of the previous volitive verb. Though the *waw* is not a true conjunction, since the verb is used in a consecutive sense, we insert “and.” Note that this verb comes from a different root than that in 2:3. Most translations make no distinction between them.

**among the bundles** — Note the shift from “among the grain stalks” (בְּשִׁבְלִים) in 2:2. The phrase here, however, is substantially the same. The change in vocabulary is probably a character device that follows the change in speaker. Note how Boaz also says essentially the same thing in 2:15 using slightly different terminology: בֵּין הָעֵמֳרִים (between/within/among the bundles). Though some make a distinction between עֵמֶר (sheaf/bundle) and עָמִיר (cut stalks/fallen grain), and, thus, propose reading עֵמֳרִים as a defective form of the latter (see BDB), two things argue against this: (1) in the four instances where עָמִיר occurs (Jer 9:21; Amos 2:13; Mic 4:12; Zech 12:6), Jer 9:21 is the only text in which any discernible difference exists (virtually all translations render עָמִיר as עֵמֶר), and, in that case, such a difference arises not from the use of עָמִיר, but from how עָמִיר is further described (ungathered); (2) since עָמִיר clearly functions, in several of those verses, as a collective singular, and no plural form is otherwise utilized, if there were a substantive difference between עֵמֶר and עָמִיר, the collective singular would, most likely, appear here (בְּעָמִיר, not בְּעֵמֳרִים). Some, like Bush (WBC) and Grossman, propose reading בְּעֵמֳרִים as an adverbial expression (in bundles). Since, however, Ruth already used prepositional *bet* with “grain stalks” to mean “among” (2:2), the preposition most likely serves the same semantic and syntactic purpose here.



**Then she came [and] took her place** — Literally, “She came, she stood.” The text is ambiguous. It could mean she did nothing while waiting for permission, she remained in the field all morning, and/or she was “on her feet” working hard. Many interpreters prefer the first option (Ruth stood waiting for permission) under the assumption that, to quote Moore (“Two Textual Anomalies in Ruth”), “The most the foreman can do is take her request under advisement and present it to Boaz, which he does.” It should be noted, however, that it is Boaz who goes to the foreman, not the foreman who goes to Boaz. If Ruth had asked permission of the foreman and was waiting until he asked Boaz, the text gives no indication of it (the foreman doesn't say anything to Boaz until Boaz comes to him and makes an inquiry entirely on his own volition). Some, like Hubbard (NICOT), believe that עמד should be interpreted as nothing more than standing in one place. Yet, like the verb נצב, which also means “to stand,” but in our text (2:5, 6) refers to the authority the foreman has over Boaz's workers, עמד has many nuances (such as “to stay/remain” in Gen 45:1 or Ps 10:1 and “to serve/attend” in Gen 41:46 or Isa 6:2). Since the Hiphil, as the causative stem, often gives עמד the meaning “to cause to be in a position/station/status,” the Qal probably has a stative sense: “being in a position/station/status.” Psalm 1:1 provides evidence of that nuance; it says, “on the path/road/way of sinners, do not stand,” which is a poetic way of saying “do not *be like* a sinner.” Thus, עמד can signify one's place within the social sphere based on one's actions. Psalm 102:27 uses עמד to state that, unlike the wicked who perish, God “lasts/endures.” In other words, עמד defines a characteristic of the deity—YHWH's “standing” with regard to others. In this case, Ruth's station or “standing” is as one who gleanes behind the harvesters. The verb עמד was probably chosen so that the storyteller could say that, just as Ruth asked to come and act as the person who gleanes behind the harvesters, so she came and did so. We attempt to capture the ambiguity of the verb by rendering it “took her place.” Note that both verbs are inverted imperfects. The bonded *waws* are not conjunctions; they invert the aspect or tense of each verb. See 1:1. Since we believe the first inverted verb exists in a subordinate relationship to the previous one (she said), we insert “then.” KJV, NRSV, and others do so as well. With most translations, we believe the second inverted verb exists in a coordinating relationship with the verb “she came.” With that one, therefore, we insert “and.”

**[ever] since** — מאז means “since/before/earlier/once/from the time of” (see, for instance, Gen 39:5; Exod 4:10, 9:24; Josh 14:10; Isa 14:8) or “in the past/long past/long ago” (see, for instance, 2 Sam 15:34; Isa 44:8; Ps 93:2; Prov 8:22). In no place does it mean simply “from” as virtually all translations treat it here. The reason translations routinely alter the sense of מאז in this passage may be to accommodate the Masoretic accentuation, which links this word not only with הבקר, but with ועד-עתה (“from the time of the morning and until now” or, more simply, “from the morning till now”). We choose not to depart from the word's sense. Neither do NJPST, YLT, or Moffatt.

**But** — By placing a *zaqef qaton* above עתה, the Masoretes linked the first temporal expression “since the morning” with the second “until now,” giving the conjunction a coordinating sense

(and). Virtually all English translations follow the accentuation, though they tend to drop the conjunction, resulting in “the morning until now.” Based on our analysis of the remainder of the text, however, we believe the *zaqef qaton* actually belongs over **הַבֹּקֶר**. NJPST agrees: “ever since she came this morning. She has rested.” If the disjunctive accent is moved, the conjunction can easily take on an adversative sense (but/yet/though). It seems evident to us and to many interpreters that the foreman first tells Boaz about Ruth and then follows it up with an adversative statement. The difference is that we locate the adversative in a physically present particle (the *waw*), whereas others, following the Masoretic accentuation, must insert it where nothing exists. Note, for example, HCSB (until now, *except that*), ESV (until now, *except for*), ASV (until now, *save that*), and NKJV (until now, *though*). See below for more.

**up to this moment** — As accented by the Masoretes, **זֶה** stands alone at the opening of a new phrase. Many difficulties arise from trying to make sense of the text as accented. Some translations, like KJV, ASV, and HCSB, treat it as a relative marker (that/which). This is done despite the fact that such a rendering makes no sense (note the KJV’s ludicrous “and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried”) and the use of **זֶה** as a relative is highly questionable outside poetry (as in this instance). IBHS provides several examples of the “relative” **זֶה** (see §17.4 and §19.5). Every one, however, works better as a demonstrative:

Ps 74:2: **זֶה שְׁכַנְתָּ בוֹ** = *the [very] one* on which you dwell

Judg 20:16: **כָּל-זֶה** = *every one/person*

Prov 23:22: **זֶה יִלְדֶּךָ** = *the one* who fathered you

Ps 104:26: **לִוִיתָן זֶה יִצְרָתָהּ** = *Leviathan itself*, you fashioned

Ps 104:8: **מִקּוֹם זֶה יִסְדַּתָּ** = *the very place* you established

Isa 25:9: **זֶה קִוִּינוּ לוֹ** = *he* for whom we waited

Thus, **זֶה** renders **זֶה** with **זֶה** (this one). In a footnote, LEB admits that **זֶה** functions as a demonstrative: “Literally ‘this one she is sitting’.” Numerous translations simply ignore **זֶה** (NASB, NIV, ESV, etc.). Since, however, **עַד-עַתָּה** (until now) is a common expression (see, for instance, Gen 32:5; Deut 12:9; 2 Sam 19:8) and the phrase **עַתָּה זֶה** (just now) occurs elsewhere with no reason for interpretive doubt (2 Kgs 5:22), we read against the Masoretic accentuation and take the whole as a single phrase **עַד-עַתָּה זֶה** (“until just now” or “up to this moment”). Bush (WBC) does likewise. Thus, the foreman describes what Ruth has been doing since the morning and then qualifies it to explain why, at that particular moment, she was not doing so. Such an interpretation makes sense of the existing text, is based on common idioms and well-attested semantics, eliminates the difficulties caused by reading **זֶה** alone, and has strong interpretive power. If Ruth were out in the field, following the harvesters, bending down to pick up what was thrown aside, with tall shafts of grain all around, Boaz would probably not notice her. If, however, she were sitting in a shelter, taking a break while others were out working, it would be easy for Boaz to spot her and such notice would impel his inquiry as well as the foreman’s need to explain what she was doing. **וְעַתָּה** says “until

evening,” reading ער-ערב instead of ער-עתה. That appears to be a case of harmonization with v. 9. Instead of זֶה, שׁ represents the negative particle לֹא (no). ו follows שׁ. Some English translations also follow שׁ: NRSV (*without resting*) and Moffatt (*without stopping*). There is, however, no reason to believe, nor evidence to suggest, that שׁ represents an actual Hebrew variant. In both places, the Hebrew should be retained. If one is determined to follow the accentuation, the best rendering would be that of Lys (“Résidence ou repos? Notule sur Ruth ii 7”), who proposed reading הַשָּׂדֶה as the antecedent of זֶה, resulting in a rendering like “this [field] [is] her dwelling—her house, not so much.” Moore prefers that reading: “This (field) has been her dwelling. The house has meant little.” While such an interpretation makes good sense of grammar, accentuation, and syntax, it does not work contextually. First of all, to say that Ruth has made the field her “dwelling” makes no sense at all. She is not living there. The fact that she has been there “since the morning” would not differentiate her from the reapers. Second, in what way and by what means could the foreman conclude that she treats the field as her dwelling more than her own home? Has he been watching her at home or inquiring about her activity at No'omi's house? Instead of better explaining the narrative, that rendering gives rise to a host of new interpretive problems.

**she has been resting** — Two issues arise with שבתה: its root and its verbal form. Does שבתה come from יָשַׁב (to sit/dwell/remain), שׁוּב (to turn away/turn back/return), or שָׁבַת (to halt/cease/stop/rest)? The Masoretes point שבתה as an infinitive construct from יָשַׁב with feminine singular pronominal suffix (her sitting). If correct, this would be the only instance of that particular construction of יָשַׁב in the HB. שׁ's use of יָתַב clearly takes the verb from יָשַׁב. שׁ uses καταπαύω numerous times for שָׁבַת and a few times for שׁוּב, but not once for יָשַׁב. If שׁ were attempting, at this point at least, to represent the Hebrew text as closely as possible, its use of καταπαύω would indicate שָׁבַת. If one goes with that root, however, one must reposit the word as a feminine singular perfect (“she stopped/rested,” “she has stopped/rested,” or “she has been still/resting”) or, as suggested by some, a segolate noun with suffix (her stopping/resting). ו's *reversa est* clearly takes the verb from שׁוּב. Fenton (she returned) is one of the only non-Vulgate translations to do likewise. To derive שבתה from שׁוּב, however, one must presume that the present text is a corruption of שָׁבַת, for which there is no evidence, or go to the one occurrence of שָׁבַת as a feminine singular perfect of שׁוּב in Ezek 46:17 and then presume an accidental duplication of the *heh* from הַבֵּית. Of the three proposals, יָשַׁב and שָׁבַת are the most sensible options. Though we prefer “to stop/rest,” “to sit” would work equally well.

**[in] the shelter** — Since we interpret this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “in.” Like many translations, we interpret בֵּית (house) as a reference to some sort of shelter, hut, or pavilion in which those who worked the fields could take a break and/or eat a meal. Based on Egyptian reliefs in the tomb of Menna, which show a foreman standing in a simple hut in the field while harvesters reap and winnow grain all around him, Manor (*Ruth*) believes that the shelter

was “a kind of brush arbor set up as a break shade for the workers.” Though Bush (WBC) says, “There is no precedent anywhere in the OT for translating בית as ‘hut, shelter,’” this denies a semantic nuance to the word that is clearly within its attested range. Job 27:18 identifies the “house” (בית) built by the wicked one with what is constructed by a moth (a cocoon) or the “hut/booth/shelter” (סכה) of a watchman. Proverbs 14:11 features a contrasting parallelism between the “house” (בית) of the wicked and the “tent” (אהל) of the righteous (“house” and “tent” function as synonymous word-pairs). Furthermore, Ps 84:4 calls a bird's nest a “house” (בית). Thus, just as “house” can describe something grand and established (like YHWH's temple), so it can describe something small and temporary (like a hut, tent, cocoon, or bird's nest). ❸ says “in the field” (בשדה) instead of “the house” (הבית). There is, however, no reason to believe, nor evidence to suggest, that ❸ represents an actual Hebrew variant. It does, however, support our interpretation of the phrase as a dative of place. Some translations ignore הבית or explain its presence as an act of accidental duplication (since הבית shares many of the same letters with שבתה). We stick with the Hebrew, which is supported by ❹ and ❺.

**a while** — With numerous translations, we interpret מעט in a temporal or adverbial sense (for a short time). For more examples, see Job 24:24, Hos 1:4, and Ezek 11:16.

2:8 **Boaz then said** — ויאמר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *said*). See 1:1. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the verb in a subordinating (then) or coordinating (and) relationship to the previous verse. We prefer the former, which is why we insert “then.” NET prefers a consequential sense (so/thus/therefore).

**Haven't you heard [the saying]?** — A question is presented at this point using an interrogative *heh* and the negative particle לוא (literally, “have you not heard?” or “did you not hear?”). The issue, however, is how to understand the question. Is it a genuine question or does it mean something else? ❹ interpreted it as an imperative (*audi*, meaning “listen/pay attention!”). Most translations follow ❹ with renderings like “listen carefully” (NASB), “listen to me” (NIV), “now listen” (ESV), or simply “listen” (HCSB). Since, however, Hebrew interrogatives *do not function as commands*, all such renderings must be rejected. They do, however, function as statements of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). For multiple examples, see GKC §150e. If used that way here, it would mean something like “you surely heard,” “you heard rightly,” or “it was already said to you.” In the next verse, Boaz will ask another question that, it seems to us, is meant only to express a statement of affirmation or assurance (see **Be assured, I have ordered**). See also 3:1, 2. But is Boaz really meaning to say “You surely heard X and even Y”? That doesn't make much sense. Why repeat what she already heard? Virtually no English translation renders the question as one of affirmation or assurance. Jastrow (“On Ruth ii. 8.”) thought that Boaz asked the question in order to rebuke Ruth for gleaning without permission: “In a tone of apparent reproach he says, ‘Hast thou not heard, “Gather not in another's field”? What, then, art thou doing here in a field that is not thine?’” Given Boaz's other responses to Ruth, we find that interpretation unlikely. We

propose that the question is real, but rhetorical. The goal is to ascertain whether this unknown foreigner can understand and follow directions. The statements that follow represent common or proverbial sayings. If Boaz ascertains that Ruth understands the guidelines in those sayings, he can direct her to act in a way that follows those guidelines. Thus, Boaz asks the question to get some sort of affirmation from her. To bring out all of this, we insert “the saying.” Such an interpretation may differ sharply from English renderings, but it agrees with how many ancient Jews understood the text. **ס**, for example, understood the verse that way. Like us, it adds the word “parable/proverb/saying.” Lamsa, therefore, translates **ס** as “have you not heard the saying?” **ט** uses the Pael of **קבל**, meaning “to accept/consent” (CAL) to imply the same kind of situation: “Do you not accept [these terms] from me?”

**Don't go glean in someone else's field** — Literally, “Do not go to glean in another field.”

As pointed by the Masoretes (**לִלְקֹט**), the verb is a Qal infinitive construct. Everywhere else in Ruth, **לִלְקֹט** occurs in the Piel (the Piel infinitive construct, as seen in 2:23, is **לִלְקֹט**). Many interpreters believe that, in this verse at least, **לִלְקֹט** has the general sense of the Qal (to gather) instead of the more technical sense of the Piel (to glean). We disagree. Ruth has come to Boaz's field not just to “gather” in general, but to “glean” in particular, and Boaz is addressing her expectations. Furthermore, the difference between the Qal and Piel infinitive construct is one of vocalization alone. It is quite possible to read the consonantal text as a Piel, thereby negating any differences (see section A3). Note that there are two ways to read **בְּשָׂדֵה אֲחֵר**. The first is how the Masoretes marked it: **בְּשָׂדֵה אֲחֵר** (in another field). That reading is reflected by **ו** and **ט**. The second way to read the text is **בְּשָׂדֵה אֲחֵר** (in the field of another). That reading is reflected by **ס** (in a field that is not yours, do not glean). Either option is possible. Virtually all English translations prefer the first. We prefer the second (as does NAB). Boaz's first words to Ruth are deeply symbolic. Not only do they tell Ruth how she should act, but they tell us something about his character and foreshadow what is to come. This young Moabite woman is part of No'omi's “field.” If Boaz were to glean a “harvest” from her, he would be trespassing on the territory of another (her restorer). As a man of **חֶסֶד**, he would first have to become the rightful owner of No'omi's “field” (ch. 4). But if any of that were to happen, she must not, in the meantime, go into another person's “field.” She should remain in his. To take the phrase as referring to another person's field as opposed to another field not only makes sense in terms of a proverbial expression, but sheds further light on the rest of the story. Green (“The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth”) notes how the term “field” is one of the primary symbols used by the storyteller: “The field, a symbolic representation of the woman, is the locus of resolution.” Numerous scholars have also pointed to the redundancy of the phrase “do not go glean in *another field*” followed by a statement like “do not leave this one.” Note, for instance, Bush (WBC): “The sense seems redundant and the order of the two clauses rather incongruous and unnatural, since the first clause says essentially the same thing.” Such redundancy is only exacerbated when the statement after that is rendered “stay here with my young women.” By taking the phrases as we do, no such redundancy exists.

**or even** — Due to our view of the first two statements in this verse as proverbial sayings (see notes above and below) we interpret the *waw* as alternative (or). Those that interpret the first two statements as commands usually interpret the *waw* as coordinating. They may, therefore, drop the conjunction from their renderings, duplicate the negative aspect (neither), or simply render it “and.” Most translations ignore the וְ. There are, however, exceptions (such as YLT, LEB, and NASB). We render it in its typical sense. Bush (WBC) and Hubbard (NICOT) view וְ + *waw* as an emphatic asseverative.

**do not pass beyond this [point]** — Or, more idiomatically, “do not trespass here.” The preposition מֵיִן has the sense of “beyond” or “outside of,” which is reflected by NET (beyond the limits of). Note that עָבַר means “to cross/pass/go across/go through.” It has a more specific sense than הָלַךְ (to go) or עָזַב (to leave/abandon). One should, therefore, avoid rendering the verb “go” (as in KJV, NJB, etc.) or “leave” (as in ESV, NRSV, etc.). Though תַּעֲבֹרִי is vocalized irregularly with *shureq* (see JM §44c), that has no effect on its meaning.

**In such a way, then** — Most translations interpret the conjunction as adversative (but/yet). Others (NET, NAB, and NJB) ignore it. Since we believe that Boaz first asks Ruth if she understands directions and then graciously allows her to glean according to those directions, it makes more sense to view the conjunction as consecutive (then). Since the interpretation of this verse taken by many English translators makes the כֹּה redundant, they often ignore it. The others interpret it as locative (here/right here). We believe it makes more sense in its typical semantic nuance “so/thus/in such a way” (having confirmed that Ruth understands the two sayings, Boaz tells her to act in *just such* a manner by sticking with his young women).

**stick with** — דָּבַק has a relational meaning (“remain with” or “remain alongside”) as opposed to a physical meaning (hold on to). See section A3. As in 2:21, the verb is spelled with a paragodic or energetic *nun*—a form that still perplexes scholars. Garr (“The Paragodic *nun* in Rhetorical Perspective”) dispels common misconceptions and provides one of the best analyses to date. Basically, the *nun* is a remnant of the ancient Semitic *yaqtulu* form—the original indicative as opposed to the jussive-preterite *yaqtul* or volitive *yaqtula* (as seen in Ugaritic and Amarnah Canaanite). It now exists as a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see JM §44e-f). Thus, just like Phoenician, the indicative form is distinguished from the jussive form by final *nun*. Since modal forms inhabit the same semantic space as jussives, we differ sharply with Holmstedt's assertion that “The [paragodic] forms as they exist in Ruth cannot be tied to any indicative/modal distinction” and reject his modal interpretation (you *should* stick with). In BH, the imperfect indicative can function as an imperative, which must be the case here. Since Boaz is asking Ruth quite directly (via כֹּה) to abide by the sayings he already mentioned, we avoid NET's permissive nuance (you may go) and go with the imperative nuance of the indicative.

2:9 **[Fix] your eyes on the field.** — As in poetry, the initial verb (דָּבַק) governs two different phrases and, thus, is not repeated. To make sense of the second phrase in English requires inserting another verb. Instead of repeating the verb “to stick,” we substitute a synonym (to fix). Because of this dependence on דָּבַק, we abandon the Masoretic pointing, which would

separate the phrase from its verb, and move the *soph pasuq* (equivalent to a period) to the end of “field.” In our textual division, therefore, the new verse begins with אֲשֶׁר.

**Where they harvest** — Alternatively, “Wherever they are harvesting.” Note that, even though the masculine plural has been used, the antecedent is “my young women.” Not for the first time (see **the harvesters** in 2:3), the masculine form is the default marker for any of those who have a part in the harvesting, regardless of their actual gender. Thus, unlike NET and NIV (where *the men* are harvesting) or REB (where *the men* reap), we make no gender distinction here. Note also the use of paragogic or energetic *nun*, which is a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see **stick with** in previous verse). For that reason, we reject the rendering of Leeser (which they *may* reap). Contrary to translations like NRSV (the field that is being reaped) and NAB (which field is to be harvested), “field” is not the passive subject of the verb.

**go after them.** — וְהִלַּכְתָּ is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, that makes the verb function as an imperfect. Imperfects sometimes function as imperatives. Since the inverted verb takes up and repeats the sense of the verb at the end of v. 9 (תִּרְבֹּקֵין), which was itself an imperfect used as an imperative, we render this with the imperative sense “go!” Wright agrees: “The perf. must be rendered imperatively on account of the preceding imperfects used in that signification.” It is possible to take the inverted verb as existing in a coordinating or subordinate relationship to תִּרְבֹּקֵין, in which case one would insert “and” or “then,” respectively. Note that a few translations either do not render the pronominal suffix (them) or italicize it (HCSB and NJB). Those renderings may be the result of uncertainty arising from the masculine plural verb “they harvest” and the feminine plural suffix. Since no change in subject has occurred, they must refer to one and the same antecedent. It is not necessary, therefore, to clarify that “them” refers to the young women (as in Geneva, NET, and NIV). Though the Masoretes placed the next major textual division at נִנְעָךְ (to assault you), we move the *athnach* up to this verb and place a period here. Our reason for doing so is contextual. The statement “Be assured, I have ordered the young men not to assault you” is not only a severe break from “Where they harvest, go after them,” but the phrase “should you thirst” and what follows is a natural continuation of that initial statement. English translations intuitively view this point as a major textual break even if they do not shift the accentuation like we do.

**Be assured, I have ordered** — Or “I have assuredly ordered.” Literally, “Haven’t I ordered?” The issue is how to understand the question. Is it a genuine question or does it mean something else? Hebrew interrogatives sometimes function as statements of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). For multiple examples, see GKC §150e. Since it is only now that we, the audience, learn of such an order, and Ruth is as new to Boaz as we, it is safe to assume that Ruth had no previous conception of the order. Thus, we render the question as a statement of affirmation or assurance. ⚡ does the same by substituting the presentative particle הִנֵּה for הֲלוֹא (Look, I have ordered). Note also JM §112g (Behold, I order). NASB (Indeed, I have commanded) takes it as a statement of affirmation. Note that the perfect form is primarily indicative of complete aspect, not past tense. Thus, it is possible

that Boaz is speaking about a future state as though it were finished and complete. A rendering like NET (I will tell) may, therefore, be justifiable. Some believe that the statement could function as a performative: by saying the thing, Boaz has done the thing. It would only remain for the young men to be notified of the new situation enacted by his statement. Bush (WBC) is one example: “I am herewith ordering.” It seems to us, however, that the use of an interrogative and a negative particle would undermine any performative statement. Thus, while we might render צויתי alone as “I hereby order,” such a rendering is unlikely here.

**young men** — A few translators prefer “servants.” In that case, however, since the text clearly goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (נערים) and the female ones (נערות), we think the gender should be represented (like, for instance, “man-servants”). See section B3.

**assault you** — One of the most common renderings of the Qal verb נגע is “to touch.” However, when not speaking about issues of purity/impurity or holiness/profanity, and when pertaining to negative actions directed against a person or group, the verb means to inflict physical harm (i.e., “to strike/hit/beat/assault/batter”). This involves more than simply “touching.” In Isa 53:4, for instance, YHWH's servant is “beaten/stricken/assaulted” (ננוע), which is further described, through apposition, as “battered/smitten.” Gen 26:27-31 features a pact between Abimelech and Isaac: since they did not “strike/assault” (לא ננענוך) Isaac and his people, they ask Isaac and his people to do them no harm. In Judg 20:41, the Benjamites are terrified when they realize that disaster has “struck” (ננעה) them. The Niphal of נגע is utilized in Josh 8:15 to convey the sense that the Israelites feigned to be “beaten” by the forces of Ai. Given these usages, we render the verb as “assault.” So does Schipper (AYB). Curiously, virtually no other English translation renders it that way. Instead, they blunt the force of the verb with renderings like “do you no harm” (NAB), “do thee no hurte” (Bishops'), “not to treat you roughly” (NLT), or “not to lay a hand on you” (NIV). A few rob the verb of virtually all its nuance with renderings like “not to bother you” (NRSV) or “to leave you alone” (NET). Note that the Masoretes placed a strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*) under this verb, which would split the content after from the content before. It is evident, however, from the repetition of the subject “young men” that the order not to “assault” Ruth relates directly with the situation described at the end of the verse. Thus, we have shifted the *athnach* to “go after them.” The statement “where they harvest, go after them” ensures Ruth's safety while she is gathering grain by limiting her contact with anyone but the young women, whereas the statement “be assured, I have ordered the young men not to assault you” ensures Ruth's safety among the young men while she is getting a drink.

**should you thirst** — וצמא is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb so that it functions as an imperfect (see 1:1), which opens the verb up to a modal or hypothetical interpretation: “if you thirst” or “should you thirst” (as in NRSV, LEB, etc.). One could also interpret it in a temporal sense: “when you are thirsty” (as in KJV, NASB, etc.). The latter is supported by ט (at the time that you [are] thirsty). Though Boaz might expect Ruth to get thirsty, it makes more sense that Boaz would



graciously offer her the opportunity to drink. Thus, we treat the verb as hypothetical (if/should). The loss of the expected *aleph* (צמא) does not influence meaning (see also 1:14). How one deals with the accentuation, however, influences how one interprets the rest of the verse. The Masoretes placed a *rebia* at this point, separating וצמת from the verbs that follow. As mentioned in the notes above, we do not follow the accentuation. In this place, we view וצמת and the two verbs that follow as a string of consecutive verbs that build upon each other in ever-increasing detail: “should you thirst, should you go to the buckets, should you drink of what the young men draw.” See below for more.

**go** — והלכת is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb so that it functions as an imperfect (see 1:1). As such, it may be interpreted as a strict imperative (go!), a permissive imperative (you may go), or a modal. Most take it as a strict imperative. A few (NET and NAB) go with the permissive. All those interpretations are driven by a desire to follow the Masoretic accentuation, which separates this verb from the previous one, allowing for a different nuance than that which came before. We, however, believe that this verb functions in tandem with the previous verb to create a string of consecutive verbs that build upon each other in ever-increasing detail: “should you thirst, should you go to the buckets, should you drink of what the young men draw.” Thus, we interpret the inverted perfect as continuing the sense of the previous verb and interpret the verb as modal (shortened for stylistic reasons).

**buckets** — Like the word דבר, which basically means “word,” “thing,” or “matter,” but, in different contexts, can be used with a great deal of specificity (like, for instance, “oracle” in prophetic utterances or “command” in covenant legislation), כלים is a generic word with a wide semantic range that can be limited by the context in which it is used. In this case, כלים refers to vessels for the holding/containing/storage of water (just as 2 Kgs 4:3-6 uses it to describe vessels for the holding/containing/storage of oil). Also, since the verb שאב (to draw) is used exclusively with wells, cisterns, or springs, the kind of “instruments” that would hold, contain, and/or store that water must be something like “buckets” or “amphora.”

**[and] drink** — ושתית is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb so that it functions as an imperfect (see 1:1). As such, the verb may be interpreted as a strict imperative (drink!), a permissive imperative (you may drink), or a modal. Since the Masoretic accentuation links this verb with the previous, and that is usually rendered as an imperative, translations take this as an imperative as well. We, however, read the previous verb as a modal (see above). Since we believe this verb functions in tandem with the previous two to create a string of consecutive verbs that build upon each other in ever-increasing detail, we include a final “and,” which is used in English to finish the last item in a list.

**of what** — Alternatively, “of whatever.” The *min* can be taken either as partitive (some/part of) or in its more common sense of movement “from/out of.”

**draw** — Note the use of paragogic or energetic *nun*, which is a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see **stick with** in 2:8). The use of this form means that any

rendering of the verb as a perfect (“have filled” in NIV or “have drawn” in KJV) must be rejected. Likewise, the modal nuance of Leeser (may draw) must be rejected.

2:10 **She dropped face-forward** — Literally, “She fell on her front/face,” an idiom meaning she went down with her face to the ground. She did not *face-plant*. To avoid the suggestion that she actually “fell on her face” (a *ridiculous* English rendering), we have opted for “dropped face-forward.” וַתִּפֹּל is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *fell*). See 1:1. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the verb in a subordinating relationship to the previous verse (*Then* she fell). Contrary to YLT and LEB, there is no reason to interpret this verb in a coordinating relationship to the previous one (*And* she fell). Such translations are obviously reacting to the mere presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function.

**in obeisance** — וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ is an inverted imperfect, 3FS form of the verb חוה in the Hishtafel stem. That form is a combination of the older causative *shin*-stem (precursor to the Hiphil) as seen in Ugaritic as well as the reflexive or “self-moved middle” T-stem. Literally, “She caused herself to do obeisance/bow/go prostrate.” Older translations drop the causative sense, but retain the reflexive sense, resulting in “to bow oneself” (Geneva, KJV, Leeser, etc.). Such an expression, however, is unnecessary. What else are they going to bow (someone else's body)? With modern translators, we drop both the causative and reflexive senses from our rendering (the form had probably been fixed long before its use in biblical texts and, thus, no longer carried any special nuances). We also interpret this phrase as appositional to the previous one. Thus, instead of two different actions (She dropped face-forward *and* did obeisance), we regard it as one (She dropped face-forward *in* obeisance). It is interesting how other translations deal with the double expression. NRSV, for instance, says “she fell prostrate,” a combination of verbs from both phrases, and then says “with her face to the ground,” which brings together the last part in each phrase as well. HCSB's “She bowed with her face to the ground” ignores נָפַל. NET combines both verbs into one (to kneel), but then duplicates the expression עַל-פָּנֶיהָ (on her front/face), altering it to עַל-פָּנָיו (before him). REB eliminates the first phrase entirely (She bowed).

**[and] replied** — Literally, “She said to him.” וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the verb in a subordinating (then) or coordinating (and) relationship to the previous verse. We prefer the latter, which is why we insert “and.”

**How is it [that]** — Or “Why/For what reason.”

**I am regarded by you favorably [enough]** — Literally, “I found favor in your eyes.” See 2:2.

**to make me an insider** — See section B3, example 1.

—**even I, an outsider** — How does one make sense of וְאֲנִי נִכְרִיָּה? Most translations interpret the *waw* as concessive. Note, for example, NRSV (when), KJV (seeing), NASB (since), HCSB (although), and NET (even though). A few render it in a restrictive sense: Sasson (I am *but* a foreigner) and GW (I am *only* a foreigner). For those renderings, however, one would expect וְאֲךָ נִכְרִיָּה אֲנִי (Yet, only a foreigner [am] I). We interpret the *waw* as both

coordinative and emphatic. It not only stands in for **מִדּוֹעַ** and, thus, carries on the sense of the question, but takes it in a new direction: why *me*? The fact that she is a foreigner is a related, but secondary concern. After all, there is nothing odd about showing mercy to a foreigner. What is odd is how Boaz speaks to her directly and treats her as though she were a member of his own community. Thus, Ruth, as well as the reader, must assume that it is not on account of Ruth's foreignness that Boaz does such things for her, but on account of who she is (this would also explain why the text did not put emphasis on “foreigner” by fronting it). In agreement with the Masoretic accentuation, we view the phrase as disjunctive, with “I” and “foreigner” in apposition. NIV (me—a foreigner) and YLT (and I a stranger) view the text similarly. Note how the scribe used **נִכְרִיָּה** in tandem with **נִכְרִי** to create a wonderful word-play, ringing with both phonetic similarity and semantic contrast. We mimic those qualities with our renderings “outsider” and “insider.” Unfortunately, we were not able to capture the alliteration between **לִהְיוֹתִי**, **נִכְרִיָּה**, and **אֲנִי**. See section B3, example 1.

2:11 **Boaz said in reply** — Literally, “Boaz answered, he said to her.” Some translations simplify the double expression to one verb. Others render both and insert a conjunction. We attempt to find a place somewhere between (see 2:6). **וַיַּעַן** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *answered*). Many older translations, however, as well as a few newer ones, insert “and” based on the false assumption that the inverted verbal form always indicates succession. See 1:1. Some translations (NRSV, ESV, Leeser, etc.) interpret the verb as adversative with respect to what came before. Thus, they insert “But.”

**Firmly affirmed (it) was** — In BH, an infinitive absolute comes before a finite verb of the same root in order to create emphasis for the finite verb. Thus, **וַיִּגֹּד** is an emphatic way to state how Boaz was **וַיִּגֹּד** (told/informed). Our rendering “firmly affirmed” is an attempt to capture the wonderful brevity, assonance, and word-play of the phrase. The same verb is reused in 2:19 to draw a clear connection between events in both the past and present.

**conducted [yourself]** — The verb **עָשָׂה** refers to the way that Ruth *acted/behaved* or what she *did*. Since the same verb is reused in 2:19 to draw a clear connection between events in both the past and present, we have used a rendering here that works equally well there.

**at your mother-in-law's side** — The **אֵת** in **אֶת־חֻמְתָּךְ** can be interpreted either as a direct object marker or the preposition “with/alongside/beside.” When **עָשָׂה** is used transitively with a direct object marker, it means “to do/make/create.” When saying that something is done “for/to” someone, it is a prepositional *lamed*, not **אֵת**, that links the object to the verb (see, for instance, Gen 3:21, 9:24, 12:18, 21:6, etc.). Thus, contrary to Bush's (WBC) claim that this **אֵת** expresses advantage, it must be a preposition. For example, **עָשׂוּ מִלְחָמָה אֶת־בֶּרֶעַ** (Gen 14:2) means “they did battle *with* Bera”, **יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־אֲחֻתִּי** (Gen 34:31) means “should he deal *with* our sister,” and **לֹא תַעֲשֶׂן אִתִּי** (Exod 20:23) means “you must not make *with/beside* me.” Such a reading is clearly preferred by **עִ** in this verse: **עִם** (with). Though the manuscripts of **ע** vary, **μετα** (with) has the best support. Holmstedt states for good reason

then that, although **עשה + את** is lexically different from **עשה + עם**, they are “semantically synonymous.” Most translations treat the phrase as **עשה + ל** instead. YLT is one exception. Note the fantastic assonance and end-rhyme in the phrase **אֶת־חֲמוּתְךָ אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אִישְׁךָ**. We shift “with your mother-in-law” to “at your mother-in-law's side” in order to mimic the assonance and end-rhyme (side / died). The rhetorical point, as noted by Porten, was probably to impress on the hearers the extraordinary nature of Ruth's actions. By failing to represent that assonance, English versions lessen the impact of Boaz's statement.

**your husband died:** — Literally, “the death of your husband.” We shift it to “your husband died” in order to mimic both the assonance and end-rhyme in **אֶת־חֲמוּתְךָ אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אִישְׁךָ**.

**you abandoned** — Since the sense of the verb is not that she merely “left” (the rendering preferred by virtually all English translations), but that she *wasn't returning*, we believe the verb is better rendered “abandoned.” Sasson, Schipper (AYB), and Campbell (AYB) agree. So do Fenton and ISV. **וַתַּעֲזֹבִי** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Though an inverted verb may convey a sense of succession, this is not one of those cases. Thus, we reject the translations that render either the verb or the *waw* with “and.” Instead, the sense of the verb or of the clause itself is explanatory (*that* you abandoned). Hubbard (NICOT) agrees: “*specifically*, you left.” 6 has *πὼς κατέλιπες* (*how* you abandoned). We place a colon at the end of the previous word to communicate the same sense.

**to go** — Contrary to most translations, this verb is **הֵלֵךְ** (to go/walk/journey), not **בֹּא** (to come/arrive/enter). Holmstedt (went) and Schipper (traveled) capture the sense well. Like NJB, we interpret the use of the inverted imperfect as the creation of a purpose clause (in order to go).

**clan** — For **עַם** as “clan,” see section A3.

**you were not acquainted** — Traditionally rendered, “you knew not.” As indicated by the terms **לִהְיוֹתִי** and **נִכְרִיָּה** in the previous verse, however, this is about relation and identity far more than knowledge. Thus, we prefer “you were not acquainted.” In BH, the verb **יָדַע** in the Qal stem regularly contains notions of intimacy and/or belonging that do not carry into the English rendering “to know.” Hubbard (NICOT) renders it “with whom you have had few dealings.” Moffatt prefers “who were strange to you.”

**[in] a prior day** — Literally, “three [days] prior.” An idiom meaning “in prior times” or “previously.” The difference between **תַּמּוּל** and **אֶת־תַּמּוּל** is merely orthographic. There is a fantastic use of alliteration between the word that ends this verse (**שְׁלֹשָׁם**), the word that begins v. 12 (**יִשְׁלַם**), and **שְׁלֹמָה**. We attempt to mimic that alliteration by rendering them “prior day,” “may repay,” and “replete,” respectively.

2:12 Between this verse and the previous one, Boaz's words (to use Hubbard's apt description) have “soared majestically in poetic language and rhythm.” Unfortunately, no English translation other than ours tries to capture those qualities. See the notes below.

**May (he) repay** — Our use of “prior day,” “may repay,” and “replete” mimics the fantastic alliteration woven between the words **יִשְׁלַם**, **שְׁלֹשָׁם**, and **שְׁלֹמָה** (see above). **יִשְׁלַם** could be

interpreted indicatively (he will repay) or modally. Since Boaz is introduced as someone who blesses people in the name of YHWH (2:4), and he speaks favorably of Ruth in this place, it fits his character to pronounce a blessing upon her. Therefore, we and most English translators favor the modal sense. Some scholars view the phrase “May X repay” as a shorter version of the more formulaic blessing (or curse) “X repay to Y according to Z” as seen, for instance, in 2 Sam 3:39 and Jer 25:14. While that is certainly possible, the lack of formulaic markers in our text leaves that reading entirely hypothetical. **℣** compensated for this by reinserting one of the markers: “May YHWH do *to you* (לִיךְ).”

**deed** — Or “action/conduct/behavior.” Boaz hopes that Ruth will be rewarded by the god of Israel for her acts of devotion to No’omi. Renderings like “what you have done” (HCSB), “your deeds” (NRSV), or “your efforts” (NET) capture that sense well. In the Greek, however, Boaz asks that Ruth would be rewarded by the god of Israel for her “labor/work” (ἐργασίαν) in the field. LaMontagne explains it this way: “The word ἐργασίαν . . . implies not just things done, but things done as a business practice or as a profession, usually with the connotation of profit. . . . Ruth in the Greek narrative is perceived . . . as a business woman, plying her trade in the fields.” Older translations (Geneva, KJV, ASV, etc.) as well as some newer ones (NASB, ISV, LEB, etc.) follow that alternate sense.

**what you earned** — Though מַשְׁכָּרַת typically refers to one’s “earnings/compensation/wage,” Boaz does not use it in the sense of one’s “paycheck” for regular duties at “work.” Rather, he uses it in the sense of one’s just “due” or “reward” for extreme, but exemplary faithfulness. Therefore, we reject renderings like NASB (wages) or SET (payment), which present the situation primarily in economic terms.

**that (it) is [returned]** — We believe that וְתָהִי is used in parallel with יִשְׁלַם in order to further the sense of reward and retribution. Thus, we render it “is returned” (more literally, “turns out to be”). Furthermore, we interpret the use of the inverted imperfect as the intentional creation of a purpose clause (in order that).

**replete** — Or “whole/complete/entire.” Our use of “prior day,” “may repay,” and “replete” mimics the fantastic alliteration between יִשְׁלַם, שְׁלֵשׁוֹם, and שְׁלֵמָה.

**by YHWH** — The precise nuance of מֵעַם is tricky. One could render it “from YHWH,” which would employ its typical sense (and the same sense it has in 4:10). This option is preferred by most translations. It could be rendered “before/in the presence of YHWH,” a sense used when speaking of authoritative figures. See, for instance, Exod 8:8 (referring to Pharaoh) or 2 Sam 3:28 (referring to YHWH). **℣** interpreted מֵעַם in both senses: מִן־קֶדֶם (from before). As is often the case with compound prepositions, however, מֵעַם has its own semantic sense. It should not be interpreted as simply the sum of its parts (עַם and מִן). One could also, with a slight change of vocalization, render it “because of the people (מֵעַם) of YHWH.” In that case, Boaz could be declaring that the future of the people of Israel depends on how YHWH responds to Ruth’s actions. In this particular case, however, we think מֵעַם is a helping particle for the verb. It adds a sense of agency (by means of/due to/on account of) to the verbal

situation as seen, for instance, in Gen 41:32: נכון הדבר מעם האלהים (the matter is established by the One True God).

**for sanctuary** — Literally, “to seek refuge/protection.” 𐤍 interprets it a bit differently: “to whom you came *to trust/depend*.” Geneva and KJV follow 𐤍.

**fringes** — Traditionally rendered “wings,” but referring, in the case of people, to the “fringes” or “hem” around the bottom of a person's robe or tunic. Schipper (AYB) and Goldingay prefer “skirts,” which we think is rather unflattering considering that its use in (American) English typically refers to a woman's dress. It appears that 𐤌 found such an anthropomorphic description troubling when speaking about the One Who Spoke Heaven and Earth into Being. Thus, it replaced “fringes/hem” with “the shade/canopy of his glorious Shekinah.” For a fuller discussion of כנף, see 3:9 and section B2, example 3.

2:13 **Let your favorable regard for me continue** — Literally, “Let me continue to find favor in your eyes.” See 2:2, 10. The primary difference between this instance of the phrase and those before is the use of the imperfect verbal form as opposed to the perfect. Some translations appear to interpret the *yiqtol* in its more ancient form as a preterite: NASB and ESV (I have found favor) and HCSB (you have been so kind). We consider that highly unlikely. Bush (you are most gracious) and NJPST (you are most kind) prefer a simple expression of thanks. Holmstedt takes the imperfect as an unmarked interrogative ([why] do I find favor in your eyes?) as if Ruth were simply repeating her former question. Schipper (AYB) interprets the imperfect as a statement of assurance: “I *must have* found favor.” A larger group of translators believe that Ruth is making use of a common, formulaic expression meant to show deference to a superior, request their favor, and, like “thank you,” politely end a discourse. The imperfect would both make the request and extend the request into the future (a durative function). We prefer that reading. Thus, we render the imperfect with “let” and “continue.” In 2 Sam 16:4, for instance, King David awards to Ziba all that his master owns. In response, and to conclude the exchange, Ziba says אמצא־חן בעיניך אדני המלך (May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord the king). In Gen 33, Jacob returns to Esau in a dramatic show of deference and servitude. When Esau accepts him back warmly, Jacob's response and concluding statement (v. 15) is אמצא־חן בעיני אדני (May I continue to find favor in my lord's eyes). Translations that reflect a durative sense include NRSV, NJB, GW, and REB.

**she appealed** — Literally, “she said.” What she said, however, is not a mere statement, but a standard, formulaic declaration of submission and appeal for a lord's continued favor by a servant or slave (see above). In other words, Ruth is not making conversation or commenting on Boaz's generosity; she is bowing to him in word as she did before in deed. Therefore, we render it “appeal.” Note that ותאמר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. In this particular context, however, it is possible to interpret the inverted imperfect as consecutive, which is why numerous translations begin the verb with “then.”

**since** — How one understands the previous part of the verse influences how they interpret each כִּי. The way we interpret the text, each כִּי makes more sense as causal (because/since). The way Holmstedt interprets the text (see notes above), each כִּי makes more sense as resultative.

**reassured** — Though נחם often speaks of the comfort/consolation given to those in mourning, it is not limited to that context. Bush (WBC) notes that “The verb can have the more general sense of ‘reassure, relieve the mind’; cf. Gen 50:21, where Joseph reassures his brothers regarding his intentions toward them after the death of their father.” Since we have no reason to believe that Ruth is mourning or grieving, “to reassure” makes far more sense than “to comfort/console.”

**addressed [what is] on your slave's mind** — See section B2, example 1. Note that, in this place, Ruth calls herself a שפחה (female slave). In the next chapter (3:9), she will use a different, though semantically synonymous term (אמה).

**although** — With most translators, we interpret the conjunction as concessive.

**I, myself, may not be** — Note the inverted S-V word-order in אנכי לא אהיה. BH is primarily a V-S-O language—especially in narrative (as here). Previously, the subject was “you” (Boaz) and the object was “me” (Ruth): “you have consoled me” and “you have addressed your slave's desire.” Now, however, the subject is “I” (Ruth). To signal that change and provide emphasis for the shift, the new subject is fronted before the verb. We follow that shift and emphasis by rendering אנכי as “myself” and repeating the subject as it recurs in the following verb (literally, “I—I may not be”). Bush (I myself), Hubbard (in my case), and Campbell (as for me) do similarly. Note also that אהיה is imperfect. When used with לא, it means “I will not be.” Most translations, however, treat it as a stative perfect: לא הייתי (I am not). They are struggling with an imperfect verb and a negative particle. ⚙ swapped לא with הנה to make better sense of the text: ὁδοὺ ἐγὼ εἶπα (look, I will be). ⚙ drops the negative particle. So does NAB (would that I were). Since ⚙ and ⚙ include the negative, we stick with the Hebrew. Bush prefers “I myself will *never* be.” For Ruth to say that she will never be like Boaz's young women after Boaz has gone out of his way to treat her like one would be a shameful response and would indelibly damage Ruth's character. Instead, the imperfect was probably utilized for its modal quality: “I *may* not be.” This softens the sense of her identification from her previous statement “I—an outsider” to “I—who may not be equivalent to.” In other words, though Ruth is aware of the ethnic and social distinction between herself and others, in light of Boaz's words and actions toward her, she is now allowing for the possibility that such distinctions can be overlooked and, to some degree, erased.

**equivalent to** — Or “like/as/similar to.”

2:14 **At mealtime** — Literally, “At the time of the food.” The *lamed* introduces a dative of time (at/on/in/during). Strangely, NET duplicates the meaning (later during). According to the Masoretes, who placed a disjunctive accent (*rebia*) above האכל, this should probably be read “Boaz said to her at mealtime,” not “Boaz said to her, ‘At mealtime.’” JM §15k agrees. ⚙, however, read it as the latter. So did Geneva, KJV, and YLT. It is certainly possible to read against the accentuation (especially since the accentuation tells us more about the tradition of recitation and/or late Jewish perspectives than the narrative structure of the earliest attested text and/or its intended meaning). In this case, however, we see no reason to do so. Ruth had just used an expression that usually ends a discourse (see notes on v. 13), which would seem

to preclude the continuation of the same speech event unless this particular pericope were subverting normal discourse. Furthermore, if the phrase “at mealtime” were part of Boaz’s speech, it would mean that the story picks back up at the phrase “so she sat,” which, as noted by Bush (WBC), “would then create a clumsy break in the flow of the action from v4.” Even Holmstedt, who disagrees with our assessment, admits the point: “The second half of the verse describes Ruth as sitting down to eat right after Boaz’ instructions, which admittedly makes for a rough sequence of events.” We agree, therefore, with LaCocque, who notes that, after Ruth’s speech in v. 13, “Boaz does not say a word, like Naomi after Ruth’s speech in 1:17.” To make it clear in English that the text skips from Boaz’s first dialogue to a second one at a different point in time, we shift the phrase “at mealtime” to the front of the verse. Many translations do likewise.

**Come right up** — Many translations render נָשִׂי as “come.” The verb, however, does more than give direction (to come/go). It indicates proximity: “to draw near/approach/come close.” Thus, we render it “come right up.” YLT says “come nigh.” Rotherham says “draw nigh.”

**Taste . . . [and] baste** — Literally, “eat . . . [and] dip.” As we already saw (vv. 11-12), Boaz’s discourse is often characterized by alliteration. The same is true here, where Boaz places two verbs together that create a unique, but sonorous end-rhyme: *wě’ākalt* and *wētābalt*. We attempt to mimic that sound-play with our renderings “taste” and “baste” (alternatively, “get” and “wet”). Note that וַאֲכַלְתָּ and וַתִּבֹּלְתָּ are inverted perfects. The bonded *waws* are not conjunctions; they invert the aspect or tense of their respective verbs. In this case, that turns them into imperfects. Imperfects sometimes function as imperatives. Since inverted verbs often repeat the sense of a previous verb, which, in this case, was an imperative (come right up!), these should probably be taken as imperatives. It is possible, however, to interpret each one as a modal imperfect: “Come right up [that] you may taste . . . [and] baste.” That reading is preferred by NASB. The fact that the two verbs belong together is signaled by more than the sound-play—it is noticeable in the accentuation (the Masoretes placed a strong disjunctive accent between “dip” and the next verb) as well as the grammar (the verb that comes before is not an inverted verb and the verb that comes after is an inverted *imperfect*, shifting us out and away from the sense of the inverted perfects). We insert “and” to make the pairing evident.

**some of** — We interpret this as a partitive *min*.

**the bread** — The use of פַּת, which often occurs in contexts involving bread, favors “bread” over “food.”

**piece** — Or “bit/bite.” A small amount. Alter prefers “crust.”

**[wine] vinegar** — As shown by other parts of the HB (see, for instance, Num 6:3), the kind of vinegar that ancient Israel used was different from the apple or corn-based solution we have on our kitchen tables. King and Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*) describe it this way: “Vinegar made from fermented wine was used as a condiment, as when Boaz invited Ruth to dip her morsel of bread . . . . A diluted form of vinegar resembling sour wine was sometimes drunk by the poor and by soldiers.” Thus, we render it “wine vinegar.” So do NIV and LEB. ESV and Fenton say simply “wine.” Some translations prefer “sour wine” (GW, NRSV, etc.). Surprisingly, S interprets חֲמֵץ as “milk”!



**So she sat** — Since the inverted imperfect **וַתֵּשֶׁב** gives a resultative sense to the flow of the narrative, we begin the verb with “so” (we are not treating the *waw*, which inverts the aspect or tense of the verb, as a conjunction).

**[and] he grabbed** — Since the verb **וַיִּצְבֹּט** occurs only once in the HB, translators often turn to **ⲧ** or **Ⲅ** for guidance. **ⲧ** uses **יִשְׁט**, meaning “to extend/stretch out/offer/hand over” (CAL), which often occurs in place of the Hebrew verb **שָׁלַח** (to send/stretch out). Most English translations follow **ⲧ** with renderings like “serve” (NASB), “offer” (NIV), “reach” (KJV), “hand over” (NET), or “pass” (ESV). **Ⲅ** uses the verb **βουνίζω**. Unfortunately, that verb occurs only in this verse and in participial form in v. 16. The noun **βουνος** (hill/pile/mound) may be related. If so, the verb could mean something like “make a pile/heap” (see GLS or LEH). That interpretation is favored by **ⲫ**: *congressit* (to collect/amass/pile). Some English translations follow **Ⲅ** and **ⲫ**: “heap up” (NRSV), “make a heap” (NJB), “bundle together” (Alter). The question, however, is whether **Ⲅ** provides an accurate representation of the Hebrew verb. It may be that **Ⲅ** is harmonizing this with **הַצְבֹּתִים** in v. 16. Since 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> supports **ⲙⲗ**<sup>L</sup>, we stick with the text and turn to other ancient Semitic languages to gain a better understanding. In Akkadian (East Semitic), we find the verb *ṣabātu*, meaning “to seize/take/snatch” (CAD). Ugaritic (Northwest Semitic) appears to preserve a word from this root. A line from the Baal Cycle (KTU 1.4.i:24) reads *bd ḥss mšbṭm*, which means “in the hands of Hasis [were] tongs” (or “dual-[pronged] grabbers/snatchers”). Thus, the verb probably means “to snatch/grab.” In their commentary on the Baal Cycle, Smith and Pitard have this to say about the line we noted: “The word *mšbṭm* here translated 'tongs' is a dual form from \**šbt*, 'to seize, hold' . . . The root \**šbt* is also cognate with BH *šbt*, used of Boaz's grabbing parched grain in Ruth 2:14.” Thus, on the basis of Ugaritic, Smith and Pitard end up with the same rendering in Ruth as we do (to grab). Almost a century ago, Joüon proposed the meaning “to grab,” but abandoned it because he thought it did not fit the context (for additional words in the context that continue the sense of grabbing or seizing, see 2:16). Just like the previous two verbs, **וַתֵּשֶׁב** (she sat) and **וַיִּצְבֹּט** (he grabbed) operate in tandem. Both are inverted imperfects. Both are contained within the boundaries of strong disjunctive accents. In terms of narrative progression, both describe the acts leading up to Ruth's dining. We insert “and” to make the pairing more evident.

**roasted [grain]** — **קָלָה** comes from **קָלָה/√** (to roast/bake/burn). Since the harvesters would not eat raw grain, it seems evident that this word describes the state of the grain's preparation. Lev 2:14 provides evidence of this: **אֲכִיב קִלְיֵי בָאֵשׁ** ([grain] head[s] roasted in the fire). As in 2:2, the Geneva, Bishops' and KJV bibles called this “corn”—a rendering that modern translations have rightly abandoned. Curiously, Fenton renders this “oatcake.” For more Fenton curiosities, see 1:9, 11, 3:2, 7, and 4:17.

**She ate plenty** — Literally, “She ate, she had plenty.” We, however, view the two verbs as an expression of hendiadys. So do Sasson (she ate her fill) and NIV (she ate all she wanted). Our rendering of the verb matches our rendering of the noun/gerund in 2:18.

**saved [the rest]** — Or “left [some] over.” It is difficult to capture the intransitive nature of the Hebrew verb. KJV’s “and left” attempts to preserve it, but gives the wrong impression of her action (going away from a place as opposed to leaving some of her meal uneaten). NKJV wisely corrected this, but was forced to make the verb transitive: “kept some back.” Note that the verb is in the Hiphil (causative stem) as opposed to the Niphal (passive stem). Thus, passive renderings like “she had some left” should be avoided.

2:15 In both this and the following verse, Boaz’s speech begins to approach poetic discourse. Each verse features a great deal of structural parallelism. Boaz begins his speech with “Even” (גם) and continues in the next verse with “Even more” (וגם). “The bundles” (העמרִים) are parallel in this verse to “the takings” (הצבתיִם) in the next. The verb תלקט (she may glean) in this verse parallels the verb ולקטה (that she may glean) in the next. The final phrase in each verse is also parallel. Each begins with a conjunction affixed to a negative particle (ולא) and ends with verbs within a similar semantic domain featuring Ruth as their object. Boaz could have used a simple imperative, infinitive absolute, or imperfect to issue his command in v. 16, but, typical of his style, used an alliterative phrase instead: של־תשלוּ לָהּ. Poetry, likewise, often makes use of word-play or sound-play. Despite these things, however, and quite unlike No’omi in the first chapter, Boaz’s words never quite leave the realm of prose.

**then got up to glean.** — The traditional verse division preserved by the Masoretes ends the previous verse with “she saved [the rest],” which isolates the phrase ותקם ללקט from what comes before and links it more closely with what comes after. For that reason, translators usually treat the whole phrase as temporal (*when* she got up to glean). We think, however, that the phrase fits better at the end of the previous verse. Instead of placing the *athnach* so close to the start of the verse under ללקט, we shift it to what seems like a more natural position under לאמר (the *athnach* usually falls under לאמר since the division between narration and dialogue is not only a common break-point, but often one of the most severe within a single verse—a phenomenon that can be seen, for instance, in Gen 1:22; 2:16; 5:29; 15:1, 18; etc.). In our estimation, therefore, ותקם ללקט should end the previous verse, which is why we link it with what comes before, place a period after the infinitive, and begin the next paragraph with “Boaz ordered.” Though Holmstedt does not follow our arrangement, he seems to agree with our assessment: “The narration of Ruth’s actions continues here . . . the most natural reading . . . is that it immediately follows Ruth’s eating in the last verse.” For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3. Since we view this as the conclusion to the string of verbs that ended v. 14, it clearly takes place in chronological succession to those acts, and inverted verbs are often used in such a manner, we add “then” to the start of the phrase. We are not treating the bonded *waw* in the inverted imperfect as a conjunction (see 1:1).

**ordered** — The verb used here communicates something far stronger than “to instruct” (NRSV) or “to tell” (NET). It should be rendered something like “to command/order.” Hubbard (NICOT) says it rightly: “The translation *issued orders* . . . mirrors the emphatic tone of Boaz’s words.” This is the same verb (צוה), applied to the same people (the young men), by the same person (Boaz), for the same purpose (to honor and protect Ruth), as seen in 2:9. In 2:9,

virtually all translations render the verb “to order/command/charge.” In this verse, however, for no apparent reason, and despite the emphatic nature of Boaz's words, many translations alter their rendering.

**young men** — Some translators prefer “servants” or “workers.” In that case, however, since the text goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (נַעֲרִים) and the female ones (נַעֲרוֹת), we think the gender should be represented in translation (like, for instance, “man-servants” or “male workers”). See 2:9.

**as follows:** — Many translations render לֵאמֹר as “saying.” Since לֵאמֹר introduces direct speech, it is not necessary to represent it in translation by anything more than quotation marks. If one desired to reflect the text's verbosity, “quote” or “as follows” would work well because they are sometimes used when relating somebody's statement, whereas “saying” is almost never utilized in ordinary speech.

**“Even** — Boaz's discourse begins with אֲנִי. Some translations ignore it (Geneva, HCSB, NIV, etc.). Most treat it as peripheral to the action of the verb. In reality, אֲנִי (and the rest of its accompanying clause) has been purposely fronted before the verb to produce emphasis—not only in this verse, but again in the next. For more on the structural parallelism, see the first verse note above. For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. We were already aware of the fact that Boaz gave Ruth permission to glean. What neither we nor the harvesters expected, however, was for Boaz to give her permission to glean “even between the bundles”! It is the extent of this gleaning that is new and significant—not the action of the verb. Thus, we consider it vital not only to represent the particle in English translation, but to show its importance by placing it prominently within Boaz's discourse.

**between the bundles** — For our rendering of this phrase and עֲמֻרִים in particular, see 2:7.

**may she glean** — תִּלְקֹט is a 3FS permissive imperfect: “she may glean.” Most translators prefer “let her glean.” For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3. For more on the structural parallelism, see the first verse note above.

**denounce** — Translators vary widely on their rendering of the verb כָּלַם. Such variety reflects the wide semantic range of the verb. In some contexts (see, for instance, Num 12:14; 2 Sam 10:5, 19:4; Ps 35:2), it clearly functions as a synonym of בֹּשַׁע and means something like “put to shame/disgrace/humiliate.” That interpretation is reflected by 6 and 7. Translations that prefer it include HCSB (humiliate), JPS (put to shame), YLT (cause to blush), Leeser (feel shame), and SET (embarrass). In other places, the verb refers to an aggressive, opposing position. In 1 Sam 20:34, for instance, Jonathan is upset because Saul did this act to David. Yet David wasn't there and Saul's most threatening action was directed at his own son. In that context, כָּלַם means something like “oppose” or “spurn” (see also 1 Sam 25:7, 15; Ps 44:10; 74:21). Translations that reflect that include NJB (molest), NJPST (interfere), NET (chase off), Alter (harass), GW (give problems), NEB (find fault), and Moffatt (hinder). In still other places, כָּלַם refers to critical or condemning speech (see Job 11:3; 19:3; Prov 25:8). We believe that is the nuance of the verb here. First, כָּלַם is structurally parallel with נַעַר in

v. 16, which refers to a derogatory remark (to scold/reproach/rebuke), not to shame or disgrace. Second, just as it doesn't make sense to render the verb “oppose” (they were already told by their boss that she has permission to glean), so it doesn't make sense to render the verb “humiliate/disgrace/put to shame” (what could they do to humiliate her while harvesting—tar and barley her?). It makes more sense to say that when they see her gleaning, they should not dishonor her with their speech. Thus, something like “denounce/criticize/condemn” fits perfectly. Translations that reflect that nuance include KJV (reproach), NASB (insult), NAB (scold), NIV (reprimand), ISV (taunt), Goldingay (put down), and Geneva (rebuke). For more on the parallelism, see the first verse note above.

2:16 **Even more**, — Boaz's discourse continues with וְגַם (see notes on the structural parallelism in the previous verse). Some translations ignore the גַּם (HCSB, NET, Moffatt, etc.). Like v. 15, וְגַם is included to provide emphasis. The purpose is not to give an additional command to the young men (and also), but to further define what it means for Ruth to have permission to glean between the bundles. Thus, Bush (WBC) and Schipper (AYB) render it “in fact.”

**please seize** — Or “plunder asunder.” In BH, an infinitive absolute comes before a finite verb of the same root in order to create emphasis for the finite verb. Thus, שָׁל adds an emphatic aspect to Boaz's command תִּשְׁלֵנִי (an imperfect functioning as an imperative). Each comes from √שָׁל. The verb שָׁל occurs several times in the HB—always with the meaning “to seize/take/plunder.” In fact, שָׁל has the same meaning in Akkadian (East Semitic) and Ugaritic (Northwest Semitic): *šalālu* (CAD) and *šll* (DUL). In late (post-Biblical) Hebrew, the verb still conveys the older meaning: “to carry off/capture/transfer” (Jastrow). Instead of this root, however, Hebrew grammarians typically assign this verse's verbs to an alternate root meaning “to pull out” or “withdraw” (see, for instance, HALOT and BDB). That suggestion depends entirely upon a similar verb in Arabic (Arabian branch of Central Semitic), which may or may not be related. There is no evidence for such a verb in BH except, perhaps, in this one verse. From such flimsy conjecture have arisen the multitude of translations that render this “pull out.” As Joüon noted long ago, however, “שָׁל means 'to plunder,' never 'to pull/draw,' 'to withdraw.'” Other translations, unsatisfied with the attested meaning of שָׁל, but unwilling to adopt an otherwise unattested meaning, discard the Masoretic pointing and read the verb as “to drop/let fall” from נִשָּׁל, meaning “to remove/detach/fall off” (see, for example, Exod 3:5; Deut 19:5; 28:40). This may be supported by ט, which renders the Hebrew verbs with נָתַר, meaning “to fall off/drop down” (CAL). ט renders the Hebrew with two verbs. The first is βαρσάζω, which has a wide semantic range: “to carry/bear/lift” or “support/sustain” (as in נִשָּׂא), “bear away/remove” (as in נִשָּׁל), and “steal/pilfer/carry off” (as in שָׁל). The second verb used by ט is παραβαλλω, meaning “to cast/throw.” This secondary verb in the Greek must be the impetus for YLT (cast to her). In light of the well-attested meaning of שָׁל, the highly questionable rendering “pull out/withdraw,” and the lack of agreement and uncertain derivation from the versions, we see no reason to depart from the rendering “seize/take/plunder.” Positive support for that rendering comes from the context,

where Boaz is said to “grab/seize/take/snatch” roasted grain for Ruth (see note on **צַבַּט** in v. 14). Thus, the harvesters are told to acquire grain for Ruth in the same manner as did their boss. As expected, the use of alliteration (*šōl-tāšōllû*) characterizes Boaz's speech (see notes below for more). Our rendering “please seize” is an attempt to recreate the brevity and alliteration of that word-play. Among translators and commentators, Alter (take her share) is one of the only ones to follow our interpretation: “The use of the verb *sh-l-l* here . . . usually means ‘to take booty.’ The evident idea is that she will have a windfall of good takings, like someone who reaps booty after a victory.”

**some of** — We interpret the *min* as partitive. The phrase **מִן־הַצִּבְתִּים** (some of the takings) functions precisely like the phrase **מִן־הַלֶּחֶם** (some of the bread) in v. 14. Both are employed by Boaz to describe how Ruth is to take a share of the different forms of grain. The one at mealtime leads, inevitably, to the one at harvest-time.

**the takings** — The masculine plural noun **צִבְתִּים** occurs only here. It appears to derive from the same root as the verb **צַבַּט** in v. 14 (through an interchange of **ט** and **ת**), which probably means “to grab/seize/take/snatch” (see v. 14). Thus, this probably means the “takings/seizures/spoils.” Such a meaning works well in light of Boaz's order to the harvesters to “seize/take/plunder” (see notes above). Thus, they are to do for Ruth nothing more than what they have already done for Boaz. Under the assumption that **צַבַּט** refers to making a pile or heap, translators usually render the noun here as “bundles,” “heaps,” or “handfuls” (see v. 14). **ט** renders it **עֲתָרִיא**. According to CAL, this refers to “riches/wealth,” but Jastrow says that **עֲתָר** also means “pitchfork” or “shovel.” Such is the interpretation provided by Beattie (*The Targum of Ruth*): “let some fall from the pitchforks.” Note that a “pitchfork” is like “tongs” in that both are specifically made to “snatch/grab.” If that is the meaning intended by **ט**, it would lend further support to our interpretation of **צַבַּט**. **Θ**'s τῶν βεβουνημενων may mean “that which is being amassed,” but it is difficult to tell the sense of the verb. Among translators and commentators, Alter comes closest to our conception. Though he does not translate it the way we do, he uses the same word in his explanation: “The evident idea is that she will have a windfall of good *takings*” (*italics added*). Note how **הַצִּבְתִּים** alliterates with the following verb (**וְעִזְבָתָם**). Such sound-play, as we have already seen, is characteristic of Boaz's speech. We attempt to mimic that alliteration with “takings” and “forsaking.”

**forsaking [it]** — Literally, “Forsake/abandon/leave behind!” The intransitive nature of the verb is difficult to capture in English, which is why an object is almost always inserted. **וְעִזְבָתָם** is an inverted perfect. It functions, therefore, as an imperfect, mimicking the sense of the previous imperfect (seize!). Since **וְעִזְבָתָם** alliterates with **הַצִּבְתִּים**, we attempt to mimic that with “takings” and “forsaking.”

**for her to glean** — Literally, “that she may glean.” The inverted perfect functions as resultative (so she may/for her to). For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3. For more on the structural parallelism, see notes on 2:15.

**rail against** — נער means “to scold/reproach/rebuke.” Critical or condemning speech is intended here as it probably was with כלם in v. 15. Nevertheless, a few translations veer from this such as GW (give a hard time), ISV (bother), and YLT (push). Just as the verse used a helping particle (*lamed*) with pronominal suffix for the first verbal phrase (**for** her), so it uses a helping particle (*bet*) with pronominal suffix for the final verbal phrase (**against** her). For more on the structural parallelism between this verse and the previous one, see v. 15.

2:17 **She gleaned** — ט adds a subject for the verb: שובלין (the equivalent of שבלים in BH). ט and 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> support מז<sup>L</sup>. Virtually all English translations interpret the inverted imperfect as either a summary remark or resultative: “So she gleaned.” We think that is both unnecessary and counterproductive. The text already said (start of v. 15) that “she got up to glean.” The implication is that she actually began doing so. The use of the verb at this point is not to tell us that Ruth actually gleaned, but to move the story from Boaz’s command into her action and what happened as a result. Placing a “so” at the start, it seems to us, robs the text of this momentum to emphasize something we already knew. Note that the bonded waw is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb, turning what would be an imperfect into a perfect (she *gleaned*). See 1:1 and section A3.

**the evening, then threshed** — Though not necessary, we include a definite article in our translation since one is present in the consonantal text. ט adds a subject for the verb: שובלין (the equivalent of שבלים in BH). ט (and what room is left on 2QRuth<sup>a</sup>) supports מז<sup>L</sup>. The Masoretes placed a strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*) above הערב, disassociating the verb חבט (to thresh/thrash/beat out) from the previous one. If one follows that reading, it would mean the beginning of a new narrative event. Thus, most translations place a period after “evening” and start a new sentence with ותחבט (either “she threshed” or “when she threshed” if treated temporally). One could, however, go against the accentuation, in which case חבט is linked much closer to the verb that begins the verse. The use of the inverted imperfect would, in that case, indicate chronological succession (*then* she threshed). The final phrase becomes explanatory with the *athnach* relocated beneath לקטה. This second option makes the most sense to us because the most important point of the verse is not that she actually gleaned, nor for how long, and not even that she threshed the grain, but that she “reaped” a great reward for her boldness and efforts. The inverted imperfects propel us to the conclusion (the barley was about an *ephah*). ISV, KJV, LEB, and others seem to read the text as we do instead of following the traditional accentuation.

**[the] barley came to about a [full] sack**— Literally, “it came to about an *ephah*—[the] barley.” Contrary to virtually all English translations (as well as ט), *ephah* is not in construct with barley (an *ephah of* barley). That would look like this: איפת שערים. Thus, Holmstedt is right to say, “The noun איפה is not a clitic or bound form.” The word “barley” functions to make explicit the subject of the verb “it was/came to,” which was only previously called “that which she had gleaned.” Since שערים functions as a collective singular, there is no conflict between the plural noun and the singular subject of the verb. ט expands the text: “it was *an amount of*

about.” מ<sup>L</sup> is supported by 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> and 6. Curiously, NIV adopts the expansion (it amounted to). The *kaf* carries the nuance of approximation: “almost/about/approximately” (see 1:4). We do not agree with some who, on the basis of a single epigraphic text (the Yavneh-Yam or Meşad Ḥashabyahu ostrakon) think it indicates an exact quantity. In our reading of the text (KAI §200, lines 4-7), it seems clear that the preposition communicates comparison or similitude, not an exact quantity: ויקצר עבדך ויכל ואסם כימם לפני שבת (Your servant harvested, measured, and stored like every [other] day before he stopped. Just as your servant measured the harvest and stored like every [other] day, . . .). Shmuel Aḥituv (*Echoes from the Past*) agrees. He renders the relevant word “as always” and describes it as “an adverbial temporal phrase meaning ‘as usual,’ as has always been done.” Also, if the composer or scribal artisan wanted to communicate an exact quantity, she or he could have chosen “it was an ephah.” There would be no need for the *kaf*. Schipper’s (AYB) rationale is cogent: “There is no reason to argue for an obscure use of the preposition *k* when a much more common use . . . , which occurs elsewhere in Ruth . . . , conveys the same point.” An *ephah* was a volumetric measure of dry goods (usually grain), the quantity of which is highly uncertain in both pre-exilic and post-exilic times. Most translators transliterate the term. NET gives a weight: “thirty pounds.” HCSB says “26 quarts.” NJB has “a bushel.” GW prefers “half a bushel.” ISV mysteriously renders it “a week’s supply.” As seen in Zech 5:5-11, “*ephah*” also described the container that held an *ephah*. In that text, many translators prefer a rendering like “basket.” Considering the interchangeability of the term, either usage could apply here. NLT, for example, renders it “an entire basket” and Goldingay prefers “a barrel.” What we consider far more important is **how the term is utilized by No’omi**. We have already seen her penchant to take names and spin them into word-play. In this chapter, she does so again. Upon seeing the *ephah* (אֵיפָה) that Ruth brings home, No’omi immediately declares *ephoh* (אֵיפָה), meaning “where?” or “what place?”. Since name puns are characteristic of No’omi’s speech, it is important to represent them. Since we are unable to make a word-play with the transliterated measure or its equivalents, we utilize the second meaning (a container). Instead of “basket,” however, we use “sack,” which enables us to recreate the word-play (see next verse). As we did before, we continue to italicize those parts of No’omi’s speech that indicate word-play. However one understands the term, it is evident that one *ephah* was a large amount. Our use of “full” makes that quantity explicit.

- 2:18 **Having loaded up,** — Or “she lifted.” We attempt to capture the intransitive nature of the verb. Hubbard (NICOT) does likewise: “she loaded up.” Virtually all other translations insert an object. Remarkably, most translations do not insert a conjunction before the verb (*and* she lifted)—probably because they view this verse as the start of a new paragraph. We view the first phrase of this verse as a continuation of the previous verse and a summary conclusion to Ruth’s adventures in the field. That scene ends just like the scene of Ruth’s argument with No’omi in 1:19: entering/coming into/arriving at the city. Just as in 1:19, where the arrival of Ruth and No’omi causes women to exclaim in wonder, so the arrival of Ruth causes the woman No’omi to exclaim in wonder. Thus, the flow out of one scene and into another ends and begins the same in both places.

**arrived** — Or “came to/entered.” Note that even though the translator has already made extensive use of the verb **שׁוּב** (to return/go back), that verb was *not used here*. It seems evident that **בֹּא** was specifically chosen to create narrative continuity and/or parallelism between the end of the major scene in this chapter and the end of the major scene in the previous chapter (1:19). For that reason, we reject any rendering of this verb as a going “back.” NRSV, Alter, and SET appear to be the only translations other than THF to render this verb the same way in both places.

**the town.** — **עִיר** can refer to a “city,” “village,” or “town.” We continue the use of “town” since, during the time described by the text (the period of the “Judges”), Bethlehem would not have been a fortified city, nor a major center of trade and commerce. Micah calls it “small/little” (5:1) and the Chronicler claims it was first fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:5-6). Because we view this as the primary point of narrative division within the text (see notes above and below), we move the *athnach* beneath **הָעִיר**, thereby ending both the sentence and paragraph with “town.” Several translations also consider this a major point of division in the text (see, for instance, NJB, ESV, ISV, etc.).

**When she saw** — We believe that a new narrative event begins with **וַתֵּרָא**. First, there is a switch in subject from Ruth to No'omi—a switch that, while it is briefly interrupted by the notion that Ruth took out and gave No'omi the rest of the grain she had saved, ultimately leads to No'omi as the focus of the narrative event. Second, it seems evident that the text is purposely mirroring the transition between closing and opening scenes in 1:19. In the same way that an inverted verb was used as a temporal scene opener in 1:19, so this inverted verb is used as a temporal scene opener. In the same way that the new scene in 1:19 involved the exclamation of women at the sight of Ruth and No'omi's arrival, so the new scene here involves the exclamation of the woman No'omi at the sight of Ruth's arrival. Thus, we begin a whole new paragraph with **וַתֵּרָא** and start the sentence with “when.” NJPST and Rotherham also interpret the verb in a temporal sense (when). **וַ**<sup>L</sup> points the verb as a Qal (to see). A few medieval Hebrew manuscripts along with **ו** and **ש** read the verb as a Hiphil (to show). **וַתֵּרָא** could be read either as a Qal or a Hiphil. To take the verb as a Hiphil harmonizes the subject of this verb with the next two verbs, which clearly refer to Ruth. Several translations prefer that reading (NAB, NLT, REB, etc.). That would also work well in tandem with the next verb, which is a Hiphil. While such an interpretation is certainly possible, we follow the traditional reading for a couple of reasons. First, **וַ** renders the verb “to see,” not “to show,” giving ancient attestation to the Qal. Second, “mother-in-law” directly follows the verb as it ordinary would if it were the subject. Third, if Ruth's mother-in-law were the one to whom Ruth had “showed” what she gleaned, we would expect a pronominal suffix as in Num 13:26 (**וַיִּרְאוּם**, “they showed them”), Deut 34:1 (**וַיִּרְאֵהוּ**, “he showed him”), and Judg 1:25 (**וַיִּרְאוּם**, “he showed them”), or, perhaps, a pronominal suffix attached to a preposition as right here in this verse (**וַתִּתֵּן-לָהּ**, “she gave her”) or in the very next verse (**וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ**, “she said to her”) or, instead, attached to a direct object marker as in 2 Kgs 11:4 (**וַיִּרְאֵם אֹתָם**, “he showed them”). This leads us to believe that No'omi is the subject of a Qal stem verb (“to see,” not “to show”).



**[and] she brought out** — וַתֵּצֵא is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *brought out*). See 1:1. Because this inverted verb functions consecutively with the previous verb, we insert “and.”

**[and] gave her** — Or “gave/offered/handed *to* her.” וַתֵּן is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *gave*). See 1:1. Because this inverted verb functions consecutively with the previous verb, we insert “and.”

**saved** — For our rendering of הוֹתִירָה as “she saved,” see notes on 2:14.

**of her plenitude** — We interpret the *min* as partitive (as in 2:14, 16). Most interpreters take it as temporal (when/after). Schipper (AYB) thinks it is causal (because of). Porten believes it to have its most common nuance (from). שָׂבַע could be the noun “satiation/fullness/plenitude” or an infinitive construct with feminine suffix, which would function like a gerund and, therefore, give basically the same meaning: “her satiating.” Our rendering of the noun/gerund matches our rendering of the verbal form in 2:14. Some translations prefer looser renderings like “meal” (HCSB), “mealtime” (NET), or “lunch” (NAB). 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> has a prepositional *bet* instead of *min*, which could be interpreted as an infinitive construct with temporal marker: “when/after she was filled.” Such a reading is presumed by NRSV (after she herself had been satisfied), NASB (after she was satisfied), ESV (after being satisfied), KJV (after she was sufficed), and Alter (after being sated). There is no way of knowing, however, if the DSS variant accurately reflects the earliest text or was a deliberate or accidental change. 6 rendered the phrase as a passive verbal form with relative particle (what had filled her), which follows neither מִן<sup>L</sup> nor 2QRuth<sup>a</sup>. Brenton translates it “what she had been satisfied with.” Some translations abandon the text and reproduce the entire verbal phrase from 2:14 instead: “eating all she wanted” (NJB), “eating her fill” (NJPST), and “she had eaten enough” (NIV). We stick with מִן<sup>L</sup>.

2:19 Two things deserve advance mention here. First, in both this and the following verses, as a continuation of the characterization established in ch. 1, No'omi's speech weaves in and out of poetic discourse and includes puns on the names of people and/or things. Second, there is artistic storytelling intent behind the selection of particular words within both the narrative and dialogue. Such poetic and narrative details are described below.

**said** — וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). Since this inverted verb exists in a subordinating relationship with וַתִּרְאֶה (she saw), one could represent that by beginning the verse with “then” (as in Geneva and HCSB). It is evident, however, that the many versions inserting “and” before the verb are reacting to the presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. See 1:1.

**What [field]** — The first word of No'omi's discourse contains a word-play. Upon seeing the *ephah* (אֵיפָה) that Ruth brings home, No'omi immediately declares *ephoh* (אֵיפֹה), meaning “where” or “what place?” Unfortunately, we have been unable to use any semantic nuance of אֵיפֹה to capture the pun in English. Since אֵיפֹה is directly parallel with אָנֹה (where/what place?), we have preserved the poetic parallelism with our renderings “what field?” and “where?” and then shifted the word-play to the verb לִקְטֹט (see next note).

**sack** — Literally, “glean.” In order to capture No'omi's word-play with *ephah*, we have rendered *ephah* as “sack” and לקט as “to sack” (that is, “to gather in a sack”). Rendering the verb in this way provides the added benefit (though not present in the Hebrew) of continuing the sense that Ruth, with the help of Boaz and his reapers, is “seizing spoil” from the field (see vv. 14 and 16). Within the poetic structure of No'omi's discourse, the verb “to glean/gather in a sack” is parallel with “to conduct [yourself].”

**Where, indeed,** — Since אנה contains a directional *heh* (the regular expression would be ה), many think it should be rendered “whither” (that is, “to where”). Stinespring (“Note on Ruth 2:19”), suggests “to what end/purpose.” Any such renderings would avoid a simple repetition of the word “where” for איפה and אנה. In some cases, however, אנה does not seem to have a directional nuance (see, for instance, 2 Kgs 6:6). As part of a synonymous parallelism with איפה, it is likely that nothing more than “where” was intended. The versions use the same word in both instances (6: σου; 7: ubi; 8: לאן). Therefore, we are on solid interpretive ground interpreting אנה in the same sense as איפה. Since, however, we have altered our rendering of איפה to accommodate No'omi's word-play (see note above), our use of “where” still mimics the poetic alternation between איפה and אנה. A far more important aspect of the text is the conjunction. Within No'omi's poetic statement, what she asks in the second line is not much different than what she asked in the first. The *waw*, therefore, makes the emphatic nature of the duplication more explicit. In other words, it serves an asseverative function. ISV (Where, *precisely*) and GW (*Just* where) agree. Though Hubbard (NICOT) does not view this as poetry, we like the emphatic rendering suggested by him: “where in the world?” To treat the *waw* like a simple coordinating conjunction (and) would make it seem as though No'omi were repeating herself either to hear her own voice or because she didn't think Ruth was listening. Perhaps that is why so many English translations ignore it. Such a rendering either misunderstands the role that the *waw* often plays in poetry or fails to recognize the use of poetry in No'omi's dialogue. For another use of asseverative *waw* in No'omi's poetic speech, see 1:12.

**did you conduct [yourself] . . . she conducted [herself] . . . I conducted [myself]** — Though עשה is parallel with the verb “to glean/gather in a sack,” it does not mean “to work” (the rendering preferred by most translations). The verb refers to what Ruth *did*—her *action* or *behavior*. We know this because the language is drawn directly from 2:11, which has nothing to do with “working.” The scribal artisan is using this language to create a dramatic realization: what Ruth has now *done* (become sated and accumulated an abundance) is a direct result of what she had previously *done* (stuck with No'omi and abandoned her homeland). 6 represents the text well: σου εποιησας . . . που εποιησεν . . . μεθ ου εποιησα (Where did you *do* [this]? . . . where she *did* [it] . . . with whom I *did* [this]). Sasson also recognizes the sense: “How did you *accomplish* it? . . . that which she *accomplished* . . . The man with whom I *dealt*.”

**May he be** — Or “Let *it* be [that].” It seems far more likely, however, that what we have is the usual V-S-O word-order with מכירך as the subject.

**he who made you an insider** — Or “your insider-maker.” The former represents the participle as a verb. The latter represents it as a substantive. For the reason why we render this “to make an insider” instead of “to take notice of,” see 2:10 and section B3, example 1.

**blessed!** — Note that the passive participle is not fronted for emphasis: בָּרוּךְ מְכִירְךָ (*Blessed be he who made you in insider*). Instead, בָּרוּךְ inhabits the conclusion of the statement. Therefore, unlike numerous translations, we reject any rendering with “blessed” at the start of the phrase. Leiser was one of the earliest English translations to reconsider the errant word-order first established by Geneva, Bishops', and KJV. Many modern translations are now doing so as well. For a place where בָּרוּךְ is fronted for emphasis (and, therefore, deserves to be rendered “Blessed be”), see the next verse.

**affirmed to** — Here we see Ruth “affirm to” (וְהִגִּידָהּ לְ) No'omi the great things Boaz did for her just as the common folk “firmly affirmed to” (וְהִגִּידָהּ לְ) Boaz the great things she did for No'omi. By reusing the same verb from 2:11, a connection is drawn by the narrator between events and it becomes inescapable to conclude that the latter is a direct consequence of the former. Since we rendered נָגַד as “to affirm” in 2:11, we continue that rendering here.

**the one** — Our rendering takes אֵת as the object marker of the verb, in which case אֲשֶׁר is either a relative pronoun (as we render it) or an indicator of place (*where* she conducted [herself]). A few translations (NJB, NIV, and REB) take it as the later. So does 5. Since, however, Ruth does not tell No'omi *where* this took place, and what she says clearly defines her subject as “the man,” a relative pronoun is preferable. Strangely, HCSB renders אֲשֶׁר as “the men.” Alternatively, אֵת could be a preposition. In that case, אֵת אֲשֶׁר would mean “with whom.”

**in whose [keep]** — Meaning, “in his care” or “under his authority.” Schipper (AYB) states it well: “Ruth does not work with Boaz. Rather, she works under his authority.” The scribal artisan has again taken a word from other places and reused it to further the narrative. In previous contexts, Ruth was “in her [keep]” (עֲמָהּ)—that is, under the authority of No'omi (1:7; 2:6). Now, however, Boaz brought her “into his [keep]” (עֲמֹו) so that she is aided by both him and his reapers to an extent that surpasses any usual kindness or welcome. See 1:7.

**Boaz** — As soon as Ruth names the man who helped her, No'omi responds with a blessing that incorporates the same consonants from the man's name. In doing so, she reacts the same way she did at the sight of Ruth carrying an *ephah* of grain: with a pun. Schipper (AYB) says it well: “The consonants in the name *b'z* are an anagram for the Hebrew root *'zb*.” We mimic that word-play by utilizing the same consonants and/or sounds from the name “Boaz” in No'omi's reply and then placing both in italics to make their connection evident.

2:20 Though No'omi's speech begins here as prose, it becomes poetry by the end. In the prose part of No'omi's speech, we find her reacting to Ruth's situation through the use of puns.

**No'omi said** — וְהָאָמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). One could read the use of the inverted verb as one of temporal succession (*Then* she said). It is evident, however, that most of the

translations that insert “and” before the verb are reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function.

**Blessed be he** — Note how, quite unlike No'omi's pronouncement of blessing in the previous verse, where a jussive began it and the passive participle בָּרוּךְ was tacked to the end, here there is no jussive and, instead, בָּרוּךְ is fronted for emphasis (for more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10). Thus, we begin the pronouncement here with “Blessed” whereas we began the pronouncement in the previous verse with the modal quality of the jussive (May he be). Most translations ignore these differences and treat the text in this verse as if it were the text in the previous one. They disregard the emphatic position of “blessed,” throw it to the end, and begin the pronouncement with a jussive that does not exist (May he be blessed). Interestingly, the Geneva, Bishops', and KJV bibles, which completely ignored the form of the pronouncement in the previous verse, get it right here: “Blessed be he.”

by **YHWH** — The *lamed* in לַיהוָה probably indicates the agent or author of the action (see JM §132f). It should be stated that any rendering that takes the *patach* beneath the *lamed* as the marker of a definite article, as in Holmstedt (*the* Yhwh), has no grammatical ground. לַיהוָה is **always** vocalized with *patach* (so it may be pronounced לֵאדֹנִי). Additionally, as a personal name, “YHWH” needs no definite article. Contrast that with “El” or “Elohim,” which are titles or descriptors, and, thus, may take the article.

**because his faithfulness** — There are two ways to understand אֲשֶׁר: a normal relative marker meaning “who” or an explanatory relative meaning “for the reason that/because.” Most translations prefer the former. In that case, one must identify the antecedent (either YHWH or Boaz). Most translations take it as a reference to YHWH. Several make that referent explicit by inserting the divine name (GW and Moffatt). YLT and JPS capitalize the pronoun to give the same sense (His kindness). SET and Alter capitalize both the relative and the pronoun! In this case, however, אֲשֶׁר both introduces a clause that refers to Boaz and has an explanatory function. First, this is not the only time in Ruth that someone has spoken about the faithfulness of another to both the living and deceased. No'omi spoke this way to Ruth and Orpah with regard to herself (the living one) and her dead sons (1:8). Since we have the same speaker using the same words to utter another blessing, the conclusion is inescapable: as she did so with reference to humans before, so she does so now. But how can we tell that, in this particular instance, the one about whom she is exclaiming is Boaz? We know this not only because the story tells us that Boaz did the great deeds for Ruth (no mention is made of YHWH), but because No'omi's blessing is framed as a pun on Boaz's own name (see below). Thus, we have every reason contextually to believe that Boaz is the object of her blessing and no contextual reason to believe it is YHWH. Second, we can compare different forms of the blessing formula “Blessed be X” to see when it does and does not apply to YHWH. 2 Sam 2:5 is one such example: בָּרַכְתֶּם אֶתְּכֶם לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתֶם הַחֲסֵד הַזֶּה עִם־אֲדֹנֵיכֶם עִם־שָׁאֹל (Blessed be you [all] by YHWH because you [all] have dealt so faithfully with your master—with Saul). Contextually (David is speaking to a group of men), grammatically (“you” is

plural), and logically (the Israelite deity would not have Saul as its master), **אֲשֶׁר** cannot introduce a clause that refers to YHWH. Note the presence of the phrase “by YHWH” (**לַיהוָה**). Gen 24:27 provides an example of a blessing of YHWH himself: **וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָנִי אֲבִרָהָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חֲסִדּוֹ וְאִמְתּוֹ מִעַם אֲדָנִי** (He said, “Blessed be YHWH, the god of my master Abraham, because his steadfast faithfulness with my master never failed”). In this situation, **אֲשֶׁר** does introduce a clause referring to YHWH. The difference is that when YHWH is the object of the blessing (as in Gen 24:27), **לַיהוָה** is absent (see also Ruth 4:14). Thus, the presence of **לַיהוָה** shows that someone other than YHWH is the object of the blessing. Bush (WBC) agrees: “It seems unquestionable that Boaz is the antecedent of the relative clause.” Finally, it can be seen that **אֲשֶׁר** explains the reason for the blessing. This is self-evident in 2 Sam 2:5, but can also be seen in Gen 24:27. Since **אֲשֶׁר** inhabits the same syntactic position here as in the examples above, we have every reason to think it functions the same way (form and function go hand-in-hand). For **אֲשֶׁר** as causal, see IBHS §38.4. **ס**, which uses *hoti*, not *hos*, supports our rendering. Thus, Brenton renders the Greek as “Blessed is he of the Lord, *because* he has not failed.” **ט** supports our rendering as well: *quoniam* (because/since). Campbell (AYB) believes that, since “those who live” (**הַחַיִּים**) is a masculine plural, it must be a generalized statement, not one that identifies Ruth and No'omi (otherwise, one would expect the feminine plural **הַחַיּוֹת**). And if the blessing is general, not specific, YHWH is the more likely referent. Against that, however, Rebera (“Yahweh or Boaz? Ruth 2.20 Reconsidered”) provides the definitive reply: “*Ḥayyôt* the plural form is not attested anywhere as a substantive referring to human females. The substantive *ḥayyâ*, singular, and *ḥayyôt*, plural, refer to living creatures other than humans. *Ḥayyîm* must be regarded as a generic expression applied to living humans of either sex.” Furthermore, it would be preposterous for No'omi to conclude that the same deity that had “marred” her, “swung his hand against” her, and turned her back “empty,” had proven himself a beneficent deity after all just because Ruth brought back a large sack of grain. As Rebera notes, “The vindication of Yahweh is not to be found in the utterances of Naomi but in the utterances of the women in 4.14 to whom Naomi addressed her indictment in 1.20-21.” In order to make the referent clearer, we have steered away from using “who” or “whose” and gone, instead, with the explanatory meaning (because), which better fits the formulaic usage. NET agrees with our analysis. For **חֲסִדּוֹ** as “faithfulness,” see section A3. Though we take “his faithfulness” as the subject of the verb (as in NRSV, ESV, and LEB), it could function as the accusative object instead: “because he does not abandon his faithfulness.” Whichever is chosen, the Qal perfect must function in a gnomic sense to describe Boaz. Geneva veered far from the text at this point, rendering **חֲסִדּוֹ** as “to do good.”

**is as boundless** — Literally, “does not abandon/forsake/do away with.” As with “*ephah*,” we find No'omi crafting a word-play—this time from the name of Ruth's benefactor. Porten mentions it almost in passing: “(בַּעַזַּי play on the name עֲזָב).” In order to mimic the word-play, we

render the verb “is as boundless” and place it in italics to show its phonetic connection (“as” contains the same sound as the last syllable in Boaz’s name and “boundless” begins with a sound quite similar to the first syllable in his name).

**with those who live** — Or “with the living ones.” We prefer to render **אִתּ** as a preposition (with). This is supported by **ᜆ**: **μετα** (with). YLT, REB, and Alter also interpret it as a preposition. Most translations, however, treat **אִתּ** as if it were prepositional **ל** (to/toward). NJB and Leeser represent it as **מִיּוֹן** (from). Alternatively, **אִתּ** could be interpreted as an object marker for the verb, in which case it would go untranslated.

**as with those [now] deceased** — Or “as with the dead ones.” The language is drawn directly from 1:8. In consonance with 1:8, we interpret the conjunction as comparative. As in the previous phrase, we render **אִתּ** as a preposition (with). Most translations represent it as if it were prepositional **ל** (to/toward). Alternatively, **אִתּ** could be interpreted as an object marker for the verb, in which case it would not be translated.

**No'omi [then] told her** — Literally, “No’omi said to her.” Since it is neither necessary nor advantageous to represent the “to,” we have dropped it. More meaningful, we think, is the inclusion of “then.” **וַתֹּאמֶר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). Sometimes, however, inverted verbs function in a subordinating relationship to a previous verb. We believe that relationship exists between this **וַתֹּאמֶר** and the one that began the verse. Therefore, we insert “then.” So do Bush (WBC), NET, and GW. **ᜆ** says *russumque ait* (and again she said). Translations that mimic **ᜆ** include HCSB (continued), NRSV (also), NASB (again), and NIV (added).

**Close to us** — To produce emphasis, the composer fronted the predicate (“close to us [is] the man,” not “the man [is] close to us”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. “Close to us” means, more idiomatically, “a relative/relation of ours.” See **נֶאֱלַל** in section A3.

**that man** — Since the definiteness of the article is indicated just as well by “that,” we see no reason to go with “*the* man.” See also NIV, GW, and Fenton. Others (NET, REB, NKJV, etc.) prefer “*this* man.” Within the two lines of poetry, **הָאִישׁ** is directly parallel to **הָיוֹא**.

**One of our restorers** — Alternatively, “One [of those] who restores us.” See section A3. To produce emphasis, the composer fronted the predicate (“one of our restorers [is] he,” not “he [is] one of our restorers”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. The affixed *min* is best understood as partitive (some/part/one of). Virtually all scholars and translators agree. Staples (“Notes on Ruth 2:20 and 3:12”), however, denies that there could be more than one eligible restorer. He proposes, therefore, three other interpretations of this verse. First, he suggests that the *min* is a negative particle on the basis of its use in Hos 6:6 (**כִּי חֹסֶד חֲפַצְתִּי וְלֹא־זִבְחַ**) “because fidelity is my desire and not sacrifice, yes, the knowledge of Elohim rather than ascension [offerings]”. On this basis, he renders our text “he is not our *go’el*.” In Hos 6:6, however, *min* functions not as a negative particle, but as a particle of comparison. It just so happens to be a *contrastive* comparison. That nuance is made clear not by the *min*, which could make one of numerous comparisons, but on the basis of the word directly parallel to it: **וְלֹא** (and not). There is no **לֹא** in our verse to give *min* a contrastive

sense. Thus, that interpretation is extremely tenuous. Second, Staples suggests looking at the way *min* functions in Job 17:12 (אֹר קָרוֹב מִפְּנֵי־חֶשֶׁךְ). Due to the use of קָרוֹב next to *min*, Staples understands *min* to mean “near to.” Thus, he renders our text “he is next to our *go’el*.” But קָרוֹב is not used with *min* in this part of the verse. It does appear in a previous part of the verse, but is unrelated to the use of *min* here. Therefore, there is no reason to read the *min* here with any such nuance (see 3:12, where קָרוֹב is used with *min* and has the meaning “closer than”). Third, Staples points to 1 Sam 20:21, 22 as an example of *min* with the meaning “on the side of.” In that text, *min* relates to physical proximity—whether the arrows that Jonathan shoots are “across from you” (מִמֶּךָ), and, therefore, retrievable, or “across from you, but distant” (מִמֶּךָ וְהִלָּאָה), and, therefore, not retrievable. Such usage, however, reflects physical proximity, not blood relation. On that basis, therefore, Staple’s proposed rendering (he is close to our *go’el* [in relationship]) makes no sense at all. The incredible length to which Staples must go to make sense of the *min* as anything but partitive is, we believe, evidence enough that the majority opinion is correct. Since גֹּאֵל can stand for a category of person, it is not necessary (contra many interpreters), to read גֹּאֲלֵנוּ as a defective form of the plural (גֹּאֲלֵינוּ). The one thing Staples says rightly is “In the kethîbh of the MT the word is only found in the singular—except in one passage (1 Kgs 16:11), and even here it can be demonstrated that the singular should be read. . . . From this we may conclude that in every instance of the occurrence of the active forms of גֹּאֵל the singular is used” (scripture notation added). Lacking, therefore, any plural usage, the singular must function, in some places, as an expression of a collective. This is certainly one of them. Within No’omi’s poetic discourse, גֹּאֵל is directly parallel to קָרוֹב, which shows that both describe the same person (Boaz).

- 2:21 **Ruth the Moabite said** — This verse stands at the center of the text according to Masoretic counting (see Masorah Finalis). וְהָאִמֶּר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). See 1:1. Though it is certainly possible to interpret the use of inverted verbs in a coordinating (and) or consecutive (then) manner, in this particular case, the presence of גַּם (see below) renders the use of such words redundant. Since Ruth’s gender is obvious, we feel no need to render this “Ruth the Moabite” as do some translations. Instead of “the Moabite” (הַמּוֹאבִּיָּה), 6 says “to her mother-in-law” (לְחַמּוּתָהּ). 5 follows 6. NJB provides both readings: “Ruth the Moabite said to her mother-in-law.” There is, however, no Hebrew manuscript evidence for “her mother-in-law.” *BHQ*’s critical apparatus commentary explains the variant as “the application of a translation technique of making participants explicit.” The impetus to make the text more explicit probably lies behind one Kennicott manuscript, which says “Ruth the Moabite said to No’omi.” As numerous interpreters have noted, the phrase “Ruth the Moabite said” both begins Ruth’s speech in this chapter (v. 2) and ends it (here). Thus, there appears to be structural purpose behind the use of this particular phrase at this point in the narrative. The Hebrew text should be retained.

**moreover** — Usually, the phrase **גם כי** (or **כי גם**) means “even if/though.” Thus, for instance, **גם כי-אלך בגיא צלמות** (Ps 23:4) means “Even though I go through a vale pitch-black” and **גם כי-תרבו תפלה איני שמע** (Isa 1:15) means “Even if you perform many iterations of prayer, I will not be listening.” Such a nuance, however, does not work here. Some scholars take the phrase as a synonym of **אף כי**. That phrase, however, is almost always used in contrast with something else to show “how much more” or “how much less” it is than the other. In the few places where it doesn’t have that meaning, it asks whether something “actually” or “really” happened (Gen 3:1) or the **כי** adds a temporal nuance (when) to the verb (Neh 9:18 and Ezek 23:40). It is best, therefore, to treat the two particles separately. Wright agrees: “**גם** is not to be taken here in connection with the following **כי**.” The Masoretes seem to have understood this, which would explain why they placed a *paseq* (separator) between them (**כי | גם**). JM §157a.n2 interprets the two particles as “(there is) still (that) which.” Holmstedt does similarly: “also (it is) that.” Both interpret the **גם** as an indicator of continuation. Translators generally agree. Virtually all of them follow the strong disjunctive accentuation (*athnach*) and interpret what comes before as the narrator’s speech, while taking this and the following particle as part of Ruth’s speech. Note, for example, NASB (Furthermore, he said to me), NRSV (He even said to me), KJV (He said unto me also), and ESV (Besides, he said to me). Since, however, the **כי** is either as a complementizer of a previous verb or an introductory marker of direct discourse (see below), **גם** is best interpreted as a modifier of *the narrator’s speech*. Thus, we shift the *athnach* from **המואבית** to **אלי**. This results in renderings like “Ruth the Moabite *also* said” or “Ruth the Moabite *added*.” ASV (Yea) and Moffatt (Yes) take **גם** as an affirmation of No’omi’s blessing. If we are correct about the function of **כי** below, such an interpretation cannot be maintained.

**that** — The Masoretes placed a *metheg* between **כי** and **אמר** in order to link them together in the recitation process. The question, however, is whether **כי** is more closely connected to what follows or what came before (for the reason that we interpret this particle apart from **גם**, see note above). Quite often, **כי** follows sensory verbs (like seeing, hearing, or saying) or verbs referring to mental processes (like thinking, knowing, or remembering), as a helping particle or complementizer of the verb. Note the following examples:

- **וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יִשְׁבֹּן מֵאוֹן** (Job 36:10)  
“He demands that they turn away from iniquity”
- **מִי הֵגִיד לְךָ כִּי עִירָם אַתָּה** (Gen 3:11)  
“Who told you that nude you [were]?”
- **אֶעֱנֶה כִּי־יִרְבֶּה אֱלֹהִים מֵאָנוֹשׁ** (Job 33:12)  
“I must counter that Eloah is greater than men.”
- **אָמַר אִמְרָתִי כִי־שָׂנֵא שְׂנֵאתָהּ** (Judg 15:2)  
“Conclusively I concluded that, [as a] reject, you rejected her”



— וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי יִהְיֶה שְׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת (Isa 39:8)

“He thought that there would be lasting peace”

— כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעֻנִי (Gen 29:32)

“... because she said that 'YHWH saw my suffering'”

— אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר כִּי־הוּא זֶה (Exod 22:8)

“... where anyone claims that 'He [is] the one!'”

In our verse, therefore, where **כִּי** follows **וַתֹּאמֶר**, it is natural and works well contextually to view the particle as a complementizer (she said *that*). Related to that function are instances of **כִּי** as an introductory marker of direct speech. Muilenburg (“The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle **כִּי** in the Old Testament”) notes that, “Frequently, . . . it introduces a direct quotation, tantamount to *thus* or *this* or *here* or *as follows*” (no italics added). In other words, it is quite similar to **לֵאמֹר**. Whether interpreted as a marker of direct speech or a complementizer, **כִּי** would exist in a disjunctive relationship with **אָמַר** and mark the boundary between Ruth's and the narrator's voices. NAB took **כִּי** as a complementizer, but linked it with **אָמַר**, resulting in the rendering “He even told me that.” Such an interpretation sacrifices the syntax of the consonantal text in order to follow the accentuation. Geneva (certainly) and YLT (surely) interpret **כִּי** as an asseverative. Rotherham (for) takes it as causal. While those interpretations are possible in other contexts, they make little sense here.

**He told me** — Literally, “He said to me.” Because a repetition of the word “said” is infelicitous in English, we use “told.” Additionally, since the person to whom Boaz spoke is obvious, there is no need to include “to.”

**With the young men** — Note the change from “young women” in 2:8. Since 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> clearly says “young men,” we retain **נָעָרִים**. BH—particularly in narrative—is a V-O language. Note, therefore, the inverted O-V word-order: “with the young men stick” (not “stick with the young men”). The object has been purposely fronted for emphasis (for more on “fronting,” see the notes on 1:10). This is important because it tells us something about how Ruth views her place among the harvesters: due to Boaz's special treatment, her status surpasses that of any female worker and, indeed, is equivalent to a male worker. Most translations don't seem to care if they bury this highly marked expression within normal English syntax. Alter, YLT, and Rotherham are a few exceptions. Instead of “young men,” some translators prefer “servants” or “workers.” In that case, however, since the text clearly goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (**נָעָרִים**) and the female ones (**נַעֲרוֹת**), we think the gender should be represented (“man-servants” or “male workers,” for example).

**my [very] own** — Literally, “who belong to me/who I have.” This phrase exists in apposition with “the young men.” One could, therefore, render the whole thing “my own young men.” In order, however, to show that the phrase **אֲשֶׁר־לִי** was probably duplicated accidentally at the end of the verse, we have kept the phrase distinct.

**stick** — See section A3. As in 2:8, the verb is spelled with a paragodic or energetic *nun*, a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive, indicative imperfect (see 1:14). Thus, we reject

modal renderings like “you should” (NASB) or permissive renderings like “you may” (NET). In BH, the imperfect can function as an imperative, which must be the case here.

**up until** — ער אֵם is a rare form of expression. Since Boaz's speech, which is being reported here, is sometimes peculiar, we feel it necessary to provide a more peculiar sense in English (instead of the more common “till/until”).

**{, my [very] own}** — It seems fairly certain that this phrase is an accidental duplication of the previous phrase referring to the young men. Originally, the verse would have ended with “the whole harvest.” 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> is, unfortunately, too fragmentary to preserve this part of the verse. ⚡, however, provides evidence of מ<sup>L</sup>'s antiquity. ⚡ also supports it. The way the phrase is handled by most English translations (collapsing it to “my harvest”) gives the impression that nothing is out of the ordinary. LEB (the servants which are mine . . . all of the harvest which is mine), YLT (the young people whom I have . . . the whole of the harvest which I have), and Alter (the lads who are mine . . . the harvest that is mine) are notable exceptions. Some scholars believe that the repetition creates a more formal and verbose diction, which fits Boaz's characterization (and, thus, was probably intentional). Boaz's previous speeches, however, are not marked by repetition—they are marked by *alliteration*. Other interpreters believe the first appearance of אֲשֶׁר-לִי is the duplicate, not the second. In that case, Boaz would be claiming the harvest, not the young men, as his own. While it is true that any harvest coming from “the part of the field owned by Boaz” (2:3) would be “his own,” it is much more in line with the social and cultural environment of the time to refer to people as “belonging to” someone. Thus, Boaz does not say “Who is that young woman?”, but “Who owns that young woman?” (2:5). And No'omi does not say “I am too old to marry,” but “I am too old to belong to a man” (1:12). If one looks back to what Boaz said to Ruth, it is clear that what he called “mine” was not the harvest, but the people: “stick with *my young women*” (2:8). Technically speaking, it would be more difficult for a scribe to accidentally duplicate a phrase before it had occurred than afterward. Accidental duplication is far more common at the end of sentences (see, for example, Ezek 1:24-25). There is every reason to believe, therefore, that the second phrase, not the first, is the duplication.

2:22 **No'omi replied** — וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. It is evident that many translations that begin the verb with “and” are simply reacting to the mere presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function. See 1:1.

**Better** — Or “Best/Preferable.” Bush (WBC) says it well: “טוֹב must be understood as the comparative/superlative use of the adjective.” See JM §141g. The Geneva and Bishops' bibles did an excellent job with their rendering of טוֹב. The KJV, however, departed from them by rendering it “good.” Many English translations have continued to follow KJV. Unfortunately, such a rendering misses the point. No'omi's response is not about providing an alternate option for Ruth that just so happens to be “good,” but providing a “better/best” one in place of it. Fenton (That is right) and SET (It is fine) render this as if No'omi were affirming Boaz's instructions. Since, however, No'omi goes on to challenge those instructions, such a rendering should be avoided.

**if** — Most translations render כִּי as a demonstrative pronoun (that). In some places, when combined with טוֹב, that meaning is preferable (see, for example, 1 Sam 27:1). Here, however, where it plays against the conjunction in the next verbal clause (וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ-בָךְ), it seems to function as a conditional marker of the protasis (if).

**go out** — It is not entirely clear whether this refers to Ruth going out with the young women *into* Boaz's fields (entering them) or going out with the young women *from* Boaz's fields (leaving them). Perhaps it refers to both.

**young women** — Instead of “young women,” some translators prefer “servants” or “workers.” In that case, however, since the text clearly goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (נַעֲרִים) and the female ones (נַעֲרוֹת), we think the gender should be represented (“servant women” or “female workers”). Note, however, how translations that prefer “servant” for נַעֲרָה backpedal when Ruth is called one (2:5, 6; 4:12). We find that inconsistency telling (such translations are driven more by interpretive bias than textual fidelity). 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> has נַעֲרוֹתָּה (his young woman) instead of נַעֲרוֹתָיו (his young women). Since the plural makes the most sense and is supported by שׁ, ט, and י, מ<sup>L</sup> should be retained (the omission of *yod* is either accidental or the form is defective).

**then** — Most translations render the previous כִּי as a demonstrative pronoun (that), which forces them to interpret the conjunction that begins the next verbal clause (וְלֹא יִפְגְּעוּ-בָךְ) as an indicator of purpose (so that/in order that). Instead, however, the conjunction seems to play against the particle כִּי as a subordinating marker of the apodosis (then).

**attack** — For פָּגַע + ב as an indicator of physical and/or verbal attack, see notes on 1:16 and section B3, example 3.

**in someone else's field** — There are two ways to read בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲחֵר. The first is how the Masoretes marked it: בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲחֵר (in another field). The second is בַּשָּׂדֶה אֲחֵר (in the field of another). Either is possible. Virtually all English translations prefer the first. We prefer the second. So does S (in the field of someone you don't know), NIV, GW, and NAB. The reason for our choice is simple: if the young men were going to “attack” Ruth, it would be much easier and safer for them to do so in a field unrelated to the one in which they were all assembling and/or working. See 2:8.

2:23 **So she stuck** — וַתִּדְבֶּק is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Sometimes, however, inverted verbs have a resultative sense (so/thus/therefore), which seems to be case here. Inverted verbs may also introduce a summary remark (thus/so). As the conclusion of the second narrative act, that makes a lot of sense as well. Therefore, we insert “so.” Virtually all translators agree. For דָּבַק with a relational meaning (remain with/alongside) instead of a physical meaning (hold on to), see section A3.

**in order to glean** — Or “for the purpose of gleaning.” The infinitive construct with prefixed *lamed* is often used in the creation of a purpose clause (see JM §124l). One is tempted to presume that a different preposition was intended (*kaf* or *bet*) so that one could read the

infinitive in a temporal fashion as seen, for instance, in Moffatt (*as* she gleaned). 2QRuth<sup>a</sup>, however, supports מִלְּ. For our use of “glean” instead of “gather,” see section A3.

**Boaz's young women** — Literally, “the young women of Boaz.” Some translators prefer “servants” or “workers.” In that case, however, since the text clearly goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (נַעֲרִים) and the female ones (נַעֲרוֹת), we think the gender should be represented (“servant women” or “female workers”).

**the finish of** — The infinitive כָּלוֹת, which exists in construct with the following definite phrases, functions as a gerund. Thus, one could also render it “the finishing of.” Multiple translations (HCSB, NJB, NIV, etc.) treat it like a regular finite verb instead. Despite the fact that כָּלוֹת and כָּלו share the same root, translators also frequently use different words to represent them. Through our use of “the finish of” and “finished” (2:21), we show not only where the text reuses its own terms, but when those terms change form.

**the barley harvest and the wheat harvest** — Literally, “the harvest of barley and the harvest of wheat.” Note that, contrary to 1:22, each period is introduced with a definite article. Since, however, both “barley harvest” and “wheat harvest” refer to specific seasonal periods, the article is not required. To show the orthographic difference, however, we have included the article here and excluded it where it is not present (in 1:22).

**but stayed with** — וַתֵּשֶׁב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *stayed*). See 1:1. Inverted verbs can, however, have several different semantic functions. The question, therefore, is how to understand the relation of this verse's final verbal clause to what came before. Most translations take it in a coordinating sense (and)—though many of them are simply reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. NJPST takes it as indicating some sort of chronological succession: “she stayed close . . . *then* she stayed home.” So does Bush (WBC): “The most natural understanding of the *waw*-consecutive form וַתֵּשֶׁב is to take it in its regular sense of temporal (or logical) sequence, ‘Then she stayed at home.’” Such a reading is also preferred by Schipper (AYB), NET, and SET. That interpretation is certainly possible. It may even be influenced by a slight textual ambiguity. The consonantal text could be read as either “she returned/turned back” (וַתֵּשֶׁב) or “she stayed/remained” (וַתֵּשֶׁב). ט (reversa est) takes it as the former. If one allows for that vocalization, then chronological succession is the preferred interpretation. Note that אֵת in the phrase אֵת-חֲמוֹתָהּ stands in the same place as ב in the phrase בְּנַעֲרוֹת בַּעַז. We have good reason, therefore, to believe that they function the same way: as prepositions meaning “with/together with.” If so, וַתֵּשֶׁב would be favored over וַתֵּשֶׁב. This was understood by both ט (עם) and Θ (μετα). NLT interprets this verbal action as contemporaneous with the previous verbal action: “Ruth worked . . . And *all the while* she lived.” ISV, GW, and NJB agree with NLT. Perhaps we need to ask why this verbal phrase is here at all. Wouldn't the statement “So, in order to glean, she stuck with Boaz's young women until completion of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest” serve as a natural ending? The first act ended in just such a manner: “Both of them arrived [at] Bethlehem at the start of

barley harvest.” What, then, does **וַתֵּשֶׁב אֶת־חַמּוּתָהּ** add to the narrative? One can only surmise, but we think it was included in order to clarify what the phrase “so she stuck with Boaz’s young women” did *not* mean: that Ruth had abandoned No’omi and, therefore, broken her oath (1:17). On the contrary, she *remained/stayed* with her mother-in-law. By inserting this final phrase, the text reinforces Ruth’s **חֶסֶד** (faithfulness) in the face of narrative uncertainty. Such rationale also explains why renderings like “to dwell with” (KJV) or “live with” (NIV) miss the point. The phrase is included in order to show that she did not *leave/abandon* No’omi. That she did so by dwelling in the same house is but one material element in the vast make-up of Ruth’s social, material, religious, and personal devotion to No’omi. Since, therefore, the inverted verb tells us something contrary to the previous one, we render it in an adversative sense (but/yet). REB does so as well.

3:1 **No’omi said** — **וַתֹּאמֶר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *said*). Because this verb begins a new narrative act, many translations supply an introductory or temporal marker like “at that time” (NET), “one day” (NIV), “now” (LEB), “then” (KJV), or “afterward” (Geneva). All such renderings of the inverted verb are possible. We chose, however, to begin the next act as starkly and suddenly as does the text. Since ch. 2 closed with a summary remark that spoke of actions extending all the way to the end of the harvest seasons, but the content of this chapter takes place in the midst of those seasons, any interpretation of this verb as coordinating with the content in the previous verse (*And No’omi said*) cannot be sustained. Translations that treat it that way (ASV, JPS, YLT, etc.) are clearly reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. See 1:1.

**I must certainly pursue** — Three things are pertinent here. First, the first-person imperfect **אֶבְקֹשׁ** most likely communicates the modal nuance “must” (see JM §113m). Translations that reflect that include Moffatt, NAB, and NJPST. The traditional rendering of the verb with “shall” or “should” misses the point; No’omi is not asking whether something *should* be done or trying to ascertain whether it *will* be done, she is communicating determination, promise, and/or obligation. NRSV (I need to) and NJB (Is it not my duty) understand this. No wonder **וְ** adds “With [this] oath [I swear] I will not rest till the time that” to the start of the statement. Second, the Hebrew presents a question using an interrogative *heh* and the negative particle **לֹא**. No’omi’s question, however, is rhetorical. It anticipates the answer and acts either as a statement of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). For multiple examples, see GKC §150e. We bring out the assurance side of the statement with our rendering “certainly” (see 1:11). For examples with Boaz, see 2:8-9. Third, **מְנוּחָה** is often linked with the verb **מָצָא** (to find) as in Gen 8:9, Isa 34:14, and Lam 1:3. Here, however, we find **בִּקֵּשׁ** in the more intensive Piel stem. Therefore, we prefer a more intensive rendering like “to seek/search for/pursue.”

**whatever peace is best for you** — The verb here is a 3MS Qal. Its subject is **מְנוּחָה**, meaning “peace” (see section B2, example 2). The composer or scribal artisan selected a word synonymous with **מְנוּחָה** (in 1:9) that would match the verb’s gender. The verb means “to be

or become good/beneficial/well/advantageous.” Holmstedt is right, however, when he says the verb “has an implicit comparative degree: ‘a place of rest that is good for you [versus here]’ = ‘a place of rest that is better for you [than here].’” Schipper (AYB) agrees: “This clause carries an implicit comparison to Ruth’s present circumstances.” This kind of comparative/superlative statement follows closely and naturally on No’omi’s previous one: “Better/best, my daughter, if you go out with his young women.” Instead of **אֲשֶׁר**, **כִּי** represents **לְמַעַן** (in order that). Many translations follow **כִּי**. As noted again, however, by Holmstedt, “The **אֲשֶׁר** clause is not a result or purpose clause in the vast majority of the Hebrew Bible, including Ruth.” Thus, that reading is unlikely here. Despite the straight-forward meaning of the verb as noted above, translations are all over the map when it comes to how they represent it. Note, for example, HCSB (to be taken care of), NJB (happily settled), NAB (please), NET (secure), NIV (well provided), ISV (better off), Moffatt (fare well), and Geneva (prosper). Additionally, translations often treat **יִטֵּב** as a second-person instead of third-person verb. We follow **יִטֵּב**, which is supported by 2QRuth<sup>a</sup>.

- 3:2 In this verse, No’omi’s dialogue contains a string of words that alliterate through word-initial H-sounds: **הֲלֵא**, **הִיִּית**, **הֵנָּה**, **הוּא**, **הַשְּׂעָרִים**, and **הַלִּילָה**. We attempt to mimic that with a repetition of word-initial W-sounds: without, one, with, women, when, and winnowing.

**Boaz [is,] in fact, our relative** — **בְּעַז מִדַּעַתְנוּ** is a verbless clause (Boaz [is] our relative). As in the previous verse, No’omi asks a rhetorical question with **הֲלֵא** that anticipates the answer and acts either as a statement of affirmation (it is so) or assurance (surely/of truth/rightly). We bring out the affirmative side of the statement with our rendering “in fact.” See 1:11. For **מִדַּעַת** as a reference to biological relation, see 2:1. Curiously, the word appears here in the form of a feminine singular participle (**מִדַּעַתָּה**). Unfortunately, 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> does not preserve the ending. Since, however, nouns with masculine subjects sometimes look like feminine singular participles—especially those that function as titles (as, for example, **סוֹפֵרֶת**, or “scribe,” in Neh 7:57)—we have no reason to believe that the difference in orthography represents a difference in meaning. See GKC §122r or JM §89b.

**with whose young women you have been** — Literally, “you were with his young women.” Instead of “young women,” some translators prefer “servants” or “workers.” In that case, however, since the text clearly goes out of its way to make a distinction between the male ones (**נַעֲרִים**) and the female ones (**נַעֲרוֹת**), we think the gender should be represented (“servant women” or “female workers”).

**When he is winnowing** — Translations struggle with the function of **הֵנָּה** in this verse. Most either ignore the particle or treat it as a simple presentative exclamation: “Look/Behold/See!” IBHS §40.2.1 provides a helpful road-map for its usage. The particle **הֵנָּה** is often linked with pronouns to create immediacy. Thus **הֵנָּה־הוּא** could mean something like “there he is” or “look at him.” If the disjunctive Masoretic accentuation (*rebia*) is any guide, it would appear that the Masoretes understood the text this way. Unfortunately, such an interpretation does not work well when dealing with what seems to be a future situation (tonight). When joined

with participles, הנה brings a sense of vivid immediacy to the action. Thus, הנה־הוא זרה could mean something like “he is now winnowing” or “he is about to winnow,” which would certainly work better than the first option. One other function, however, is worth mentioning: “The presentative forms הנה and והנה also introduce clauses expressing a temporal connection . . . or the occasion or condition . . . for the ensuing clause.” IBHS lists Judg 9:33 as an example: והנה־הוא והעם אשר־אתו יצאים אליך ועשית לו (When he and the people who [are] with him march out to you, deal with him). That example is particularly relevant because, exactly like this verse, it features the presentative particle linked to an independent pronoun, which functions as the subject for a participle before dialogue shifts to an inverted perfect functioning as an imperative (in our text, the inverted perfect begins the next verse). It seems best, therefore, to interpret הנה in a temporal or conditional sense as in Judg 9:33 (when). It just so happens that the word “when” alliterates with all the other W-initial sounds we utilize in this verse, thereby mimicking No'omi's own alliterative language.

**the barley threshing-floor** — את (definite direct object marker) identifies גרן (threshing-floor) as the object of Boaz's winnowing, which is in construct with השערים (the barley), a modifier of “threshing-floor” that provides it with its definiteness. Literally, therefore, the text reads “the threshing-floor of the barley.” Virtually all translations treat the text as if things were the other way around: “winnowing the barley on/at/in the threshing-floor.” Such a reading departs radically from the text. Campbell (AYB) agrees: “The usual translation . . . represents a more radical departure from the text than is usually admitted.” English translations usually veer from the text at this point due to an inability to understand the use of the language. But to say that one is “winnowing the threshing-floor” is really no different than a waiter or waitress saying that she or he is “waiting tables.” It is not the tables that are being served, but the customers at the tables. “Threshing-floor” and “tables” are metonyms for the people or things at or in those locations. Joüon recognized this situation almost a century ago. He notes the reference to a wild ox in Job 39:12 that is said to collect “your threshing-floor,” by which it means “your threshings,” as well as the use of “threshing-floor” and “wine-press” in 2 Kgs 6:27 to refer to the food-stuffs therein. One could, therefore, represent our text as “is winnowing the barley *threshings*.” In either case, “the barley” is not the subject. To get around את as an object marker, some read it in its rarer sense as referring to proximity (by/beside/along). Though this has the illusion of dealing with the awkwardness of the text, it merely replaces one awkward reading with another (why winnow near or beside the one place specifically designed for such activity instead of within it?). To get around השערים (the barley) as a modifier of “threshing-floor,” Campbell proposes השערים (the gates). Because *sin* and *shin* are sometimes confused in BH and were not orthographically differentiated until the time of the Masoretes, such a reading is certainly possible. Considering that all the versions read it as “the barley,” however, makes that reading improbable. Since the text makes sense as it stands and probably represents a more common vernacular, we follow the Hebrew. In place of “threshing-floor,” Fenton uses “barn”—a highly infelicitous rendering. For more Fenton infelicities, see 1:9, 11, 2:14, 3:7.

**tonight** — Or “this night.” Some translations (HCSB, NAB, etc.) substitute “evening” for “night.” Considering that the composer or scribal artisan could have used ערב (as in 2:17) instead of לילה, but did not do so, any argument that claims “night” really means “evening” runs against the firm and indisputable reality of the text. 𐤅, 𐤆, 𐤇, and 𐤈 support the Hebrew.

3:3 **wash** — This and the following three verbs are inverted perfects. The bonded *waws* are not conjunctions; they invert the aspect or tense of each verb so that they all function as imperfects. See 1:1. Since imperfects often function as imperatives and No'omi is acting in her role as the one with authority over Ruth, we think, along with most translators, that the verb has an imperative sense. Joüon (you *will* wash yourself) calls it a “future injunction.” Some, however, prefer a modal sense: “you *should* wash.” What is the relation of this first inverted verb to the previous clause? Most translations, if they view it as connected in any way with the previous verse, give it a resultative sense: “so” (NAB, NET, ISV, etc.) or “therefore” (NASB, KJV, JPS, etc.). We believe this inverted verb, as in the example from Judg 9:33 above, follows successively from the temporal condition created by the previous presentative particle, independent pronoun, and participle. In both syntactic constructions, an inverted perfect begins an imperative statement. Despite the fact that the Masoretes split this verb from previous content with the strongest disjunctive accent (*soph pasuq*), this verse picks up in the middle of No'omi's previous statement. Thus, contrary to virtually all English translations, we do not begin a new sentence at this point. Many translations give the verb a reflexive sense: “wash *yourself*.” Such an expression, however, is unnecessary. What would Ruth wash other than herself—No'omi?

**apply oil** — This inverted verb follows successively from the previous verb. It could, therefore, be rendered with or without “and.” The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense so that the verb functions as an imperfect. See 1:1. In succession with the previous inverted verb, we render it as an imperative. Many translations give the verb a reflexive sense: “oil *yourself*.” Such an expression, however, is unnecessary. What would Ruth apply oil to other than herself—No'omi? Translations often render this verb “anoint,” which we consider an archaic term (in English) and ritually specific. Bush (WBC) agrees: “‘Anoint’ is not a good translation here because the English word ‘to anoint’ has come to have primarily a technical, religious, or ritualistic sense.” We prefer, therefore, “apply oil.” See section B1, example 1.

**drape your cape** — Literally, “place your cloak/robe/mantle.” The inverted verb follows successively from the previous verb. It could, therefore, be rendered with or without “and.” The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense so that the verb functions as an imperfect. See 1:1. In succession with the previous inverted verb, we render this one as an imperative. By taking שְׂמַלְתְּךָ as “your cape,” we follow the consonantal text, which seems to feature a singular noun. Support for that reading comes from 𐤅. Translations that prefer a singular noun include Campbell (cape), ESV (cloak), NKJV (garment), and Bush (dress). It is possible, however, to read the same text as a defective form of the plural: שְׂמַלְתֶּיךָ. The latter is preferred by the ancient tradition of recitation (*Qere*) and is followed by some translations like Alter (garments) and NIV (clothes). Support for that reading comes from 𐤆 and 2QRuth<sup>a</sup>. To get around the number uncertainty, some translations utilize a



collective noun that could be singular or plural. Examples include NAB (attire), KJV (raiment), Rotherham (apparel), and LEB (clothing). More important is the fact that the whole phrase (ושמת שמלתך) was crafted to ring with phonetic repetition (consonantal sounds [s], [m], and plosive or fricative [t]). The number of the noun, therefore, is best determined by how one expresses the phrase's alliteration. We have chosen “cape” and “drape” because both words reflect the semantic nuance of the words while recreating their alliteration (see section B1, example 1). Some translators abandon the verb and noun combination entirely, reading לבש (to get dressed/put on clothes) instead. 3 has ושמת with an archaic, 2FS verb form: ושמתי. That occurs neither in מ<sup>L</sup> nor מ<sup>A</sup>. De Rossi notes that “an infinite number of copies” lack the final *yod*. 3 is most likely an error—an assimilation of spelling to the verb that occurs next (see below).

**[and] get down** — Here we find an archaic, 2FS verb form (יירדתי) as explained in JM §42f: “The primitive form (of the 2FS Qal perfect) is *qatalti* with short *i*” (see also GKC §44h). Blau shows this by comparing the 2FS ending in Hebrew with the 2FS ending in other branches of Semitic: the Akkadian stative (-*ātī*), Ge'ez (-*kī*), Arabic (-*tī*), Aramaic (-*tī*), and Hebrew (-*t*). The only major differences between them are Ethiopic's use of consonantal *k* instead of consonantal *t* and the absence, in Hebrew, of a terminal *i*-vowel. This shows that the early Semitic 2FS form contained a consonantal *t* terminating in an *i*-vowel. Though that vowel fell out of Hebrew, it is still preserved in poetry. The Song of Deborah, for instance (Judg 5:7), says עד שקמתי דבורה שקמתי אם בישראל (till the time you rose up, Deborah—the time you rose up, Matriarch of Israel). English translations often confuse the *-tī* ending in that verse with the 1CS verb form, rendering it erroneously as “until I, Deborah, rose up.” The archaic ending is also preserved in 2FS perfects with pronominal suffixes. Blau provides an example from 1 Sam 19:17: רמיתני (you [2FS] deceived me). Since the ancient verb form has no special meaning in comparison to the usual verb form, such spelling may have been used intentionally to portray No'omi's speech as old and/or peculiar. It may be the case that, like the *-nā* endings in 1:9, 12, and 20, the *i*-vowel was pronounced but not written. The Masoretes may have modernized the pronunciation in all those places where *yod* was not orthographically represented. In any case, we render the verb “get down” instead of the more usual “go down” to signify the peculiar pronunciation. Note that the verb is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Since, however, this is the last in a list of successive, inverted verbs, we insert “and.” Instead of “go down,” 6 says “go up.” Considering the fact that, even in 6, she promptly “goes down” to the threatening-floor (v. 6), 6's rendering in this verse is a clear deviation.

**[to] the threshing-floor** — Since we interpret this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “to.”

**Remain unbeknownst** — Literally, “Do not be known by/revealed to.” The verb is a Niphal (passive). Translations that recognize this include NIV (don't let the man know you are there), NJB (don't let him recognize you), and YLT (let not thyself be known to the man). Most translations treat the text as a Hiphil (do not reveal yourself/make yourself known). To the claim that the use of the verb ידע has a sexual connotation, Sasson provides the definitive response: “The *niph'al* of *yāda'* never conveys the meaning of carnal knowledge.”

**to the man** — This rendering follows the Masoretic vocalization. It is possible, however, to read it without the definite article, which provides the rendering “Do not be known by *any one*.” However, since Boaz is referenced specifically as “the man” throughout this chapter (vv. 8, 16, and 18), it is reasonable to assume that No'omi was speaking specifically about Boaz.

**he finishes** — Or “his finishing.” The infinitive functions as a gerund. The infinitive was a stative Qal in 2:23, whereas it is an active Piel here.

**feasting** — The *lameds* attached to each infinitive are *lameds* of specification (they work in tandem with the previous verb to identify what it is, precisely, that Boaz “completes”). Thus, we do not represent them in translation. See IBHS §11.2.10d. The phrase “eating and drinking” utilizes a common word-pair and probably functions as a statement of hendiadys (dining). Sasson seems to agree: “to eat and to drink, 'probably a hendiadys for 'to have, enjoy a meal.'” Considering that the work was done so late, that No'omi knew where Boaz would be, that this activity included more than eating and drinking (laying down to sleep on the spot!), and the boss himself was involved (at no other point does the text give any indication of Boaz taking part in the reaping or winnowing), there is good reason to believe that “eating and drinking” involved more than mere feeding, but was celebratory. It was celebratory, most likely, because the time of reaping had come to an end (2:23). A rendering like “feasting” would, therefore, describe the situation more precisely. Such a time of celebratory feasting at the threshing-floor and wine-press also seems to lie behind the oracle of judgment in Hosea 9.

3:4 **But let it be** — **וַיִּהְיֶה** is a *waw*-copulative—the jussive form of the verb **הָיָה** with accompanying conjunction. The jussive is like a mild imperative; it communicates wish, will, or intent and is often instructional. In this particular case, therefore, the verb means either “let it be” or “may it be” (see JM §119z). AAT (see to it), ISV (be sure), and REB (make sure) communicate the same idea. Translations that represent it with a verb in English typically treat it, instead, like the regular imperfect **יִהְיֶה** (it will/shall be). Others ignore the word and start the verse with **בְּשֹׁכְבוֹ** (when he lies down). The primary issue for us is the function of the conjunction. Since what comes next does not continue either grammatically or progressively from what came before, contrary to most early English translations, it makes no sense to render the conjunction as “and.” An adversative rendering (but/yet/however) would work well to show the shift from a direct negative command (do not) to a positive modal instruction (let it be). Some translations prefer that reading (NJB, NAB, ESV, etc.). Also possible would be a successive interpretation like “then” (as in Sasson and NKJV).

**when he lies down** — Or “while he is lying down.” Sasson's “as he lies down” presumes **כְּשֹׁכְבוֹ**. Since the accidental interchange of *bet* and *kaf* is common, such a reading is certainly possible. Since, however, 2QRuth<sup>a</sup> supports **מִ**<sup>L</sup>, we stick with **מִ**<sup>L</sup> (when/while).

**that you are aware** — Or “that you know/perceive/notice.” Unlike the *waw* linked to the previous verb, this one is not a conjunction. It inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, what would be a perfect functions as an imperfect. Since imperfects can express commands, many translators render this inverted verb as an imperative. Such a rendering makes sense of the fact that No'omi is continuing to instruct Ruth after her previous directives. It does not, however, logically follow. While it is within Ruth's power to wash, apply oil, drape her cape,

go down, and stay out of sight, there is no guarantee that she will know where Boaz goes to lie down. Boaz is expected to do so, and that makes his location ascertainable, but, much like how “chance” led her to Boaz’s field in the first place, so it will have to attend her now. Thus, No’omi must be expressing her will or intent for Ruth, not issuing a command. For that reason, we render this “that you are aware.” Translations that reflect that reading include KJV (that thou shalt mark), AAT (that you note), and NASB (that you shall notice).

**wherein he lies** — Or “there where he is lying.” Hebrew sometimes appends resumptive adverbs or pronouns to the end of relative clauses. Since no extra information is communicated, it is unnecessary to render the resumptive elements in English. To mimic, however, the verbose content of No’omi’s speech, we expand “where” to “wherein.”

**Go in** — Or “Enter.” In other words, *infiltrate*. Many translations render this as “go” or “go over,” which makes it seem like she is approaching the area, not *entering* it.

**uncover his [lower] coverings** — Literally, “uncover his legs.” The noun מרגלות is problematic insofar as it occurs only once outside Ruth, its meaning is not entirely clear within Ruth, and its form has, historically, invited speculation. Daniel 10:6, where מרגלות is directly parallel with זרעות (arms), provides the only clear meaning: “legs.” Based on that occurrence, however, we have no idea whether מרגלות could also refer, more specifically, to feet, heels, ankles, shins, or any lower portion of the body. The only rendering that seems improbable is Moffatt’s (waist). Unfortunately, 6’s rendering is no help. LaMantagne calls it “circuitous,” “confounding,” and “obtuse.” Some interpreters view the preformative *mem* as a clue to the noun’s meaning. Typically, they claim that such a noun is an identifier of place. Thus, מרגלות would refer to “the place of his feet.” Sasson provides a representative argument: “As is clear from other vocables such as *mera’ašôt* . . . , this preformative indicates the *place* (*localis*), rather than the *means* (*instrumentalis*), which affects the *regel*” (italics original). See GKC §124b, HALOT, and BDB. It should be noted, however, that nouns formed with preformative *mem* are ubiquitous and their nuances quite diverse. Landes (*Building Your Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary*) describes some of their properties: “This is a rather large category of both concrete and abstract nouns, some expressing the circumstances under which an action takes place: its place, time, manner, result or instrumentality.” Many nouns do not express any such qualities. Some examples include מלאך “messenger,” משפט “judgment,” and מזמור “psalm.” Some nouns have forms that both include and exclude a preformative *mem*, yet this never influences the meaning. A segolate like רגל, for example, is תבן (straw). In one place (Isa 24:25), a preformative *mem* is affixed to its segolate form (מתבן) just like with מרגלות, yet the preformative version has the exact same meaning as the non-preformative version. Note also how מפעלות (works/acts/accomplishments) differs in no way semantically from its non-preformative counterpart פעל (work/act/accomplishment); it does not mean “the place of work/action.” Thus, it seems unnecessary and presumptuous to say that מרגלות must mean “the place of the feet.” See section B1, example 2 for more. Note also how מרגלות alliterates with וגלית. To mimic that

alliteration, we render the verb “uncover” and the noun “[lower] coverings.” Our rendering has the advantage of anticipating Ruth's statement “Spread your fringe over your slave.” It seems fairly certain, both from biblical and extra-biblical evidence, that ancient Israelite men wore ankle-length tunics with a fringe at the bottom (see King and Stager's *Life in Biblical Israel*). It is probably the bottom of this garment, and thus the fringe, that Ruth would have handled in order to expose Boaz's מְרִגְלוֹת (see section B3, example 4).

**[and] lie low** — Here we find a reuse of the archaic, 2FS verb ending seen in the previous verse. As in the previous verse, we render it with a slightly different nuance (“lie low” instead of “lie down”) to signify its peculiar pronunciation. Note that the verb is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Since, however, this is the last in a list of successive, inverted verbs, we insert “and.”

**Then he, himself, will tell you** — Literally, “Then he—he will report to you.” Since the subject has now switched from Ruth to Boaz, an independent pronoun, which stands in place of Boaz's name, is fronted before the verb to signal that new emphasis. To capture that emphasis, we mimic the pronoun duplication. So does Alter (as for him). The *waw* seems to function, in this particular case, in a consecutive sense (then). HCSB and NASB agree. Some translations ignore it. Others prefer “and.” Apparently, Moffatt (and then) couldn't decide between them.

**how to conduct [yourself]** — In agreement with 2:11 and 19, we render this verb “to conduct oneself.” Note the use of paragogic or energetic *nun*, which is a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see notes in 2:8). Contrary, therefore, to numerous translations, we reject the use of this form with a modal nuance (must/should).

3:5 **She replied to her** — וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a coordinating conjunction (and); it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (She *said* to her). See 1:1. The speaker is named in 6 (Ruth said). We follow the Hebrew, which is supported by 7.

**Whatever you might think [is best]** — The traditional reading (*Qere*) is “Whatever you might say to me.” That reading is supported by 7. The written text (*Ketiv*), as represented by מִלִּי, lacks “to me.” 6 supports that reading. In מִלִּי, the scribes inserted a circle to make sure the text was not “corrected” to agree with the *Qere*: פֶּלֶאֱשֶׁר־תֹּאמַרִי • אֵשֶׁן. Though numerous translations follow the *Qere* (KJV, NRSV, NET, etc.), we follow the *Ketiv*. Three things are noteworthy about תֹּאמַרִי. First, it utilizes the archaic 2FS verb ending seen in previous verses (3:3-4). This may be another instance of Ruth reusing the speech of those around her. Second, the verb has an imperfect verbal form. Thus, it could be rendered in a future sense (you will say) or a modal sense (you may/could/might say). Most render it “all that *you say*” or “all that *you have said*,” both of which reflect the perfect (אָמַרְתָּ). Though the ancient Semitic *yiqtol* functioned as a preterite, the use of *yiqtol* as a preterite in BH tends to show up in poetry, not prose. Since there is no poetry here, the probability that this *yiqtol* functions as a preterite is best determined by how many other times the *yiqtol* preterite seems to occur. Up to this point, it does not occur. After this point, only one *yiqtol* is typically treated as a preterite—the identical verb, used in an identical expression, in v. 11. It is far more likely, therefore, that we are dealing with a fixed expression than an archaic form not otherwise attested. As positive proof, it is easily demonstrated that other archaic features in Ruth, such as the feminine dual

suffix *-m* or the 2FS imperfect ending *-ti*, occur several times with different words in multiple contexts. What then is the purpose of the imperfect in this expression? It must signal an intent to follow not just what someone has already directed, but their future wishes as well. Schipper (AYB) agrees: “The use of a *yiqtol* verb form . . . suggests an ongoing commitment.” Since “to think” encompasses more than “to say” and **אמר** routinely carries that semantic nuance (see 1:12, 3:14, and 4:4), we render the verb “you might think [is best].” Third, contrary to many translations, the object has been fronted before the verb (“whatever you might think, I will do,” not “I will do whatever you might think”). The purpose of the O-V word-order is to produce a more emphatic statement of fidelity, which is typical of Ruth's emphatic language and furthers her characterization as a person of **חסד** (faithfulness). When Boaz uses the same emphatic statement of fidelity in v. 11, this furthers his characterization as a person of **חסד** and shows that they belong together. For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10.

3:6 **So she went down** — **וותר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a coordinating conjunction (and); it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (She *went down/descended*). See 1:1. Inverted verbs can, however, have different semantic functions. In this particular case, it seems to introduce a summary remark. For that reason, we begin the verb with “so.”

**[to] the threshing-floor** — Since we interpret this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “to.”

**to act** — **ותעש** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (She *acted/did*). See 1:1. Inverted verbs can, however, have different semantic functions. In this particular case, most translations treat the verb as successive (*and she acted/did*). We think the text moves from the first inverted verb into a resultative sense: “She went down *in order to* act/do.” In other words, her going down to the threshing-floor is part of acting in conformity with No'omi's instruction, not something she does in addition to acting in conformity with No'omi's instruction.

**in conformity [with] everything that . . . had instructed her** — The construction **ככל אשר** + verb **צוה** (in conformity [with] everything that X instructed) is a common phrase in the HB—particularly in narrative. In this phrase, prepositional *kaf* represents an agreement in kind (in conformity with/according to). Some translations (HCSB, NET, NIV, etc.) ignore it. Others read **כאשר** (just as) in place of **ככל אשר**. There is, however, a distinct semantic difference between **ככל אשר** and **כאשר**. This can be seen, for example, in Ezek 9:11. The *Ketiv* says **כאשר צויתני**. Jewish interpreters after the first century, however, established a reading tradition that was **ככל אשר צויתני** instead. Since ancient Jewish interpreters perceived a difference between the phrases great enough to substitute one for the other in recitation, we should not be quick to treat them as identical. The difference is explained by the fact that *kaf* alone often indicates similitude (like/as), whereas **כאשר**, by the nature of its expansion, is more emphatic and, thus, more exacting in its comparison (just/exactly as). Thus, **כאשר** can correspond with what scholars call the *kaf veritatis* (representing exactness), but not *kaf* alone. JM §133g gives the verse scholars typically turn to as an example of the *kaf veritatis*: “Ne 7.2 **כִּי־הוּא כָּאִישׁ אָמֵת** *for he was a truly faithful man.*” As one can see, this is a confusion

between the asseverative use of *kaf* and its use as similitude. In Neh 7:2, the *kaf* emphasizes the truth of the statement, not exactness: “because he [was] *indeed* a faithful man” (for another place where interpreters misread *kaf* as indicating exactness, see Ruth 2:17). Note the curious spelling of צוֹתָהּ. If we read the consonantal text alone, we would think it said “she had instructed” (צִוְתָהּ) as in Est 4:17. Note, for example, how Sasson renders it: “her mother-in-law *had charged*.” The Masoretic spelling, however, reflects the assimilation of the ה of a 3FS pronominal suffix (her) into the ת of the verb. The ה that appears on the end is a *mater lectionis*, tacked on to show that the long feminine vowel from the former suffix remains. In other words, *šiwwat-hā* became *šiw Wattāh*. Schipper (AYB) gives several examples of other verbs with object suffixes such as וְכִעְסָתָהּ (she would provoke *her*) in 1 Sam 1:6, הִלְקָתָהּ (it [his hand] divvies *it up*) in Isa 34:17, and אֶחָזְקָתָהּ (it [two nouns in hendiadys] seized *her*) in Jer 49:24. See also GKC §59g. Thus, we have good reason to read a feminine object here. ⚡ supports that reading: ενετειλατο αὐτῇ η πενθερα αὐτης (her mother-in-law instructed *her*). Note, however, that the Greek uses an aorist to represent the verb, not a pluperfect.

3:7 **When Boaz had eaten** — וַיֹּאכַל is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *ate*). Inverted verbs can, however, have many different functions within a sentence. We believe this one (with the string of verbs that come after) has a temporal sense relative to וַיָּבֵא (he entered). Thus, we begin the first string of verbs with “when.” Alternatively, one could begin this verse “Boaz ate” and show the consecutive nature of וַיָּבֵא by rendering it “*then* he entered.” In any case, there is no reason to begin the verse with “and” as in many early English translations (Geneva, KJV, Leeser, etc.) and some modern ones (ESV, LEB, etc.). See 1:1.

**[and] his state was well-[effected]** — וַיֵּטֵב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (it *was* well). See 1:1. A final “and” is included, however, since this is the last item in a list. As seen in section B2, לֵב refers to one's state of being or processes associated with the mind (“will” or “intentions”). Most render it in terms of feelings. Note, for example, Geneva ([he] cheered his heart), KJV (his heart was merry), HCSB ([he] was in good spirits), and NET ([he] was feeling satisfied). Elsewhere, however, the phrase refers to an altered state of intoxication. Thus, Est 1:10 says כָּטוֹב לֵב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיַּיִן (when the mind/being/state of the king was well-[effected] by wine). See also 2 Sam 13:28. 1 Sam 25:36 makes an explicit connection between one's לֵב being “well” and drunkenness: וְלֵב נָבָל טוֹב עָלָיו וְהוּא שָׁכַר עַד־מְאֹד (and the mind/being/state of Nabal was well-[effected] with regard to him—that is, he [was] drunk, very much [so]). We think the same context is implied here and agree with Deffinbaugh's assessment (“Cutting Corners: Naomi's Under Cover Operation”): “It is just too obvious that Naomi was anticipating that the wine would have a dulling effect on Boaz's judgment. Let us not forget Noah's nakedness after his consumption of wine in Genesis 9, or the way in which Lot's daughters employed wine to seduce their father so that he would impregnate them.” Many interpreters believe the story of Lot and his daughters is behind the story of Ruth (see section B2). If the story in

Gen 19 is in the background of Ruth at all, the probability that the “wellness” of Boaz's **לב** refers to intoxication (not just cheerfulness) becomes extremely likely. Therefore, we render the phrase “his state was well-[effected].” The translations of Moffatt ([he] had a merry time), REB (he felt at peace with the world), and Sasson ([he] felt free of care) are paraphrastic.

**he went over** — **וַיָּבֹא** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. See 1:1. Inverted verbs can, however, have different functions in a sentence. This one follows consecutively from **וַיֹּאכַל** (he ate). One could represent that by inserting “then” before the verb. Since, however, we began **וַיֹּאכַל** with “When,” such an insertion is unnecessary. Note that the verb does not mean “to go” (the past tense of which is “he went”), but “to enter/go in/arrive at.” Most English translations ignore these distinctions and treat the verb as **וָיָלַךְ** (he went). NJB (he went off) treats the verb as **יָצָא** (to go out/forth)—virtually the antonym of **בָּוֹא**!

**at the edge** — **שָׁ** says “at part of.” **בְּ** says “beside.” The reason for Fenton's rendering (the lodge) escapes us. For more escapes from reason by Fenton, see 1:9, 11, 2:14, 3:2, and 4:17.

**[grain] pile** — **עֲרֻמָּה** refers to a “pile/mound/stack/heap.” Sometimes one must infer from the context the material from which the pile is composed. At other times, the material is explicitly identified. In this case, where the material is not mentioned, translators typically supply it. It seems to us that, since this is a threshing-floor and the threshing and celebration has come to an end, the pile was probably composed of harvest grain. By rendering **עֲרֻמָּה** as **στούβης**, which refers to a “cushion/pad” and, by extension, the plant material used as “stuffing” or “padding,” **ש** perceived of Boaz making his bedding on left-over stalks from the threshing process. If one followed that interpretation, they might render **עֲרֻמָּה** as “[straw] pile” or “pile [of stalks].”

**She then went in** — **וַתָּבֹא** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (She *went in*). See 1:1. Inverted verbs can, however, have different functions in a sentence. Since it is unlikely that Ruth “went in” at virtually the same moment as Boaz (Boaz went in *and* she went in), we think the consecutive sense (then) makes better sense. **ו** makes the subject more explicit: “*Ruth* went in.” Translations that do likewise include NET, NIV, and NJB.

**under wraps** — Or “under cover.” **בִּלְטָה** is a combination of the noun **לֵט** (secret/mystery) from **לִוֵּט** (to cover/wrap/conceal) and prepositional *bet*. The result is a phrase meaning “in secret” or “with secrecy.” Thus, **ש** has **κρυφῇ** (secretly) and **ו** has **בְּרִז** (in secret). Translations that represent that include HCSB, NASB, and GW (secretly) and NRSV, NJPST, and AAT (stealthily). It is also possible, however, to read the same text as a combination of **לִוֵּט** or **לֵט** (*defectiva*), meaning “covering/wrapping,” with prepositional *bet* (see Isa 25:7 for **לִוֵּט**). The result would mean “in covering” or “enwrapped.” In this manner, the text becomes a *double entendre*. It signifies not just that Ruth is “covered,” but that she moves “secretly” by means of her covering. By using **בִּלְטָה** right before the phrase “she uncovered his [lower] coverings,” the composer or scribal artisan created an impressive word-play in which Ruth remains

“under cover” both literally and figuratively just as she “uncovers” Boaz. Indeed, it seems certain that this word was chosen instead of the common term for “in secret” (בסתר) precisely to convey such nuance. It is not enough, therefore, to render בלט as one would בסתר. By rendering the phrase as either “under wraps” or “under cover,” both nuances of the Hebrew can be captured at the same time. Recently, some scholars have argued the point even further by suggesting a *third* layer of meaning. Linafelt (*Ruth*) states that “The root word *lût* has, in unpointed Hebrew, the precise lettering (that is, *lwt*) of the name Lot. And with the preposition *ba* ('in/as') attached, there is a flickering pun: she approached him 'as Lot,' that is, as Lot's daughters approached him and lay with him when he was drunk.” Schipper advances this theory in his article “The Use of *blt* in Ruth 3:7.” He argues that, since the text of Ruth uses numerous puns and word-play—particularly in the case of proper names—and many readers perceive intertextual connections between Ruth's narrative and traditions regarding Lot, it is quite possible that בלט was used as a pun on the name “Lot.” Schipper also makes it very clear that “The pun is a matter of Hebrew diction rather than the Hebrew syntax” since *bet* in בלט could not actually mean “as” or “in the manner of” in this particular instance. While we generally agree with Schipper's sentiments, it is important to note that all cases of puns on the names of persons, places, or things in Ruth play off of explicit occurrences of the names of those persons, places, or things. Thus, for instance, Bethlehem is not referred to as Judah's “Bread-House” in 1:1 apart from any actual reference to the city. Neither can it be said that *hat-temûrāh* in 4:7 was crafted as a pun on the name “Tamar” apart from Tamar's explicit reference (in 4:12). Yet Lot is not mentioned in Ruth. Furthermore, while many readers have found intertextual connections between the story of Ruth and other Israelite texts, it is a fair question whether such connections were accidental or intended. Thus, we have not attempted a rendering of בלט that would work as a pun on Lot's name. Older English translations rendered בלט as “softly” (Geneva, KJV, Leeser, etc.) or “gently” (YLT). Newer translations update it to “quietly” (NET, NIV, LEB, etc.) or “noiselessly” (Moffatt). Such renderings view בלט as a combination of לָאֵט, meaning “with slowness/gentleness” or simply “slowly/gently” (which is, itself, a combination of אָט and prepositional *lamed*), and prepositional *bet*. Joüon holds that view: “בלט does not mean *in secret* (בִּסְתֵּר), but *softly, gently*, that is to say *without noise*, so as not to be heard (1 Sam. 24,5), especially by a man who sleeps. . . . The spelling of the oldest text (Judg. 4, 21) בִּלְאֵט indicates a root of לָאֵט. But this root itself is secondary.” There are three major problems with that identification: it accepts as primary a single occurrence of a word form that could represent a textual error, the vagary of a scribe, the influence of a dialect, or even a *newer* orthographic tradition (in Punic, for instance, vowels were sometimes represented by inserting *aleph* into words, which is a transition away from the older Phoenician orthography), it accepts particle clustering (the combination of ל + ב) as old and normal when, in fact, such a thing almost never occurs in BH and is indicative of post-Biblical Hebrew instead, and the versions do not support that interpretation.

**uncovered his [lower] coverings** — See notes on 3:4.



**[and] laid down** — וַתִּשְׁכַּב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (she *laid down*). See 1:1. A final “and” is included, however, since it is used in English to finish the last item in a list. Curiously, while virtually all early English translations render this “laid down” (past tense) in harmony with the previous verbs (Geneva is one exception), virtually all modern translations render it “lay down” (present tense)—a sudden departure from the way the previous verbs were rendered.

3:8 **Then** — וַיְהִי is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (“it/there *was*” or “it *happened*”). Older translations usually spell out the verb and erroneously treat the *waw* as a conjunction. As in 1:1, however, וַיְהִי is used to introduce a temporal phrase or act as a scene-setter (see note below). Therefore, we render it “then.” Most modern translations ignore the word.

**in the middle of the night** — Many translations render בַּחֲצִי הַלַּיְלָה as “at midnight.” It seems to us, however, that the phrase is not meant to indicate a specific moment in time (12:00 AM), but some general moment late at night. Therefore, we prefer “in the middle of the night.” Bush (WBC) agrees: “The phrase is not as precise as Eng. ‘at midnight.’”

**shivered** — Typically, the verb חָרַד refers to the “trembling/shuddering/shaking” brought on by fright or terror. In some instances (like Ezra 9:4, 10:3; Isa 66:2), it refers to awe, respect, or reverence. It is no wonder, therefore, that early translations chose renderings like “was afraid” (KJV) or “became terrified” (Leeser). The meaning of the verb relates more, however, to *motion* than *emotion*. In Exod 19:18, for instance, Mount Sinai “shakes,” but certainly not in fear! Hos 11:11 uses חָרַד to describe the nations “flitting” like birds. And in Job 37:1, חָרַד describes the heart “pounding.” In this scene, Boaz “shakes” or “quivers,” but not from fear (he is sleeping)! Translations try to get around the problem with renderings like “he was startled” (NASB), “gave a start” (NAB), “started up” (AAT), or “woke up with a shock” (NJB). Unfortunately, there is nothing in the text to indicate that anyone or anything “startled” Boaz. It is true that finding a woman at this legs would have been a surprise, but there is no indication that this occurred prior to him having done the actions of חָרַד and לָפַת. Instead, we find him doing such actions and then “seeing” (discovering) Ruth. NIV exacerbates these errors by reading “the man” as the verbal object (contrary to syntax) and then inserting an anomalous subject (*something* startled the man). What we propose is to render the verb according to its typical semantic nuance (to shake/tremble). YLT and Alter prefer that meaning as well. In this particular case, since Boaz is “exposed” or “uncovered,” one can easily imagine that the cold of the night or a breeze could have caused him to quiver. Therefore, we render it “shiver” as do Joüon, Campbell (AYB), and GW. Bush rejects that interpretation, but provides one that makes even less sense: “Most probably the verb in a context such as this means ‘to wake with a shudder or start’” because “the middle of the night is in the OT frequently a time of deadly peril.” Even if one grants that “the middle of the night” is a liminal period, where nothing is yet certain and where what is “dark” fights for dominance against what is “light,” the storyteller has already given us reasons to think that something good (3:1) could come out of this night encounter. In the previous chapter, when Ruth encountered Boaz in his field, she received from him an abundance of seed, which

displays his ability and willingness to provide for her. Despite the fact that she was an outsider, she was treated as a specially favored insider. Should she encounter him again in his field, past events create expectation for future possibilities. Thus, even though we as an audience are uncertain and, perhaps, afraid of how things could go wrong *for Ruth*, to say that we might expect *Boaz*, a blessing-giver, a “restorer,” and a respected authority figure, to be in the midst of some “deadly peril” simply because he is asleep “in the middle of the night,” is (it seems to us) to come to this story with one's eyes closed.

**stretched out** — וַיִּלְפַּת is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Clearly, however, the action of this verb follows successively from previous action. If one wanted to follow the Masoretic accentuation, which uses a strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*), one could place a period after the verb and insert a conjunction before it. The most pressing issue, however, is the meaning of the verb. לִפַּת occurs only two other times in the HB (Judg 16:29 and Job 6:18). Based on Judg 16:29, some interpreters believe it refers to “grasping” or “taking hold.” Note, for example, the Geneva and Bishops' bibles (caught hold). That nuance, however, does not work with Job 6:18 (it also doesn't work in Judg 16:29 since no person could take hold of a pillar with one hand). Based on Job 6:18, most interpreters believe it refers to “twisting,” “turning,” or “bending.” This could find support from Arabic, in which the cognate verb *lafata* means “to turn/bend” (HALOT). That nuance, however, does not work in Judg 16:29 (no person could twist, turn, or bend in opposite directions at the same time to press against pillars on either side). ט uses ταρασσω (to be troubled/disturbed/agitated), which represents many Hebrew verbs, but more typically stands for רָגַז (to shake/tremble) and בָּהַל (to be terrified). It is apparent that ט sought to render this verb synonymously with the previous one (חָרַד). ט mimics the Greek verb closely with *conturbatus* (he was troubled/disturbed/agitated). ט has רָתַת, meaning “to tremble” (CAL). Thus, just like ט, it assumes that לִפַּת must be synonymous with חָרַד. ס says “he was astounded/confused” (CAL). The renderings of the versions cannot possibly account for לִפַּת in either Judg 16:29 or Job 6:18. They also plunge us back into the same quagmire noted above: for some unstated and unknown reason, Boaz was afraid/startled/troubled in the middle of the night before discovering Ruth. We propose, therefore, the meaning “to stretch/reach/extend.” This makes sense of both the Qal in Judg 16:29 (Samson *stretched/reached* [for] the two middle pillars upon which the temple was founded) and the Niphal in Job 6:18 (The tracks of their way *may be stretched out/extended*, [yet] they will culminate in a gulf and vanish). In this instance, therefore, Boaz “stretches out” (reading either a reflexive Niphal or a Qal), perhaps to cover himself where he was exposed and made to shiver or simply because he did what so many of us do when we are no longer in the throws of sleep, yet still overcome by drowsiness: stretch out arms or legs. In either case, this leads to the discovery of Ruth. LEB (he reached out) agrees with our interpretation. In Akkadian, the cognate verb *lapātu* has the basic meaning of “to touch” or “put hands upon” (CAD). Since such an act involves reaching out from one place to another, it would seem to lend support for our interpretation (some variance in meaning is to be expected since Hebrew and Akkadian are different branches of Semitic).

**and right there** — Typically, הנה functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is”). We believe it functions that way here. Our use of “right there” instead of “there” creates a sense of vividness or immediacy that often accompanies הנה. Alternatively, one could interpret הנה as “saw/beheld” as in ט and ו. That interpretation is favored by NET (saw), NIV (discovered), and Fenton (found).

**a woman** — See section C2.

**[at] his [lower] coverings** — Or “[at] his legs.” Since this is an accusative of place, we insert “at.” See notes on 3:4.

3:9 **he asked.** — Hebrew narrative typically places this indicator at the front of spoken statements. To make it flow better in English, however, we shift it to the end. ויאמר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a coordinating conjunction (and); it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (He *said*). See 1:1. If this verb has an immediate connection to the preceding material, it would be resultative, which is how HCSB (so) and Geneva (then) render it.

**Ruth, your slave** — Or “your slave Ruth.” “Your slave” is an expression of deference that modifies her statement of identity. Note that, in this place, Ruth calls herself an אמה. In the previous chapter (2:13), she used שפחה. Scholars and commentators often find meaning in these differences. One of the most recent and comprehensive analyses of the terms, both from biblical and extra-biblical sources, comes from Bridge (“Female Slave vs Female Slave: אמה and שפחה in the HB”). It is worth quoting several parts of his conclusion since they address many of the statements that scholars and commentators usually make: “No general distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה can be made. אמה and שפחה are synonyms, both when they designate women and when used by a speaker for deference. Patterns of use, or preference of one term over the other, however, occur. When אמה and שפחה designate women, אמה is preferred in legal contexts and שפחה is preferred in Genesis. . . . Since שפחה is mostly used for the patriarchs’ slave wives in Genesis, the proposal that שפחה refers to female slaves of the lowest status and אמה to female slaves in marriage contexts also cannot be sustained. When used as deference, both terms are used in a number of contexts, and the choice of which term is preferred in a long speech or dialogue appears to be arbitrary. Such arbitrariness overrides possible patterns that אמה is preferred in requests for marriage.” Contrary, therefore, to numerous claims of special meaning in Ruth’s use of אמה, we are left with a simple fact: apart from specific texts where one term holds dominance (Ruth is not one of them), אמה and שפחה are interchangeable. Campbell (AYB) agrees: “While there may once have been in Hebrew a clear legal distinction between the two terms, there does not seem to be any difference between them in Ruth.” Thus, we render both terms the same. As to whether it would be better, in English, to render either one as “servant” or “slave,” we are of the opinion that “slave,” which designates one who is owned by another, is closer to the ancient context than “servant.” And since Ruth’s gender is obvious, it seems pointless to represent the gender of the word with renderings like “female slave” or “slave woman.” Bush (WBC) has argued that when Ruth identified herself as “your slave” as

opposed to “the wife of the deceased” or “the widow of Machlon,” this meant that she “stressed her status as one eligible for marriage.” Hubbard (NICOT) holds the same view. To such an argument, it need only be pointed out that the phrase **אמתך** and its male counterpart, **עבדך**, are standard terms of deference used by persons in reference to themselves when speaking to someone who is perceived to be of greater authority and/or status. Ruth already called herself “your slave” (**שפחתך**) with reference to Boaz in 2:13 for no other purpose than to show deference. Since, as noted above, there is no semantic difference between **אמה** and **שפחה**, Ruth could no more be stressing her eligibility for marriage here than there.

**she said.** — Hebrew narrative typically places this indicator at the front of spoken statements.

To make it flow better in English, however, we shift it to the end. **והתאמר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. It is possible, however, to interpret this verb as following successively from the previous one. In that case, one could insert “and” or “then.” Many translations render the verb “to answer/reply,” but that verb (**ענה**) does not appear here (see 2:6, 11). Thus, we stick with the typical meaning of **אמר**.

**Spread** — **ופרשת** is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, that makes the verb function as an imperfect. Imperfects are sometimes used as imperatives, which we believe is the case here. Ruth is not suggesting or requesting Boaz to act (“May you spread” or “You should spread”). Instead, she is challenging Boaz with his own words to step up and act. Thus, this means “Spread!” or, alternatively, “You must spread” (JM §119w). Once again, Ruth’s **חיל** (boldness/valor) shines through her dialogue. One could also interpret this verb as having a resultative sense in relation to the previous statements. If so, one could insert “so,” “therefore,” or “consequently” (as in Geneva, KJV, and NASB).

**fringe** — The consonantal form of **כנףך** indicates a singular noun. This is supported by **כ**, **ס**, and **פ**. Therefore, we go with the singular. It is possible, however, to read the same word as a defective form of the dual/plural (**כנפך** when written *plene*). Since the dual/plural already appeared in 2:12, some may be inclined to read it that way here. That was the preference of the *Qere* (**כנפך** instead of **כנפך**). When it comes to representing the word in English, translations are all over the map. Some prefer an extended rendering like “wing of thy garment” (Geneva), “edge of your garment” (ISV), or “corner of your garment” (NIV). Others simplify it to an item of clothing such as “covering” (NASB), “garment” (LEB), “cloak” (NRSV), or “robe” (SET). Older translations narrowed the description to the specific region of the garment. Some render it “wing” (Alter) or “wings” (ESV). NKJV turns the statement into an English idiom (to take under one’s wing). In order to steer a course through this mix of interpretation, we must make a few things clear. First, we believe it is important to refer to **כנף** as a specific part of one’s clothing (the “border,” “fringe,” or “hem”), not any kind of garment or covering in general (for biblical and extra-biblical evidence that ancient Israelite men wore ankle-length tunics with a fringe at the bottom, see King and Stager’s *Life in*

*Biblical Israel*). Second, contrary to the way this passage is interpreted by most commentators, to spread one's fringe over someone does not, either necessarily or primarily, denote a proposal for marriage (see section B2, example 3). Third, just like Ruth's confrontation with No'omi in ch. 1, Ruth reuses language first spoken by her interlocutor, but subverts it to push for her own agenda. In *The Art of Bible Translation*, Robert Alter notes how the biblical writers are willing "to bend language in dialogue in order to represent the distinctive nature of character or of the specific situation of the character" and that "biblical narratives are very often constructed through the repetition of thematic keywords." In Ruth, כנף becomes an important keyword; it weaves together different narrative sections and its usage in dialogue differentiates characters and their motivations. In 2:12, translators usually render כנף as "wing" in order to recall the expression in which the deity is likened to a bird whose wings provide safety for its young (see, for example, Ps 91:4). In other words, Boaz uses כנף to indicate his desire for the god of Israel to protect and provide for Ruth. In 3:9, Ruth uses כנף to demand that Boaz become her protector or guardian instead. It could even be the case that, through conceptual blending, Ruth perceived of her demand and his desire as one and the same (for more on conceptual blending, see Fauconnier and Turner's *The Way We Think*). Therefore, Hubbard (NICOT) may be right when he says, "Boaz's covering of Ruth . . . implements Yahweh's protective covering of her." In order to capture these narrative links and characterizations, it is vitally important to use the same translation in both places. As we saw in section B2, example 3, to spread one's כנף over someone probably means "to take ownership of" or "become the guardian/protector of." If one wanted to represent that in English idiom, one could render it "take me into your fold" in 3:9 and "to whom you came for sanctuary within his fold" in 2:12.

**because** — We agree with Bush (WBC) that "the particle כִּי in this context can only be understood in its causal sense" because "the second clause must, because of the semantic content of the two clauses, still inevitably be construed as giving the grounds for the request made in the first clause." Had Ruth been speaking in poetry, there would be reason to pursue the validity of an asseverative use of כִּי as preferred by Sasson.

**a restorer [are] you** — Fenton renders גֹּאֵל as "the Restorer," but that is incorrect. Boaz is never called גֹּאֵל (*the restorer*). He was "a" restorer, which is why No'omi called him "one of" their restorers (2:20). It is not until "so-and-so" abdicates his rights that Boaz can claim such a title. For other incorrect renderings by Fenton, see 1:9; 3:2, 7. Note also how the predicate is fronted for emphasis ("a restorer [are] you," not "you [are] a restorer"). For more on "fronting," see notes on 1:10. For our use of "restore" instead of "redeem," see section A3.

3:10 **Blessed be you by YHWH** — בְּרוּכָה is a feminine passive participle. Since the blessing here has the same structure as that in 2:20, we render them the same: "Blessed be X by YHWH." Contrary to numerous translations, there is no 3MS imperfect or jussive here (May he bless). Contrary to others (NASB, NRSV, NET, etc.), this phrase is not תְּהִי בְּרוּכָה (May you be blessed). See notes on 2:20.

**he said.** — Hebrew narrative typically places such indicators at the front of spoken statements.

To make it flow better in English, we shift it to the end. וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. It is possible, however, to interpret this verb as following successively from the previous one. In that case, one could insert “and” or “then.” שׁ makes the speaker explicit: “Boaz said.” So does S. Since that is clearly an exegetical expansion, we follow the Hebrew.

**[With] your later allegiance** — Or “[In] your later allegiance.” By telling Boaz to take ownership of her (Spread your fringe over your slave), Ruth is forging a new allegiance or loyalty. Her first/former was with No'omi (ch. 1). Boaz had previously praised her for that (ch. 2). This current or later loyalty is now being established with Boaz. He immediately draws a connection between them. It is no surprise, therefore, that he should shower a blessing on her once again. For our rendering of חֶסֶד, see section A3.

**[by] not going after** — Since we interpret this infinitive phrase as explanatory, we insert “by” (alternatively, “in”). See JM §124o. Most translations do likewise. Note that Boaz reuses the verb הלך and the particle אַחֲרֵי, which last appeared when he instructed Ruth to “go after them” (וְהִלַּכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן), that is, his “young women” (2:9). Note also how Boaz crafts his words with alliteration—לְבַלְתִּי־לֶכֶת contains a thrice-fold repetition of [l] and double repetition of [t] or its allophones (we were unable to mimic that in English). Some translations treat the infinitive as a finite verb. Examples include NRSV (you have not gone after), NJB (you have not run after), and KJV (thou followdst not). NET renders the phrase “you have not sought to marry.” ט appends a statement to the phrase that identifies “going after” as engaging in sexual immorality: “to commit fornication” (Beattie).

**single men** — In his reply to Ruth, Boaz does not use the same term for “young men” that he used previously (נְעָרִים). Instead, he uses בַּחֹר. The feminine counterpart is בְּתוּלָה. We agree with modern interpreters that בְּתוּלָה does not signify virginity so much as someone who is available for marriage. Thus, בַּחֹר and בְּתוּלָה refer to a “marriageable man” and “marriageable woman” (or a “single man” and a “single woman”), respectively. Though the text is silent on the matter, it is highly likely that Boaz was beyond the age for marriage and had long since taken one or more wives (see section B2, “Levirate Marriage”). But if Boaz does not fit the category of a בַּחֹר, then his statement is best explained as a blessing upon Ruth for seeking after someone who can restore her family as opposed to seeking after someone to marry. Note that, even though the Hebrew contains a definite article, we do not represent it in English because its purpose is to identify a particular class of person. This is supported by שׁ, which says νεανίσκον, not τὸν νεανίσκον. Numerous English translations also drop the definite article from their rendering.

**whether destitute or whether prosperous** — Most interpreters render דָּל as “poor” and עָשִׁיר as “rich.” דָּל is not, however, typically used with reference to the “poor.” Joüon pointed this out long ago: “The proper word for *poor* is רָשׁ.” The adjective דָּל, from דָּלַל/לָל (to be small/insignificant), refers to someone who is “helpless,” “powerless,” “weak,” or “deficient.” It is no wonder that Joüon describes such a person as *faible* (lowly). In Gen 41:19, the term

describes *cattle*. Since, however, דל is paired with עשיר in this place, it probably refers to someone who is deficient in means and resources. Thus, we render it “destitute.” Its antonym would be “prosperous” or “flourishing” (having an abundance of means and resources). Note that the word-order is “destitute” followed by “prosperous.” Many translations reverse the order to use the common English locution “rich and poor.” Note also that Boaz uses אס twice, but virtually all translations ignore the second occurrence to create a more common English expression. The phrase Boaz uses (אם-דל ואם-עשיר) is not common, however, in the HB (it appears only here). Thus, it should be represented with an *uncommon* expression. This judgment reflects our belief that something vital is lost when the foreignness of the original is subverted by common English terms and phraseology. Perhaps Greenstein (“Theories of Modern Bible Translation”) put it best when he said, “The transfer of the Bible to another language must serve as no more than an aid to hearing the biblical text itself. . . . When a translation sounds like a translation it constantly reminds that the translation is but a mask of the sacred text that lies behind it.”

3:11 **So** — We believe the *waw* that begins this verse has a resultative sense: as a consequence of Ruth's great acts of faithfulness, Boaz will act faithfully toward her.

**don't worry** — This is traditionally understood to mean “do not fear/be afraid.” Sometimes, however, the boundary between fear and worry is hard to define. We think that “worry” captures the sense better here. So do NLT, NET, and Sasson. A positive rendering would be something like “be at ease,” “set your mind at rest” (NEB), or “be assured” (NAB). Since, however, the statement is negative (not positive), we use a negative rendering.

**Whatever you might think [is best]** — Holmstedt hit the nail on the head when he said, “The verb indicates that this is not an assertion that Boaz will take care of what Ruth has already requested (a perfective *qatal*) but of anything that she is requesting or will request (a imperfective *yiqtol*).” Thus, we render it “might.” For a detailed account of our rendering and a discussion of the emphatic O-V word-order, see notes on 3:5. ט adds “to me.” Kennicott lists three Hebrew manuscripts that also say “to me.” Since we have already seen a tendency among scribes to insert the phrase elsewhere (3:5) and ט supports מל, we stick with מל.

**since** — We interpret this כ as casual.

**everyone knows** — The active participle indicates present and continuing knowledge. Virtually all translations view “gate” as the subject and “all” as its modifier (all the gate). This is based on the Masoretic accentuation (*metheg*), which links “all” with “gate.” Such marks, however, are extremely late and often tell us more about the tradition of recitation and/or late Jewish perspectives than they do about the narrative structure of the earliest attested text and/or its intended meaning. Thus, we are willing to disregard such marks if and when there is good reason to do so. In this instance, we believe that there is good reason (see next note) and take “all/everyone” as the subject with “gate” as part of a dative of place.

**[at] my clan's gate** — Literally, “[at] the gate of my clan.” For ע as “clan,” see section A3. This phrase occurs a few other times in the HB with YHWH as the speaker (Obad 13; Mic 1:9) and refers, in a very literal sense, to the entrance of a particular city (Jerusalem). As used here with Boaz as the speaker, it would refer, in a very literal sense, to the entrance/gate of

Bethlehem. Since we view this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “at.” Virtually all other translations view “gate” as the subject of the previous participle, which introduces some major problems. The most obvious, of course, is that gates cannot know anything. To get around that difficulty, translators often interpret “gate” as a metaphoric expression for the people of the city. Others interpret “gate” as a metonym for the people that might gather at the gate. Note, for example, Leeser (the men in the gate), RSV (townsmen), AAT (counselors), HCSB (the people), NRSV (the assembly), and NJPST (the elders). That interpretation is taken by **ט**: “*who sit/dwell at the gate.*” The problem with those renderings, however, is that they take a phrase with a clear meaning elsewhere and have to alter it to suit their interpretation. Our interpretation makes perfect sense of the context, agrees with how the same phrase is used elsewhere, and gives the same meaning to “gate” that Boaz himself gives it when he uses it again in 4:10 (see notes there).

**that** — This **כִּי** functions as a complementizer for the previous participle: “knows *that*.”

**a valorous woman [are] you** — Note that the predicate is fronted for emphasis (“a valorous woman [are] you,” not “you [are] a valorous woman”). Thus, we represent that emphasis in our rendering. For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. Instead of “valorous” (**חַיִּל**), **ט** says “righteous” (**צְדִיקָה**). This kind of shift reflects the attitude of most English translations, which render it something like “a woman of noble character” (NIV), “a worthy woman” (ASV), “a woman of excellence” (NASB), or “a virtuous woman” (KJV). Such renderings not only fail to represent the semantic usage of **חַיִּל** (see section A3), but miss the point: Boaz will be able to act in accordance with Ruth's wishes not because she is “righteous” or “virtuous,” but because she and he share the same *characteristics* (**חֶסֶד** and **חַיִּל**). Sasson renders **אֵשֶׁת חַיִּל** as “the status of a wife of a notable.” While it is true that, in the patriarchal culture of that period, a woman's value would be determined, to a large extent, by the man who owned her, Sasson is denying Ruth the very traits she displays in our story *quite apart from any man* on the assumptions that (1) Machlon was an **אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל** (a powerful, valorous man) and, therefore, (2) his status would transform Ruth into a woman of **חַיִּל**. The absurdity of these assumptions is instantly evident in that Machlon's very name, which describes his character or being (something like “weakness” or “sickness”), could not be further from that of a “powerful, valorous man” and Ruth's status is clearly defined as “outsider” both by herself (2:10) and the narrator (through continual use of the phrase “Ruth the Moabite”). This is not a woman who is noteworthy because of any status of a husband. This is a woman who is noteworthy because of her own bold initiative—because of her (and only her) **חַיִּל**.

3:12 Many scholars and translators think that something is wrong in this verse because of its verbiage. Joüon, for example, says, “There is an overabundance of affirmations.” Campbell (AYB) agrees: “There are simply too many introductory words.” Thus, many translators ignore those words that seem superfluous. Yet wordy statements are *characteristic* of Boaz's dialogue. Therefore, every attempt should be made to represent that verbiage unless something is extremely suspicious (see **in matter of fact** below).



**And** — At the start of the previous verse, we viewed the *waw* as resultative (so). Even though the expression is repeated, we believe the *waw* now has a consecutive nuance (it expands upon Boaz's previous statements by opening the way for additional details).

**now** — Some translations ignore this עתה (HCSB, NIV, NJB, etc.). 𐤁 also ignores it. 𐤁, however, supports 𐤁<sup>L</sup>. Therefore, we stick with 𐤁<sup>L</sup>.

**even though** — We interpret this first כִּי as concessive (even though/while). Some interpreters think it should be read with אַמְנֵם. In his study of כִּי, for instance, Muilenburg did not differentiate between כִּי אַמְנֵם and אַמְנֵם כִּי. In Muilenburg's one example of כִּי אַמְנֵם, however (Job 9:2), it seems clear that כִּי has a very different nuance. Thus, we treat the first כִּי as separate from אַמְנֵם.

**in matter of fact** — This rendering represents the phrase כִּי אַמְנֵם, a longer version of the shorter, more typical expression אַמְנֵם (in fact/truly). The purpose of placing כִּי after אַמְנֵם, as noted by Muilenburg, is to add emphasis to the asseverative force of the expression (for another instance of כִּי אַמְנֵם, see Job 12:2). As it stands, the consonantal text actually says אַמְנֵם כִּי אֵם. The *Qere* regards אֵם as an error and does not read it. A staggering number of manuscripts leave it out (see Kennicott). Both 𐤁 and 𐤁 lack it. Since אֵם כִּי and כִּי אַמְנֵם are so similar, we consider the appearance of אֵם as a case of accidental duplication. Sasson thinks it might have been transposed from the verse below (*'im-yiḡ'ālēk*). Whatever the case, our belief reflects the consensus of the scholastic field and the agreement of virtually every English translator. If אֵם were intentional, it is difficult to make sense of it. Staples provides one of the only arguments for keeping אֵם. First, he severs אֵם כִּי from אַמְנֵם. Then he reads כִּי as an independent asseverative (really) while taking אֵם as a negative particle (not). The result is a statement from Boaz in which he denies his status as a restorer: “I am really not [your] *go'el*.” Staples reads the text this way because he denies that there could be more than one eligible restorer. To validate his point, he must go to extraordinary lengths to explain why 2:20 does not say “one of our restorers.” Obviously, we do not agree with him. We believe Bush (WBC) is right when he says “The potential redeemer could just as well be called a redeemer as the actual one.”

**a restorer [am] I** — Note that the predicate is fronted for emphasis (“a restorer [am] I,” not “I [am] a restorer”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**however** — We interpret the *waw* as adversative (but/yet/however/nevertheless).

**a restorer closer than I** — This rendering follows the division of the text according to the Masoretic accentuation: יֵשׁ גָּאֵל (there is a restorer) קְרִיב מִמֶּנִּי (closer than I). If one disregarded the accentuation, the text could be rendered “there is a closer restorer than I.” In this phrase, *min* occurs with קְרִיב to give a comparative sense (closer than). It does not, in any way, mean “next to [follow],” which is how Staples would interpret it. For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

3:13 **Stay the night** — Whereas, in 1:16, Ruth declares that she will “stay the night” where No'omi stays the night, she is now told to “stay the night” with Boaz. The statement here is no more sexual than the one spoken to No'omi. It means that Ruth must place herself under Boaz's authority now instead of No'omi's.

**Then, at first light,** — Or “Then, in the morning.” This is traditionally rendered “And it shall be in the morning.” Since, however, וַהֲיָיָה functions as a temporal scene-setter, there is no need for such verbosity. One may render it simply as “then” (as in NJPST, NET, and AAT). Numerous translations disregard it entirely (NRSV, ESV, LEB, etc.). If one absolutely had to represent the verbal form, NASB (when morning comes) and the more literal rendering of Fenton (when the morning comes) are good alternatives. Far more important, however, is the fact that alliteration is woven into Boaz's speech as part of his characterization: *hallaylâ wehāyâ* (rapid repetition of [h], [y], and long-a). By shifting “in the morning” to “at first light,” we can mimic that alliteration with “night” and “light.”

**if he restores you** — Some translations represent the text here with expressions like “agree to” (NET), “wants to” (HCSB), “wishes to” (NAB), or “is willing to” (NLT). See JM §113n. It is certainly possible to interpret prefix verbs in this manner. Just two words after this statement, Boaz uses the verb חָפֵץ followed by an infinitive of גָּאֵל to indicate that precise nuance. Since he does not use that language here, however, we stick with a shorter rendering that reflects the economy of his own speech. For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**great!** — Or “good/very well/fine.” Some prefer to read טוֹב as a finite verb (it is good), which, though awkward, is certainly possible. The semantic difference between the verbal statement and the adjectival exclamation is negligible. ־, however, clearly did not view it as a verb. The only interpretation that seems improbable is טוֹב as an adverb: “if he restores you well.”

**Let him!** — Literally, “Let him restore.” We have elided the final part of the verb in order to mimic its compact nature.

**But** — We interpret this *waw* as adversative.

**does not want to restore you** — Unlike the previous part of the verse, Boaz uses the verb חָפֵץ followed by an infinitive of גָּאֵל, which gives it the nuance “to wish/want/be willing/be pleased to restore” (see **if he restores you** above). For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**then I, myself, will restore you** — וַגָּאֵל־תִּי is an inverted perfect (*w-qatalî*, not *w-qatalîti*). The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (literally, “I will restore you”). Since, however, the inverted verb introduces the apodosis of a conditional statement (the “then” part of an “if-then” statement), we insert “then.” The text also includes an independent pronoun (אֲנִי) in order to provide emphasis to the verbal statement. Literally, “I will restore you—I!” We mimic that emphasis by repeating the pronoun (I myself). For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**[By] the life of YHWH, [I swear it]!** — The phrase “[by] the life of X” is the most common formal marker of an oath statement in the HB. It is part of a speech act (see Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*) consisting of two parts: a “force indicator,” which describes the kind of act being performed by the speech, and a “propositional indicator,” which gives the content

of the oath (see Searle's *Speech Acts*). The phrase “[by] the life of X” functions as the force indicator. It invokes the name of someone important to stand as a witness to the utterance. Since YHWH was the highest or most important deity within the religious perspective of ancient Israel, there can be no one greater to invoke than him. In other words, Boaz is making a very strong oath statement. To represent that fact, we insert the phrase “I swear it.” So does Sasson. ט does something very similar: אִמְרִית בְּשִׁבּוּעָה קֶדֶם יי (I say with an oath before YHWH). Many translations prefer a less literal or more idiomatic rendering like “as YHWH lives.” Renderings like “as surely as YHWH lives” (NIV and NET) or “Jehovah liveth” (YLT) change the statement from an oath, which calls on a person to stand as a witness, to a statement of fact, which affirms the certainty of something based on an undeniable reality. For an overview of Biblical Hebrew oath expressions, see Conklin's *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*. Since the content of the oath, in this particular case, is not what comes after the force indicator, but what comes before, we must part ways with renderings like that provided by Schipper (As YHWH lives, lie down until the morning!).

**Lie down** — Contrary to some translations, no “now” (HCSB) comes before this verb and no “here” (NET, NIV, and NJB), “there” (NAB), or “with me” (Fenton) follows it.

**the morning** — We represent the definite article (הַבֹּקֶר). Many translations ignore it.

3:14 **So she laid down** — וַתִּשְׁכַּב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, however, the inverted verb introduces the consequential actions of Boaz's instructions. Therefore, we begin the verse with “so.”

**[at] his [lower] coverings** — Or “[at] his legs.” Since this is an accusative of place, we insert “at.” See 3:4. Note that in מ<sup>L</sup> and מ<sup>A</sup> the consonantal text appears singular. The *Qere*, however, takes it as a plural. ט and 2QRuth<sup>b</sup> provide the oldest evidence of the text and both have it as a plural. Since the ending of מְרַגְלָתוֹ can easily be read as a defective form of the plural or a collective singular, we believe that both textual traditions ultimately provide the same information (previously provided in 3:8), but through different orthographic means.

**the morning** — Note the definite article (הַבֹּקֶר). Many translations, however, ignore it.

**but got up** — וַתָּקָם is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, however, we believe the inverted verb introduces an action that stands in a contrastive relationship with the previous action. Therefore, we insert “but.” Some prefer a consecutive sense (and).

**[at] break of day before** — The *Ketiv* in both מ<sup>L</sup> and מ<sup>A</sup> contains an anomalous word: טָרוֹם. The *Qere*, however, reads it as the old and familiar טָרָם (before). Kennicott shows numerous manuscripts with טָרָם instead of טָרוֹם (ט also presumes it), yet all of them may be “correcting” the text or smoothing over a textual difficulty. Scholars and translators seem to follow the *Qere* because they can make no sense of the text as it is. Bush (WBC), for instance, says “The K form בַּטָּרוֹם, . . . is inexplicable and doubtless erroneous.” Holmstedt says “There is no good explanation for the ט.” Schipper (AYB) disregards it as a “misspelling.” Yet none of these remarks explain the text before us. And it may be the case that, as Wright

believes (and in agreement with one of the foremost guidelines of Textual Criticism), “The more difficult reading is certainly to be preferred.” The question, then, is whether any of the other versions can shed light on the problem. **Ⲯ** says **בְּקִרְצָתָא עֲד־לָא** (at dawn before). **Ⲯ** appears to be representing two different words: “morning/dawn” and “before.” If “before” represents **בְּטָרָם**, then “morning/dawn” probably represents **בְּטָרוֹם**. The question, then, is whether there is any word in Hebrew like **בְּטָרוֹם** meaning “morning.” Consider the peculiar instance of **בְּתָרוֹן** in 2 Sam 2:29. Though translations are divided on their interpretation, they usually take **בְּתָרוֹן** either from **בְּתַר־** (to divide/break apart) or **תְּרַה־** (to be fresh/raw). If one follows the first, it may be interpreted as a temporal division (a period of day) or a geographic division (a ravine/gorge). If one follows the second, it may be interpreted as the “fresh” or “new” period of the day (dawn/morning). Note the similarities between **בְּתָרוֹן** and **בְּטָרוֹם**. One has **ט**, the other **ת**, yet both sound identical (both are alveolar voiceless plosives) and, therefore, could be interchanged accidentally. One ends with **-ōm**, the other **-ōn**, but either could be mistaken for the other through mispronunciation or the mishearing of a copyist. If both were altered, the result would be **בְּטָרוֹם בְּטָרָם**. It is not difficult to imagine that a scribe reading such a text could consider one or the other erroneous and that manuscript traditions and oral readings might develop that favored one over the other as well. The result would be a mix of traditions with only one word represented graphically. Such is our present situation. It is possible, however, that what appears in **Ⲯ** is a purposely created deviation. The question, then, is whether there is any other evidence that agrees with **Ⲯ**. **Ⲫ** says “in the morning, while [still] dark, before.” Thus, we have two ancient Semitic textual traditions that read the Hebrew text with one word that means “before” and one that refers to “morning.” We suggest that the word for “morning” was **בְּתָרוֹן**, but utilized as a dative (thus, we insert “at”). Hesitant to pick sides when it comes to the meaning of **בְּתָרוֹן**, we choose the phrase “break of day” (that period of “division” between dark and light that begins a “fresh/new” day), which limits us to neither. A few English translations seem to follow us in our use of one expression meaning “before” and one referring to the time of morning. Note, for example, CEV (before daylight), REB (before it was light enough), NJB (before the hour), and GW (early before). The meaning and function of **טָרָם** has been analyzed well by Hatav (“The Modal Nature of **טָרָם** in Biblical Hebrew”). It is a modal particle, which, when prefixed with *bet*, modifies a verbal clause by locating its action within a possible point of time “before” that verbal action. Thus, it is best rendered “before.”

**one [person] could identify another** — Since the verb **נִכַּר** is used specifically in Ruth with reference to identity (whether Ruth is treated as or perceived to be an insider or outsider) we render it here as “to identify.” See 2:10. As for the particular linguistic sense of the *yiqtol*, it functions as a modal verb signifying possibility. Thus, we include “could.” For the expression “a man X his fellow/neighbor,” see section C1.

**He thought** — Literally, “he said.” What follows, however, is not what Boaz “said,” but what he “thought” (interior monologue). **וַיֹּאמֶר** (he said) is the elided version of the longer expression

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ “he said in his mind” or “he said to himself.” Virtually all scholars and commentators agree. Some English translations believe that the inverted verb is explanative (it explains the reason for Ruth's actions). Therefore, they begin the verb with “for/because” (see, for instance, NRSV, NJPST, and ASV). If that were the case, however, Boaz would have said “It must not be known that *you* entered,” not “It must not be known that *this woman* entered.” In order to explain how Boaz could speak to Ruth while not addressing her directly, **ⲧ** altered the text so that he was speaking to “his young men.” **Ⲥ** altered the text so that Ruth was speaking to Boaz. **Ⲯ** dropped “this woman” and had Boaz address Ruth directly. The need for such deviations stands as a clear witness of the interpretive error. **Ⲗ** supports the Hebrew.

**It must not be known** — The same verb in the Niphal stem is used as an imperative by No'omi in 3:3. Here, however, the verb is a modal *yiqtol*. Though *yiqtol*s can function as imperatives, we know that that is not the case here because Boaz speaks *about* Ruth (this woman), not *to* Ruth (you). Therefore, we insert “must” (alternatively, “should”). See note above.

**that** — This **כִּי** is a complementizer for the previous verb. See 3:11.

**this woman** — Literally, “the woman.” Our use of “this” communicates the same definiteness. **Ⲗ** drops the article (*a* woman). Numerous translations do likewise (KJV, HCSB, NIV, etc.). The preference for an indefinite noun probably arises out of a desire to harmonize this verse with 3:8. Thus, the article should be retained. The Bishops' bible (*any* woman) makes the text more emphatic. 2QRuth<sup>b</sup> lacks הָאִשָּׁה (probably due to haplography), yet the internal nature of the “utterance” is still evident in the use of the third-person verb (she entered).

**the threshing-floor** — **Ⲯ** says “here” (*huc*)—an obvious accommodation to its other alterations. **Ⲗ**, **ⲧ**, and 2QRuth<sup>b</sup> support **ⲙ̅ⲗ̅**. Again, Fenton renders this “barn” (see 3:2).

3:15 **So he said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, since we believe the inverted verb introduces Boaz's consequential acts as spurred on by his thoughts, we begin the verse with “so.” Some translations, which take the last וַיֹּאמֶר as a reference to actual speech instead of internal monologue, run into the problem of a jarring disconnect between what Boaz said before and what he says now. Thus, they insert “also” or “again” as if dealing with a phantom **גַּם** or **עוֹד**. Such use of the inverted verb is highly abnormal, if not entirely dubious. Most translations treat this verb as consecutive to the previous one by inserting “and” or “then.” Some insert Ruth as the object of the verb (see HCSB and NAB). We view such insertions as unnecessary.

**Bring** — As aptly described by Martín-Contreras (“Masoretic and Rabbinic Lights on the Word **הָבִי**, Ruth 3:15—**יָהֵב** or **בִּוֵּא**?), even though grammarians typically describe **הָבִי** as a 2FS imperative of **יָהֵב**, ancient Jewish tradition as preserved by the Masoretes and in Rabbinic texts unanimously describe it as a 2MS imperative of **בִּוֵּא**, but written in the Hiphil stem with defective *aleph*. Thus, all strands of ancient Jewish tradition agree that **הָבִי** (come here/give) actually stands for **הָבִיא** (bring [here]). The normal feminine form of the Hiphil imperative would be **הָבִיִּאָה**, but neither Masoretic nor Rabbinic tradition had an issue with the discrepancy. Ruth Rabbah 7:2, however, does provide an explanation for the gender

difference: **היה מדבר עמה בלשון זכר שלא ירגיש בו בריה**, “He was speaking to her with masculine pronunciation so that no person would rush to him” (i.e., so as not to make anyone nearby think, upon hearing his words, that a woman was at the threshing-floor). We find that explanation highly unlikely considering the fact that Boaz uses another imperative that is clearly feminine (grip it) only a few words later. Most English translations actually treat the verb as though it were a Hiphil of **בוא**. They seem to be influenced by **Θ**'s φερω (to bring/fetch/carry over). Thus, **Θ** supports both the Masoretic and Rabbinic traditions. Only a few follow modern grammarians (NASB, NJB, YLT, and Alter). Some translate it very loosely with renderings like “take off” (NAB), “take” (REB), or “hold out” (NET).

**apron** — The precise identification of **מטפחת** is unknown. The word appears twice in the HB (here and Isa 3:22). We agree with Bush's (WBC) assessment that since “the items mentioned [in Isaiah] include none of the terms for ordinary garments or clothing in general . . . , it seems most unlikely that **מטפחת** is a synonym of **שמלה** and simply refers to the same garment mentioned in 3:3.” **ט** and **ס** render **מטפחת** as “cloak,” but it is difficult to judge whether either of them understood the term. **מטפחת** is derived from **טפח** “to spread/flatten out.” The verbal form occurs once in the HB (Isa 48:13), where it conveys that sense. The nominal forms refer to a “hand-width” or “span”—the length of an “outspread” or “flattened” hand. If the verb and nominal forms are any indication, **מטפחת** probably refers to a garment that can spread out or flatten. It could refer to something worn over the head and neck, draped over the shoulders, or wrapped around the waist. The **מטפחת** is not a “veil” (KJV); that is **צעיף** (Gen 24:65; 38:14, 19). It could be a shawl. **Θ** rendered it περιζωμα, meaning “waist-cloth.” The same Greek term is used to describe what Adam and Eve wrap around their waist in Gen 3:7. There, however, the Hebrew word is **חגורה**. There is, therefore, some difference between a **מטפחת** and a “waist-cloth.” **σ** rendered it σινδονιον, the Greek word for **סדינים** (linen clothes). Since **סדינים** occurs in Isa 3:23, right after it already mentioned **מטפחת**, **σ** is probably substituting a different word for it (to create continuity between the tale of the “valorous woman” Ruth and the “valorous woman” in Prov 31:24, who makes and sells **סדין**). Based on the appearance of **מטפחת** among a list of garments that were not necessary for mere covering (Isa 3:22), and assuming that **Θ**'s rendering accurately reflects the place on the body where the **מטפחת** was prominent, we believe the word probably refers to something like an “apron”—a skirted garment worn over one's ordinary dress, but primarily adorning the front, that, when held out from the belly or “outspread,” could be used to collect and carry things like grain. Interestingly enough, the original 1611 KJV placed a note in the margin where it gave two alternatives for this word—one of which was “apron.”

**that you [have] on** — Literally, “that [is] on you.”

**and grip it** — Or “and hold it [tight].” Contrary to numerous translations (NRSV, NIV, ESV, etc.), the verb **אחז** does not mean “hold out/extend.” Note that, unlike the next verb, **ואחזי** is an imperative with coordinating conjunction. Thus, we use “and.”

**She gripped it.** — Or “She held it [tight].” See note above. וַתִּשְׁחָזֵק is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place “and” before it.

**He measured [and] placed upon it six [shares] of barley** — Literally, “He measured six of barley [and] placed upon it.” Numerous things are worth mentioning here. First, וַיִּמַּד is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place “and” before the verb. Second, מִדָּר does not mean “to shovel” (HCSB), “pour” (NIV), “put” (NJB), or “fill” (CEV). It means “to measure,” “mete out,” or “weigh.” Third, 2QRuth<sup>b</sup> says “He measured *there*.” The appearance of שָׁם is, however, anomalous. 6, 7, and 8 support מִן. Fourth, וַיִּשֶׁת is also an inverted verb. Since, however, we read it as consecutive, we insert “and.” Fifth, whatever amount “six” refers to is not stated. The term of measure was probably well-known to the text's original audience and, thus, elided (for more instances of barley measure elision, see 2 Kgs 7:1, 16, 18), but that detail is now lost to us. Therefore, we prefer something ambiguous like “measures” (S), “shares” (Alter), or “units” (Schipper) over completely arbitrary renderings like “ephahs” (NKJV), “pounds” (NET), “pecks” (Moffatt), “omers” (AAT), or “seahs” (7). Sixth, the feminine pronominal suffix in עֲלֶיהָ has two possible referents: Ruth (her) or the apron (it). Since each of the previous two feminine pronominal suffixes referred to the apron, and there is no indication that the suffix switched referents, we believe the suffix refers to the apron. Holmstedt agrees: “The 3fs suffix . . . could refer to Ruth but more likely it refers to her מטפחת since that is her means of transporting the grain.”

**then [he] went into** — וַיֵּכֵן is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, however, we interpret the inverted verb as having a consecutive sense in relation to the previous action. Therefore, we insert “then.” Note that וַיֵּכֵן is a masculine verb. The feminine would be וַתֵּכֵן (see the start of v. 16). Thus, the text says “he” went in, not “she” went in. This reading is supported by our oldest and best Hebrew manuscripts, including the Hebrew in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rabbinic Bible (used by the translators of the KJV):

וַיֵּכֵן<sup>A</sup> = וַיֵּכֵן הָעִיר  
וַיֵּכֵן<sup>L</sup> = וַיֵּכֵן הָעִיר  
וַיֵּכֵן = וַיֵּכֵן הָעִיר

The Aramaic translation (7), utilized by Jews for at least the last 1,200 years, made the male referent undeniable by inserting the name “Boaz.” The midrash on Ruth, which goes back 1,500 years, had this to say (7:2): וַיָּבֵא הָעִיר אֶלָּא מִלְּמַד שֶׁהָיָה מִהַלֵּךְ עִמָּה (What it says [is] “he entered the town.” This teaches that he was walking with her so that none of the young men would attack her.). The text in 6 goes back at least as far as the first century AD. It begins the next verse with “And Ruth entered.” The name “Ruth” is not present in the Hebrew of the next verse. By inserting Ruth's name, 6 made it clear that this verb has a new subject, which means, of course, that the previous verb

was not speaking about Ruth. It's for good reason, therefore, that the 1611 KJV rendered this "he," not "she": **he went into the city**. At some point in time, however, the Hebrew text was corrupted so that some manuscripts, clearly deviating from the text as it was known both textually and orally throughout Jewish tradition, began to display the feminine form of the verb instead of the masculine form. Jerome reproduced that error in his Latin translation. English translations based on it perpetuate that error. Thus, Wycliffe's bible (1395) reads "she." Contrary to the 1611 KJV, both the Bishops' and Geneva bibles went with "she." At some point, the KJV was changed so that now, even in the "Pure Cambridge Edition," the KJV says "she." English translations that continue to propagate that deviation include NASB, ESV, and LEB. As aptly stated by Sasson, were we to follow the feminine form of the verb, "our text would display an obvious redundancy, since \**wattābō*' would end verse 15 and begin verse 16."

**the town** — Note the definite article (הַעִיר). Some translations ignore it (NET, NIV, ISV, etc.).

For our use of עִיר as "town," see 2:18.

3:16 **She went in** — Unlike the previous verb, which was masculine (וַיָּבֹא), this verb (וַתֵּבֹא) is feminine. The feminine here parallels the masculine there. Boaz "went in" to speak with the town elders (male authority figures). Ruth "went in" to speak with her elderly mother-in-law (female authority figure). Note that this verb is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Those translations that interpret this verb as consecutive with the previous one (or are reacting to the presence of a *waw* regardless of its verbal function) insert "and." Several read it in a temporal relation to the next verb and, therefore, insert "when." Geneva, KJV, and many of their offshoots insert both.

**who said** — Literally, "She said." וַתֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb.

**How [are] you?** — Typically, מִי־אַתָּה would mean "who [are] you?" Such a rendering, however, makes no sense. If No'omi really were asking "Who [are] you?", a very differently reply would appear (as in 3:19, where Ruth answers "I [am] Ruth"). Note also the use of "my daughter," which No'omi typically uses when speaking to Ruth. Thus, she must have identified her the moment she entered. Hubbard's (NICOT) words are apt: "Who else but Ruth would Naomi expect at this early hour?" In contrast, when Boaz uses the same interrogative in 3:19 (מִי־אַתָּה), since he does not know Ruth's identity, he does not say "my daughter." Though מִי characteristically means "who," it also has the semantic nuance of "what" (as in Deut 3:24) and "how" (as in Amos 7:2, 5). In this case, the sense is "How [are] you?" Joüon prefers "What state are you in?" Montgomery ("Notes on Amos") points to the phrase מַאי (or מִי) in Rabbinic Hebrew, meaning "what/how," as, perhaps, an offshoot of this earlier expression (see also Jastrow). 2QRuth<sup>b</sup> reads מַה instead of מִי, but that may represent an updating of the text to its more usual form. Schipper (AYB) reads the text as "Whose are you?" (i.e., "To whom do you [now] belong?"). Holmstedt does similarly: "Are you still Ruth as I know you, or are you Ruth as Boaz' betrothed?". To make that kind of statement, however, one would expect a phrase like the one in 2:5 (לְמִי אַתָּה). The willingness of



interpreters to read the text in such a manner is motivated by the belief that Ruth had proposed to Boaz—a situation that, as we have shown (section B2), has no support.

**She affirmed to her every [way] that the man had conducted [himself] on her behalf** —

This verse not only reuses many of the same words from 2:19, but follows the same structure or arrangement:

2:19 | ותגד לחמותה את אשר-עשתה עמו

3:16 | ותגד-לה את כל-אשר עשה-לה

The differences are slight. Instead of “her mother-in-law,” this is “her.” Instead of “the one,” this is “the man.” Instead of “in whose [keep],” this is “on her behalf” (or “for her”). Instead of the feminine form of עשה, the masculine appears. The only word here that has nothing corresponding to it in 2:19 is כל. Thus, we utilize the same renderings here as in 2:19.

3:17 **These six [shares] of barley, he gave to me** — For our rendering “six [shares] of barley,” see notes on 3:15. Note that the object has been fronted before the verb for emphasis (These six [shares] he gave to me,” not “He gave to me these six [shares]”). Surprisingly, a great many translations represent that emphasis. For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10.

**she said,** — Hebrew narrative typically places such indicators at the front of spoken statements.

To make it flow better in English, we have shifted it to the middle. ותאמר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded waw is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” before the verb.

**when he stated** — Ever since Geneva, any English translation that represents the כי renders it as casual (for/because), yet the result is nonsensical. One does not tell someone to do something and then, as a result of their statement, proceed, themselves, to act. Rather, one tells someone to do something and then, as a result of their statement, the person they ordered proceeds to act. Therefore, we believe this כי is better represented by a temporal rendering. It explains the purpose behind Boaz's act of giving Ruth barley instead of saying that Boaz gave Ruth barley *because* he commanded her to not go away with nothing. As noted by Muilenburg, כי only has a temporal function when it begins a sentence or clause, which is precisely the case here. Thus, our interpretation fits the narrow circumstances in which that nuance is operative. Some have proposed that the verb indicates interior monologue (as, for instance, in 3:14). In other words, Ruth would be telling No'omi what Boaz had *thought*, not what he had *said*. Given the imperative nature of the next verb, however, we cannot agree. Note that the Qere reads “he stated to me” (אמר אלי). Both ט and ט agree. Numerous English translations include that phrase as well. Since we have already seen a tendency among scribes to insert the phrase elsewhere (3:5, 11), the appearance of “to me” is easily explained as a harmonization with כי-אמר אלי in 2:21. We follow the Ketiv, which is supported by ט.

**Do not go in** — Negative commands take the form of imperfects. The fact that this imperfect functions as an imperative is signaled by the use of אל. If the scribes wanted to express the idea that something “will not” be done (as in Campbell), “should not” be done (as in

Schipper), or “must not” be done (as in NJB, RSV, ESV, etc.), **לֹא** would be used instead (see 3:18). Thus, all those renderings should be rejected. Note that, contrary to many translations, the verb here is **בִּיאָ** (to enter/go in/come to/arrive [at]), not **שׁוּב** (to go back/return).

**with nothing** — The use of **רִיקָם** recalls No'omi's statement in 1:21, where the death of No'omi's husband and offspring left her “with nothing.” Here, the negation of **רִיקָם** symbolizes Boaz's intent not only to provide for Ruth, but to furnish No'omi with an heir through his “seed.” If we are correct that the **מִטְפַּחַת** is some kind of garment worn around the waist and bulging with its contents from Ruth's front (see 3:15), this would only enhance the symbolic picture of more offspring coming to No'omi's family through Ruth. Thus, the reuse of **רִיקָם** signals high literary art. To show the connection between the end of the first and third acts by use of **רִיקָם**, we render both instances the same.

3:18 **Stay here, daughter dear** — Literally, “Stay/Wait/Sit, my daughter.” Since, however, **שְׁבִי בְּתִי** rings with such tight alliteration, we feel it is necessary to represent that word-play in English. **she said,** — Hebrew narrative typically places such indicators at the front of spoken statements. To make it flow better in English, however, we shifted its placement. **וְתֹאמַר** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” or “then” before the verb.

**till the time** — Literally, “till whenever.” Since No'omi uses the longer expression **עַד אֲשֶׁר** (instead of a simple **עַד**), we mimic that with our rendering “till the time” (instead of “until”). Campbell (AYB) does similarly: “until such time.”

**you know** — Note the use of paragogic or energetic *nun*, which is a marked expression of the non-jussive, non-volitive imperfect (see notes in 2:8). The sense of the statement, therefore, is one of certain, but currently incomplete knowledge (she *will* know).

**how thing[s] fall** — Literally, “how a thing falls.” Though **אֵיךְ** is usually an interrogative (how?), it is also a descriptor telling “how” or “why” something is the way it is (see 2 Kgs 17:28). The verb **נָפַל** means “to drop/fall” and could function as an idiom to describe something “occurring/happening.” Some scholars think it refers to the use of lots. The lot would be tossed and the outcome determined based on how it “fell” (see Ezra 7:20). **וְ** pairs the idea of “how thing[s] fall” with “how it will be decreed from heaven” (Beattie), which makes a divinely ordained outcome explicit. **דְּבַר** is an ambiguous term; it may refer to a “word” (perhaps Boaz's “promise” to restore Ruth), a “matter/affair/situation,” a “deed” (such as the act or process of restoring Ruth), or simply “thing/stuff.” Despite all these possible renderings, virtually all translations give the same rendering here (matter). We prefer “thing,” but treat the indefinite noun as a collective singular (things).

**since** — We interpret this **כִּי** as causal.

**rest** — Or “settle down/relax/be still.” A synonym of **נוּחַ** (Job 3:13) and **שָׁלָה** (Job 3:26). When referring to cities or lands, **שָׁקֵט** often means “uncontentious” (i.e., no longer in conflict).

**unless** — כִּי־אם probably introduces an exception clause (unless/except [that]). See JM §173b.

Alternatively, however, one could interpret it as adversative (but/rather). Some translations (KJV, NASB, NIV, etc.) wrongly treat it as another instance of עַד (until).

**he finishes** — As vocalized by the Masoretes, the verb כָּלָה is a Piel (active and intensifying) as opposed to a Qal. Thus, the sense is not “it is finished” or “he has finished,” but “he *finishes*” or “*gets it done*.” Note also that the form is perfect, not imperfect. Thus, renderings like “he *will finish*” (as in NRSV, ESV, LEB, etc.) must be rejected. The use of the Piel also shows that the subject is “he” as opposed to “it” since an impersonal “thing” or “matter” cannot actively and intensively *do* anything, whereas an impersonal “thing” or “matter” can certainly *be done* (the sense of the Qal). Thus, we must also reject renderings like “the matter is settled” (NIV) or “everything is settled” (CEV). Since we use “finish” for all other renderings of כָּלָה in Ruth (2:21, 23; 3:3), we continue that rendering here.

**this thing** — Since דָּבָר contains a definite article here (but not in its initial appearance in the verse), we communicate that definiteness with “this.” Most translations render both occurrences with a definite article. Some (KJV, HCSB, NASB, etc.) use a completely different word for דָּבָר in both instances even though the word refers to exactly the same “thing.” For דָּבָר as “thing,” see notes above.

4:1 **Now, Boaz** — We interpret this *waw* as introductory—it opens up a new part of the story (see also 2:1). In order to signal that the subject has now switched (from No'omi in the previous verse to Boaz in this one), the typical V-S word-order of Hebrew narrative is subverted by situating Boaz's name before the verb.

**had gone up** — While Bush (WBC) rightly says “The time sequence implied . . . is ambiguous and there is nothing in the immediate context that suggests the specific time relationship between Boaz's ascent to the city gate and Ruth's conversation with Naomi,” it seems natural to us, in light of the fact that the verbs for Boaz going into town and for Ruth going in to her mother-in-law occur almost simultaneously, to assume that Boaz left the threshing-floor at about the same time as Ruth. Furthermore, we as hearers/readers naturally anticipate a temporal continuity between the last statement about Boaz and the one we get next, so that, by the time it arrives (after an interlude involving Ruth and No'omi), our perception of Boaz's activities are situated further back in the past than the events we just heard/read. Thus, we render this verb as a pluperfect.

**[to] the gate** — Since we interpret this phrase as a dative of place, we insert “to.” Several translations (HCSB, NET, NIV, etc.) feel the need to clarify that this is the “city/village/town” gate as opposed to the gate of any other sort of place. We see no need for clarification.

**and stayed** — וַיֵּשֶׁב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, however, since we interpret the verb as consecutive to the previous one, we insert “and.”

**when** — We interpret this *waw* as circumstantial—it describes something new happening (the passage of the restorer) in direct relation to the situation just indicated (Boaz having gone up and stayed at the gate).

**quite suddenly** — For הנה as “quite suddenly,” see notes on 2:4. The same narrative device used to first introduce Boaz is now used to first introduce the restorer.

**the restorer** — Unlike Boaz, who has always been “a” restorer, this person, who is much closer to Elimelek, is awarded the definite article. For נאל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**was passing by** — The immediacy of the action is made evident by the use of an active participle (as marked by the Masoretes). One could, however, read the same consonants as a simple Qal perfect (passed/came by) as in HCSB, NJPST, NET, and others.

**Boaz had mentioned** — In this phrase, we find the subject unnecessarily recapitulated (“Boaz had mentioned” instead of “he had mentioned”). Since this is also unnecessary in English, some translations drop the name (NIV, NJB, NAB, etc.). As before, we interpret the verb as pluperfect to express the idea that something had *already* been done.

**So he said** — ויאמר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, however, since we believe the inverted verb introduces Boaz’s consequential acts as spurred on by the restorer’s arrival, we insert “so.” Strangely, many translations insert the name “Boaz” here so that, within this verse alone, the name is repeated three times (see, for instance, HCSB, NRSV, and NET).

**This way!** — Literally, “Turn!” or “About face!” Since such renderings are awkward, however, we use the phrase “This way!”, which still communicates the sense (a command to turn from one’s course to head in a new direction).

**so-and-so** — פלני אלמני (*pelōnî ’almōnî*) is a wonderfully indeterminate and alliterative phrase —indeterminate in that it withholds rather than provides identification and alliterative in that it repeats multiple sounds ([l], [ō], [n], and [ī]). To capture the alliteration, we render the phrase “so-and-so,” but leave it lower-case to make it clear that this is by no means his name as some Rabbis viewed it (Ruth Rabbah 7:7, for instance, states רבי יהושע אומר פלני שמו, “Rabbi Joshua says, ‘Peloni Almoni [was] his name’”). Whereas the phrase is used here with reference to an indeterminate person, 1 Sam 21:2 and 2 Kgs 6:8 use it with reference to an indeterminate place (such-and-such). Daniel 8:13 seems to conflate the two words into one (פלמני) with a similar sense (whosoever). The point of using the term at all is probably to revoke the restorer’s name and, thus, create a kind of literary justice (since the restorer acted in a way that would have let the name of No’omi’s family perish, his name is left to perish) as well as a fantastic sense of irony (the one person who seemed the most important is not even important enough to be named). In other words, פלני אלמני is a literary circumlocution. Thus, Bush (WBC) is right to say that positive renderings like “friend” (NRSV, NASB, NIV, etc.) or those that state the restorer was called “by name” (HCSB, NAB, REB, etc.) miss the point entirely. NET renders it “John Doe” to convey the sense that this is someone unknown, yet “John Doe” is constructed like a name (פלני is not). ⚡ renders the phrase “[O] man whose ways are hidden.” ⚡ does similarly: “[O] hidden [one].” As noted by numerous scholars, these are interpretations of the phrase based on hypothetical (if not spurious) etymological associations. Actual translations of the phrase are provided by α’ (ο δεῖνα, “some-such person”) and σ’ (οδε τις, “whoever this is”).

**He went that way** — Literally, “He turned.” For our choice of wording, see **This way!** above.

וַיִּסַּר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” before the verb.

**and sat** — וַיֵּשֶׁב is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since, however, we read it in a consecutive sense with the previous verb, we insert “and.” It may be the case, however, that both this and the preceding verb function as a statement in hendiadys: “He sat over there.”

4:2 **Then he fetched** — וַיִּקַּח is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *fetch*ed/took). Since we interpret the inverted verb as having a consecutive sense in relation to the previous action, we insert “then.” Many early English translations insert “and.” Since this action is done by a completely different subject (Boaz) than the previous action (so-and-so), the verb cannot be a continuation of and/or addition to the previous one. It is evident that all those translations are simply reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. The verb לָקַח appears three times in the final chapter of Ruth. In all three places, we render it the same: “to fetch.” Note that numerous English translations insert “Boaz” to differentiate the subject of this verb from the previous one. **G** and **V** do so as well. Since the subject of the verb is logically apparent (so-and-so could not fetch people if he was sitting), we stick with the Hebrew.

**ten men** — The typical syntactic placement and construction for a cardinal number in the absolute state when paired with a masculine plural noun is at the front of the noun and with a feminine singular ending. The number then exists in an appositional relationship with the noun. Literally, therefore, עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים means “ten [ones], men.” Several translations ignore the word “men” in this phrase (NJPST, NET, NJB, etc.). Instead of “men,” Sasson prefers “[leading] citizens” and NLT prefers “leaders.” Since the very next phrase identifies these men as “elders,” we find such explications superfluous.

—**some of the town elders**— — Literally, “some of the elders of the town.” The affixed *mem* is partitive. Note that עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים is not in construct with this one (מִזִּקְנֵי הָעִיר). If that were the case, the text would read עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשֵׁי מִזִּקְנֵי הָעִיר (ten men of the elders of the town). Contrary to virtually all English translations, the phrases are in apposition with each other. Thus, we separate them with em dashes. In place of “elders,” Moffatt has “sheikhs.” Since “sheikh” refers either to the head of an Arab family or the chief of an Arab tribe or village, such a rendering is highly anachronistic.

**and said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, since we interpret the inverted verb as coordinating with the previous verb, we insert “and.”

**They sat.** — וַיֵּשְׁבוּ is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since it is possible to interpret the inverted verb in a resultative sense, one could insert “so” (as in NRSV, NASB, NET, etc.). Many early English translations insert “and.” Since this action is done by a completely different subject (the ten elders) than

the previous action (Boaz), this verb cannot be a continuation of and/or addition to the previous one. It is evident that such translations are simply reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. NAB, AAT, CEV, and others interpret the verb as existing in a temporal relationship with the first verb in the next verse (“*When* they sat, he said” or “*After* they sat, he said”). That interpretation is possible, but it would mean a shift in textual division (moving the *athnach* to הַעִיר, placing the *silluq* under פָּה, and beginning the next verse with וַיֵּשְׁבוּ).

4:3 **He said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since it is possible to interpret the inverted verb in a temporally consecutive sense, one could insert “then” (as in NRSV, NASB, NET, etc.). Many early English translations insert “and.” Since this action is done by a completely different subject (Boaz) than the previous action (the ten elders), this verb cannot be a continuation of and/or addition to the previous one. Such translations are simply reacting to the presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function.

**The part of the field** — This is a reuse of the phrase in 2:3. To produce emphasis, the composer fronted the object (“The part of the field No'omi sold,” not “No'omi sold the part of the field”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. Both ט and טז reflect this. Most English translations ignore it. Contrary to some translations (Geneva, KJV, HCSB, etc.), since חֶלֶקֶת is in construct with a definite noun “the field that is owned by Boaz,” it too is definite, not indefinite (*the* part, not *a* part).

**is owned by** — Or “belongs to.” A *lamed* of possession. Note that, within ancient Israelite tradition, the land was supposed to pass from one generation to another so that it always stayed within the family. If it was sold to someone to raise money or to pay a debt, it was expected (according to Mosaic Law) that the land would return to the family (on the Jubilee) or be restored to the family (through repayment of the debt). Thus, it is not that the land *belonged* to Elimelek (no longer does), but that, because it *belongs* to him, it can be bought back. It certainly may be argued that the reality was quite different—that hardly any property was ever restored to its original owner (many prophetic judgments in the HB assume as much), but the very appeal to a restorer and to patrilineal inheritance shows that the narrative is operating according to that expectation. Thus, any past tense rendering should be rejected.

**clansman** — Like other relational terms, the semantic range of אֶחָיו (typically rendered “brother”) is quite wide. It can refer to someone from the same family, clan, tribe, or country, and, in any of those cases, can indicate someone with or without blood relation. In this case, though Boaz is certainly a “relative,” there is no indication of a direct, sibling relationship. Therefore, we render אֶחָיו as “clansman.”

—**by Elimelek**— Boaz's speech is characteristically wordy. Instead of using “our clansman” as an adjectival modifier (“our clansman Elimelek”), Boaz reuses the *lamed* of possession to place this phrase in apposition with the previous one. Contrary to virtually every English translation, therefore, the text actually says “owned by our clansman—owned by Elimelek.” Through our reuse of “by” and inclusion of em dashes, we duplicate Boaz's verbose style.

**sold** — Contrary to virtually every English translation, מכרה is a Qal perfect meaning “she sold,” not the feminine participle מכרת meaning “she is selling” or the imperfect תכרה, which could convey a modal sense (she *must/has to/wishes to* sell) or a future sense (she *will* sell). 6 renders it as a passive with No'omi as the dative recipient: η δεδοται νοεμιν (which was given to Noemin). Such a rendering reflects the Niphal of מכר, not the Qal, and must be regarded as an intentional alteration. Translations other than THF that actually reflect the verbal form in מ<sup>L</sup> include YLT, NKJV, and Alter. Note that this is not a trivial matter. The very role of “restorer” is bound up in the fact that someone is *in debt*. They have sold one thing to pay for another. The purpose of the restorer is not to buy something that is for sale, but to *pay off the debt*, and, thereby, restore what was sold (see Lev 25:25-8). To render the verb here as either a participle or an imperfect not only conflicts with the text, but makes the need for a restorer—the very point of this chapter—pointless. Some scholars object to the form of the verb on the grounds that, in vv. 5 and 9, Boaz seems to be saying that he or so-and-so is going to buy back the land from No'omi, which would imply that she “is selling” it. While it is perfectly clear what מכרה means, it is not so clear, in vv. 5 and 9, how the phrase מיד נעמי functions. Instead of questioning that which is clear on the basis of that which is not, we proceed on the basis of that which is clear (see v. 5 for our explanation of מיד נעמי). Others object to the form of the verb or its meaning on the grounds that there is no evidence that ancient Israelite women had property rights. To that, we have only to remark that the verb has No'omi as its subject and, as attested everywhere, the verb means “to sell.” Still others believe that, since the first-person perfect is sometimes used in a present sense when it functions as a performative (I hereby do X), this might act similarly. Schipper (AYB) explains it this way: “Naomi’s offer to sell the property is actualized through Boaz’s statement that she is offering it for sale.” The same problem, however, persists: one does not need a restorer simply to buy No'omi’s property—one just needs a buyer. One needs a *restorer* to buy back what has already been sold. Gordis says it well: “Naomi upon her return is completely without means. In view of the death of her two sons, she is the only living heir of Elimelek. As such, she has the right to redeem the alienated property of her husband by repurchasing it from its buyers. However, lacking any resources of her own, she is unable to do so. What she therefore does is to call upon her kinsman to ‘redeem’ the land by repurchasing it from its present owners.” Some people look to Jer 32 as an example of a situation in which a restorer is needed not to buy back property that was already sold, but to circumvent the property’s sale to an outsider by having a close relative buy it. If that situation were occurring here, one would have good reason to read the perfect with a present sense. In this story, however, such an interpretation is improbable for two reasons. First, if No'omi *is selling* property, it means she has had her own resources and, thus, her own means of raising money the whole time Ruth has been acting like a destitute person out in the fields. Why depend on the field of a stranger if you have a field of your own? Again, Gordis says it well: “If Naomi were a landowner, or even the administrator of land, no matter what the circumstances, she would be guilty of greed and deception in sending her foreign-born daughter-in-law to glean in the fields among the poor.” Second, if this was about selling the land to a relative instead of

paying off an already existent debt, whether so-and-so or Boaz raised up an heir through Ruth would make no difference to the restorer because the restorer would still need to be repaid in order for the field to return to its original owner(s). Bush (WBC) agrees: “If the transaction involved is a pre-emption, then the right of possession acquired by the near redeemer would be reimbursable and no voluntary responsibility to raise up an heir for the estate could have threatened his financial situation.” In other words, one is left with no discernible reason why the restorer would change his mind. In the end, it is clear that the argument drawn from Jer 32 has no basis in Ruth and is simply a way, however incoherent, for translators to maintain their interpretation despite what the text says. We'll let Bush have the final word: “The type of redemption involved in Ruth 4 must be redemption proper, i.e, the repurchase of the land of Elimelech from a third party to whom the land was previously sold” (past tense).

—**she who turned away from the country of Moab** — See 1:22. Since this phrase is in apposition with the previous one (מכרה נעמי), we separate it with an em dash.

4:4 **So my aim, I exclaim** — Boaz's discourse is often characterized by alliteration. Sometimes that alliteration is spread out over the course of a long-winded speech (see, for instance, 2:11-12). At other times, it appears in a short and compact phrase (see the start of 3:13). The latter is apparent here: *wa'āmî 'āmarî* (repetition of the guttural *aleph*, duplication of concurrent short-a sounds, and a long-i end-rhyme). To capture that alliteration, we borrow from the modal quality of the following cohortative (to wish/want/hope/aim). Note the unnecessary inclusion of the independent pronoun אני to provide emphasis to the verbal statement, which already contains a subject. Unlike most English translations, THF mimics the Hebrew by duplicating the subject. We then take the *waw* in a resultative sense (so/consequently). Virtually all interpreters believe that אמרתי references interior monologue as opposed to actual speech (I *thought*). That could be the case (for other instances, see 1:12, 3:5, 14). Considering, however, Boaz's “courtroom” setting (bringing another party before witnesses and judges at the gate), any kind of speech is probably more formal and/or juridical, which would explain the emphatic subject duplication by both Boaz and so-and-so. Therefore, we render the verb as “exclaim/pronounce” (a performative perfect). Sasson (I declare), Hubbard (I hereby say), and NET (I am legally informing) do similarly.

**is to implore** — If read as a cohortative, אנלה means, “I aim to uncover.” It is entirely possible, however, that since this verb is a third-*heh* verb, the form reflects a simple indicative (the forms are identical). In that case, the verb would mean “I *will* uncover.” Though we have only intuition to guide us, we think the cohortative makes more sense. The point of using גלה (to uncover) is twofold. First, it links Boaz's action here in the court with Ruth's action on the threshing-floor (3:7). Second, it creates a strong and consistent alliteration with the manifold uses of the verb נאל in this verse. Schipper (AYB) explains it this way: “In 4:4, the word *'eglê* in the clause *'eglê 'ozēnkā* ('I would uncover your ear') . . . creates alliteration with the various verbal forms of the root *g'l* ('to redeem') that occur five times in 4:4.” Since it is difficult, if not impossible, to capture both aspects in translation, one must take precedence. We feel that the link with 3:7 is less important than the way the words function in Boaz's discourse. The vast majority of English translations seem to agree. They consistently render the verb in a way



that alienates it from its usage in 3:7 (note, however, YLT and Rotherham). None of them, however, attempt to mimic the way the verb alliterates with the rest of Boaz's speech. By rendering גלה as "implore," THF brings it into alliteration with every instance of "restore."

**[in] your hearing** — Literally, "your ear." An instance of metonymy.

**'Purchase [it back]!' —** As evident from context, the verbs קנה and גאל function synonymously to describe what Boaz wants the restorer to do. Thus, by using קנה, Boaz is not telling the restorer to purchase something that is for sale, but to purchase something that has already been sold (see previous verse). By doing this, so-and-so will *restore it* to its original owner. HCSB (Buy it back) captures the sense well. We have chosen the rendering "purchase [back]" in order to make the lexical connection between the land in this verse and Ruth in the next as clear as possible; by means of purchasing, both are going to be restored from a state of loss or lack of "seed." Note that, contrary to numerous translations, we do not believe that the content of what Boaz wanted to tell the restorer is "purchase [it back] before those [now] sitting and before the elders of my clan." Rather, "before those [now] sitting and before the elders of my clan" is the context where Boaz wanted to tell the restorer "Purchase [it back]!" Thus, we begin and end the quotation with קנה. Note also the appearance of לאמר. Since לאמר introduces direct speech, it is not necessary to represent it in translation. If one wanted to reflect the text's verbosity, "quote" or "as follows" would work well (see 2:15 and 4:17).

**those [now] sitting** — Or "the sitters." The former represents the participle as a verb. The latter represents it as a substantive. Either is possible.

**and** — It is not clear whether this *waw* is a coordinating conjunction between two groups of people or whether it has an epexegetical sense (that is/namely), in which case it would clarify that, by "those [now] sitting," Boaz meant "the elders." With most interpreters, we think that "those [now] sitting" refers to "all the people" who happen to be there, whereas "the elders" are a more specific group of which the ten are representative. Thus, the *waw* is a simple conjunction. ו treats the groups as two different entities.

**my clan** — For עם as "clan," see section A3.

**If you can restore [it], restore [it]** — The precise nature of the imperfect תגאל is difficult to ascertain. It could have a simple future sense like "if you *will*" (KJV) or "if you *are going to*" (REB) or one of numerous modal senses like "if you *want*" (HCSB), "if you *are willing*" (NJPST), "if you *wish*" (NAB), "if you *intend*" (ISV), "if you *would*" (Alter), or "if you *can*." We prefer the modal sense, which is supported by אם רעותך למפרוק: א (if your will/wish/desire [is] to ransom). See JM §113n. For גאל as "restore," see section A3.

**But** — We interpret this *waw* as adversative.

**if one [such as you] cannot restore [it]** — This particular phrase represents one of several interpretive cruxes in the chapter. According to our earliest and best Hebrew manuscripts (א<sup>L</sup> and א<sup>A</sup>), the verb is a 3MS imperfect (יגאל). The Masoretes point it as a Qal. Literally, therefore, the text reads "if *he* will not restore." But that is quite confounding! Since Boaz is speaking to so-and-so, the second-person form תגאל is expected. Ruth Rabbah 7:9 explains

the discrepancy by saying that, at this particular juncture, Boaz is addressing the elders: **אם- תגאל גאל לגואל אמר ואם-לא יגאל לבית דין אמר** (“If you will restore [it], restore [it].” To the restorer, he speaks. “But if he will not restore [it].” To the courthouse, he speaks.). If we take the text as it is, this explanation seems a likely option. Such sudden shifts, with no explicit reference, are jarring to our sense of narrative continuity, but may not have bothered a pre-Hellenistic audience. Against that, however, is the fact that speakers within Ruth do not make these kind of sudden shifts elsewhere, which would call the one here into question. Other explanations (all quite unlikely) have been advanced. The notes in *BHQ* provide a few: “Saadya in his commentary on Ps 4:4 quotes in the first instance Ruth 4:4 as an authority for his thesis that Hebrew can use the third person for the first and the second or *vice versa*. As additional proof he cites Mic 7:9 and Ps 81:17. Ibn Ezra (par. 120), on the other hand, retaining the third-person, interprets: ‘if no redeemer redeems it.’” It is tempting to consider the text corrupt and simply “correct it” to the second-person. Most late Hebrew manuscripts do so and the versions (**Ⲫ**, **Ⲛ**, **Ⲕ**, and **ⲛ**) support that maneuver. It is no wonder that virtually every English translation simply alters the text and moves on (YLT and Sasson are a few exceptions). Yet, if the second-person form was original, it is difficult to explain how the text could have been altered to the third-person! Instead of altering the consonantal text, it seems wise to find another workaround. One could repoint the same text as a Niphal (**יִגְאֹל**). That particular verbal form occurs in a very similar context in Lev 25:54—the restoration of a “brother” sold into slavery: **ואם-לא יגאל באלה** (but if he is not restored in those [ways]). NJPST and SET reflect that repointing (if it will not be redeemed). While that may solve one problem, it introduces another. Who is the masculine subject? It would have to be “the part of the field belonging to Elimelek.” But that subject (**חלקה**) is feminine! Also, if it were only a matter of pointing the text differently, why didn’t the Masoretes do so? The obvious answer is that the nature of the text was known and respected—even if it didn’t make sense. REB renders the phrase “if not, someone must do it.” This is attractive because it doesn’t require altering the text to the second-person and makes use of a well-known semantic function of the third-person singular: an impersonal reference to “someone.” The problem, however, is that the phrase is unnaturally divided. **לא** does not stand alone; it modifies the verb. Bush, therefore, is right when he calls that “an acceptable rendering of the Hebrew.” In the end, we are forced to do something much like the other translations (use the second-person). The difference, however, is that, instead of altering the text and moving on, we leave the text as it is (using the impersonal reference of the third-person) and put our alteration in brackets to show where the text ends and our fudging begins. For **גאל** as “restore,” see section A3.

**let me know for certain** — This grammatically complex phrase betrays a simple semantic exclamation. A masculine singular imperative with the longer, more dramatic ending (*āh*), is followed by prepositional *lamed* with first-person suffix to declare “Tell me!” What comes next is a *waw*-copulative—a resultative *waw* (so that) affixed to a first-person imperfect (I may know). The *waw*-copulative was specifically chosen (instead of *waw*-consecutive or some other verb without a conjunction) to create a statement of verbal hendiadys. Thus “tell me so that I may know” means something like “Tell me plainly” or “Let me know for certain.”

We use the longer expression to match the length of the Hebrew one. The *Qere* reads the verb as a cohortative, which changes the pronunciation slightly to provide a closer phonetic link with the longer ending of the imperative, but has no real impact on meaning (the regular imperfect form can indicate modality).

**because** — We interpret this כִּי as causal. Some view it as a complementizer of the previous verb: “I know *that*.” If we are correct that the previous two verbs function as a statement of hendiadys, כִּי should not be taken as a complementizer for one of them.

**there is no one to restore [it] except you** — The way this phrase is configured in Hebrew, it looks like it says “there is no one except you to restore it.” But as the very next phrase makes clear, that is not true! To avoid the awkward situation where one thing appears to be said and is then instantly contradicted, we have shifted the word-order slightly. So does ISV (except for you—and I after you—there is no one). For נָאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**“I, myself, can restore [it]”** — The restorer answers a modal question (If you can) with a modal answer (I can), which explains the use of the imperfect. Note the unnecessary inclusion of the independent pronoun אֲנִי to provide emphasis to the verbal statement, which already contains a subject. Considering the “courtroom” setting, any speech here is probably more formal and/or juridical, which would explain the emphatic subject duplication by both so-and-so and Boaz. Unlike virtually every English translation, THF mimics the Hebrew by duplicating the subject. So does 6. For נָאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**he replied.** — Hebrew narrative typically places such indicators at the front of spoken statements. To make it flow better in English, we have shifted its placement. וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” or “then” before the verb.

4:5 **Boaz then said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In this case, since we interpret the inverted verb as having a consecutive sense in relation to the previous action, we insert “then.” Most translations do likewise.

**At the time** — Literally, “On the day.” An idiom meaning “at the time” or “when.” Some translations shorten the expression to “the day.” Curiously, not only does Geneva, Bishops', and KJV ignore the preposition, all three use the pronoun “what” instead of a definite article.

**you purchase** — Literally, “of your purchasing.” The infinitive with suffix functions like a finite verb. In context, קָנָה actually means “to buy back” or “reacquire.” To make the lexical connection between the land and Ruth as clear as possible, however, we have chosen the rendering “purchase.” See 4:4.

**the field [debt]** — Literally, “of the field.” הַשְּׂדֵה functions as a metonym for the debt that No'omi owes on the portion of the field that was sold. In this case, we are never told when the portion of the field was sold—only that it was. Thus, unless the debt is paid off (something No'omi would be unable to do), the field would never return to her.

**held by No'omi** — Literally, “out of the hand of No'omi.” The preposition *min* relates to transfer or removal. The property was sold at some unspecified point (either to raise money for the move to and resettlement in Moab or to have money when they returned). Now No'omi is a debt-holder. Boaz wants the restorer to pay off the debt on the field and, thus, take it “out of No'omi's hand.”

**so [al]so Ruth the Moabite** — וּמֵאֵת רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה looks like a conjunction attached to the word מֵאֵת followed by the phrase “Ruth the Moabite.” Like prepositional *min*, מֵאֵת often indicates motion “out of” or “away from” something. Also like *min*, מֵאֵת can indicate the cause of something (in 2 Sam 3:37, מֵהַמֶּלֶךְ means “on account of/because of the king”) or the origin of something (Genesis 19:24 says וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת יְהוָה, meaning “sulfuric fire by YHWH”). Thus, the verse seems to say “At the time you purchase the field [debt] held by No'omi *and by Ruth the Moabite*, I do hereby purchase.” That reading is supported by 𐤔 and 𐤕. The problem, however, is that there is no object for the next verb (and, thus, nothing for Boaz to be purchasing)! To get around this, 𐤔 inserts one (even her you must purchase). 𐤕 also makes Ruth the object of the verb. NIV takes “the deceased's wife” as the object. Considering, however, that Boaz already made extensive use of appositional phrases (v. 4) as well as the high frequency of appositional phrases within this particular section (the narrator in vv. 1 and 2 and so-and-so in v. 6), there is every reason to believe that “the deceased's wife” is in apposition with “Ruth the Moabite” (note the almost identical expression in v. 10: “Ruth the Moabite, Machlon's wife”). Thus, רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה must be the object. While one could take אֵת as an object marker and *waw* as a resultative conjunction, an explanation for the *mem* is still needed. When examining the parallel phrase in v. 10 (וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה), “Furthermore, Ruth the Moabite”), the similarity between וְגַם אֵת and וּמֵאֵת becomes apparent. If one momentarily overlooks the textual division, the only difference is the *gimel*. We propose, therefore, that וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה originally appeared in this verse. At some point, the *gimel* and *waw* were either confused or merged, which left a dangling *mem*. To make sense of the text, the *mem* was attached to אֵת. Thus, גַּם disappeared and מֵאֵת took its place. By inserting “also/even” into their renderings, it is evident that most translators agree with our analysis. THF is, however, the only one that shows that reconstruction in its rendering: “[al]so.” Though 𐤕 includes the word “also” (*quoque*), it is difficult to tell whether 𐤕 is inserting the word to make sense of the text or represents an actual Hebrew variant. Note that, due to a change in object (from “the field” to “Ruth the Moabite”), the new object has been fronted (“Ruth the Moabite do I hereby purchase,” not “I hereby purchase Ruth the Moabite”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. Since Ruth's gender is obvious, we feel no need to render this “Ruth the Moabiteess.”

**the deceased** — Or “the dead one.” A singular substantive participle with definite article. For the plural, see 1:8. Moffatt provides an amusing rendering when he turns “wife” into “widow” and abandons the definite article: “the widow of a dead man.” What other widows might Moffatt be expecting? The widow of a *living* man?

**do I hereby purchase** — The *Ketiv* (קניית) clearly indicates the first-person perfect. The *Qere*, however, treats it as a second-person perfect (קניית). Both ט and ט use the second-person. Virtually no English translation (other than REB) follows the written text; they all prefer the second-person. Numerous translations also change the form from a perfect to an imperfect with future renderings like “you *will*” (HCSB) or modal renderings like “you *must*” (NASB). The first-person perfect is, however, the superior reading. On the one hand, as noted by Beattie (“Kethibh and Qere in Ruth IV 5”), “No satisfying explanation as to how an original *qānîṭā* could have come to be written *qānîṭi* has ever been offered.” The only way that shift could have occurred is through the influence of the verb form in vv. 9-10. Yet the endings are so different, it is improbable that anyone vaguely aware of a text that said “*you purchase*” could have written “*I purchase*” and not recognize the mistake. On the other hand, there is every reason for scribes to alter this verb to the second-person so that it harmonizes with the previous verb (as every English translation does). Ultimately, the written text actually makes more sense than the alteration. There is nothing in the HB that states or implies that one who restores property is thereby obligated to provide an heir to the wife of the deceased. If there were such an obligation, it is inconceivable that so-and-so would be aware of the one, but not the other, and, thus, no reason why Boaz's follow-up statement should cause him to change his mind. Beattie says it well: “The redeemer's change of mind is intelligible only if Boaz's second demand involved something which he did not anticipate when he declared his intention of exercising his right of redemption.” By altering the text to deal with one perceived conundrum, translators actually introduce two even bigger conundrums. If, however, the verb is a first-person performative perfect (I hereby purchase), everything makes sense. Boaz is formerly stating his decision to restore the property to the family of Elimelek through Ruth, which means the restorer will end up losing what he purchased (it will go to the heir). The same will not happen to Boaz, however, because the heir will be his son. When the restorer realizes this, he changes his mind and passes his right of restoration to Boaz. Unlike virtually every English translation, therefore, THF follows the totally intelligible written text.

**in order to re-establish the name of the deceased on his inheritance** — In this phrase, the *lamed* expresses purpose (in order to) and the Hiphil infinitive means “to set up” or “re-establish.” The word “name” refers here to the property rights of the deceased. Bush (WBC) provides a wonderful summary of the semantic nuances of שֵׁם: “Name, . . . is not being used in its literal sense but rather in that dynamic sense in which it is the embodiment of the deeds and achievements, the substance (property, goods, assets), and the renown, honor, and reputation of a person.” Taken as a whole, this phrase refers to the restoration of property to its original owner (the family of Elimelek). It is a roundabout way of saying that Boaz intends to father an heir to the property through Ruth. It's no wonder that NAB would render this “raise up a family for the departed on his estate” and NET would provide the extremely lengthy rendering “in order to preserve his family name by raising up a descendant who will inherit his property.” The reason Boaz speaks in this particular way instead of saying he will raise up “offspring” (as in Gen 38:8) is because he wants to point out to so-and-so that if so-and-so buys back the land, he will lose it once the claim on the inheritance is restored. Boaz does not offer so-and-so the opportunity to purchase Ruth (see **do I hereby purchase**).

He begins and ends his deal-making only with the land. By keeping events with the restorer focused on the land and its restoration, Boaz cleverly keeps the restoration of Ruth close to himself. Because his actions go unattested, Boaz succeeds in becoming Ruth's restorer.

4:6 **The restorer replied** — Literally, “The restorer said.” וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since it is possible to interpret the inverted verb in a temporally consecutive sense, one could insert “then” (as in RSV, ESV, NJB, etc.). Many early English translations insert “and.” Since this action is done by a completely different subject (the restorer) than the previous action (Boaz), this verb cannot be a continuation of and/or addition to the previous one. It is evident that such translations are simply reacting to the mere presence of *waw* regardless of its verbal function. For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**I am unable to restore [it]** — Literally, “I am not able to restore.” As vocalized by the Masoretes, אֵיכָל looks like a Hophal. Yet there is no Hiphil of this root and a causative passive (I have been made unable to restore) makes no sense. Whatever its origins, it is better to read it as a simple stative verb (see JM §75i). For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**for my [sake]** — We interpret this *lamed* as one of advantage or interest. JM §133d describes it this way: “From a grammatical point of view one must note the ל of the *dativus commodi* (and *incomodi*), which expresses *for* whom, *to* whose *advantage* (or *disadvantage*) something is done. . . . The ל of the *dativus commodi* is used in a very particular way with the pronoun of the **same person** as that of the verb” (italics and bold original). We interpret it this way because, in context, so-and-so is clearly stating that it would be disadvantageous for him to restore the field. Alternatively, however, one could take it as an ethical dative—a colloquial use of *lamed* that focuses the sense of the verb back on its subject: “I will not be able, *myself*, to restore it.” See GKC §119s or IBHS §11.2.10d.

**otherwise I could ruin** — Note that, contrary to some translations, כֵּן is a particle of negative consequence (so that X not/in case X not/otherwise), not a causal particle (for/because). Since “lest” is no longer used in English, we avoid that rendering. The imperfect verb אֲשַׁחֵת reflects an irreal modal situation (if so-and-so restored the land, *he would/might/could ruin* his inheritance). Thus, we render it as a modal. Renderings like NRSV (without damaging) and NJB (without jeopardizing) reflect a different phrase consisting of the infinitive and its typical particle of negation: לִבְלֹתִי הַשְׁחִית. The precise sense that שָׁחַת carries here is difficult to know for certain. Some believe it has a subtle sense like “harm” or “injure.” Others think it was used for rhetorical effect as an overstatement/exaggeration. If so, a more intense rendering like “destroy” or “decimate” would be fitting. To straddle the ambiguity, we use “ruin,” which could convey either sense.

**Restore [it] for your [sake]** — For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3. The *lamed* is probably a *lamed* of advantage—possibly an ethical dative (you *yourself* restore). See **for my [sake]** above.

—**you with my [right of] restoration** — This dependent clause modifies the previous one. The independent pronoun provides emphasis to the previous imperative. For another dependent

clause beginning with an independent pronoun, see **הוא ואשתו ושני בניו** (he and his wife and his two sons) in 1:1. Additionally, **את** is a preposition, not an object marker. It indicates the means by which Boaz can act as restorer. The fact that **את** does not function as the object marker is evident in that the verb **גאל**, despite its ubiquitous usage, does not appear anywhere in Ruth with an object (the reason why we constantly insert one). Schipper (AYB) and others are correct to say that **גאלה** is a cognate accusative of the verb, not its object. The object is “the portion of the field.” THF is the only English translation that makes a distinction between them. The translators of **ע** seem to be confused by this clause. Though they kept the pronoun, they altered the rest: **את דלית לך איתא** (you *for whom there is no wife*). Virtually all translations are paraphrastic at this point—merging content from both independent and dependent clauses into one. NIV drops the clause entirely. Outside of Ruth, **גאלה** (or **גאלה** *defectiva*) appears numerous times in Lev 25, has a duplicated use in Jer 32:7-8, and shows up once in Ezekiel (11:15). With the exception of the Ezekiel passage, where it carries the secondary sense of its root (to go into exile), all these instances have to do with restoration—either of land to its owner, of freedom to someone sold into slavery, or the *right* (**משפט**) to restore something. For **גאל** as “to restore,” see section A3.

**since I am unable to restore [it]** — In agreement with all other interpreters, we read this **כי** as causal. Since, however, the phrase that follows adds nothing to the discourse (the exact same phrase was used at the start of the verse), **כי** might function as an asseverative in order to heighten the intensity of the original statement and bring his discourse to a dramatic end: “I *truly* am unable to restore [it].”

4:7 The narrator's voice interjects at this point to explain the significance of a forthcoming action (drawing forth a sandal). The same phrase (**וזאת**) both opens and closes the interjection, providing a framework for the explication. Some believe this is a later insertion. They usually point to the use of **קום** in the Piel as evidence of late language (it occurs most often in Esther and Psalm 119). See, for instance, JM §80h. Against that, however, is the fact that the same form occurs in an early exilic text like Ezek 13:6. Nothing about the interjection gives us reason to believe that it derives from someone other than the original composer or scribal artisan. The use of apposition between phrases is typical of the storyteller's style in the first half of the fourth chapter (see vv. 1, 2, 3 and 6). Though three rare words are utilized in this short explication (**הגאלה**, **התמורה**, and **התעודה**), it is clear that they were chosen for their oral and/or literary assonance—a device frequently utilized by the narrator (see 1:1, 6). We mimic that assonance with our renderings “restoration,” “commutation,” and “validation” (and put them in italics to show their close phonetic relationship).

**This then** — This phrase occurs twice at the opening and close of the verse. **זאת** (this) points forward to a particular action (drawing forth one's sandal) while the conjunction provides transitional force. Most translations render the conjunction in the first instance of the phrase as “now,” but ignore it completely in the second instance of the phrase. To enable the same phrase to function the same way in both places, we render it “This then.”

**[the] precedent** — **לפנים** functions here as a temporal marker of the past (before/prior/once).

To avoid an awkward sense in English, however, translators frequently expand it into a phrase like “in former times.” Yet **לפנים** also relates to a way of doing things in the past. Thus, translators insert nouns like “custom” or “manner” as well. The result is often an expansive phrase consisting of four or five words. Note, for example, KJV (the manner in former time) and NASB (the custom in former times). Even **ע** turned the solitary word into a lengthy phrase: **מנהגא בעידנא דמלקדמין מתנהגא** (custom practiced in former times). Such prolix renderings are, however, unnecessary. The sense is easily represented in three words or less. Some examples include AAT (the ancient custom), HCSB (an earlier period), and NJPST (formerly done). Our rendering not only mimics the concise nature of the Hebrew, but captures both its senses because “precedent” refers to what is *customary* while also describing something that stems from *former times*. **ע** makes the action a matter of law: **το δικαίωμα εμπεροσθεν** (formerly the ordinance).

**the [right of] restoration** — See 4:6. Note that **הנאולה** is definite, not indefinite.

**or** — This conjunction is either coordinating (and) or alternating (or). Translations are split about equally between them. Since the type of custom could easily apply to an exchange that does not involve restoration, we believe that “or” represents the conjunction more accurately and that the two nouns do not function as a statement of hendiadys.

**regarding the [way of] commutation** — The particle **על** is repeated a second time in this phrase. Though virtually all translations ignore it, we mimic the repetitive nature of the text. **תמורה** comes from **מור/√**, meaning “to exchange/trade.” Thus, **תמורה** refers to an “exchange/trade.” To mimic the assonance intentionally crafted between **תמורה**, **נאולה**, and **תעודה**, we render this word “commutation.” Note, however, that **התמורה** is clearly definite. To make our rendering less awkward in English, we render it “*the way of commutation*.” Some translations make the reference far more explicit. Note, for example, NASB (the exchange of land), HCSB (the exchange of property), and ISV (changing inheritances). Since **תמורה** is used elsewhere with reference to the exchange of *animals* (Lev 27:10, 33), *wealth* (Job 20:18), *golden items* (Job 20:17), and that which is *worthless* (Job 15:31), one should not limit the term to things like land or inherited property. GW is far more cautious: “exchanging goods.” Schipper (AYB) believes that *hat-temûrâh* was specifically utilized in order to create a pun with the name “Tamar” in 4:12. He is probably right. Since one must choose their battles, we have focused our efforts on mimicking the word-play between **תמורה**, **נאולה**, and **תעודה** instead of **התמורה** and **תמר**.

—**to establish any [such] matter** — In 4:5, the sense of **קים** in the Hiphil was “to re-establish.” Here, however, the Piel is simply “to establish/confirm/validate.” As noted by Porten, this chapter is full of word-play, such as the following (all of which come from the same root): **הקים**, **קים**, and **מקום**. To mimic that root-play, we render them “re-establish,” “establish,” and “establishment.” There is some question about the relationship between this clause and the surrounding phrases. The Masoretes wrote a disjunctive accent (*pashta*) above **התמורה**



and a conjunctive one (*mehuppak*) below **הַנְּאוּלָה**, which indicates that they read **עַל־הַנְּאוּלָה** and **וְעַל־הַתְּמִנָּה** together, but separate from **לְקִים כָּל־דָּבָר**. Yet **לְקִים כָּל־דָּבָר** clearly relates back to the previous clauses (the *zaqef qaton* above **דָּבָר** disassociates it much more strongly from what comes next than from what came before). Thus, the text does not mean to say that such an act was used “to confirm all things” (KJV). Rather, it means all things *with regard to the restoration right or exchanges*. It seems evident that we are dealing with another instance of apposition, which we show through use of the em dash and by inserting the word “such.” Campbell (AYB) does similarly: “to confirm any such matter.” Just like with the previous appositional phrase (you with my [right of] restoration), translations tend to become paraphrastic at this point—merging content from all the clauses together. Again, NIV drops the phrase entirely.

**one [person] . . . to the other** — As in other cases of the expression “a man X his fellow/neighbor,” **אִישׁ** functions distributively to refer to any person, regardless of gender, standing in a reciprocal relationship with someone else. See 3:14 and section C1.

**would draw forth** — **שָׁלַף** is used almost exclusively with reference to the unsheathing/drawing of a sword or similar weapon. Psalm 129:6 and this verse are the only exceptions to that usage in the HB. Had the composer or scribal artisan wished to say something as mundane as “remove” or “take off,” virtually any other verb would have sufficed (**סִיר** would be expected, or maybe even **פָּתַח**, but verbs like **נָשַׁל**, which describes the removal of sandals elsewhere, and **חָלַץ**, which, in Deut 25:9, actually refers to the removal of a sandal upon the refusal of a restorer to fulfill his obligation, would also be fitting). Thus, the use of **שָׁלַף** with “sandal” is *astonishing*. It is a shame that English translators are so quick to use common renderings for uncommon words. Note also the form of the verb. It clearly has the form of a perfect. As many scholars and translators have noted, however, it probably functions as an iterative or modal perfect—it describes something that *used to be* or *would be* done (not any more). Thus, **שָׁלַף** must be similar in sense to the imperfect (one *would* draw forth). The very next verb corroborates that interpretation; since we can expect it to match the nuance of **שָׁלַף**, but it is an inverted perfect (**וַיִּנָּתֵן**), it seems certain that **שָׁלַף** does not function as a typical perfect. Conversely, if **שָׁלַף** were a typical perfect, the next verb would most likely be an inverted imperfect (**וַיִּתֵּן**). For another passage that closely parallels this one (with a perfect that functions modally or iteratively), see 1 Sam 9:9. Our interpretation is supported by 6.

**sandal** — Almost a century ago, Joüon noted that even though **נַעַל** looks singular, there are several places where the singular is used as a dual (see, for instance, Deut 29:4 and Isa 20:2). Thus, one could read this as a dual (sandals). While that interpretation is certainly possible, we find it unlikely. One would not need *both* sandals to validate a transaction—just one. Some translators prefer “shoe” instead of “sandal.”

**[and] give [it]** — **וַיִּנָּתֵן** is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since, however, we read it as consecutive with the previous verb, we insert “and.”

**its validation** — Literally, “the validation.” Since “its” works better in English and still communicates the definiteness of the noun, we use that rendering instead. As for תעודה, we agree with Bush (WBC) that, even though it derives from עוֹדָה (to witness/testify), “The meaning ‘testimony’ or ‘attestation,’ i.e., a solemn declaration in support of a fact, simply does not make tolerable sense. . . . Since this symbolic act was the means of visibly and tangibly making concrete or legitimizing a transfer . . . , it makes sense that תעודה here moves in the same range of meaning as לָקִים, ‘to effectuate, confirm,’ . . . Hence, the context demands some such meaning as ‘ratification, validation.’” Though the following verse is ambiguous about who exactly is drawing their shoe, we believe it makes more sense contextually to read this as an action done by so-and-so toward Boaz. Not only does Boaz then have material evidence to “validate” the actions he later undertakes, but it symbolizes a commutation of the restorative role from the nameless one to Boaz, at which point he will become *the* restorer.

4:8 **The restorer said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. All translators, however, read it in a resultative sense. Thus, they insert “therefore,” “so,” “then,” or “thereupon.” We cannot agree. This verb is not an expansion upon previous actions or statements; it is a summary resumption of them after the pace of the story was interrupted by the narrator’s interjection. In other words, וַיֹּאמֶר does not take us forward or introduce anything new; it takes us back by means of recapitulation. Once we are back, it is possible to proceed with the restorer’s act of sandal drawing. Thus, we add nothing to the start of this verse. The fact that every English translator adds something like “so” or “therefore” makes us wonder whether translators are all simply parroting each other. Perhaps it is the Latin from which all these renderings derive: *dixit ergo*, (then/therefore/so he said). For גָּאֵל as “to restore,” see section A3.

**Purchase [it back]** — The point is not to “purchase” something that is for sale, but to “purchase back” the land that was sold (see 4:4). ט interprets the object of the verb not as the portion of the field, but as the restorer’s גְּאוּלָּה ([right of] redemption). We stick with the Hebrew.

**for your [sake]** — The *lamed* is probably a *lamed* of advantage—possibly an ethical dative (you *yourself*). See 4:6.

**[and] he drew forth** — וַיִּשְׁלַח is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since, however, we read this verb as consecutive with the previous one, we insert “and.” For our rendering of שְׁלַח, see previous verse. Though we believe that it is the restorer who drew forth his sandal (not Boaz), ט clearly thinks otherwise: וַיִּטְלַע בּוֹעַז (and Boaz untied). ט harmonizes this verse with the previous one by adding the phrase “and gave [it] to him.” We follow the Hebrew.

4:9 **Boaz said** — וַיֹּאמֶר is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Translations that read this verb in a consecutive sense with the previous one insert “and” or “then.”

**and the whole clan** — Or “and all the clan.” For עַם as “clan,” see section A3. Following ט, some English translations (NJPST, NAB, KJV, etc.) insert “to” at the start of this phrase.

Since the conjunction is duplicating the sense of  $\text{ל} + \text{אמר}$ , such a rendering is certainly possible.

**Witnesses [are] you** — The predicate has been fronted for emphasis (“witnesses [are] you,” not “you [are] witnesses”). For more on “fronting,” see notes on 1:10. Strangely, SET renders  $\text{עדים}$  as singular.

**that** — In this instance,  $\text{כִּי}$  acts as a helping particle or complementizer for the noun “witnesses.” Though that function is more common with sensory verbs (like seeing, hearing, or saying) or verbs referring to mental processes (like thinking, knowing, or remembering), it may also occur with nouns that reflect the same verbal idea. Holmstedt describes it this way: “Many nouns, like  $\text{עדים}$ , are derived from or at least closely related to verbs that take accusative complements; as such, the nominalized action may still take a complement.”

**I hereby purchase [back]** — This is a first-person performative perfect. See JM §112f. For  $\text{קנה}$  as “purchase [back]” instead of simply “purchase,” see 4:4.

**Elimelek owns** — The *lamed* of possession attached to Elimelek's name signifies that such and such “belongs to” him. There is nothing in the form or function of the preposition that signifies a past situation (belonged to him). Such a rendering would have to be drawn from context. In context, however, it seems evident that the property is still considered Elimelek's. Boaz is not simply buying something that is for sale, but paying off the debt on all that has already been sold (see **is owned by** in 4:3).

**Kilion and Machlon own** — Literally, “belonging to Kilion and Machlon.” For “own” instead of “owned,” see note above. While it is certainly possible that the conjunction is duplicating the sense of the *lamed* as, perhaps, in the phrase  $\text{לזקנים וכל־העם}$ , we believe that, as in 1:2, the two brothers are being treated as a collective entity. Thus, this is probably what “Kilion and Machlon own,” not what “Kilion owns and Machlon owns.” Joüon agrees: “*Les deux frères sont pris per modum unius.*” One difference, however, is the order of the names (“Kilion and Machlon,” not “Machlon and Kilion” as in 1:2, 5). As noted by Schipper (AYB), “The reversal of two terms after their initial use is a stylistic feature found throughout the book.” Most translations represent this stylistic device (note, however, NJB).

**[as] held [in debt] by No'omi** — Literally, “out of the hand of No'omi.” It is not technically the land that Boaz is taking out of No'omi's hand, but the debt from its sale. Therefore, we insert “in debt.” See 4:5. Curiously, Fenton ends this verse with a question mark—as if asking the people whether they will agree to be witnesses. Given the court-like setting in which all this occurs, such a question seems preposterous. For more preposterous renderings by Fenton, see 1:9; 3:2, 7, 9.

4:10 **Furthermore, Ruth the Moabite, Machlon's wife, do I hereby purchase** — For the verb as a first-person performative perfect, see 4:5. Note that, due to a change in object (from “all that X owns” to “Ruth”), the object has been fronted (“Ruth the Moabite do I hereby purchase,” not “I hereby purchase Ruth the Moabite”). Since Ruth's gender is obvious, we feel no need to render this “Ruth the Moabitess.” Note also that, contrary to numerous translations, the word here is  $\text{אשה}$  (woman/wife), not  $\text{אלמנה}$  (widow). As in the story of Tamar and Judah, the woman is still considered to be the *wife* of her deceased husband (see 4:5). A few translators

render גַּם as “more importantly” (see, for instance, Hubbard and Campbell), which expresses a higher value judgment with regard to Boaz's redemption of Ruth than of Boaz's redemption of Elimelek's land. Not only is such a value judgment expressed nowhere in the text, but it runs contrary to the narrative, which links the fate of Ruth and the land together as one.

**as my own** — Or “for my possession.” Unlike the *lamed* of advantage twice utilized by so-and-so (v. 6), since Boaz is *purchasing* Ruth, this *lamed* is clearly one of possession. Just as Boaz's first words when he sees Ruth is “to whom does she belong” or “who owns her” (2:5), so he becomes the very person at the end about whom he first asked (he *owns* her).

**as a slave-wife** — Unlike the previous *lamed*, which signaled possession, this *lamed* is a marker of the indirect object, which indicates the outcome or goal of the verb (*as* an אִשָּׁה). The question, then, is how to understand אִשָּׁה. All English translations render it “wife.” In the Old Testament and ancient NE, however, there was no such thing as marriage by purchase. Instead, a man could purchase a woman as a *slave-wife* according to Old Testament slave law (Exod 21:7-11). One example with several striking similarities to the story here in Ruth comes from Gen 16:3: וַתִּקַּח שָׂרַי אִשְׁת־אַבְרָם אֶת־הַגֵּר הַמִּצְרִית שְׁפָחָתָהּ . . . וַתֵּתֶן אֹתָהּ לְאִשָּׁה (Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave, . . . [and] gave her to her husband Abram as his own, as a slave-wife). Notice that the phrase that describes Hagar's relationship to Abram (לְאִשָּׁה) is the same as the phrase describing Ruth's relationship to Boaz (לִי לְאִשָּׁה). The only difference is the suffix. But Hagar is not a free wife—she is a *slave-wife*. Thus, אִשָּׁה can indicate either a free-wife or a slave-wife. Other similarities between Ruth and Gen 16 are evident: both are transactions done for the sake of raising up an heir to a woman without offspring, both involve foreign women, and both women, at some point, are designated “slave” (Hagar is called אִמָּה in Gen 21 and שְׁפָחָה in Gen 16; Ruth calls herself אִמָּה in 3:9 and שְׁפָחָה in 2:13). For more about Ruth's status as a slave, see section B2, “Levirate Marriage.”

**in order to re-establish the name of the deceased on his inheritance** — See 4:5.

**Then** — We interpret this conjunction as either epexegetical or resultative.

**the name of the deceased** — See 4:5.

**will not have ceased** — Literally, “will not be cut off.” Boaz's discourse is often characterized by alliteration. Sometimes it is spread out over the course of a speech. At other times, it appears in a short and compact phrase. The latter is the case here, where two phrases ring with a fun end-rhyme: וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵט שֵׁם־הָמֵת (welō'-yikkārēṭ šēm-hammēṭ). We attempt to mimic that alliteration with our renderings “deceased” and “ceased.”

**among his clansmen** — Or “from his clansmen.” See 2:12 for a discussion of מֵעַם. For אֹהֶל as “clansman,” see 4:3.

**and** — Translators are split about equally between rendering this as a coordinative (and) or alternative (or) conjunction. We prefer the former because the narrative makes it clear that the fate of the lineage and the fate of the land are bound together. To redeem Ruth, but not the land (or *vice versa*) is a position that neither Boaz nor the story entertains.

**the gate of his [ancestral] establishment** — The word **מִקְוֶה** (place) is peculiar. If it was important to clarify what “inheritance” meant, why not say something like “house/home” (**בֵּית**) as in v. 11? As pointed out by others, however, the use of **מִקְוֶה** creates a word-play with the verb **קָוָה** (to set up/re-establish) that appears in this verse and in v. 5. To mimic that word-play, we render the verb “re-establish” and the noun “establishment.” Since, however, this is not just any establishment, but one passed down in Elimelek's family, we have augmented it with “ancestral.” As in 3:11, 4:1, and 4:11, the word “gate” most likely refers to an actual structure, not the “village” (NET), the “counselors” in that area (AAT), and certainly not the “town records” (NIV). Again, **Ⲫ** says “tribe” instead of “gate.” Since **πύλη** (gate) and **φυλή** (tribe) are phonetically similar, it is possible that the Greek word was misheard.

**Witnesses [are] you** — See 4:9. Note how Boaz's speech closes with the same phrase that began it (v. 9), providing a neat and tidy conclusion.

4:11 **The whole clan** — Literally, “All the people.” For **עַם** as “clan,” see section A3.

**including the elders** — Since the elders were part of “all the people” at the gate, it makes no sense to render the conjunction as a simple “and” (YLT's “also” is equally problematic). To get around the difficulty, **Ⲫ** read the verb twice in reference to each group of people: “And all the people who [were] in the gate said, 'Witnesses!' and the elders said, 'May the Lord make.’” NJB follows **Ⲫ**. Since, however, the same two groups are mentioned previously without any distinction in their role or function (v. 9), we stick with the Hebrew, which is supported by **Ⲛ** and **ⲛ**. In contradistinction to the previous *waw*, this one is either explicative (it further defines what was meant by “all the people”) or a conjunction of accompaniment (it specifies a particular group who did this with all the others). We prefer the latter. So does NRSV (along with) and NAB, ISV, and REB (including). Note the inversion of the former word-order from “the elders” / “all the people in the gate” in v. 9 to “all the people in the gate” / “the elders” here. Though it could be that the elder phrase was a scribal addition in early Hebrew manuscripts, since the inversion of a previously established word-order is a regular phenomenon in Ruth (compare, for instance, the order of the names of Elimelek's sons in 1:2, 5 and 4:9), we stick with the text as we have it. Some translations, however (HCSB, NIV, CEV, etc.), do not represent the inversion in word-order. As in 4:2 and 9, Moffatt says “sheikhs” instead of “elders”—a highly anachronistic rendering.

**Affirmative!** — Note that this is not **עֲדִים אֲנַחְנוּ** (Witnesses [are] we). This verse contains neither a verbal nor a verbless clause. Rather, this is a single word exclamation: “Witnesses!” To say “yes” in ancient Hebrew, one repeated the main component of a statement or question (see GKC §150n). Thus, this is an answer of “Yes!” Given the court-like context of the statement and the nature of the word, such an answer probably has a judicial function as well. Thus, something like “Aye,” “Yea,” or “Affirmative” would fit the usage best. See also Josh 24:22. NAB comes close to this with “We do so.” Unable to decide between a positive answer and a descriptive statement, GW gives both: “Yes, we are witnesses.”

**May YHWH make** — In 1:9, **יְהוָה יַתֵּן** meant “May YHWH give favorably” or “May YHWH reward.” In this verse, the blessing is more specific and relates to giving/rewarding with a new status equivalent to Rachel and Leah. To communicate that in English, we use “to make.”

**the woman who enters into your home** — The *heh* at the front of **הבאה** is an example of the relative article (who/that). Thus, this is “the woman—she who is entering into your home.” Ruth’s status is now changing from “she who turned away” (**השבה**) to “she who enters.” As a consequence of Boaz taking her as a slave-wife, she will gain full membership as part of the people of Israel. Note that **בית** differs in meaning here than in the phrase **בית ישראל**. Here, it refers to Boaz’s *residence* (a physical location). There, it refers to Israel’s *descendants* (those that make up the people-group “Israel”). The reuse of a word with a different meaning is the literary device *antanaclasis*. We attempt to show that device with our renderings “house” and “household.” Some translations (NAB, GW, CEV, etc.) render **אשה** as “wife.” Since Ruth has not been taken as a slave-wife yet, we view that rendering as premature.

**and like Leah** — The preposition *kaf* is repeated in this phrase. Though most translations drop it, we mimic the repetitive nature of the Hebrew (so do KJV, YLT, Alter, etc.).

**between them both** — Or “the two of them.” For the ending *-hm* as a third-person feminine dual suffix, see 1:19 and 1:8.

**So, act valorously in Ephrathah** — At this point, the text breaks into poetry. Two things make this evident: the switch to short, compact phrases and the transition from statements without any syntactic or structural similarity to statements with tightly structured parallelism. The parallel structures and syntax are as follows: an opening conjunction affixed to an imperative with verbal complement followed by prepositional *bet* affixed to a proper noun. Characteristic of poetry, the second colon identifies the same entity in the first colon by means of an alternate designation. Further confirmation that poetry is present comes from the bystanders who, in v. 15, break out into poetry as well. As noted in 1:9, an imperative with *waw* following a jussive typically carries a sense of consequence. Thus, many scholars argue that the opening conjunction or verbal phrase is one of consequence. The rules for poetry and prose are, however, quite distinct. If the whole blessing were one continuous piece of prose, Campbell (AYB) would be right that “the blessing has a syntactic unity” and “one expects this couplet to be consistent in meaning with the other elements of the blessing.” It simply won’t do, however, to read these two cola in such a way. By their very nature, they break away from what was said before to say things in new ways (see below for a blatant example). In this new textual situation, where a new style and referent are introduced, the *waw* probably serves an introductory role. Thus, we render it “so” (alternatively, “now”). The phrase **עשה-חיל** consists of an imperative (act!) followed by **חיל**. For **חיל** as “valor,” see section A3. Since the noun functions as an adverbial accusative, we render it “valorously.”

**Yes, invite acclaim in Bethlehem** — We interpret the *waw* as asseverative (yes/indeed). Though conjunctions rarely have an asseverative nuance in narrative, that function is common in poetry. Had the content in this verse been prose, one could interpret the *waw* differently (probably an extension of the previous *waw*, which would have a sense of consequence: “so that”). Now, however, the *waw* seems to have an intensifying value—furthering the previous poetic statement with more detail. **קרא** in the Qal stem has an active nuance: “to summon/call.” When paired with **שם** (name), it would normally mean “to call/proclaim a name” as

reflected by Alter (proclaim a name), LEB (bestow a name), and Goldingay (call out a name). Unfortunately, that makes no sense here, which leaves translators to come up with their own explanations. Note, for example, NJPST (perpetuate your name), REB (by keeping this name alive), ISV (may you excel), and YLT (“proclaim the Name,” by which it seems to mean “invoke YHWH”). We think the phrase probably conveys the sense of “to invite acclaim” or “to welcome renown.” In other words, by means of valiant action (the parallel phrase), Boaz would win acclaim. NAB (win fame), AAT (gain fame), and GW (make a name for yourself) come to the same conclusion. This is quite different from the passive sense preferred by translations like KJV (be famous), RSV (be renowned), or Leeser (let thy name become famous). The passive sense is typical of the Niphal stem. As one can see in 4:14, when the composer or scribal artisan wants to communicate a passive sense for קרא, the Niphal is used. Thus, the passive should be avoided here. The fact that קרא־שם is not the normal expression for “making a name” or “winning fame” (see, for instance, 2 Sam 7:23 and 1 Chr 17:8) can be explained as poetic elision (dropping לך) and poetic alternation (the second line in a poetic bicolon typically introduces variety instead of repeating the same content from the first line). Thus, even though this phrase would not work in a narrative text, it fits quite comfortably within a new poetic blessing. Joüon proposes that the text originally read קנה־שם (acquire a name) instead of קרא־שם. While it is possible that our current text could have resulted from a transmission error (קנה misheard as קרא), there is no evidence for such a mistake. Therefore, we stick with the text as we have it.

4:12 **And may it be** — Or “And may it become.” וַיְהִי is a *waw*-copulative (see 3:4). Thus, unlike the inverted form (1:1), there actually is a functioning conjunction. It should, therefore, be represented in translation (HCSB, NIV, NKJV, and others lack it). Like most, we think it has a simple additive sense (and). Some think it has a sense closer to גם. Note, for instance, GW (also) or NASB (moreover). Translators that view the previous two verbal constructions (*waw* + imperative) as resultative may view this opening conjunction as a continuation of that sense. See **So, act valorously in Ephrathah** in v. 11 for why we reject that interpretation.

**household** — Here, “house” does not mean “residence,” but Perez's *descendants*. Thus, we render it “household.” Others prefer “family.”

**the offspring** — Or “the seed.” A collective singular (there is no plural in BH). Fenton renders it “the heir,” which makes the connection with the land's restoration more explicit.

**will give you** — Literally, “will give to you.” Curiously, Holmstedt says “gave” (past tense). Clearly, he reads the *yiqtol* as a preterite. Though the ancient Semitic *yiqtol* functioned as a preterite, it tends to show up in poetry, not prose. Since we do not agree with those who claim that there is a *yiqtol* preterite in 3:5 and 11 (and YHWH has, in fact, given Boaz and Ruth nothing as of yet), such a rendering must be rejected.

**from that young woman** — Most English translations view מִן as a particle of instrumentality and render it “by” (that is, “by means of”). Since, however, מִן occurs twice in this verse with (what seems to us) the same semantic sense, we render it the same in both places. A minority render מִן as “of” (KJV, YLT, Rotherham, etc.). If “of” represents a shortening of the spatial

rendering “out of,” then such a translation is perfectly acceptable. If, however, “of” is just a marker of the genitive, it should be rejected. Virtually all English translations say “*this* young woman” as though Ruth were near at hand. Considering that Ruth is nowhere in the vicinity, “that” (someone or something *there*) actually represents the usage of the English demonstrative better than “this” (someone or something *here*).

- 4:13 Translators divide this verse in numerous ways. (1) Some follow the Masoretic accentuation by placing a period where the Masoretes had their second-strongest disjunctive accent (*athnach*): “So Boaz fetched Ruth, she became his own as a slave-wife, [and] he went to her” (see NASB, NET, and Rotherham). (2) Others shift the *athnach* from “to her” to “as a slave-wife.” **וַיָּבֹא** would then introduce the second half of the verse and, perhaps, take on a temporal relationship with the final clauses: “So Boaz fetched Ruth [and] she became his own as a slave-wife. When he went to her, . . .” (see KJV, NIV, and NJB). (3) One could separate the verse into three parts—the first terminating with “Ruth” and the second with “to her”: “So Boaz fetched Ruth. She became his own as a slave-wife [and] he went to her. YHWH then rewarded her” (see NJPST and Sasson). (4) One could terminate the first part with “as a slave-wife” and the second with “to her”: “So Boaz fetched Ruth [and] she became his own as a slave-wife. He came to her. YHWH then rewarded her” (see SET). (5) Finally, the whole thing could be taken as one giant sentence: “So Boaz fetched Ruth, she became his own as a slave-wife, he came to her, YHWH rewarded her [with] a pregnancy, [and] she bore a son” (see Fenton, YLT, and Alter). Of these options, we view (5) as the least likely. The fact that the Masoretes added an *athnach* shows that ancient Jews did not view it as one continuous string of clauses. Also, (4) does not seem likely. Though the phrase **וַיָּבֹא אֵלֶיהָ** is significant, it does not naturally stand alone or apart from Boaz's other actions. Of the other three options, whichever assortment of phrases sticks together more naturally is anyone's guess.

**So Boaz fetched** — **וַיִּקַּח** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since we interpret the inverted verb as resultative, we begin the verse with “so” (as a consequence of Boaz formally declaring his intent to take Ruth as a slave-wife, he goes out and does so). A few translations render this “Boaz married.” Hubbard (NICOT) is probably right when he says, “In this context, the Hebrew root *lqh* apparently means ‘take home.’” Thus, we render it “to fetch” (see also 4:2 and 16).

**Ruth** — Fenton and Alter say “Ruth the Moabite.” Kennicott lists only one Hebrew manuscript with that reading. It does not appear in **5**, **7**, or **9**. We follow the Hebrew.

**she became his own as a slave-wife** — Or “she was his own.” **וַתְּהִי** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Translations that read it as consecutive with the previous verb insert “and.” For **לֹאֶשָׁה** as “as his own as a slave-wife,” see 4:10.

**[and] he went to her** — **וַיָּבֹא** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. A final “and” is, however, included since it is used in English to finish the last item in a list. There is no doubt that, in this particular place, “to come to” is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. But it is, precisely, a *euphemism*. It is not



saying that he went “in to” her as in he “penetrated” her; rather, it signifies that he went to where she was. If the text wanted to say he “had sexual relations with her” (NET), “had sex with her” (Goldingay), “slept with her” (NLT, GW, and CEV), “was intimate with her” (HCSB), “had marital relations with her” (ISV), “had intercourse with her” (AAT), “made love to her” (Hubbard), or “came to bed with her” (Alter), it would have said **וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ** (he laid with her) as in 2 Sam 12:24. Bush (WBC) explains it well: “The euphemism originates from the action of the husband entering the room or tent of his wife (as is conclusively demonstrated by such passages as Gen 39:14; Judg 15:1; 2 Sam 12:24; Prov 2:19).” Thus, we render this “he went to her.” Fenton and SET do likewise. Other proposed euphemistic renderings include “they came together” (NRSV, NJB, and NAB) and “he cohabitated with her” (NJPST).

**then rewarded** — **וַיִּתֵּן** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the verb in a subordinating (then) or coordinating (and) relationship to the previous verb. We prefer the former, which is why we insert “then.” For **נָתַן** as “to reward,” see 1:9. As Hubbard (NICOT) says, this verse “illustrates the biblical truth that God does reward *hesed*.”

**[with] a pregnancy** — **וְהָרִיוֹן** is an accusative noun describing what YHWH gave Ruth or what he rewarded her “with.” Though it occurs only two other times in the HB (Hos 9:11 and Gen 3:16 in an alternate form), its use in those places, its underlying root (**הָרָה**), and its usage here makes its meaning evident: “pregnancy.” Though many refer to it as “conception,” ancient Israelites would not have shared the modern, scientific idea of “conception” whereby a sperm fertilizes an egg to form an embryo.

**[and] she bore** — **וַתֵּלֶד** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Since, however, we read it as consecutive with the previous verb, we insert “and.”

4:14 **The women said** — **וַתֹּאמְרֶנָּה** is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” or “then” before the verb. The renderings of NET (village women), NLT (the women of the town), and ISV (the women of Bethlehem) draw on the occurrence of **הַשְּׂכֵנֹת** in v. 17.

**Blessed be YHWH** — As in 2:20, there is no jussive verb. Thus, contrary to some translations, this should not be rendered “May YHWH bless.” Instead, **בָּרוּךְ** is fronted for emphasis. For more on “fronting,” see 1:10.

**because** — For **אֲשֶׁר** as an opening particle of explication in a blessing, see **because his faithfulness** in 2:20.

**he did not withhold** — Or “he did not remove.” **הַשְּׁבִית** is a 3MS perfect Hiphil of **שָׁבַת** (to stop/end). Usually, this verb would mean something like “he did not put an end to.” Here, however, it probably has the same sense as in Lev 2:13: **לֹא תִשְׁבֵּית מֶלַח בְּרִית אֱלֹהֶיךָ** (you must not withhold the salt of the covenant of your god). NJPST (he has not withheld) agrees.

Most translations render this “who has not left you without,” which is a strange way to handle the text. It waters down the causative sense of the Hiphil (“to make/cause/keep,” not “leave”) and requires inserting a word that isn't there (without). Translators seem to be following the Latin instead of the Hebrew: *qui non est passus ut deficeret* (who has not suffered to be left without). Perhaps they do this to make some sense of the verb with גָּאַל as its accusative object. But if, as we argue below, the text does not actually say “restorer,” one is free to render the verb in a more natural sense. Sasson (who did not deny) and Alter (who has not deprived) offer better alternatives. Note also how the women's speech in this and the next verse is woven throughout with alliteration: מְשַׁבְּעָה, שִׁיבְתָּךְ, לְמַשִּׁיב, הַשְּׂבִית (the four-fold repetition of either *shin* or *sin* followed immediately by either a hard or soft *bet*). We bring out that alliteration with “withhold,” “upholder,” “old age,” and “seven-fold.”

**restoration** — The Masoretes point גָּאַל as גָּאַל (a restorer). If correct, the “restorer” must be Boaz or Obaid. Arguments in favor of Boaz include the fact that, as stated by Bewer (“The Goël in Ruth 4:14, 15”), “Up to this point in the story it is Boaz who is the Goël of Naomi and Ruth, or better, Boaz . . . has also performed the duty of the Goël.” Yet, it makes no sense for the women to bless YHWH because he did not withhold Boaz. Rhetorically, the blessing given to Boaz by “the whole clan” makes the reader assume that Boaz will be around for its fulfillment and v. 13 is the first proof of it. Another phrase that would be out of place if this refers to Boaz is “May his name be proclaimed in Israel”; it adds nothing to what was already declared in v. 11 and, in fact, says even less (the blessing in v. 11 has him *win* such acclaim). Arguments in favor of Obaid include the fact that such a title is given on the very day he is born and it will be Obaid, not Boaz, who will inherit the land and, thus, continue the tradition of patrilineal inheritance. Furthermore, Obaid is clearly the subject of the continuing blessing, not Boaz (your daughter-in-law . . . bore him). Technically, however, a “restorer” is always a close relative of the deceased—never a descendant—and Boaz already restored the land by buying it back for No'omi and her family. Thus, the term doesn't even fit Obaid. The pertinent question, therefore, is *what, exactly, is being restored?* The answer is not the land, its inheritance, the “name” of the deceased, or Ruth—it is No'omi. No'omi began this story “full,” but lost her husband and two children and became “empty.” Considering herself cursed by the Israelite deity, she blamed him for her misfortune before the women of the village and became bitter. Now that a child has been born to Ruth by the intervention of the deity, the women of the village point this out to No'omi. The god she thought had worked against her has done something for her benefit (he did not withhold for you) by filling her emptiness not just with a new “little boy” to replace the “little boys” she lost, but with a daughter who is better than seven sons. Thus, it is not “a restorer” (גָּאַל) that has come to No'omi “today” (and certainly not a Levirate), but restoration itself: גָּאַל! Through a simple repointing of the consonantal text, all the problems associated with reading Boaz or Obaid as “restorer” are eliminated. Originally, the text probably read גָּאַלְהָה הַיּוֹם, with the final *heh* falling off גָּאַלְהָה due to haplography. For our use of “restore” instead of “redeem,” see section A3. ו says “successor,” which is clearly an interpretive alteration.

**for you** — This *lamed* is probably a *lamed* of advantage. See 4:6.

**May his name, therefore, be proclaimed** — וַיִּקְרָא is a *waw*-copulative (an imperfect form of קרא in the passive Niphal stem with accompanying conjunction). For קרא in the active Qal stem, see 4:11. Does the verb refer to YHWH or Obaid? Perhaps, due to conceptual blending, to proclaim the name of the one who came (Obaid) is also to proclaim the name of the one who gave him being (YHWH). The answer, therefore, may be *both* (for more on conceptual blending, see Fauconnier and Turner's *The Way We Think*). As for the conjunction, it probably has a resultative sense (so that/therefore). Campbell (therefore) and KJV (that) agree. Others render it simply “and.” Some translations that regularly insert a conjunction where there is none (with inverted verbs), strangely fail to represent it here where one is clearly present. In harmony with the use of a declaration of blessing at the start of the verse, we interpret this imperfect as a jussive (*May* it be proclaimed) with שמו as the passive subject. ו says “your name” (referring to No'omi), which is clearly an interpretive alteration.

4:15 **May he serve** — וְהָיָה is an inverted perfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb (he *will* serve/be). Thus, unless one is reading this verb in a consecutive sense, there is no reason to place an “and” before the verb. Most translations render this verb with a simple future tense. Since, however, inverted verbs often continue the sense of previous verbs, and we interpreted the previous verb as a modal, we believe this verb carries on that sense: “*May* he.” See also NASB, Leeser, and NKJV.

**on your behalf** — This *lamed* is probably a *lamed* of advantage. See 4:6.

**as a life upholder** — This *lamed* is an indirect object marker. It indicates the goal or outcome of the verb הָיָה: “to serve/be *as*.” Most translations ignore it. מְשִׁיב means “one who brings back.” A substantive rendering of the participle would be “renewer/reviver.” As Holmstedt notes, “The participle is not in the construct form (which would be מְשִׁיב), making . . . נַפֶּשׁ the accusative complement.” One could, however, repoint the text to get “an upholder of life.” נַפֶּשׁ refers to the neck and, by extension, the “breath” that passes through it. As a metaphor, it refers to one’s “life” or “being.” Taken together, the phrase means “as a life reviver” or, more idiomatically, “a lifesaver.” Some translations treat מְשִׁיב as a verb instead of a participle: HCSB, NIV, and NJPST (he will renew), NET (he will encourage), ISV (he will restore), CEV (he will make happy), and Geneva (this shall bring again). Others drop the previous לְךָ and add the pronoun onto נַפֶּשׁ: “your life.” We follow the Hebrew. Note the alliteration woven into the women’s speech here and in v. 14: מְשִׁיבָה, שִׁיבָתָךְ, לְמִשְׁכָּבִי, and מְשִׁיבָה (the four-fold repetition of either *shin* or *sin* followed immediately by either a hard or soft *bet*). We mimic that alliteration with “withhold,” “upholder,” “old age,” and “seven-fold.”

**to mitigate** — לְכַלֵּל is an infinitive construct of the verb כוּל (“to provide/supply/sustain” or “to contain/endure”) in the Pilpel stem. As many scholars have noted, there is a word-play between לְכַלֵּל (to support) and כַּלְתָּךְ (your daughter-in-law). We think Porten is right when he says all these sounds “reverberate in this climactic verse to punctuate its importance.” It is doubly important, therefore, to reproduce such reverberations. We do so with the renderings “to mitigate” and “your son’s mate.”

**old age** — שיבה means “gray hair” and, thus, “old age.” See **as a life upholder** above for information about its alliterative use.

**since** — We interpret this כִּי as causal.

**your son's mate** — Literally, “your daughter-in-law.” In order to capture the alliteration woven into the words לְכַלֵּל (to support) and כְּלִתָּךְ (your daughter-in-law), we have rendered them “to mitigate” and “your son's mate.” Note how, since a change in subject has occurred (from “he” to “her”), the new subject is fronted for emphasis. Thus, this is “because your daughter-in-law, who loves you, bore him,” not “for he has been born to the daughter-in-law who loves you” (NJB) or “for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you” (Moffatt).

**bore him** — We prefer a rendering in the simple past. One would expect No'omi to be aware of Obaid's birth (more-so than the other women of the town). Thus, it makes little sense for the women to be reporting his birth to her (she *has given birth* to him). Rather, the women are expecting this child to do great things for No'omi because *he comes from Ruth*.

**who, herself,** — JM §158g calls this הִיא a “retrospective subject pronoun” (the reintroduction of a subject within the relative clause). Usually, the pronoun is omitted. We mimic the verbose nature of the Hebrew by reintroducing the subject. So do Hubbard (NICOT), AAT, and Schipper (AYB).

**[is] better for you than** — This *lamed* is probably a *lamed* of advantage (see 4:6). *Min* occurs with טובה to give a comparative sense (better than). For other instances of comparative *min*, see 1:13 and 3:12. We do not agree with renderings like “who is more to you” (NRSV, ESV, and NJB), “who is worth more to you” (NAB), or “who means more to you” (Campbell) for the simple reason that, while it may be true that she is far more valuable than seven sons, there has never been a point where No'omi acknowledged it. And if it were true, No'omi would certainly not need the women of the town to tell her that. The fact that they do so means that that are telling her something she has not yet realized for herself: Ruth “is better” for her.

**seven-fold** — For “seven-fold” instead of “seven,” see **as a life upholder**.

4:16 The grammar and syntax in this verse has been intentionally crafted to mimic v. 13. Therefore, we render their parts the same way in both verses.

4:13 – ותהי־לו לאשה | ויקח בעז את־רות

4:16 – ותהי־לו לאמנת | ותקח נעמי את־הילד

**So No'omi fetched** — ויקח is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. In harmony with the inverted verb in v. 13, we render this resultative (as a consequence of the blessing that the women call forth from the child to No'omi, she brings him to her). For לקח as “to fetch,” see 4:2 and 13.

**the little boy** — The terminology here is very specific: No'omi lost her “little boys” at the beginning (1:5), but has gained a “little boy” at the end.

**set him** — ותשתהו is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. Thus, there is no reason to place an “and” before the verb unless one preferred a hard stop after בחיקה (as in NJPST, NET, or NJB).

**in the hollow of her [arms]** — חֵיק refers to a hollow space created by a curved body, in which an infant, an animal, a lover, or anything else can be held or contained. In 1 Kgs 22:35, for instance, the blood of a wounded king runs “into the hollow of the chariot” (אֶל-חֵיק הַרֶכֶב). In Ezek 43:13-14, the חֵיק is part of the sacrificial altar—either a “hollow channel” (gutter) wherein the blood of the sacrifice would be channeled or a “hollow impression” (bowl) into which part of the altar was lowered. In Exod 4:6-7, Moses moves his hand into and out of his חֵיק, which must be a hollow spot (a pocket, sleeve, or fold) inside his garment. From the idea of being contained or enfolded in a hollow comes the adjectival expression בְּחֵיק (in secret). When it comes to the human body, that hollow space is located in the area where one would embrace a person (between the arms and chest). In some places, therefore, modern translators regularly render חֵיק as “the arms” or “the embrace” (see Gen 16:5 or 1 Kgs 17:19) and the expression אִשְׁתִּי חֵיק as “the wife of (one's) embrace” (see Deut 13:7 or 28:54-56). That is probably the sense here: No'omi cradled the infant *in her arms*. חֵיק may also refer to an interior part of the body—the chest cavity (gut) where one's emotions and passions were located (see, for instance, Job 19:27 or Qoh 7:9). Most translations render חֵיק as “bosom,” which we avoid since that word has no common usage in modern English except among children as an amusing substitute for “breasts.” As Bush (WBC) says: “It never refers to the female breast at which an infant is nursed.” Sasson agrees: “To give the notion of suckling, . . . Hebrew consistently uses *šad* (once *zīz* in Isa. 66:11) as a term for 'breast'.” Thus, the rendering “breast” (NJB, Hubbard, etc.) or a statement like she “nursed” Obaid (Moffatt) must be rejected. Geneva and Bishops', followed by many modern translations (NASB, ESV, NIV, etc.), render this “lap.” While that captures the sense of a hollow in which something is held, it refers to a part of the body to which the noun does not (the word “knees” is used for the area of one's “lap” as, for instance, in Gen 48:12).

**[and] she became his own** — Or “[and] she was his own.” וְתָהִי is an inverted imperfect. The bonded *waw* is not a conjunction; it inverts the aspect or tense of the verb. A final “and” is included, however, since it is used in English to finish the last item in a list. This verb duplicates the same sense as the one in 4:13 (also וְתָהִי). In 4:13, לוֹ indicated that Ruth was becoming “his own” (Ruth would belong to him). Here, the same grammar and syntax communicates a similar idea: Obaid is going to get No'omi “as his own.” As his own what? The text goes on to make the particular association clear.

**as a nanny** — As in 4:10 and 13, this *lamed* is a marker of the indirect object, which indicates the outcome or goal of the verb (*as* an אֲמֵנָה). The question, then, is how to understand אֲמֵנָה. English translations usually render it “nurse.” The English word “nurse,” however, has several nuances that do not apply to this situation (a person who cares for the sick or disabled or a woman employed to suckle a child who is not her own) and, thus, is a rather imprecise term to use. Bush (WBC) agrees: “It is best in our opinion to avoid the English term 'nurse' since it is ambiguous and could be taken to mean 'wet-nurse.’” “Nanny,” however, describes a woman who takes care of children, which is precisely what the אֲמֵנָה does. A similar, non-gendered

term would be “caregiver” (NET and Schipper). Some translations combine **היה** and **אמנת** into a single verbal expression: “to take care” (HCSB), “to care for” (NIV), “to look after” (NJB). A few give the extremely paraphrastic an anachronistic rendering “foster-mother.”

4:17 **The townswomen** — Literally, “the (female) residents/neighbors” (from **שכן**, meaning “to dwell/settle/reside”). It is curious that the text becomes more specific about the women only at this point of the narrative. We have no explanation for the sudden detail, but have followed the text by identifying the women more specifically at this point only (some translations take the description here and insert it in v. 14).

**acclaimed him** — The *lamed* in **לו** is probably a *lamed* of advantage (see 4:6) with **שם** as the accusative object. Literally, “they proclaimed for him a name.” In other words, they spread the news so as to make him well-known. Thus, Sasson renders it “they established his reputation,” AAT says “they spread the report of him,” and Hubbard (NICOT) writes “they proclaimed his significance.” **ו** translates it more loosely as “they rejoiced/celebrated.” This phrase stands in contrast with **שם + קרא** in the second half of the verse, where a pronoun is suffixed to **שם** in order to declare a specific name for someone or to define the name in some manner. The difference is slight, but it pivots on the indefinite (or non-defined) versus the definite (or defined) use of *šēm*. Contrary to Bush (WBC), the presence of **שם** differentiates this (and 4:11) from the generic statement of name-giving in texts like Gen 2:20 and 26:18 as well as the defined use in Isa 65:15, which defines the name as a *living* one (i.e., an on-going, blessed one). Neither can the saying of the townswomen in this particular place be called a “poetic” naming or a naming that involves a “semantic word-play” (as in v. 15). What we have here is a “birth announcement,” in which mention of a child is made in order to spread the news of its coming. Isaiah 9:5 is a good example. There, the announcement is first made completely apart from any actual naming of the child: **כי-ילד ילד-לנו בן נתן-לנו** (Because a newborn is [newly] born to us, a son bestowed to us). Only after that is a “name” given to the child: **ויקרא שמו** (his name is called). The difference in Isa 9:5 between acclaiming a child and naming it is made evident by the definite (**שמו**) or defined usage of *šēm* in the second half versus the absence of *šēm* (or an indefinite/non-defined usage of it) in the first half. The same is true here. Only in the latter part of the verse does a name appear, and, along with it, a definite use of *šēm* (**שמו**). Thus, the rendering of most translations (“they gave him a name” or “they named him”), or those like CEV (they called him “Naomi’s Boy”) and ISV (they gave the child a nickname, which is “Naomi has a son!”) that treat **ילד-בן לנעמי** as a nickname or title, should be rejected. Fenton’s “they collected to her” is utterly perplexing. For more utterly puzzling renderings by Fenton, see 1:9, 11, 2:14, 3:2, 7.

**Born is a son** — **ילד** is a passive Qal. Over time, it fell out of use and, therefore, was replaced with or reimagined as other passive stems. Here, for instance, the Masoretes point it as a Pual. The problem, however, is that **ילד** in the Piel stem means “to act as a midwife,” so the passive form would mean “to be midwived”! Although the vocalization doesn’t make sense, the consonantal text can still be read coherently. The form of the statement (**בן + ילד**)

*lamed* with pronominal suffix) is formulaic for a birth announcement (see Jer 20:15). Just as the phrase begins and ends with the same consonant (*yod*), so we begin the first and last words with the same consonant (Born / behalf).

**on No'omi's behalf!** — Here, as in 4:15, the *lamed* is probably one of advantage. The women believe that YHWH gave Ruth a child in order to address No'omi's “emptiness.” Just as the phrase begins and ends with the same consonant (*yod*), so we begin the first and last words with the same consonant (Born / behalf).

**They called his name** — Here, as in 4:14, קרא is combined with שמו in order to declare a specific name for someone or say something about someone's name. This is in contrast to the use of שם + קרא in the first half of the verse, which, like 4:11, indicates that someone is (or is going to be) praised/celebrated.

**Obaid** — Typically “Obed.” עֹבֵד is the participial form of the verb עָבַד, meaning “one who serves/labors/works as a slave.” As a substantive, it would be “server/laborer/slave-worker.” Within the narrative, his name is explained due to the fact that he will be a source of life and support for No'omi (v. 15). ט explains the name in a more religious sense (v. 21): “Boaz fathered Obaid, who served the Master of the World with his whole being.” It is more likely, however, that he was called “Obaid” because he was the son of a *slave-wife* (see section B2, “Levirate Marriage”).

**He [was] the father of Yishai** — This is a verbless phrase. Instead of “was” or “is,” some translations use “became” (NRSV, NET, and REB). “Yishai” is typically rendered “Jesse.”

**the grandfather of David** — Note the defective spelling of “David” (דָּוִד instead of דָּוִיד). If one wanted to represent the differences in English, one could use “David” for the full spelling and “Dave” for the defective spelling. Instead of “father,” we use “grandfather” (so does NLT) because the point is not to establish a relationship between Yishai and David (that will be done in the following genealogy), but to establish a relationship between David and Obaid.

4:18 **Now** — We interpret this *waw* as introductory—it opens up a new part of the story. Many translations do likewise. Some, however, ignore the conjunction entirely.

**these [are] the descendants** — אלה תולדות is a typical idiom in the HB used to introduce or conclude either a genealogical list or a catalog of family stories/records (Gen 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; etc.). Here, the phrase clearly introduces a genealogical list. That list has a particular pattern: “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Though we use “descendants” for תולדות, translators make use of many other possible renderings: “genealogy” (HCSB), “generations” (NASB), “line” (NJPST), “family line” (NIV), “lineage” (Alter), “account” (GW), and “pedigree” (Fenton).

**Perez fathered** — Instead of the verb “to beget,” which is no longer used in modern English, we use “to father.” Some translate it “Perez was the father of,” which treats the causative Hiphil (X made Y) as though it were a stative Qal (X was Y). Note how the text has shifted from the normative V-S to an S-V word-order. Such word-order is typical of genealogical lists in this pattern type. Note, for instance, Gen 4:18: ועירר ילד את־מחויאל ומחייאל ילד את־ מתושאל ומתושאל ילד את־למך.

- 4:19 **And Hezron** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction.  
**And Ram** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction. **𐤓** renders the name as “Aram.” Since **𐤕** agrees with **𐤓**<sup>L</sup>, we follow **𐤓**<sup>L</sup>.
- 4:20 **And Amminadab** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction.  
**And Nahshon** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction.  
**Salmah** — This name is spelled two different ways in Ruth (שלמה and שלמון). We follow the spelling in each case. A third comes from 1 Chr 2:11 (שלמא). **𐤓** renders the name as “Salmon,” which could be a case of harmonization with the spelling that occurs next.
- 4:21 **And Salmon** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction. This name is spelled two different ways in Ruth (שלמה/שלמון). A third comes from 1 Chr 2:11 (שלמא).  
**And Boaz** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction.  
**Obaid** — For the name “Obaid,” see v. 17.
- 4:22 **And Obaid** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction. For the name “Obaid,” see v. 17.  
**And Yishai** — Contrary to numerous English translations, this genealogical list follows the pattern “And Person X fathered Person Y.” Thus, we include the conjunction. “Yishai” is typically rendered “Jesse.”  
**David** — Note the defective spelling of “David” (דוד instead of דויד). If one wanted to represent the difference in English, one could use “David” for the full spelling and “Dave” for the defective spelling.



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