

AN IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY

THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

Ruth, Boaz, and the Goel Who Pays the Full Price

Ruth 1-4 · Leviticus 25 · Job 19 · Galatians 4

A journey through history, biblical languages, and the law that shaped the gospel

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Introduction: A Man Who Walked Away

Before Boaz redeemed Ruth, another man had the first legal right to do it. He was willing — until he learned the redemption included marrying a Moabite widow and risking his own inheritance. At that point, he refused, removed his sandal in a public legal ceremony, and handed his right of redemption to Boaz.

Most readers know the book of Ruth as a story of loyalty and romance. It is that. But underneath the narrative sits a precise, technical legal institution — the office of the גֹּאֵל (goel), the kinsman-redeemer — governed by specific conditions in Israelite law. This study exists to recover that legal architecture: what the Goel was required to be and do, how Boaz's actions in Bethlehem match those requirements point by point, why the nearer kinsman's refusal matters as much as Boaz's willingness, and how the New Testament — particularly Paul in Galatians 4 and Jesus's own words in John 10 — picks up this exact legal vocabulary to describe the work of Christ.

As with the other studies in this series, careful attention is given to distinguishing what the biblical text and its surrounding legal material state explicitly from what represents a well-supported, reasoned theological application.

Did You Know?

The book of Ruth is placed, in the Hebrew Bible's traditional ordering (the Ketuvim, or Writings), among the Five Scrolls (Megillot) read at specific Jewish festivals — Ruth is traditionally read at Shavuot (the Festival of Weeks), which occurs at the conclusion of the barley and wheat harvest, the very agricultural season during which the book's events take place (Ruth 1:22; 2:23).

How to Use This Study

Each chapter includes: (1) the central biblical text; (2) historical and linguistic context; (3) explanations of Hebrew and Greek terms; (4) cross references; (5) 'Did You Know?' boxes with historical background; (6) suggestions for maps, diagrams, or illustrations for those teaching this material in a classroom or small group; and (7) questions for personal or group reflection. At the end, you will find a consolidated summary of the main points, a list of further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography for deeper study.

Suggested Illustration

Opening page with a simple family-tree diagram showing Elimelech, Naomi, their sons, Ruth, the nearer kinsman, and Boaz — along with the resulting line through Obed, Jesse, and David to Christ (Matthew 1:5-6) — useful for orienting readers to the relationships this study will examine.

Chapter 1 — The Law of the Goel: Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer

A Legal Institution, Not a Sentiment

The Hebrew term גֹּאֵל (goel), commonly translated 'redeemer' or 'kinsman-redeemer,' describes a specific legal office within Israelite family law, not merely a general term for someone who helps another in distress. The verb behind it, גָּאֵל (ga'al), means 'to redeem' or 'to buy back,' and carries the sense of restoring something — property, a person, a family line — to its rightful place within the covenant community.

Three Areas of Goel Responsibility

Old Testament law assigns the Goel several distinct responsibilities, depending on circumstance. Leviticus 25:25 addresses redemption of land: if a poor Israelite is forced to sell family property, 'then shall his kinsman that is next unto him come, and shall redeem that which his brother sold.' Leviticus 25:47-49 addresses redemption of persons sold into servitude due to debt. Numbers 35:19-21 addresses the role of the 'avenger of blood' (go'el ha-dam), a related but distinct application of the same root, pursuing justice for a slain relative. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 establishes a related institution, levirate marriage, requiring a brother-in-law to marry a childless widow to preserve the deceased husband's name and inheritance — a provision that, while technically distinct from the Goel land-redemption laws, becomes intertwined with them in the book of Ruth, as Chapter 6 will discuss.

Three Necessary Qualifications

Across these provisions, a consistent set of requirements emerges for anyone serving as Goel: he had to be a near blood relative (not a stranger to the family); he had to possess sufficient resources to actually accomplish the redemption (Leviticus 25:26 anticipates cases where 'he be waxen rich, and indeed find sufficient to redeem it'); and, as the book of Ruth will demonstrate vividly, he had to be willing — the law provided a formal mechanism for a qualified redeemer to decline, transferring the right to the next eligible relative.

Qualification	Legal Basis	Why It Mattered
Blood relation	Leviticus 25:25, 'his kinsman that is next unto him'	Redemption restored something to the family; a stranger had no standing to do this
Sufficient resources	Leviticus 25:26	The redeemer had to actually be able to pay the price required
Willingness	Ruth 4:6 (the sandal ceremony, detailed in Chapter 7)	The law did not compel; a qualified relative could formally decline

Did You Know?

The root ga'al is distinct from another Hebrew word often also translated 'redeem,' פָּדָה (padah), which carries more of a sense of ransom or payment of a price without necessarily implying a family relationship. The specific choice of ga'al throughout the redemption laws and the book of Ruth consistently emphasizes the relational, kinship-based nature of this particular form of redemption — restoration accomplished by someone who belongs to the family, not simply by any willing payer.

 **Further Reading:** *Leviticus 25:23-34, 47-55; Numbers 35:16-21; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think Israelite law required the redeemer to be a blood relative, rather than allowing any willing person to redeem lost property or a family line?
2. How does understanding the Goel as a precise legal office, rather than a vague gesture of kindness, change the way you anticipate reading the rest of Ruth's story?

Chapter 2 — Naomi and Ruth: Loss and an Unlikely Return

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried." — Ruth 1:16-17

A Family Undone by Famine and Death

Ruth 1 opens with a famine driving Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons from Bethlehem to the neighboring country of Moab. There, the sons marry Moabite women — Orpah and Ruth — but within the chapter's first five verses, Elimelech and both sons die, leaving Naomi without husband, sons, or male heirs, and her two daughters-in-law widowed as well.

Naomi's Bitter Assessment

Hearing that the famine in Judah has ended, Naomi determines to return to Bethlehem and urges her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab, remarry, and rebuild their lives among their own people (1:8-13). Orpah eventually agrees and departs (1:14). Naomi's own assessment of her situation is stark: she later tells the women of Bethlehem to call her 'Mara' ('bitter'), 'for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me...I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty' (1:20-21).

Ruth's Declaration

Ruth's response to Naomi's urging is one of the most quoted declarations of loyalty in the entire Bible: 'whither thou goest, I will go...thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God' (1:16). This is not merely an expression of affection; it is Ruth's explicit renunciation of her own national and religious identity — a Moabite woman voluntarily attaching herself to Israel and to Israel's God, with no legal or social guarantee of acceptance or security in doing so.

Did You Know?

Moab's relationship with Israel carried significant historical hostility, rooted in events recorded in Numbers 22-25 (Balak's attempt to have Balaam curse Israel, and Moabite women leading Israelite men into idolatry at Baal-peor) — background that makes Deuteronomy 23:3's exclusion of Moabites from the assembly of Israel 'even to their tenth generation' (discussed further in Chapter 8) considerably more understandable, and makes Ruth's declaration of loyalty to Naomi's people and God more remarkable given this history.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 1:1-22; Numbers 22:1-25:18 (the historical background of Israelite-Moabite hostility).*

Reflection Questions

1. What does Ruth's willingness to abandon her own national and religious identity suggest about the nature of her commitment to Naomi?

2. How does Naomi's bitter self-assessment in 1:20-21 set up the reversal the rest of the book will describe?

Chapter 3 — "She Happened to Come": Providence in the Field of Boaz

"And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech." — Ruth 2:3

Gleaning as a Legal Provision for the Poor

Ruth's initial activity in Bethlehem — gleaning, gathering the grain stalks left behind by harvesters — was not an act of charity extended at a landowner's discretion but a legally mandated provision. Leviticus 19:9-10 and 23:22 command Israelite landowners not to harvest the corners of their fields or gather every fallen stalk, but to leave this portion 'for the poor and stranger.' Ruth, as both poor and a foreigner, qualified doubly for this provision.

An 'Accident' the Text Treats as Providence

Ruth 2:3 describes Ruth's arrival in Boaz's specific field using a phrase often translated 'her hap was to light on' or 'she happened to come to' — language that, on the surface, suggests random chance. Many commentators note the narrative irony here: the text uses the language of coincidence to describe an event the entire subsequent narrative reveals as anything but coincidental. Boaz, as the story will soon reveal, is 'of the kindred of Elimelech' (2:1, 3) — a near relative with standing to serve as Goel.

Reading Providence Without Overreading the Grammar

It is worth being precise about what this verse does and does not claim. The Hebrew phrase does not contain an explicit statement like 'and the LORD guided her steps'; it describes the event, from the human characters' vantage point, as apparently accidental. The theological reading — that this 'accident' reflects God's unseen providence — is drawn from the larger narrative shape of the book (in which this 'chance' encounter proves pivotal to Israel's entire redemptive history) rather than from an explicit textual assertion at this specific verse. This is a well-supported literary and theological inference, not a claim the grammar itself makes.

Did You Know?

The book of Ruth never records God speaking directly or performing an overt miracle — no burning bush, no parted sea, no audible voice. Its entire theological argument for God's active involvement is made through the ordinary, 'coincidental' unfolding of events: a famine ending, a woman gleaning in the right field, a kinsman noticing her. This makes Ruth one of Scripture's clearest literary demonstrations of divine providence working through ordinary circumstances rather than dramatic intervention.

 **Further Reading:** *Leviticus 19:9-10; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Ruth 2:1-3.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does recognizing gleaning as a legally mandated, not merely charitable, provision change your reading of Ruth's circumstances?
2. Where have you noticed a similar pattern in your own life — events that seemed like 'coincidence' at the time but later revealed a larger, providential shape?

Chapter 4 — Boaz's Character: Grace Beyond the Letter of the Law

More Than the Law Required

Ruth 2 records Boaz doing considerably more for Ruth than the gleaning laws technically required. He instructs his workers to let her glean even among the standing sheaves, not merely the corners and forgotten stalks (2:15-16); he invites her to eat at his own table alongside his workers (2:14); he explicitly instructs the young men not to touch or reproach her (2:9); and he ensures her safety by keeping her within his own fields rather than risking exposure to potential harm elsewhere (2:8-9, 22).

Boaz's Stated Reason

When Ruth asks why she has found such favor as a foreigner (2:10), Boaz's answer is explicit: 'It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore' (2:11). Boaz's kindness is a direct response to Ruth's demonstrated loyalty and sacrifice, not an arbitrary or condition-free act.

An Echo of Abraham's Call

Boaz's language — 'thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity' — closely echoes God's own words to Abraham in Genesis 12:1: 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house.' Ruth, like Abraham, has left the familiar and secure for the unknown, trusting in a God she has only recently come to know. Boaz's blessing over her in Ruth 2:12 — 'a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust' — reinforces this connection, presenting Ruth's journey as a genuine act of faith comparable to the patriarch's own.

Did You Know?

Boaz's blessing that Ruth would find refuge 'under whose wings' (Ruth 2:12) uses imagery closely paralleled in several Psalms describing God's protective care (for example, Psalm 91:4, 'he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust'). Later in the narrative, Ruth will ask Boaz to 'spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid' (Ruth 3:9) — using related Hebrew vocabulary (*kanaph*, 'wing' or 'skirt/corner of garment') to ask Boaz himself to become the answer to his own earlier blessing.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 2:4-23; Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 91:1-4.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does Boaz's kindness, extended beyond the minimum legal requirement, model a pattern of grace worth emulating?
2. What significance do you see in Boaz's blessing over Ruth echoing God's call to Abraham?

Chapter 5 — The Threshing Floor: A Bold and Careful Request

"And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art my kinsman." — Ruth 3:9

Naomi's Plan

Ruth 3 records Naomi instructing Ruth to approach Boaz at the threshing floor during the harvest celebration, after he has eaten and lain down for the night, and to 'uncover his feet, and lay thee down' (3:4) — a culturally coded action inviting Boaz to recognize his obligation and opportunity as a potential redeemer, rather than (as some modern readers might assume) a sexual advance. The narrative itself is careful to record nothing improper occurring; Boaz is startled awake, Ruth makes her request, and he sends her away before dawn specifically 'that it be not known that a woman came into the floor' (3:14), protecting both their reputations.

Ruth's Explicit Legal Language

Ruth's own words to Boaz invoke the specific legal category this study has traced: 'spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art my kinsman' (3:9) — a near relative (Hebrew קָרוֹב, qarov, 'near' or 'close relative,' related to the concept of the Goel). Ruth is not making a vague romantic appeal; she is invoking Boaz's specific legal standing and asking him to act on it.

Boaz's Honest Disclosure

Boaz responds with evident regard for Ruth's character (3:10-11) but immediately discloses a complication: 'there is a kinsman nearer than I' (3:12). Rather than concealing this fact or attempting to proceed without addressing it, Boaz commits to resolving the matter properly the very next day — a detail that reinforces his integrity and sets up the legal proceeding of Chapter 4.

Did You Know?

The Hebrew word Boaz uses in 3:11 to describe Ruth, אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל (eshet chayil), 'a virtuous woman' or 'a woman of worth,' is the same phrase that opens the acrostic poem in Proverbs 31:10 ('Who can find a virtuous woman?'). Many readers have found it fitting that this exact phrase, elsewhere used to describe an idealized woman of character, is applied directly to Ruth by a man who has already observed her sacrificial loyalty firsthand.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:1-18; Proverbs 31:10-31.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why does Boaz's immediate, honest disclosure about the nearer kinsman matter for how we read his character?
2. How does Ruth's use of specific legal language ('thou art my kinsman') shape her request as something more substantial than a romantic gesture?

Chapter 6 — The City Gate: Ruth 4 and the Nearer Kinsman

"Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for thou I cannot redeem it." — Ruth 4:5-6

A Public, Legal Proceeding

Ruth 4 opens with Boaz going to the city gate — the customary location in ancient Israelite towns for conducting legal and civic business publicly, before witnesses — and assembling ten elders along with the nearer kinsman himself, whom the text notably never names, referring to him only as 'such a one' (Hebrew פְּלֹנִי אֱלֹמֹנִי, peloni almoni, roughly 'so-and-so').

The Offer, and the Hidden Condition

Boaz first presents the matter as straightforward land redemption: Naomi is selling property that belonged to Elimelech, and this man, as nearer kinsman, has first right of refusal (4:3-4). He agrees readily: 'I will redeem it' (4:4). Only then does Boaz introduce the second, intertwined obligation — that redeeming the land also means marrying Ruth, in order to preserve her deceased husband's name and inheritance (4:5), linking the land-redemption law of Leviticus 25 with the levirate-marriage principle of Deuteronomy 25 discussed in Chapter 1.

The Refusal, and Its Stated Reason

The nearer kinsman's refusal is immediate once he understands the full scope of the obligation: 'I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance' (4:6). His concern appears to be practical and financial — marrying Ruth and raising up an heir in the dead man's name would mean any child born would inherit the redeemed property in that deceased man's line, not his own, effectively diminishing what he could pass on to his own existing heirs, while he would have paid the purchase price himself. The cost, in his calculation, outweighed the benefit.

Requirement for the Goel	Did the Nearer Kinsman Meet It?	Did Boaz Meet It?
Blood relation	Yes — a near relative of Elimelech	Yes — also 'of the kindred of Elimelech' (Ruth 2:1)
Sufficient resources	Yes — able to redeem the land	Yes — a man of wealth and standing (Ruth 2:1)
Willingness to pay the full price	No — refused once the full cost was clear	Yes — 'I have purchased...Ruth' (Ruth 4:10)

Did You Know?

The narrator's decision to leave the nearer kinsman unnamed throughout the account — calling him only 'pelsoni almoni,' roughly equivalent to 'Mr. So-and-So' — stands in deliberate contrast to the careful naming of every other significant character in the book (Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, Chilion, Orpah, Ruth, Boaz, Obed). Many readers see this anonymity as a subtle narrative judgment: a man remembered, in the text's own structure, chiefly for what he declined to do.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 4:1-6; Leviticus 25:25; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.*

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think the nearer kinsman was willing to redeem the land but not willing to take on the full scope of the obligation, including Ruth?
2. What do you make of the narrator's choice to leave this man unnamed while carefully naming every other significant character?

Chapter 7 — The Sandal Ceremony: Public Renunciation of a Right

"Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thyself. So he drew off his shoe." — Ruth 4:7-8

A Custom the Narrator Explains for Later Readers

Notably, the text itself pauses to explain this custom — 'this was the manner in former time in Israel' — suggesting that even for the book's original audience (composed, most scholars believe, sometime after the events it describes, possibly during or after the united monarchy), this specific ceremonial practice required explanation, having perhaps already fallen out of common use or memory by the time of writing.

A Related but Distinct Practice From Deuteronomy 25

Deuteronomy 25:7-10 describes a somewhat different, related sandal-removal ceremony specifically tied to levirate marriage refusal, in which the widow herself removes the reluctant brother-in-law's sandal and spits in his face as a public mark of shame ('the house of him that hath his shoe loosed'). The ceremony in Ruth 4 is milder and does not involve this element of public shame or Ruth's direct participation; the man himself voluntarily removes his own sandal and hands it to Boaz, without recorded rebuke. Many scholars view the Ruth 4 ceremony as a related but somewhat generalized legal-transfer custom rather than an exact enactment of the specific Deuteronomy 25 levirate procedure, reflecting how such customs could vary or evolve across different periods and communities within ancient Israel.

A Legally Binding, Public Transfer

Whatever its precise relationship to the Deuteronomy 25 procedure, the ceremony in Ruth 4 accomplishes a clear legal function: it publicly, unambiguously transfers the right and responsibility of redemption from the nearer kinsman to Boaz, before witnesses, in a manner the entire community would recognize as final and binding. This is why Boaz can immediately proceed to declare, before the elders, 'Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's...Moreover Ruth the Moabitess...have I purchased to be my wife' (4:9-10).

Did You Know?

The elders and witnesses at the gate respond to Boaz's declaration with a formal blessing invoking Rachel, Leah, and Tamar (Ruth 4:11-12) — notably including Tamar, whose own story (Genesis 38) involves a related instance of a father-in-law failing to fulfill a levirate obligation, adding another layer of intertextual resonance to the legal proceedings just completed.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 4:7-12; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Genesis 38:6-30 (the related account of Tamar).*

Reflection Questions

1. Why might a public, witnessed ceremony have been necessary to finalize a legal transfer like this, rather than a private agreement?
2. What does the elders' blessing, invoking Rachel, Leah, and Tamar, suggest about how this moment was understood within Israel's larger covenant history?

Chapter 8 — Ruth the Moabite: Exclusion and Inclusion

A Real Legal Barrier

Deuteronomy 23:3 states plainly: 'An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.' This is a genuine legal provision within the Torah, rooted in the historical hostility between Moab and Israel discussed in Chapter 2, and it forms a real backdrop of exclusion against which Ruth's story unfolds.

How Ruth's Story Relates to This Law

It is worth being careful here about exactly what the book of Ruth does and does not claim regarding this exclusion. The text does not present Boaz, Naomi, or the elders at the gate as explicitly overturning or debating Deuteronomy 23:3; the narrative simply proceeds with Ruth's full acceptance into the community and, ultimately, the lineage of David, without direct legal commentary on the apparent tension. Various explanations have been proposed by later Jewish and Christian interpreters — some suggesting the exclusion applied specifically to Moabite men (given the male grammatical form of the Hebrew text and the specific historical offenses in view in Numbers 22-25), others noting that Ruth's explicit, voluntary allegiance to Israel's God (Ruth 1:16) may have been understood as a form of conversion superseding ethnic categories. This study presents these as reasonable, widely held explanations rather than a point the text of Ruth itself directly resolves.

The Genealogical Outcome

Whatever the precise legal reasoning, the outcome recorded in Scripture is unambiguous: Ruth 4:17 records the birth of Obed, 'the father of Jesse, the father of David.' Matthew 1:5 includes Ruth by name in the genealogy of Jesus Christ: 'And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth.' A woman from a nation under formal exclusion from Israel's assembly becomes, within a few generations, part of the direct ancestral line of Israel's greatest king and, ultimately, of the Messiah himself.

Did You Know?

Ruth is one of only four women named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (alongside Tamar, Rahab, and 'her that had been the wife of Urias,' referring to Bathsheba) — a notable feature of the genealogy, since ancient genealogies typically traced descent through male lines exclusively. Each of these four women's stories, including Ruth's, involves some form of complication, scandal, or exclusion by strict social or legal standards, making their inclusion in Christ's genealogy a consistent pattern many readers find theologically significant regarding the scope of God's redemptive purposes.

 **Further Reading:** *Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Ruth 4:13-17; Matthew 1:1-6.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does the real legal tension around Ruth's Moabite identity add weight to her ultimate inclusion in Israel's story and Christ's genealogy?
2. What does the pattern of complicated, excluded, or scandalized women appearing in Christ's genealogy suggest about the scope of the gospel?

Chapter 9 — Galatians 4 and John 10: The Goel Fulfilled in Christ

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." — Galatians 4:4-5

Blood: "Made of a Woman"

The first Goel qualification — blood relationship — is met, Paul states, through the incarnation itself: Christ was 'made of a woman,' entering the human family genuinely, not redeeming from outside it. Hebrews 2:14-17, discussed at length in a related study on Gethsemane, makes this connection explicit: the Son shared in 'flesh and blood' specifically so that he could act on behalf of those he came to redeem, 'in all things...made like unto his brethren.'

Resources: "Made Under the Law"

The second qualification — sufficient resources to pay the price — is met through Christ's own sinlessness. Unlike every other human being, subject to sin's debt, Christ, though genuinely 'made under the law' and subject to its full demands, carried no disqualifying debt of his own (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15). He alone possessed the 'resources' — a life without forfeit — necessary to redeem others.

Willingness: "No Man Taketh It From Me"

The third qualification — willingness, the very point at which the nearer kinsman failed — is met explicitly in Jesus's own words: 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself' (John 10:17-18). Where the nearer kinsman calculated the cost and declined, Jesus, fully aware of the cost, embraced it.

Goel Requirement	Fulfilled By Boaz	Fulfilled By Christ
Blood relation	Kinsman 'of the kindred of Elimelech'	'Made of a woman' — genuine incarnation (Galatians 4:4)
Sufficient resources	A man of wealth, able to pay the price	Sinless, carrying no disqualifying debt (2 Corinthians 5:21)
Willingness	'I have purchased...to be my wife' (Ruth 4:10)	'I lay it down of myself' (John 10:18)



Did You Know?

Paul's phrase 'the fulness of the time' (Galatians 4:4) has often been connected by historians and theologians to the specific historical conditions of the first century — the relative political stability of the Roman Empire, the widespread use of Greek as a common language, and the extensive Roman road network — all of which

are sometimes cited as practical factors that facilitated the rapid, early spread of the gospel message once the incarnation had occurred, though Paul's own point is primarily theological (God's sovereign timing) rather than a claim about these historical circumstances specifically.

 **Further Reading:** *Galatians 4:1-7; Hebrews 2:14-18; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 10:11-18.*

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the three Goel qualifications — blood, resources, willingness — do you find most striking when applied to Christ's work?
2. How does the contrast between the nearer kinsman's calculated refusal and Christ's deliberate willingness shape your understanding of the cost of redemption?

Chapter 10 — "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth": The Goel Elsewhere in Scripture

"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth."

— Job 19:25

Job's Use of the Same Legal Term

Job's famous declaration, spoken from the depths of his suffering and social isolation, uses the same Hebrew root, ga'al, that structures the entire book of Ruth. Job, stripped of family, wealth, health, and the support of his friends, expresses confident hope not in a vague spiritual comfort but in the specific legal category of a Goel — someone with the standing, resources, and willingness to restore what has been lost and vindicate the sufferer, even, remarkably, beyond death ('though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God,' Job 19:26).

A Broader Pattern of Redemption Language

The Goel concept extends well beyond Ruth and Job into Israel's broader theological vocabulary. Isaiah repeatedly describes God himself as Israel's Goel: 'Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One' (Isaiah 49:7; see also 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 63:16). This application of Goel language directly to God himself — not merely to a human relative acting within family law — is significant background for understanding how naturally the New Testament could apply the same category to Christ, understood as God incarnate.

A Term That Bridges Personal and National Redemption

Across these varied uses — Ruth's personal, family-level redemption; Job's individual hope amid suffering; Isaiah's application of the term to God's redemption of the whole nation of Israel from exile — the Goel concept consistently carries the same core elements this study has traced: genuine relationship, sufficient power or resources, and willing, decisive action on behalf of someone who cannot redeem themselves.



Did You Know?

The New American Standard Bible and several other modern translations render Job 19:25 using the capitalized 'Redeemer,' reflecting a long tradition of Christian interpretation reading Job's statement as a messianic anticipation of Christ, though it is worth noting that within Job's own immediate context and historical setting, he may have had in view a more general hope of vindication rather than a fully developed messianic expectation as later, fuller revelation would come to describe it — another instance of the progressive revelation pattern discussed throughout this study series.



Further Reading: Job 19:23-27; Isaiah 41:14; Isaiah 43:14; Isaiah 44:6; Isaiah 54:5-8; Isaiah 59:20.

Reflection Questions

1. How does seeing the Goel concept applied to God himself throughout Isaiah change the weight you give to its application to Christ in the New Testament?
2. What comfort might Job's declaration offer to someone today walking through significant loss or suffering?

Chapter 11 — Common Questions and Interpretive Caution

Given how much legal and theological weight this study has placed on the details of Ruth's story, this chapter addresses several fair questions a careful reader might raise.

"Is the connection between Ruth 4 and Galatians 4 explicitly stated in the New Testament, or is it an inference?"

This is an important distinction to draw honestly. Paul, in Galatians 4:4-5, does not explicitly cite the book of Ruth or use the specific Hebrew term goel (writing in Greek, to a largely Gentile audience). The connection this study draws is a well-supported thematic and structural parallel — Paul's language of redemption, sonship, and the specific conditions he describes (born of a woman, born under the law) map remarkably well onto the Goel requirements — rather than a direct citation or explicit New Testament reference to the Ruth narrative specifically. This study presents it as a strong, illuminating theological parallel, consistent with how the Goel concept functions elsewhere in Scripture (as Chapter 10 demonstrates), rather than claiming Paul had the book of Ruth specifically in mind as he wrote.

"Was the sandal ceremony in Ruth 4 the same as the one in Deuteronomy 25?"

As Chapter 7 discussed, the two ceremonies share a common element (sandal removal marking a legal transfer or refusal) but differ in significant details (the presence or absence of shaming, who removes the sandal). Responsible reading treats them as related but distinct customs rather than assuming Ruth 4 depicts a precise, formal levirate-marriage refusal ceremony identical to Deuteronomy 25:7-10.

"Does the book of Ruth resolve the tension with Deuteronomy 23:3's exclusion of Moabites?"

As Chapter 8 discussed, the text does not explicitly resolve this tension through direct legal argument; it simply narrates Ruth's inclusion without extended comment on the apparent conflict. This study presents several traditional explanations as reasonable possibilities while being honest that the text itself does not settle the question definitively.

Did You Know?

This pattern of distinguishing explicit textual connections from well-supported thematic parallels, and flagging genuine areas of interpretive uncertainty rather than glossing over them, has been applied consistently across every study in this series, precisely because it allows the strongest, best-supported claims (such as the Goel concept's broad application throughout Isaiah, or the plain legal function of the Ruth 4 ceremony) to carry their full weight.

 **Further Reading:** *Galatians 4:4-5; Ruth 4:7-8; Deuteronomy 23:3; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.*

Reflection Questions

1. Which parts of this study's argument do you hold with the most confidence, and which do you consider more interpretive?
2. How does this kind of transparency shape your trust in the study's overall presentation?

Chapter 12 — Practical Applications for the Christian Life

The legal architecture of redemption traced through Ruth, Job, Isaiah, and the New Testament carries direct implications for how believers understand both their salvation and their own capacity for costly love.

1. Redemption Was Never Cheap

The nearer kinsman's refusal reminds believers that genuine redemption always involves real cost — a cost some, even those legally qualified and resourced, are unwilling to bear. Understanding this refusal alongside Christ's willingness underscores that the price of redemption was neither small nor abstract; it was fully calculated, fully understood, and fully paid.

2. Grace Extends Beyond Legal Minimums

Boaz's kindness toward Ruth, extending well beyond what the gleaning laws technically required, models a pattern worth emulating: genuine care for the vulnerable that goes beyond minimum legal or social obligation, motivated by recognition of another's character and circumstance rather than mere compliance.

3. No One Is Outside the Reach of the True Goel

Ruth's status as an excluded Moabite, and her ultimate inclusion in Israel's covenant community and Christ's own genealogy, offers powerful assurance that no background, exclusion, or disqualification under the letter of the law places a person beyond the reach of the redemption Christ offers. The very lineage of the Messiah includes those the law technically excluded.

4. Loyalty and Faithfulness Are Not Wasted

Ruth's costly loyalty to Naomi — leaving her homeland with no guarantee of security or acceptance — was not immediately rewarded but was, in God's providence, woven into the fabric of Israel's redemptive history. Believers walking through seasons of costly faithfulness with no visible payoff can find encouragement in Ruth's example: faithfulness is never wasted, even when its ultimate significance is not yet visible.

5. Redemption Is Personal, Not Merely Transactional

The Goel law's insistence on genuine kinship — not merely payment by any willing party — reminds believers that Christ's redemption is not an impersonal transaction but flows from a real, incarnate relationship: He became genuinely human, entered the family, and redeemed as a true kinsman, not a distant benefactor.



The name Obed, given to Ruth and Boaz's son, means 'servant' or 'one who serves' in Hebrew — and the women of Bethlehem, blessing Naomi at his birth, declare that he 'shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age' (Ruth 4:15), completing the narrative's full circular reversal: Naomi, who returned from Moab 'empty' (1:21), is fully restored by the end of the book.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these five applications feels most relevant to your own life right now?
2. Where might God be calling you to extend grace beyond the minimum required, as Boaz did for Ruth?

Summary of Key Points

- The Goel (kinsman-redeemer) was a specific legal office in Israelite law, requiring blood relation, sufficient resources, and genuine willingness to redeem lost property, a family line, or a person in need.
- Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem with nothing, and Ruth's gleaning — a legally mandated provision for the poor — leads her 'by hap' to the field of Boaz, a near relative of her deceased father-in-law.
- Boaz extends grace well beyond the law's minimum requirements, motivated explicitly by Ruth's demonstrated loyalty to Naomi, itself echoing the language of Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1.
- At the city gate, a nearer kinsman initially agrees to redeem Naomi's land but refuses once he learns the redemption also requires marrying Ruth, citing the risk to his own inheritance — meeting the blood and resource qualifications but failing the test of willingness.
- The sandal ceremony (Ruth 4:7-8) publicly and legally transfers the right of redemption from the nearer kinsman to Boaz, who then formally redeems both the land and Ruth herself before witnesses.
- Ruth, a Moabite technically excluded from Israel's assembly under Deuteronomy 23:3, becomes, through this redemption, an ancestor of David and is explicitly named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ.
- Paul's description of Christ's redemptive work in Galatians 4:4-5 ('made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem') closely parallels the three Goel qualifications, and Jesus's own words in John 10:17-18 emphasize the willingness the nearer kinsman lacked.
- The Goel concept extends throughout Scripture, from Job's confident hope in a living Redeemer (Job 19:25) to Isaiah's repeated application of the term to God himself as Israel's Redeemer.
- Practically, this study grounds appreciation for the real cost of redemption, models grace beyond legal minimums, offers assurance that no exclusion places someone beyond Christ's reach, encourages faithfulness even without immediate visible reward, and emphasizes the genuinely personal, relational nature of Christ's redeeming work.

Further Reading by Theme

On the Goel and Redemption Law

Leviticus 25:23-55; Numbers 35:16-21; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

On the Full Narrative of Ruth

Ruth 1:1-4:22 (the complete book, best read in a single sitting).

On Ruth in the Genealogy of Christ

Matthew 1:1-17; Genesis 38:1-30 (Tamar); Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:22-25 (Rahab).

On the Goel Applied to God and to Christ

Job 19:23-27; Isaiah 43:1-14; Isaiah 54:5-8; Galatians 4:1-7; John 10:1-18; Hebrews 2:14-18.

On Providence in Ordinary Circumstances

Ruth 2:1-23; Esther 4:14 (a related instance of providence without explicit divine speech); Romans 8:28.

Bibliography and Recommended References

The works below are recommended for readers who wish to go further than this introductory study, whether through academic commentaries or accessible reference resources.

Commentaries on Ruth

- BLOCK, Daniel I. Judges, Ruth. New American Commentary. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.
- HUBBARD, Robert L. Jr. The Book of Ruth. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- DUGUID, Iain M. Esther and Ruth. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing.

On Israelite Family and Redemption Law

- WENHAM, Gordon J. Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- WRIGHT, Christopher J. H. God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

On Job and the Goel Motif

- HARTLEY, John E. The Book of Job. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- ANDERSEN, Francis I. Job: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

On Galatians and the New Testament Doctrine of Redemption

- MOO, Douglas J. Galatians. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- MORRIS, Leon. The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Dictionaries and Original-Language Tools

- BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (BDB).
- HARRIS, R. Laird; ARCHER, Gleason L.; WALTKE, Bruce K. (eds.). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), entry on ga'al.
- VINE, W. E. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

— End of Study —