

Review

Last time, we took a detailed look at the Law and traditions of ancient Israel concerning inheritance of and redemption of the land. We learned that the traditions surrounding redemption of widows for the perpetuation of the family name of men who died without offspring and no surviving brothers were connected to the Law concerning inheritance of the land although the redemption of these widows was not enshrined directly in the Law. Most importantly, we saw that Ruth's redemption by Boaz could not be arranged through her parents as would have been the ordinary procedure. Therefore, Ruth herself had to claim Boaz as her redeemer. We noted that Christians must also lay claim to our redemption by Christ – our Kinsman Redeemer. Chapter 3 tells the story of the midnight conversation between Ruth and Boaz in which she asked Boaz to redeem her.

Ruth 4

Now at last we come to the culmination of Ruth's redemption by Boaz and the beautiful model it provides of Jesus' redemption of the entire world. Let's read Ruth 4 together before we examine the text in detail.

Boaz Arranges to Redeem Ruth

¹Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. ²And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.

Ruth 4:1-2 [ESV]

While Ruth returned just before dawn to Naomi after her midnight conversation with Boaz at his threshing floor, Boaz set out from there to the city gate to carry out his plan for Ruth's redemption. We can infer that Boaz had already determined how he could redeem the name and lands of Ruth's father-in-law Elimelech along with Ruth herself long before Ruth asked him to do so at their threshing floor meeting. Perhaps Naomi had heard through the grapevine about Boaz' inquiries into the matter, and thus encouraged Ruth to go to Boaz at the threshing floor. Of course, it goes without saying that Boaz' actions on this morning and Ruth's the night before were in fulfillment of God's own plan of salvation for the entire world in which Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi all played their parts. Thus, without doubt God went before Boaz on this morning and blessed Boaz' meeting with Ruth's closer relative just as Boaz had hoped. The unnamed relative and the ten elders of the town that Boaz obtained as witnesses didn't just happen to come by the city gate that morning. Clearly God arranged beforehand for them to be in that place at the proper time.

³Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." Ruth 4:3-4 [ESV]

It is difficult to imagine that in a small town like Bethlehem in that day those present at the city gate wouldn't have already known about Naomi's return from Moab and the dire financial state she found herself in when she got home. Boaz no doubt formally stated the situation to these men in order to make the arrangement for Ruth's redemption legally clear. Although we had no previous indication in

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the text that Naomi intended to sell Elimelech's land, Boaz was not being deceptive when he said so to the assembled men. Land ownership in ancient Israel was the sole province (nyuk, nyuk, nyuk) of the men. Women only owned property in their own names when there were no surviving men in the family as we saw in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27).

5Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." 6Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it." Ruth 4:5-6 [ESV]

We know that Naomi's primary purpose was to provide for Ruth through her redemption by Boaz. Boaz' main desire was to marry Ruth whom he clearly already loved. We know that Boaz was a wealthy man who really didn't need to acquire the lands of Elimelech for his own prosperity. But in the ancient Israelite tradition, Ruth's redemption through marriage was part and parcel (nyuk, nyuk, nyuk) with the redemption of Elimelech's family land just as Boaz pointed out to the nearer kinsman.

It's not entirely clear from the text what the kinsman meant when he said that redeeming Ruth might impair his own inheritance. He was apparently concerned that if he were to marry Ruth and then she were to bear him sons of her own, then his own sons by his current wife would lose at least a portion of their inheritance of his own lands which were apparently significantly larger than Elimelech's lands. Boaz had also very likely thought of this, and presented the case to the kinsman the way he did in order to point up the potential issue. Boaz himself had no such concern, having no sons of his own whose inheritance might be jeopardized by his marrying Ruth.

7Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. Ruth 4:7-8 [ESV]

Recall from Ruth 1:1 that the story of Ruth and Boaz took place sometime during the latter part of the period of the judges' rule in Israel. Ruth 3:7 gives us a clue that the story was written down in the book of Ruth that we read today quite a while after the story itself took place. Traditionally, authorship of the book of Ruth has been attributed to the prophet and judge Samuel, but there is no way to verify this from the Biblical texts themselves. Furthermore, the brief genealogy we find at the end of the book was likely added later, but this also can't be verified or disproved since no contemporary manuscripts of the book have yet been found.

The tradition spoken of in verse 7 no doubt arose out of the Law concerning the public shaming of men like Onan (Genesis 38) who refused to redeem the widows of their brothers who died without sons.

7And if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' 8Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he persists, saying, 'I do not wish to take her,' 9then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders and

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pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face. And she shall answer and say, ‘So shall it be done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house.’ ¹⁰And the name of his house shall be called in Israel, ‘The house of him who had his sandal pulled off.’ Deuteronomy 25:7-10 [ESV]

Jewish tradition in the time of the Judges had apparently modified this call in the Law for the shaming of non-compliant brothers by the forsaken widows through the forcible removal of a man’s sandal into a tradition of voluntarily removing the sandal by unwilling redeemers as an indication that they were abdicating their rights of redemption as the widows’ nearest kin.

⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.” Ruth 4:9-10 [ESV]

In response to receiving the sandal from the abdicating redeemer, Boaz formally proclaimed his intention to redeem the lands of Elimelech and Mahlon’s widow Ruth himself as the next nearest kinsman redeemer. In making this declaration aloud at the city gate, Boaz sealed the deal in the presence of witnesses.

NOTE – Although chapter 1 didn’t make it clear, we can glean (nyuk, nyuk, nyuk) from Ruth 4:10 that Ruth had been the wife of Mahlon and Orpah the wife of Chilion. It really doesn’t matter, because Boaz was redeeming the lands of Elimelech their father – the combined inheritance of both sons.

¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹²and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.” Ruth 4:11-12 [ESV]

Rachel and Leah were of course the wives of Jacob whom God renamed Israel – the forefather of the Hebrew people. Jacob’s wives and their maidservants Zilpah and Bilhah became the mothers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

This blessing pronounced by the witnesses at the gate contains an ironic twist. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah – the widow of Judah’s son Er who died without any sons. Judah directed his son Onan to take Tamar as his wife and “perform the duty of a husband’s brother” for her. Onan tried to ensure he wouldn’t impregnate Tamar, and thus retain his dead brother’s inheritance for himself and his surviving brother Shelah. This displeased God so much that He put Onan to death. Judah understandably feared for the life of his remaining son Shelah, so Judah “slow-rolled” allowing his surviving son Shelah to take Tamar as his wife. In response to Judah’s inaction, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and enticed Judah into impregnating her himself. Judah’s son Perez by Tamar then became the progenitor of the line of Judah that eventually led to King David and from David on to Jesus’ earthly parents Joseph and Mary. This convoluted story can be found in Genesis 38.

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¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. Ruth 4:13-16[ESV]

With the birth of a son to Boaz and Ruth, Naomi’s redemption was complete. The bitterness she felt when she first returned from Moab to Bethlehem was dispersed. None of them knew the broader plan for the redemption of all mankind that God was working through them and the newborn child. We who find ourselves in the midst of trouble and sorrow can remember this story and look forward with hope and joy to what God will work and is already working in and through us.

¹⁷And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed [עֹבֵד *’ôbēd* - serving]. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²²Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David. Ruth 4:17-22 [ESV]

In verse 10, Boaz declared that his redemption of Ruth would ensure that the family name of Elimelech would not be cut off ***“from the gate of his native place.”*** Although Boaz might not have known it when he made this declaration, he was uttering a Messianic prophecy. Centuries later the prophet Micah would confirm that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem – King David’s home town.

²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 [ESV]

The wise men from the east who visited Jesus and His family in Bethlehem knew where to look for the new Ruler because they had read this prophecy. God used Boaz and Ruth to bring about the fulfillment of this prophecy through the line of their son Obed and his grandson King David. From David’s line, eventually Jesus’ earthly father and mother Joseph and Mary were born. Although Joseph and Mary were from Nazareth, when the time came for Mary to give birth to Jesus, God caused Caesar Augustus to decree a census so that Joseph had to return from Nazareth to Bethlehem where Jesus was born at last.

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Luke 2:1-5 [ESV]

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It is truly awe inspiring when we ponder this intricate sequence of events which God used to put into place His magnificent plan of salvation for all mankind through the incarnation, ministry, sacrificial death on the cross, and resurrection from the grave of Jesus – God the Son. It is even more humbling and wondrous when we consider that God conceived all of these details of His plan of salvation even before He created the universe.