

Ruth 4

The story of Ruth draws to a close here and concludes with a stunning reversal. The story begins with an empty and embittered woman far from home and without family. It ends with that same woman, resting and rejoicing, back at home and full with family.

Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, “Turn aside, friend, sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down.

About the time that Ruth and Naomi were at home, discussing the events of the previous night, Boaz rises and heads to the city gate. The city gate was a busy place, something like the town square. Merchants, messengers, judges and everyday people congregated there, visitors and residents alike. Locals conducted official business there, and this morning will serve as a prime example.

Boaz’s expediency to fulfill his promise to Ruth is noteworthy because there is no external pressure on him to do so. No one else is about to marry Ruth, and he is under no legal requirement to do so. She is a poor widow and has little worldly value. So why the rush? Presumably, it is because, quite simply, he is attracted to Ruth, and secondarily, it is because he is a man of his word. He will do what he said, and he will not delay.

At the same time, he will not cut corners. Although he wants to marry Ruth, he finds the man who is, in fact, a closer relative and thus has the “right of first refusal” both to the family land and to Ruth’s hand in marriage. He finds the man, convenes a quorum of the town elders and court is in session.

Then he said to the closest relative, “Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. So I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.’” And he said, “I will redeem it.” Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” The closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.”

Apparently, Naomi still owns some land, but her poverty is forcing her to sell. This is exactly the situation described in Leviticus 25:25, in which a close relative is to buy (redeem) the land from the impoverished family member in order to keep it in

the family. Given this choice, the close relative jumps to redeem. After all, Naomi has no heirs, so it is an easy and legal way to increase his personal landholdings.

Next, however, Boaz adds on that purchasing the land requires marrying Ruth as well. It is unclear why this is the case—legally, the man is not required to marry Ruth, so it may simply be a social stigma that he would take the land but not care for the family by marrying Ruth.

Regardless, this stipulation causes second thought and the man withdraws his offer stating it would “jeopardize [his] own inheritance.” With Ruth in the picture, he’s spending money to buy the land but not increasing his property long-term because the property would go back to Elimelech’s family. In addition, any children he has with Ruth might have a claim on his current property as well. The situation has just become more sticky, so he backs out and Boaz joyfully steps in.

To be intellectually honest, we should note it is difficult to read of a woman being traded as a piece of property, a bargaining chip in a land deal. In addition to recognizing the different culture, however, it is also important to keep in mind that Boaz is doing this entire scene not to treat Ruth as property but to care for her and Naomi and to give them permanent security. He is very much *not* treating them as property but rather treating them as valued family members. In this way, the Israelite law is set up so that widows and children don’t fall into destitute poverty.

(And let’s be honest: Boaz benefits, too. Proverbs 19:14 says, “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” Boaz is walking proof of that.)

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birthplace; you are witnesses today.”

Following an Israelite custom (probably some sort of derivation of the custom described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10), the man gives Boaz his sandal and with that, the deal is struck. Boaz announces the decision to the elders and his redemption of Ruth (and of the land) is secured.

This word “redeem” is also translated “close relative” and appears over twenty times in the book of Ruth. In the Old Testament, the redeemer is a close relative, the one who buys back lost property and secures the continuance of the family line. He is the defender and the advocate of his family and purchases individuals for

freedom's sake (cf. Isaiah 43:1, 44:22-23). But all this work is also a foreshadowing of the true redeemer.

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus is the true redeemer, the one who does all these things and more. As our redeemer, Jesus:

- Frees from the curse (Galatians 3:13)
- Makes us a son or daughter of God (Galatians 4:5)
- Buys us back through the offering of blood (Ephesians 1:7)
- Offers us eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12)

Boaz, as the redeemer, says, "I will pay your debt and you will inherit all that I have." Jesus says the same thing to you. Like Ruth, we simply must acknowledge need (in our case, our sin) and accept the offer.

All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman."

The crowd rejoices at this development and blesses Boaz and Ruth. In their prayer, they refer to two different moments from centuries earlier. The first is a reference to Rachel and Leah, the two wives of Jacob, who birthed most of the sons that would become the tribes of Judah (Genesis 29-30).

The second story references Genesis 38 in which one of one of Leah's sons—Judah—has a son (Perez) by his daughter-in-law, Tamar. It is an interesting reference because, like Ruth, Tamar was a widow after Judah's son died. Judah refused to let his son marry Tamar, thus refusing to her the right of redemption that Boaz has just granted Ruth. Thus scorned, Tamar, disguises herself, seduces Judah and gives birth to twins, including Perez. The people likely mention Perez here because their clan descends from Perez, but in reminding us of this story, we see, in contrast, the character of Boaz and Ruth from these ancestors.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him. Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse.

Fast-forward a few days, and Boaz and Ruth are married. The rest that Naomi and Ruth sought has become a reality. Fast-forward a year, and a son is born. The

redemption is complete. Keep in mind that Ruth was married to Mahlon for ten years and had no child (1:4-5). The implication is that Ruth was barren. But God has acted here, too. He has taken the barren, outcast widow and brought her into a family and into His family.

It is a good reminder that God's plan includes the far-reaching nations of the earth, the ones that worship other gods and are our enemies. From the time of the Exodus, foreigners who joined the people of God were welcomed in (e.g. Exodus 12:42-49). Israel was to remain separate and holy in religious loyalty to the Lord (cf. Deuteronomy 23:1-6) but foreigners who worshipped the Lord, like Ruth, are welcomed with open arms.

Not only that, He has used Ruth as an instrument of redemption herself. Ruth, the women say, is better than seven sons. Like Jesus, Ruth left her home and brought life from death for God's people. Look at Naomi. You may recall that chapter one ended with Naomi telling the community, "Call me bitter. God is against me. I went out full but now I am empty." Now the same women call her extravagantly blessed.

She went from full to empty to an even greater fullness. She had everything her culture wanted (family, land, a place in the covenant community). Then she lost it all. Then, wonder of wonders, she got it all back and better than before. A new family, a new land, a new role in the covenant community.

What do we make of this? It took the desperate pain of chapter one, to bring about the hope and life of chapter four. Would we ever wish for the pain? Of course not. But the beauty of redemption comes through that pain. And we see God's goodness and kindness and character all the more because of it. Sounds like the Gospel, doesn't it? We destroyed God's best, but God took our worst and displayed His goodness and glory even more because of it.

The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. Now these are the generations of Perez; to Perez was born Hezron, and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

The story could have ended after the last section. It would have been a great story of God's care for an individual family. His kindness to Naomi (and Ruth and Boaz) would have encouraged us and challenged us. But there is still more.

This baby that was born (Obed) will have a grandson, David. That grandson will be the greatest king the nation has ever seen. The line that was almost snuffed out will bring about the king of Israel. And then the King of Kings.

This genealogy is meant to be accurate but not complete (many Biblical genealogies skip generations and list grandfathers or great-grandfathers as fathers). Five generations, however, are mentioned here. Naomi holds her grandson (who she will have a key role in raising) and her grandson's grandson is named as the future king.

The writer of Ruth thus ends the story by pointing not to the pain of life in the time of the judges nor to the present goodness Naomi experiences, but at the future hope that is coming for the nation.

Conclusion

The period of the judges lasted a few hundred years, and it was a dark period for the people of Israel—the messy time after Joshua and before David. The Dark Ages of Israelite history. Here, in Ruth, we get one story from the Dark Ages.

Mark Dever asks, “Do one marriage, one child, and a couple of full stomachs matter all that much when society is disintegrating and sinking into a morass of immorality, as the book of Judges shows?” Ruth answers with an emphatic “Yes.”

As these individuals walk through their days trying to make right decisions, God is behind the scenes doing some majestic work in them and through them. At moments, they experience His goodness, but they will die before their descendant becomes king and long before their other descendant rescues all humanity. For Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, life is a long series of ordinary days with a few dramatic moments thrown in.

But it is in the ordinary that God unfolds His plan. There are no miracles or prophets here—just God working through ordinary human means—the scheming of Naomi, the hard work of Ruth, the kindness of Boaz, the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. They didn't recognize the significance of these events. They didn't recognize that the implications of their faithfulness to the Lord had long-reaching impact.

Even though our experience of the life of faith is different now that we have the Holy Spirit, we too, often forget about the value of living faithfully day in and day out and trusting God to work behind the scenes and extend us grace. We may not see much, in this life, of what God is up to through our days, but let's trust He's up to something good.

After all, in this one story, three individuals not only experience God's kindness to them, but they paint a powerful picture of God's ultimate redemption and even, as the story's close reminds us, bring about the next stage of that redemption.

Suggested Study Outline¹

- I. Pray
- II. Backdrop—What’s come before (recall last week)
- III. Read Passage
- IV. Exploratory Questions
 - a. What do we see of God in this passage?
 - b. What do we see of man in this passage?
 - c. What’s the most important word in the passage?
 - d. What similarities do you see between Boaz, as Ruth’s redeemer, and Jesus, as ours?
 - e. Look at 4:11-12 and 4:14-15. Then look back at some of the other prayers in Ruth. What does it look like for these prayers to be answered?
 - f. Do you think we’re supposed to judge the “close relative” negatively?
 - g. Why do you think the book is titled “Ruth” but begins and ends with Naomi?
 - h. Look at the genealogy listed in Matthew 1:2-6 and glance briefly at the stories of the four women mentioned (Genesis 38, Joshua 2, 2 Samuel 7). What do they have in common? What significance does this have for understanding Jesus?
- V. Application Questions
 - a. Have you ever experienced God doing something very good in your life out of something bad? What good has come out of negative things in your life? Let’s recognize his kindness in that.
 - b. Is there anything “good” that you need to do? Don’t wait. How quickly can you get it done?
 - c. What’s your story of experiencing God’s redemption?
 - d. How could you pray Scripture like the people pray in 4:11-12?
 - e. Boaz uses his influence and wealth for the good of others. How could use your influence and wealth in this way and who could you use it for?
 - f. How does God call you to action through this passage this week?
- VI. Other questions/thoughts
- VII. So what we’ve seen here is that...
 - a. God is abounding in lovingkindness to His people.
 - b. God works the big picture through the everyday happenings of our lives.
- VIII. Pray

¹ The questions here are suggestions. Pick the questions you want to use or create your own. The goal is to: 1) Get at the true meaning of the text; 2) Engage the student; 3) Push the student to apply the truth of the text. In addition, use sessions like this to ensure the student believes the Gospel and could study Scripture for himself/herself.