

Ruth Chapter 4

- OUTLINE:** I. Negotiations for redeeming Ruth (1-12)
II. Blessings (13-17)
III. Epilogue genealogy (18-22)

I. NEGOTIATIONS FOR REDEEMING RUTH

The gate in Palestinian cities became a public arena, the centre of city life and the place for any important assembly, or legal business. Less formally it was a place for a social gathering. At the gate, there was space available, in contrast to the layout of a closely-built, walled city.

It is of special interest that if a man died childless and his brother refused to marry the widow the woman was bidden '*go up to the gate unto the elders*' (Deut. 15:7) to begin the process of public humiliation of the offender. The gate was the normal place for public business, and specifically for the kind of business described in this chapter. Boaz arranges ten elders, indicating this was a legitimate, official legal transaction.

One commentator suggests Ruth will not release the land unless the redeemer marries her. A different comment suggests that the land would revert to an offspring of Boaz and Ruth, a loss for the redeemer.

Oral cultures rely on witnesses to record and validate legal agreements. A sandal is particularly easily used as such a symbol, because it is a common personal item easily removed. To gain the community's approval for this unusual marriage arrangement, Boaz identifies Ruth as a Moabite (v10), so fully disclosing the relevant facts. However this is the final time within the narrative that Ruth is identified as a Moabite. For the first time Boaz, explicitly states his intended relationship with Ruth.

Perez was the offspring of an irregular union, so witnesses may be acknowledging a questionable marriage arrangement for Ruth and Boaz, but nevertheless affirming its rightness, and blessing. (see Gen 38 re Tamar & Judah)

II. BLESSINGS

The conclusion celebrates marriage, birth and the promise of redemption. (cf Jane Austen, all ends well and the single man in possession of a large fortune who 'must have been in search of a wife' finds the best possible!) These events ultimately lead to David, Israel's king above all others. Naomi's hopelessness at the beginning of the book is mirrored by the unexpected outcome of transformation at the end. The child brings joy as a son but furthermore as a redeemer for Naomi, reversing her earlier bitterness. It shows *hesed* triumphs over loss, and Naomi becomes the source of continuity. 'Obed' means 'one who serves', perceived by the women as serving Naomi's needs.

III. EPILOGUE

The genealogy places the story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz into a much bigger picture, by use of a typical Biblical genealogy, placing good people in a position of honour. The Book of Ruth may be understood to explain King David's lineage (but an accurate and complete list would be longer). It is a possible later addition. Whatever the purpose of the narrative, by

beginning with Perez, it places 'breach' (meaning 'violation' or 'transgression') against 'blessing' both of which Perez represents.

God works out his purpose, generation after generation. We think also of the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. It is most significant that in a wider panorama, beyond the scope of the Book of Ruth, it gives us a greater context for the genealogy of Jesus. The process of history is not haphazard. There is a purpose in it all, the purpose of God.

QUESTIONS

1. How does the reader understand that Boaz has a respected position of leadership in Bethlehemite society?
2. What seems surprising or different in these negotiations to sell Naomi's land, and to take Ruth in marriage along with the land?
3. The time elapsed between the occurrence of these events (spanning around a century) and the writing of the book (sometime in 5th century B.C.E. necessitated the intrusion of the narrator into the story. Quote the words used.
4. Which party, Boaz or the unnamed closer relative do you think removes his sandal, and what is the significance in this agreement?
5. How does Boaz formalise the agreement of acquiring Naomi's property and his announcement of marriage to Ruth?
6. Why do you think Boaz publicly announces his intention to marry Ruth to preserve Mahlon's name here, but at the threshing room, he is solely concerned with Ruth herself?
7. From v11 onwards, community acceptance for Ruth the Moabite appears to be unanimous. How is this achieved?
8. Why do the witnesses mention Perez as a benchmark of blessing for Ruth and Boaz?
9. After ten years of marriage to Mahlon, Ruth was childless, yet, married to Boaz, she bore a son. What would the community assumption be? Do you agree?
10. What purpose does the concluding genealogy serve?