

PREFACE

For the last two sessions we have been looking at the individual called Ruth, the Moabitess. Indeed, the stated purpose of this brief series is to discover and apply laudable qualities of three *individuals*: Rahab, Ruth, and David.

But as we turn the corner into Chapter Four, the individual who gave her name to this book seems to fade into the background. This last chapter is less about her than about the results of something she instigated. Back when Ruth and Naomi were still in Moab, just beginning their momentous journey, Ruth had declared unequivocally her intention and direction for the future.

Read Ruth 1:16-17.

Now, in the final chapter of her story, we see the results of her heroic faith and devotion to family. She has been resolute in putting action to faith, and now we witness the happy consequence: Ruth's new God, Yahweh, responds with mercy and grace, and a promise for a royal future.

REDEMPTION

Just as Naomi predicted, Boaz wasted no time in securing his position in Ruth's life. No matter the amount of love in his heart for the woman, this was a legal procedure that must be settled first.

The events that transpired at the town gate—where the elders gathered to adjudicate and, in this instance, witness a transaction—did not match the classic definition set down in Deuteronomy.

- The two parties were not brothers; just related.
- They did not live together.
- There was no shaming of the first party when he rejected his obligation.
- The woman at the center of the transaction (in this case, Ruth) was not present to denounce the shirking redeemer.

Once the immediate kinsman-redeemer and the elders are in place, Boaz presents the offer.

Read Ruth 4:3-4.

One can't help but wonder if Boaz was being purposely incomplete in his initial statement. It certainly doesn't make the first gentleman look good when he eagerly accepts the land, but then turns down the right to marry Ruth.

Read Ruth 4:5-6.

I am impressed with how meticulous Boaz is about crossing every T and dotting every I. One gets the impression that he was so earnest and desirous in this that he wanted no complications later.

Read Ruth 4:8-10.

Sidebar: The business about the sandal refers to closing a deal of transfer of land. The sandal represented ownership—i.e., the right to walk about on one's land. By removing his sandal and handing it to the new owner, the first kinsman-redeemer relinquished his rights to the land (and, in this case, to the widow). The tradition is not too far afield from our practice of closing a deal with a handshake.

Boaz receives the blessings of the town elders, who pray that he and Ruth will have *many* children: the first will belong to Mahlon's line; from then on, to Boaz.

Sidebar: The elders mention Perez (in v12) and the generational list in v18 begins with Perez, because he, the son of Judah, was considered the ancestor of the Bethlehemites in general (Kidner).

Read Ruth 4:13.

There are a couple of things easy to miss in this paragraph. First, don't forget that Ruth had been childless during ten years of marriage to Mahlon in Moab. To the Jews, both fertility and barrenness were attributed to the Lord.

Read Genesis 29:31, 30:2.

We cannot know with certainty why God did not give Ruth children with Mahlon, although one might surmise that it had something to do with this Bethlehemite of the tribe of Judah emigrating to a land where Chemosh (*kem-oshe'*) was the Moabite national god—a god who required the sacrifice of children upon his altar. The birth of Obed to continue the line of Mahlon and Elimelech would be sign of God's grace—and, perhaps, forgiveness—to a family that had failed to place their trust in Him.

Another thing easy to miss is what the neighbor women are really saying to Naomi in vv14-15. **Read v14 and tell me to whom it refers—that is, who is the “redeemer” they speak of.**

Now read v15.

It is easy to think they are speaking of Boaz and, thinking that, it is easy to miss the last phrase: “has given birth to him.”

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.” (Ruth 4:13-15)

This can, admittedly, be confusing: Is Boaz the kinsman-redeemer, or is the child? John Peter Lange, in his commentary, helps sort it out.

Lange: Boaz had married Ruth, as a blood-relative of her former husband, in order to raise up the name of the latter upon his inheritance. The childless widow did not, as happens so often among us, leave the family of her deceased husband, as if she had never become a member of it. The blood-relative obtains a son by her, and the birth of this son becomes an occasion for congratulations to the mother of the former husband. The child borne by Ruth to Boaz as a blood-relative, although not the nearest, of Naomi's husband, is called by the women the *goel* of Naomi, and they praise God that he has not left Naomi without him. Not Boaz, who has redeemed the inheritance, but the child for whom he redeemed it, is the real *goel* of Naomi—the person, that is, in whom her sinking house again raises itself; for he is the son of her son's wife, albeit by another husband. He is the grandson of her family, though not of her blood. Ruth's *goel* was Boaz, but Naomi's the son of Ruth.

The birth of this child has “redeemed” Naomi, her late husband and her two dead sons. He will be the one to continue the family line and will be a comfort to Naomi in her old age. But the second half of v15 offers us one last commendation of Ruth.

for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, Let us not pass lightly over this. To our modern ears this may just seem like hyperbolic praise of Ruth, but to the women and Naomi this would have true meaning. These women were acknowledging Ruth's extraordinary character. Sons were everything in that culture: *they* were the ones who inherited land and wealth; *they* were the ones who continued the family line.

First, the number seven is not accidental, but suggests an idea of fullness, completeness, perfection.

Matthew Henry: Observe, They say of Ruth that she loved Naomi, and therefore was better to her than seven sons. See how God in his providence sometimes makes up the want and loss of those relations from whom we expected most comfort in those from whom we expected least. The bonds of love prove stronger than those of nature, and there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother; so here there was a daughter-in-law better than an own child. See what wisdom and grace will do.

For a group of women to say to another woman that her daughter-in-law is better than seven sons—even if an exaggeration—speaks volumes about Ruth's character and worth.

Read Ruth 4:16-17.

Then Naomi took the child... “a son has been born to Naomi”

Scholars are divided on how we should interpret this final scene of the book. Some (K&D, for one) say that Naomi *legally adopted* the child as her own, becoming his legal mother, as it were. But there is no biblical evidence for such a ceremony (Huey). I am inclined to side with those who interpret this as simply a way of describing a grandmother's extravagant love, devotion and joy, in the context of family tragedy—it is, in Naomi, in a sense the mirror image of Ruth's devotion to *her*.

The word translated “nurse” (*aman*, “cared for him”) does not refer to a *wet* nurse, but rather a guardian. It was used to describe Mordecai bringing up Esther. Instead of describing legal adoption, the women simply express the joy everyone is feeling for the formerly abject Naomi being redeemed and restored. I can well imagine that child was smothered with affection from his grandmother. The story of Ruth ends with a pertinent genealogical fragment, linking Boaz and Ruth, and their newborn Obed, to King David—his grandson.

Read Ruth 4:17b-21.

Of course, as we have seen, Obed’s *legal* father, for the purpose of property ownership handed down to the first-born, would have been Mahlon. Not surprisingly in this context, Boaz is listed as Obed’s *natural* father, as he is in the Matthew list ([along with Ruth](#)) and in Luke’s list.

CONCLUSION

I would like to close, again, with what David Guzik has to say about the presence of Christ Jesus, in type, being woven throughout this story. Beyond this being a picture of devotion and love, of strong character, of kindness and restoration, the story of Ruth is a picture of Christ Jesus.

- The kinsman-redeemer had to be a family member; Jesus added humanity to His eternal deity so He could be our kinsman and save us.
- The kinsman-redeemer had the duty of buying family members out of slavery; Jesus redeemed us from slavery to sin and death.
- The kinsman-redeemer had the duty of buying back land that had been forfeited; Jesus will redeem the earth that mankind “sold” over to Satan.
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, was not motivated by self-interest, but motivated by love for Ruth. Jesus’ motivation for redeeming us is His great love for us.
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, had to have a plan to redeem Ruth unto himself - and some might have thought the plan to be foolish. Jesus has a plan to redeem us, and some might think the plan foolish (saving men by dying for them on a cruel cross?), yet the plan works and is glorious.
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, took her as his bride; the people Jesus has redeemed are collectively called His bride (Eph_5:31-32; Rev_21:9).
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, provided a glorious destiny for Ruth. Jesus, as our redeemer, provides a glorious destiny for us.

It all comes back to the idea of Jesus as our kinsman-redeemer; this is why He became a man. God might have sent an angel to save us, but the angel would not have been our kinsman. Jesus, in His eternal glory, without the addition of humanity to His divine nature might have saved us, but He would not have been our kinsman. A great prophet or priest would be our kinsman, but his own sin would have disqualified him as our redeemer. Only Jesus, the eternal God who added humanity to His eternal deity, can be both the kinsman and the redeemer for mankind!

Read Isaiah 54:4-8.