

## Background

In this final chapter of Ruth we will address two items of primary significance to this time period: land and legacy. The Promised Land was a gift of God granted to Israel, promised to their father Abraham, divided by Joshua and Moses, granted to specific tribes and then divided by lot to the families within the tribes. It not only provided them livelihood and physical identity as a people, but was part of the inheritance they would pass along to the next generation. As we established in our study of the kinsman redeemer in Chapter 2, the Israelite legal system provided a means for the redemption of land that was sold outside of the family, in order to restore the ownership of the land within the family. Additionally, the Lord decreed a year of Jubilee to be observed every 50<sup>th</sup> year, in which any property sold would be restored to the original owner or their blood line (see *Leviticus 25:10-17, 25-28*). The land was sacred.

Additionally, having children and leaving a legacy was important. The “ideal” Jewish family would have seven sons, the number of perfection. The sons would carry on the family name, own and tend the land they inherited, and prosper in Israel, thus establishing the father’s legacy. **Everyone wanted to be respected in the present and remembered in the future.**

Though the two items of significance are a focus, the means of obtaining land and legacy was through a process of redemption. To redeem means to buy back, to get or win back, or to free from distress or harm. **Redemption is valiant but redemption is costly.**

## Ruth 4:1-10 – At the Gate

As chapter three closed, Boaz sent Ruth home early in the morning with a cloak full of grain. Naomi promised Ruth that Boaz would not rest but would settle the matter on the same day. Naomi’s confidence was well-placed. Boaz went to the gate of Bethlehem and sat down with the intention of finding the nearest kinsman redeemer.

The city gate was probably the most significant location within a small city. Four things made it so important: traffic, transactions, proceedings, and protection.

1. **Traffic** - For those who dwelled within the safety of the city walls at night, they would have to pass through the city gates to go their fields and work. The city gate was a highly trafficked area and if you wanted to find someone, wait at the gate long enough and you will see them.
2. **Transactions** – Because there was so much traffic, the city gate was a logical place to gather to buy and sell and conduct business. There were always plenty of people around to serve as witnesses for any legal transaction, which was essential in the days before binding legal documents.
3. **Proceedings** – Whenever a matter had to be decided by a council of elders, the city gate was a logical location to gather and hear the case. Many of the elders of the city would congregate and “sit” at the gate in order to be present to provide their leadership in various matters.
4. **Protection** – Perhaps most significantly, a gate suggests a walled city, established to protect the people from those who would do them harm. With limited access points, the city would be better protected.

There was much more to the “gate” itself than we might imagine. The picture of the ruins of the city gate of Gezer shows a narrow pathway, approximately 13 feet wide, surrounded by six chambers that had benches within them. All who passed through the gate had to fit through the narrow entrance and would pass the chambers. The chambers were likely rooms where transactions and proceedings could be conducted, in a public setting. No doubt they were also strategically useful for military defense.



It didn't take long for Boaz's location to work to his advantage. The near kinsman redeemer walks by and Boaz addresses him and asks him to sit. In most contemporary translations, Boaz calls the man “friend.” In the King James Version, Boaz calls him, “such a one.” This is a difficult phrase to translate because it is a Hebrew idiom, which doesn't have a direct translation into English that makes sense.<sup>1</sup> The best sense of the word is the current English idiom, “so and so.” Remember, this is a written description of the events that occurred. It is unlikely that Boaz called the man, “Mr. So and So,” which would have been perceived as an insult; but that is the divinely inspired record of the conversation. This is what the Lord wants us to remember. **The significance of this address will come up later.**

---

<sup>1</sup> An idiom is an expression that is unique to a people or to a district. For example “beat around the bush” or “barking up the wrong tree” are commonly understood idioms in English that would not make sense if translated into another language without the cultural context.

Why did Boaz assemble the 10 men? **He was assembling trustworthy witnesses to the legal proceeding that was about to take place. There was an outstanding responsibility of redemption under the law and the issues needed to be resolved. The witnesses would ensure the law was honored, would attest to the validity of the resolution, and serve as ongoing witnesses to what took place. Although the number 10 is not prescribed in Scripture for such a quorum, it was apparently the custom at this time.**

The land transaction we read about here is a bit complex. Notice that we have no record of Naomi speaking to Boaz about the land. **Yet, Boaz knew that in order to properly fulfill his duty as a kinsman redeemer towards Ruth, the issue of the land would also have to be addressed first.** In fact, it is the issue most clearly addressed by Scripture, as the laws of redemption of the land by the nearest relative are set forth in Scripture (see *Leviticus 25:25-28*), but the requirement for someone to marry a widow outside of the immediate family was not addressed by Scripture (see *Deuteronomy 25:5-10*). However, the spirit of this marital law was apparently carried forward outside of the immediate family.

Although the text refers to Naomi selling the land, it is unlikely that she owned it at this point. The Jewish laws surrounding land transfer do not contemplate a widow acquiring property after the death of a husband, although a daughter could inherit the land if she had no brothers (see *Numbers 27:1-11*). It is likely that Elimelech sold the land during the famine to someone outside of the family because of their poverty. He may have used this money to fund their new start in Moab. The transaction that will take place at the Gate of Bethlehem is the transfer of the right to redeem the property back into the family, according to Jewish law (see *Leviticus 25:25-28*). The nearest kinsman redeemer would have that opportunity if he would so choose.

What is the near kinsman's response to Boaz's first proposal regarding the redemption of the land? What are his likely motives for redemption? **He is willing to do it. By redeeming the land, he would have more land to work and from which to prosper. Although there would be a financial expenditure to make the acquisition and more fields to manage, it would likely be a profitable venture for him. In this society, fertile land equals financial success. Without a descendant of Elimelech to later claim the land, this land would likely remain in the near kinsman's family in perpetuity.**

Now that he has established the near kinsman's willingness to redeem the land, he introduces the responsibility that accompanies the land: marrying Ruth. By separating the two portions of the kinsman redeemer obligations, Boaz allows each to be addressed with clarity. It also exposes the distinction in character between the near kinsman and Boaz. As Boaz describes it, what was the purpose in the kinsman redeemer marrying Ruth? Why was this important? **The purpose of marrying Ruth was to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance (the land). Not only would the kinsman redeemer need to acquire Elimelech's land, he would need to marry Ruth and attempt to have a child which could later inherit Elimelech's land and perpetuate the name of Elimelech as an ancient landowner and forefather. At risk was the loss of Elimelech's legacy in Bethlehem and Israel. With no one to redeem his land and his daughter-in-law, he would eventually be forgotten in Israel and have left no legacy to future generations.**

Why did the near kinsman refuse to redeem Ruth and the land? He said that redeeming Ruth would impair his own inheritance and therefore he would redeem neither Elimelech's land nor his legacy. By taking the land and Ruth, there would be at least five expectations of the redeemer:

1. He would purchase the land from its current owner and work it.
2. He would attempt to father a child (preferably a son) with Ruth and give her all the legal protections and affection due a wife.
3. He would have to provide for Naomi, who was Ruth's mother.
4. At his death, Elimelech's land would pass to any sons (or daughters if there were no sons) born to Ruth.
5. Because any child born to Ruth would be his legitimate heir, they would also receive a portion of his land inheritance, shared with any of children from his present wife.

It is primarily the fifth point that made the near redeemer unwilling to redeem Ruth. Under the "land only" scenario, he was willing to redeem the land because it would create present prosperity and would enlarge his legacy. Under the "land and Ruth" scenario, he was unwilling to redeem the land because of the ongoing present obligations and the risk to his long-term legacy. **This man did not possess the kindness (*hesed*) and nobility of spirit characteristic of Boaz or Ruth.**

Why did Boaz redeem the land and Ruth? He agreed to purchase the land and to "buy" the right to marry Ruth as his wife to perpetuate the legacy of Elimelech, so that it would not be cut off from among the Israelites and from the gate of Bethlehem. His expressed concern was to honor the dead by expressing the covenantal love commanded of Israel.

Did Boaz have less to risk than the near kinsman? Although we can conjecture that Boaz was unmarried and childless, we are not told that; neither are we told that the near kinsman was married and had children. There is no solid basis to claim that Boaz had less to risk than the near kinsman. **Boaz did not have less risk than the near kinsman, but he did have more love.**

Why is the near kinsman redeemer's name left out of this passage? Why is he referred to as "so and so"? Review *Deuteronomy 25:5-10*. The kinsman who refused to redeem the widow of his brother was to be known as "the house of him who had his sandal pulled off." Although the sandal of the near kinsman was given to Boaz to serve as a sign of the transaction; we don't read about a public ridicule of the near kinsman. Ruth was not left without a redeemer. Boaz stepped in. However, the name of the near kinsman has been lost and forgotten. **He sought to preserve his legacy but lost it in the process. Boaz was willing to risk his legacy, and has his name eternally established in the record of this book and in the lineage of David and ultimately of Jesus Christ.** This is an enduring legacy and reminiscent of the words Jesus would speak around a thousand years later to His disciples, "*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.*" (Luke 9:24).

True love is risky; it will cost us something. But it is a risk that will be rewarded by our Father and His Son Jesus Christ, the greatest risk-taking Kinsman Redeemer of them all.



How do we see a shadow of Christ in the redemption of Ruth? There are several parallels to Christ's redemption of mankind in Boaz's redemption of Ruth.

1. There must be an object of redemption that is captive and needs to be freed. Apart from salvation, we are captive to the law of sin and death. (see *Galatians 3:13* and *Hebrews 7:26-27*)
2. Eternal redemption required an eligible kinsman redeemer. Jesus became eligible by the incarnation and His perfect life. (see *Hebrews 2:14*)
3. Redemption required a price. Jesus paid the price of our redemption by shedding His blood and dying for us. (see *1 Peter 1:18-19*)
4. Redemption required willingness. (see *John 10:17-18*)

#### Ruth 4:11-12 – The Blessing of the People

Boaz closed this last section (vs. 9-10) by stating his interpretation of the events that just transpired and now looked to the court of the 10 elders and witnesses to affirm the transaction. What was their response? They affirmed Boaz's interpretation of this transaction emphatically and then endorsed it by pronouncing a Divine blessing upon him.

What is the significance of mentioning both Rachel and Leah in blessing Boaz? These Bethlehemites were of the tribe of Judah, descendants of Leah, the first wife of Jacob (*Genesis 29:35*). However, Rachel was Leah's sister and the preferred wife of Jacob (*Genesis 29:30*). Ultimately, they both had children (along with their handmaids) and became the mothers of the nation of Israel, but Leah had more children than Rachel. I believe that by mentioning both women and particularly Rachel first, they were praying for a blessing of a joyful and fruitful marriage for Boaz and Ruth.

Why was Perez cited as the example of blessing rather than Judah? Perez was the head of the household of the clan from which Boaz came, and also likely many of the Bethlehemites. He was a child born through the pseudo-kinsman redemption of Tamar after her first and second husband died. Even though Judah failed to properly fulfill his responsibility to provide a redeemer, Tamar bore a child who became the father of their clans. See *Genesis 38:6-30*.

Who is the deciding factor in the blessing? They mention the Lord (Jehovah) twice. They prayed for the Lord to make Ruth like Rachel and Leah and for Him to make their offspring like the house of Perez. They recognized the truth of *Psalms 127:1*, though it had not yet been written: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."

#### Ruth 4:13-17 – The Birth of the Kinsman Redeemer

True to form, the Lord allowed Ruth and Boaz to have a son and this birth caused a great stir and resulted in rejoicing in Bethlehem. A chorus of women then turned to Naomi and blessed the Lord for providing her with a kinsman redeemer. Who was Naomi's kinsman redeemer? The son born to Boaz and Ruth was called the kinsman redeemer of Naomi because he would be the one who would ensure the name of Elimelech and Chilion were not forgotten in Israel.

Consider verse 15 in light of Ruth 1:19-21. What has happened? **The women praising the Lord on behalf of Naomi in verse 15 were likely some of the same women she complained to in *Ruth 1:19-21*. She told them that she had come back empty from Moab. Yet now the women responded in return that she has brought back a daughter-in-law that who truly loves her and is better to her than seven sons, the perfect number and gender of children in ancient Jewish thought. Naomi thought she was empty, but because of the Lord, the one she returned with provided more to her than her husband or sons could.**

What was Naomi's role in the life of this baby? **She became a surrogate grandmother to the child, probably like a nanny. No doubt this allowed her to influence the boy and pass along the heritage of her family. He would bring her great joy.**

The text implies the chorus of women named the boy Obed. It was most likely that Boaz and Ruth named the boy, but the women of the town confirmed the name. Obed means "servant."

#### Ruth 4:18-22 – The Small Arc within the Greater Arc

The book of Ruth concludes with a genealogical record of the generations from Perez to David. It is interesting that the lineage begins with Perez rather than Judah; but Perez was established as the son of Judah in verse 12. What is the focus of this lineage? Note verse 17 as well. **The purpose of the lineage is to show us the heritage of David.**

What does this tell us about the date of writing of the book of Ruth? **At the earliest, this book had to be written during the days of David's established kingdom. We are unable to date it precisely.**

What does this tell us about the immediate purpose of this book? **The book establishes the godly lineage of David and how the Lord intervened therein supernaturally to establish his line. It also makes clear that his Moabite heritage was not a threat to the purposes of Israel.**

What are the larger purposes of this book? **We know Jesus is of the lineage of David and that the greater purposes of God (kinsman redemption, grafting in Gentiles, covenant love) were being foreshadowed.**

We have just zoomed in upon a short span of time in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz and saw the hand of the Lord working in a desperate situation to deliver, heal what was broken, and bring plenty out of poverty. Yet, we see this is just but one little story arc in the midst of a much greater story arc the Lord was weaving. **Can you attest to the Lord doing this in your life?**

What if you were a Bethlehemite and friend of Naomi? What if you sincerely committed to pray for Naomi and her family as they faced the famine in Bethlehem and left for Moab? Think about how you would have prayed for them during the different phases of Naomi's journey from the death of Elimelech to the birth of Obed. How would your faith have fared during this journey? **How can this perspective affect the way you pray for others today?**