



Ruth - Chapter Four

Summary of Chapter Four

Boaz met with the closer relative of Elimelech and Naomi and, in the presence of ten elders, outlined the case of Naomi and the man's position as kinsman-redeemer. Boaz states that if the man wants to redeem Elimelech's name then he should do so. The man agreed. Boaz then went on to point out that by doing so the redeemer would also inherit Ruth the Moabite as a wife. At this the man declined as it would impact on his own inheritance rights. Therefore, he offered the right to Boaz to act as redeemer.

According to the custom, the transaction to become the redeemer was undertaken in the presence of the elders. Boaz promised to take care of Naomi and to marry Ruth in order to have children to take on the name of Elimelech. The people present called for God's blessing on what was to come. So Boaz and Ruth were wed. They had a son Obed from whom, according to the given genealogy, King David would come.

V. Ruth 4:1-12 - The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth

This fourth and final scene is framed by opening and closing at the 'gate' with 'elders' (vv.1-2 and vv.11-12). Both verb and noun forms of 'redeem' occur throughout this scene continuing the theme of the whole story.

¹ No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.' And he went over and sat down.

² Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down.

Ruth 4:1-2

The gate served as a combined town hall and courthouse: <<*Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the road into the gate; and when anyone brought a suit before the king for judgement, Absalom would call out and say, 'From what city are you?' When the person said, 'Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel'*>> (2 Samuel 15:2), <<*When I went out to the gate of the city, when I took my seat in the square, the young men saw me and withdrew, and the aged rose up and stood*>> (Job 29:7-8), <<*Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land*>> (Proverbs 31:23), and: <<*They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth*>> (Amos 5:10). It was a place of commerce but, more importantly, it was the place where the esteemed and honourable men of the city sat. For an ancient city in Israel it was a combination of a city council chamber and a courtroom.

The next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. Boaz surprised Ruth in 3:12 by telling her there was a nearer kinsman than himself. Now this man came by the city gates as Boaz sat there. Because Ruth had quietly gone back home after being at the threshing floor at Boaz' instruction (3:14), Boaz' approach to this nearer kinsman would be a complete surprise to the other man. Clearly this was a tactical advantage to Boaz.

Come over, friend; sit down here. Literally, in the ancient Hebrew, when Boaz greeted the nearer kinsman he called him "Mr. So-and-so." The writer of Ruth never identified the name of the nearer kinsman, because he was not worthy of the honour. He declined to fulfil his obligations as the nearer kinsman to Ruth because of self-interested concerns for his own inheritance. By not naming the individual, Scripture hides the identity so as to protect his descendants from the shame that he brought upon them.

The elders witnessed such transactions as these, as confirmed by: <<*But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate 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'*>> (Deuteronomy 25:7), and decided cases, as confirmed by: <<*If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place*>> (Deuteronomy 21:19).

³ He then said to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech.

Ruth 4:3

The next-of-kin is Hebrew *Ploni Almoni*, a brother; Boaz was a nephew.

Redemption is referred to here in terms of buying and selling in this chapter, just as it is in: <<*Remember your congregation, which you acquired long ago, which you redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage. Remember Mount Zion, where you came to dwell*>> (Psalm 74:2), and: <<*Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours'*>> (Jeremiah 32:7).

This parcel of land, or the legal right to use it, may have been sold to buy food during the famine or before leaving for Moab. Or Naomi may still be in full possession of the land, or of its use, which she is selling out of necessity. In either case, a kinsman must redeem it. Therefore, when Boaz brought the matter up to the nearer kinsman, he brought it up as a matter regarding property - something any man would be interested in. Anyone would want to buy back a piece of property and keep it in the family name by keeping it for one's self.

⁴ So 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, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.' So he said, 'I will redeem it.'⁵ Then Boaz said, 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance.'⁶ At this, the next-of-kin said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.'

Ruth 4:4-6

If you will redeem it, redeem it. When Boaz put it in terms of purely a land transaction, there was no hesitation on the nearer kinsman's part. When the 'more closely related kinsman' (Ruth 3:12) is given the opportunity to redeem the field from Naomi. He responds, "I will redeem it."

Then Boaz said, 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance.' When he learns that Ruth the Moabite will become his wife as part of the transaction, he changes his mind, "I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance." Apparently he was concerned that any son born to him and Ruth would share the inheritance already planned for his present children or, perhaps that, marrying a foreigner would negate his inheritance when it was due to him.

However, the man failed to realise that any inheritance rights in this life have no bearing on the inheritance to be received in the next. Other men once approached Jesus to try to trap him with a question of a woman who was married to seven brothers as each of their predecessors died: “Whose wife will she be at the resurrection?” In response: <<Jesus said to them, ‘Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’>> (Mark 12:24-25).

Take my right of redemption yourself. His decision then opens the door for Boaz.

⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, one party took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, ‘Acquire it for yourself’, he took off his sandal.

Ruth 4:7-8

In former times. The practice must be explained since the audience for the book of Ruth no longer does this. Redeeming and exchanging is the transference of the right of redemption (v.6).

The removal of the sandal was a symbol of this exchange. Although it represents a different but related custom, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 describes the ceremony conducted when a kinsman declined his responsibility. The one declining removed a sandal and the woman he declined to honour spat in his face. But in this case, because there was no lack of honour was involved, they just did the part of the ceremony involving the sandal.

⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, ‘Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.’

Ruth 4:9-10

Boaz said to the elders and all the people. The transaction for acquiring both the land and taking on the responsibility to perpetuate the name of Elimelech by marrying Ruth is completed with a public proclamation, with those present acting as legal witnesses to what has transpired between the parties involved.

I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite. To preserve the property, Ruth was acquired or bought, i.e. redeemed, to be Boaz' wife: <<*When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her*>> (Deuteronomy 25:5). It is important to note, however, that Boaz mentions his marriage separately and does not include Ruth with his newly acquired land. A wife is not a piece of property, but a beloved partner in the sacred task of building a home.

That the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred. That is, from his clan relatives (v.3) and, indeed, from the nation of Israel: <<*The eye that saw them will see them no more, nor will their place behold them any longer*>> (Job 20:9).

From the gate. Men of this family may have held prominent positions in the gate and therefore part of the town's ruling council of elders.

His native place refers to his social standing, his home, city, and country.

¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate, along with 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 produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹² and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'

Ruth 4:11-12

Rachel and Leah. These two women were barren, as Ruth had been up to this point, but the Lord opened their wombs (Genesis 29:31 and 30:22). Leah was the mother of Judah (Genesis 35:23), the ancestor of the tribe of Boaz and Naomi. Through childbearing these two women, with the assistance of their maids Bilhah and Zilpah, built up the house of Israel, i.e. established and perpetuated the family of Jacob: <<*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain*>> (Psalm 127:1).

The people and the elders also express their blessing-wish that Boaz would act worthily by producing children through this marriage of redemption. Through Boaz' offspring, David's house was built: <<*Thus your name will be magnified for ever in the saying, "The Lord of hosts is God over Israel"; and the house of your servant David will be established before you*>> (2 Samuel 7:26), which was the pride of Ephrathah and Bethlehem; refer to the comment made on Ruth 1:2.

Perez was the ancestor of the preeminent Judæan Perezite clan: <<*The descendants of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. The descendants of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites*>> (Numbers 26:20-21), and of prominent leaders: <<*Jashobeam son of Zabdiel was in charge of the first division in the first month; in his division were twenty-four thousand. He was a descendant of Perez, and was chief of all the commanders of the army for the first month*>> (1 Chronicles 27:2-3), <<*And in Jerusalem lived some of the Judahites and of the Benjaminites. Of the Judahites: Athaiah son of Uziah son of Zechariah son of Amariah son of Shephatiah son of Mahalalel, of the descendants of Perez; and Maaseiah son of Baruch son of Col-hozeh son of Hazaiah son of Adaiah son of Joiarib son of Zechariah son of the Shilonite. All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant warriors*>> (Nehemiah 11:4-6).

Tamar and Judah, who was Tamar's father-in-law and the father of her child, recalls this attempted levirate marriage (Genesis 38:6-8).

VI. Ruth 4:13-22 - The Genealogy of David

The final part of the story briefly describes the marriage of Ruth to Boaz, the birth of their son and his place in the genealogy of King David and therefore the coming Messiah.

VI.a Ruth 4:13-17 - Conclusion: Naomi Blessed with a New Family

The conclusion serves as the reversal of the introduction, showing how the Lord, through Ruth's love, restored Naomi's life.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son.

Ruth 4:13

Ruth went from self-proclaimed slave-servant (2:13) and maidservant (3:9) to wife.

The Lord made her conceive just as he did for Leah and Rachel; as confirmed by Genesis 29:32-35 and 30:23.

The word son, Hebrew *ben*, sounds like 'built up', Hebrew *banah* in v.11; the son is the one through whom the house is to be built. Ruth has now found rest and security: <<*He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord!*>> (Psalm 113:9).

¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel!

Ruth 4:14

Blessed be the Lord. The women recognise that the Lord is the author of new life resulting from redemption. Calling the heir the next-of-kin or redeemer indicates the one in whom redemption is realised.

¹⁵ He 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 borne him.’

Ruth 4:15

A restorer of life is literally ‘he who causes life to return,’ Hebrew *shub*, which reverses Naomi’s complaint before the women of Bethlehem: <<*the Lord has brought me back empty*>> (1:21), using *shub* as the indication of the return.

For your daughter-in-law who loves you. Ruth’s love for Naomi has been steadfast throughout the book, as first seen in 1:16-17.

Who is more to you than seven sons. The number seven expresses completion, fullness, or perfection; this is the answer to Naomi’s complaint; refer to the comment made on 1:20-21.

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse.

Ruth 4:16

The child. A nurse cares for a child as a foster mother: <<*Saul’s son Jonathan had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled; and, in her haste to flee, it happened that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth*>> (2 Samuel 4:4). Naomi’s blessing is that she gets a hands-on role in raising her grandson, who perpetuates the names of her father and one of her own sons.

¹⁷ The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Ruth 4:17

A son has been born to Naomi for he would become Elimelech's heir (v.9). The Lord, through Ruth, also recompenses Naomi (Ruth 2:12) and gives her rest and security (Ruth 1:9 and 3:1). The childless widow became the grandmother of Obed, who was the grandfather of King David.

In keeping with cultural tradition, Naomi raised David; hence he is called after Naomi's name (Sanhedrin 19b). Many people misunderstand the culture of the day and believe that the men ruled over the women. This was never the case in Israel or Judah, where the women were held in high esteem in the home. Scripture taught them: <<*So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*>> (Genesis 1:27). Men and women are equal in the sight of God but were created to fulfil differing roles within the family and society generally. The people of God know this and should always respect this fact.

VI.b Ruth 4:18-22 - Genealogy: Extended Blessing

Looking backward and forward, this genealogy, as confirmed by 1 Chronicles 2:5-15, shows how the Lord repaid and rewarded Ruth, just as Boaz desired (2:12). The Lord brought about a new family line which became, through David, the greatest in all Israel. The ten names in Ruth's new family more than fill her ten years of childlessness.

Noah's and Abraham's genealogies also have ten names (Genesis 5:3-32 and 11:10-26). In a genealogy, the word 'fathered' can mean fathered a later descendant; thus biblical genealogies, including this one, may skip generations when the number of names is more important than recording every single member.

The Lord made everlasting, universal covenants with Noah concerning all creation (Genesis 9:16-17), with Abraham regarding Israel and the nations (Genesis 12:2-3 and 17:4-16), and with David concerning his dynasty (2 Samuel 7:16 and Psalm 89:4). All three are examples of the blessing received by faith: Noah as described in Genesis 6:8 and Hebrews 11:7; Abraham as described in Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:2-9 and Galatians 3:8-9; David as described in Psalm 32:1-2 and Romans 4:6.

The Christ is the 'son' of Noah (Luke 3:36), Abraham, and David (Matthew 1:1). Jesus' genealogy also includes three foreign women: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth, all related to this genealogy.

¹⁸ Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹ Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²² Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

Ruth 4:18-22

Perez was commented on at v.12 and appears in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:3.

Nahshon, Aaron's brother-in-law, is fifth in the list. He was a leader among the Judæan clans as noted in Exodus 6:23, Numbers 1:7 and 10:14, and 1 Chronicles 2:10.

Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, as listed in Matthew 1:5. Some believe this to be Rahab the prostitute who saved the Hebrew spies in Jericho (Joshua 6:25).

The Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, is the root of Jesse and the root and descendant of David, as recorded in Genesis 49:9, Isaiah 11:10, Romans 15:12, Revelation 5:5 and 22:16. He is also David's Lord: <<*Then he said to them, 'How can they say that the Messiah is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" David thus calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?'*>> (Luke 20:41-44).

Ruth is a story of triumph over adversity, love overcoming grief, and the promise of redemption for those who place their hope and faith in God.