

Ruth 4 Boaz Takes Charge

We now come to the climax and resolution of the story of Ruth.

Remember that the theme of the book is how God demonstrates His faithfulness by loving, superintending, and caring for His people. Chapter 4 shows how God provides a home and security for Naomi and Ruth. God demonstrates his *hesed*—his mercy and loving kindness—to those who behave themselves with godly virtue and honor. During the time of the Judges, when most people were doing whatever seemed right in their own eyes, Ruth and Boaz were living according to God’s standards of behavior, and God blessed them for it.

We live in a time much like that of the Judges—many people do whatever they want without reference to what God might want. After reading the book of Ruth, we should be assured that God blesses those who live virtuous, honorable lives.

Any sincere Christian wants to enjoy God’s blessing on his/her life. This story shows how God can do that for his people. The story doesn’t guarantee that all believers will experience this same set of circumstances, but it shows that God is active in our lives providentially, providing resources and opportunities for those who please him.

Remember the context: In chapter 3, we learned that Ruth has asked Boaz to spread his “skirt” or wing over her, in effect asking him to play the role of the *goel* and marry her. Boaz has stated his willingness to do so, and in this final chapter of the book, Boaz goes to work to fulfill Ruth’s request.

While Ruth and Naomi wait at home, Boaz takes charge of the situation.

- I. Boaz approaches the nearer kinsman at the city gate. .1-8
 - A. .1 The “gate” of the city is where people conducted business. Boaz is conducting a real estate transaction that has other elements associated with it. Today, we might transact business like this at a bank or at a lawyer’s office. But in those day, they did such things at the city gate where all the leading citizens of the city would gather.
 - B. .1 The nearer kinsman was there, and Boaz asked him to sit down.
 1. Again we see the hand of God’s providence revealed here. The right man was in the right place at the right time. God is working out all the details on behalf of his people.
 2. Boaz knows that this nearer relative has the rights of first refusal. Because he is the nearer kinsman, this man had the right to buy the property and take Ruth as his wife.

- C. .2 Boaz also asked 10 of the others there at the gate to be witnesses to this procedure. Having many witnesses means that there will be no misunderstanding about this agreement. Boaz and the nearer kinsman came to this agreement publicly. Many people will know about this transaction; in fact, the whole city will know about it eventually. So there should be no dispute or doubt about this arrangement; it's done openly and publicly.
- D. .3 Boaz explained the situation:
1. .3 Naomi is selling a parcel of land that originally belongs to Elimelech.
 - a) Remember that Elimelech is Naomi's deceased husband, the father of Ruth's deceased husband. Naomi is in control of the estate since no other family member is still alive.
 - b) This is the first time that we hear about this land sale. Apparently Naomi had told Boaz about this, or maybe the sale of the land was advertised publicly. We don't know all the details, but Ruth's destiny depended on who would be willing to buy that parcel of land.
 - c) Remember that according to the OT law, land was not to be permanently sold outside the family. You could lease the land out, but only for 50 years. Families were supposed to retain the ownership of their land.
 - d) Typically, a family would sell its land only to get out of debt. Naomi had no means of support, no means of income. It was fortunate that she still owned some land that she could sell. No one would be surprised that she had to sell her property to stay out of debt.

Quote: Land sold for debt relief could also be redeemed at any time by the seller or his *goel*. As long as Elimelech had no heirs, the property he and Naomi had sold to pay their debts would automatically become the permanent possession of anyone who acted as Naomi's *goel* by redeeming her property.¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Twelve Extraordinary Women: How God Shaped Women of the Bible and What He Wants to Do with You* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2005), 83.

- e) Boaz displays tremendous integrity and honesty here. He clearly wants Ruth for his wife, and he probably could have rigged the system for his own benefit. He could have bought the property and married Ruth without giving the nearer kinsman a chance to do anything about it. But he doesn't do that. He advises the nearer kinsman about the land and subjects himself to the man's decision. He's willing to lose this opportunity because he is honest. Boaz is ready to defer to this nearer kinsman.

App: When a person is willing to defer to the rights of someone else, it says a lot about his personal character. It's a rare person who will suffer personal loss because he is honest. Our society emphasizes having your own rights, not deferring to the rights of others. Christian virtue demands that we recognize the rights of others even when such rights get in the way of what we want.

Ps 15:4 ... *He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*

Even if it is costly, we should always be honest.

Quote: "a good man will have everything done with perfect openness and honor and will stand by the result whether it [fulfills] his hopes or disappoints them."²

That's a mark of honesty and integrity.

2. .4 The nearer kinsman initially agrees to buy it.

Buying the land in this case would be very beneficial for the buyer. Since Naomi had no heirs, nobody from her family could claim ownership of the land once she sold it. It would become the permanent possession of whoever bought it. So this would be a great benefit for the buyer. It's no wonder that he agreed to buy it immediately.

² "Preface," in *Ruth: A Story of God's Grace: An Expository Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 103. Quoting Richard Watson.

3. .5 Boaz mentions a catch that the nearer kinsman had probably not thought about. He explained that part of the responsibility of the purchaser in this case is levirate marriage. The *goel* is responsible to “raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.”

- a) As we’ve talked about before, the OT established the practice of levirate marriage, in which the nearest relative of a dead man could marry the widow and raise up a child who would be considered to be the heir of the dead man.
- b) That way, no inheritance would be lost; the land would continue to belong to the same family. The firstborn son of that union would be considered the son of the dead man, and he would inherit all his dead father’s property and wealth.

App: The OT law included some remarkable provisions for those in need—people like orphans, widows, and foreigners. The law provided for orphans and the fatherless to retain their property from one generation to the next. It really was an ingenious system that put a high value on family relationships.

Today, unfortunately, the laws and policies of our government do just the opposite. The laws encourage people *not* to form strong family ties. That’s one reason we see so much chaos and instability in our culture today—government policies promote the breakup of the family.

4. .6 Upon hearing that he’d be expected to marry Ruth, the nearer kinsman refused the right of redemption. He didn’t want to “mar” his own inheritance.

- a) We don’t know the details here, but it seems as if the nearer relative must have been married and had a family of his own.

- b) Had he married Ruth, it would have complicated things in his family. He would be expected to have a child with Ruth, who would be thought of a Mahlon's child, and that land belonging to Elimelech would belong to that child, not to the nearer kinsman. So the nearer kinsman would not benefit financially from buying this land or by marrying Ruth.
 - c) Further, this would throw all sorts of complications into the life of the nearer relative. He probably doesn't want another wife or more children to feed. So he passes on the option to buy the land.
 - d) Interestingly, the OT law was very harsh on a *goel* who refused to do his duty (Deut 25:7-10 proclaims a curse on such a person). But in this case, since Boaz was more than happy to take on this responsibility, no one objected to the refusal of the nearest kinsman.
- E. .7-8 The narrator explains how agreements were made between parties by the exchange of shoes/sandals.
- 1. It seems like a rather unusual tradition, but that's the way they did it back then.
 - 2. The nearer kinsman transferred his right of redemption to Boaz by giving him his sandal.
- II. Boaz confirms publicly his "purchase" of Ruth. .9-12
- A. .9-10 Boaz affirms that all the people at the gate were witnesses that he had bought everything that had belongs to Elimelech, and at the same time he had "purchased" Ruth to be his wife. His intent was to "raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance."
- IOW, he would be fulfilling the duty of the *goel* by buying the property, and he'd be fulfilling the duty of levirate marriage by marrying the widow. So the firstborn son of that union would be considered to be the son of Ruth's former husband, Mahlon. That son would also inherit whatever remained in the estate of Elimelech.
- B. Boaz was careful to do all of this publicly, with many witnesses around to see what he's doing. This is all legal and properly done. He wants everyone to know what he's doing. He doesn't want any misunderstanding of this transaction.

That shows that Boaz has real integrity. He's *not* doing things in a shabby or shady way; he's not operating "under the table." He's doing things according to the book, in an honest and forthright way. Boaz was an honorable, virtuous man.

App: That's how we should do things as well. Our business dealings should not be shady or underhanded or in any way dishonest or illegal. We should do the right things in the right way.

Unfortunately, many people—even those professing to be Christians—are rather devious and dishonest when it comes to business transactions and deals.

That kind of behavior is inappropriate for Christians. We should operate honestly and with integrity in all our business practices.

- C. The text does not mention it, but it seems likely that Boaz paid the money for the property, deeds were drawn up, notarized, sealed, and archived. No doubt it was all done very carefully and according to tradition.
- D. .11a All those gathered there affirmed that they were witnesses.
- E. .11b-12 Then the people pronounce a blessing on Boaz and wish that Ruth would be fruitful like Rachel and Leah.

This is quite an amazing statement, seeing that Ruth is a Moabitess, not a Jewess. To wish that a non-Jewish foreigner—and a Moabite at that—would be like Rachel and Leah is a most gracious sentiment. It seems to suggest that the people of Bethlehem had become great admirers of Ruth.

App: Why do you suppose the people of Bethlehem became so supportive of Ruth? Why were the people so happy about this arrangement? Because Ruth was an admirable person; she was a person of high character and virtue; she was loyal, faithful, and kind. You make friends by being a good friend. You gain support by living a virtuous, loving, and sacrificial life. People liked and supported Ruth because she was a good person.

III. Boaz and Ruth are married and have a son. .13-22

A. .13 Boaz married Ruth and she conceived and bore a son.

We could wish for more details here. Did they have a ceremony, or did Boaz's transaction at the gate constitute the wedding?

You can imagine Boaz coming back from the gate and telling Ruth, "Ok, honey; we're now married." We don't know how all of this worked out.

B. .14 The women conferred various blessings and prayers for prosperity on Naomi.

C. .15 We can see from this description how much value that culture placed on children.

1. .14 The child is a blessing from God.

2. .15 The child would be responsible for restoring Naomi's life and would care for her in her old age. Naomi's well-being is directly related to her family relationships. Now that she has a grandson, she has hope for the future.

App: We should put a high value on human life, and that means that we value children as the gift of God. One of the great benefits of marriage is children.

We also see here that the biblical assumption is that children care for their parents in their old age (.15). To the best of our abilities, we should be willing to care for our aging parents. It's unfortunate that many families today don't care for their aged relatives.

- D. .16 Naomi became the caregiver for the child. We can assume that Naomi came to live in Boaz's home. We can imagine Naomi's happiness and satisfaction in caring for that little baby. Remember that Boaz was a wealthy, influential man. I imagine that he provided a very comfortable home for his family.
1. Naomi had said that she'd gone out full and returned from Moab empty. She was a bitter old lady who'd suffered through drought and death.
 2. But now, in her senior years, she's full again. She has no worries. She's well cared for in Boaz's home, and she has the pleasure of caring for Ruth's baby, which she thinks of as her own grandson.
 3. Although Naomi has faced some truly difficult times, God has provided abundantly for her, primarily through Ruth.
Naomi owes a lot to Ruth; it's only because of her that Naomi is now living comfortably in Boaz's home and caring for a grandson. Imagine if Naomi had come back to Bethlehem without Ruth.
 4. As we approach the end of the story, we could almost say, "They all lived happily ever after." Given what we know about the personal character of Ruth and Boaz, we can assume that their home was a wonderful place. Obed and his siblings no doubt enjoyed a warm and loving family atmosphere.
 5. By the way, the name "Obed" is based on the root word meaning "servant," and it's understood to be a shortened version of Obadiah, "servant of the Lord."
- E. The narrator gives us some details regarding the genealogy of Boaz's family. We find out that Obed was the grandfather of King David, which makes Boaz and Ruth David's great-grandparents.
1. So the importance of Obed was not so much that he was such a blessing to Naomi and Ruth, but that he was the grandfather of King David. The blessing of 4:11 is fulfilled through David, who "became famous in Bethlehem." Indeed, David became "famous in Israel" (4:14).

2. It seems likely that this story was circulated around the time that David became the king in Israel. It's a story designed to gain support for David. Genealogies like this are usually used to claim legitimacy for the one at the end of the chain—in this case, David.
3. These details are important to us as well because we know that King David is in the ancestral line of Jesus. There's a Moabite woman in Jesus' genealogy.

What do we learn from the book of Ruth? Here are the primary lessons:

- A. God is full of *hesed*—mercy and loving kindness, and he delights in blessing those who behave themselves with godly virtue and honor.
- B. God accepts those who put their faith in Him. Even foreigners and idolaters can be saved by seeking refuge under the wings of the God of Israel. The grace of God is evident throughout this book.
- C. God is working out his providential plan in our lives. Many have recognized that the chief actor in this entire drama is God. God puts the right people at the right place at the right time. He provides abundantly for those who live virtuous, responsible lives. God is working behind the scenes to bless his faithful people.
- D. God cares for His people; i.e., God meets our daily needs. We may need to live on barley gleanings from time to time, but we can trust God to take care of us.
- E. God can bring good out of bad. Naomi had good reasons to be bitter. She believed that the hand of the Lord had gone out against her. But it was the hand of the Lord that brought her back to Bethlehem and provided a home and a family for her. When things looked bleak, God provided a spark of hope. God can provide solutions to our problems when we humbly submit to him and live a virtuous life.
- F. God rewards good personal character and godly living. Boaz and Ruth exemplify honorable, responsible behavior during a very chaotic and ungodly time in the history of Israel, and they enjoyed God's blessing because of it. In fact, everyone who reads this story benefits from the godly examples of Boaz and Ruth.

- G. Good character and virtue in one generation have influence that extends to succeeding generations. The history of Israel depends on the covenant faithfulness of Ruth and Boaz. Our personal character will have influence for generations after us.

The book of Ruth is one of the rare biblical stories with a truly happy ending. The book presents us with godly, realistic characters whose example we can follow. All of us should seek to be people like Boaz and Ruth; we should be kind, gracious, and virtuous. Above all, we should be confident that God demonstrates His faithfulness by loving, superintending, and caring for His people. Since God is so kind and gracious to us, we should respond by obeying his commands and being kind and gracious toward others.