

The Book of Ruth

Lesson 5 - Chapter 2 Continued

Let's briefly review as it's been awhile since we've met. We left off in chapter 2 with Ruth meeting Boaz, and Boaz (relative of Elimelech) admiring Ruth for her dedication to Na'omi, Ruth's Jewish mother in law. What makes Ruth's commitment all the more astounding in Boaz's eyes is that Ruth is a Moabite (a gentile) who has turned her back on her former nation, her parents and family, and her former god (Chemosh) in order to come to Bethlehem of Judah with Na'omi and take up worship of the God of Israel and make the Israelite people her own. She has also given up the prospects of a reasonably secure life as a widow living with her parents, for the uncertain future of living among a people she is unfamiliar with and taking care of an aged Jewish woman, Na'omi.

Because the theme of the first 2 chapters of Ruth is the mysterious relationship that is created between gentile and Hebrew when that gentile converts to the worship of Yehoveh, we discussed at length that a strong bond ought to form naturally (as illustrated by Ruth) between gentile Christians and the Hebrew people. But sadly it has been an underlying Christian doctrine for a very long time, that gentile Christians have replaced the Hebrew people as God's chosen and thus a wall of separation has been erected between the two groups. And I'm here to tell you in the strongest possible terms that that doctrine is the result of rampant ant-Semitism within the earliest Roman church leadership, a desire to distance Christianity from all things Jewish in order to create an exclusive gentiles-only religion, and such a thing can happen only because rank and file Believers tend to prefer men's doctrines (no matter how misguided) to the Word of God. So-called Replacement Theology has done extensive damage to the divinely intended connection between Hebrews and gentile Believers, and has also led to several attempts by men bearing the symbol of the Cross to exterminate the Jewish people from the face of the earth.

How we can read the wonderful and inspired book of Ruth and so easily adopt that part of the theology of Ruth that deals with her relationship with Boaz as her Kinsman Redeemer and accept it as a type and shadow of the Church and our Jewish Savior, only to turn around and disavow the equally powerful part of the theology of Ruth that shows that converted gentiles ought to cleave to the Jewish people, is a study in religious hypocrisy that we need to correct.

Ruth was gleaning in Boaz's fields when her fortunes began to turn; and even this was because the hand of the God of the Hebrews guided her, unawares, to that particular area of a common field shared by many farmers. The Law of Moses generally allowed the poverty stricken widow Ruth to choose any field that caught her eye to glean, but the Lord had His own plans.

Boaz was attracted to Ruth by her youthful beauty and her rare character; thus he began almost immediately to show her special favor. Boaz was an old man at this time, successful and wealthy, and his unmerited kindness towards Ruth is a study in the wonderfully Hebrew

concept of **chesed**; acts of loving-kindness towards others as a response to God's love and mercy towards His redeemed. And of course Ruth is exhibiting the same towards Na'omi even though she's not fully aware. Boaz then instructed Ruth that she should glean only in his field, full-time, and thus he and his hired men could watch over and protect her; he even went so far as to allow her the unheard-of privilege of gathering up stalks of barley and wheat that Boaz's men intentionally pulled out of the carefully bundled sheaves of grain, just to make her gleaning time easier and considerably more productive.

Let's re-read all of chapter 2 so we can get back up to speed together.

RE-READ RUTH CHAPTER 2 all

We're going to be looking a couple of very important principles shortly and I hope you are ready to absorb information at a fast and furious pace today!

I told you (to end our last lesson) that I wanted to point out something interesting to you about Boaz pulling out some of the stalks from the wheat and barley so that Ruth could gather them. And that "something" is in Romans 11 and it's contained in a dissertation by Paul that deals with the means by which gentiles are able to come under Israel's covenants for salvation.

Turn your bibles to Romans 11. Here Paul presents the theology of Ruth in the classic rabbinical way that a highly trained Pharisee such as Paul would do as a natural course; he sets up the straw man and speaks to it.

READ ROMANS 11:1 – 26

We aren't going to study this whole chapter but I did want you to hear it in full context. And the context is in the form of a question: has God repudiated His people (the Hebrews) and replaced them with the new gentile converts who wish to follow the Messiah Yeshua? The answer he gives immediately is "heaven forbid" (NO!), and then goes on to explain just how a gentile should view his new relationship in Christ with the people of Israel.

And whereas in the book of Ruth the Jewish Kinsman Redeemer Boaz has pulled out some of the gathered stalks of wheat and barley from the sheaf so that Ruth could join in the choice harvest, so we have the metaphor of the Olive Tree (a regular biblical metaphor for Israel) where branches are removed by the Jewish Kinsman Redeemer Yeshua so that gentiles can be grafted in and partake of the choice harvest.

The theology of Ruth IS the theology of Paul. Gentiles must join Israel in the way that counts the most, spiritually, in order to be redeemed by the God of Israel. And to illustrate this fundamental truth, agricultural motifs are used because Israel was an agricultural society and so they could be more easily visualized and understood.

Paul ends his argument by explaining something that ought to put all gentiles in our proper place: the REASON that God has allowed gentiles to do the heretofore unthinkable (participate

in what up to now has been an exclusively Hebrew covenant without a national conversion) is so that all Israel will be saved. Gentiles being saved are merely a byproduct of God's goal of saving all of Israel! If that doesn't pop your pride, I don't know what will.

Ruth, from before time was time, was destined to be the gentile grandmother of the Jewish King David, who would go on to produce the Jewish Messianic line that led to the Jewish Yeshua of Nazareth. Ruth (in God's eyes) was a necessary element (as a gentile) to bring about the Jewish Savior whose purpose it was to save all Israel. But because of God's inscrutable inclusion of gentiles at critical moments in the redemptive process, gentiles would ALSO be given the opportunity to be redeemed under the covenants that God gave to the Hebrews. There was no special new "gentile covenant" handed down.

There are several more connections like these that we'll explore, but the point was to show you the direct OT parallel of the stalks removed from the sheaves for the sake of the gentile Ruth, to the New Testament metaphor by Paul of branches being removed from the Olive Tree for the sake of all gentiles who would trust Christ.

Back to the book of Ruth.

Verse 17 of chapter 2 says that due to Boaz's kindness, Ruth was able to gather an abnormally large amount of barley that day; and when she separated the grain from the heads and stalks by beating them on the threshing floor, it came to an entire bushel (weighing between 55 and 60 pounds!)

Ruth had quite a load to take home to Na'omi and when Na'omi saw it she was startled and in a disbelieving voice asked, "WHERE did you glean today?" And then offered a joyful blessing upon whatever field owner had been so generous, having no idea that it was Boaz. When Ruth revealed his identity to her Na'omi was practically in shock at such wonderful fortune. Na'omi instantly knew that it was the same Lord who had afflicted her with such bitterness who now was afflicting her with such grace and favor as to not only provide so much grain for their sustenance, but also to lead Ruth directly to Boaz, a family Kinsman Redeemer. At last, after so long a time of darkness, there was hope!

Na'omi listened intently as Ruth explained all the circumstances surrounding her encounter with Boaz, and Na'omi told Ruth that she needed to do as Boaz said and stay close to Boaz's female harvesters so that she was protected and not mistreated by others among the Jewish community who probably didn't care for the idea of a Moabite gleaning in Jewish fields. Ruth listened to her mother in law and did as Boaz offered and Na'omi affirmed.

Now, before we venture into Ruth chapter 3, we're going to pause and closely examine another of those principles I said at the outset of today's lesson that we would; and it's the concept of what Christians call the Kinsman Redeemer because from here forward in the story of Ruth that concept is front and center. It is important for us to understand that concept in its fullness because otherwise we can get some wrong or incomplete impressions about not only the office of Kinsman Redeemer in general, but also in Yeshua's role as our Kinsman Redeemer and how it affects our relationship with Him.

First, the Hebrew word is **ga'al or go'el**, and it is this word that English bibles generally translate into Kinsman Redeemer; and in fact, this is incorrect. More correctly **go'el** simply means a near relative who is able to perform a whole range of certain duties within his own clan or tribe. Only one of those many duties is as a Kinsman Redeemer.

Let me give you an analogy so you understand what I'm getting at. Let's take the term "mother". Being a mother means a whole series of things. In one context it means the person who gives you life. In another it means to suckle and give sustenance. In another context it means the female authority figure in a family. In American society it usually means the person who is in charge of the domestic affairs of the home. Traditionally it means the one who cooks, cleans, and nurtures the children. **Go'el** is like that; being a Kinsman Redeemer is but one of the many duties that a **go'el** may perform. And, like that of a mother, the **go'el** may perform some of those duties but not the others.

Second, we need to step back and understand that the solidarity and continuation of a tribe and clan was paramount in ancient Hebrew (and most Middle Eastern) societies. We today like to say that "the family" is the basic social unit that our country operates under (and that is certainly true). But what is a family? Because of the way family has evolved in the Western world (as opposed to the Eastern world), the idealized Western family has come to mean for us mom, dad, and 2.3 kids living together in a single household. Grandparents and aunts and uncles are generally seen as family units of their own, and somewhat secondary to the immediate family. Broken homes due to divorce or children born out of wedlock have put that ideal of identifiable family units into reverse over the past few decades, but nonetheless it remains (though fragile) as the norm for us. But this was not so for ancient cultures like that of Israel. Biblical families are NOT like modern Western families.

The Biblical "family" was not seen as merely the parents and their immediate children; rather it was at that time a little more as it was for Americans in the 19th century when we were a nation of farmers. Then we were more clan-like and tended to think of families as automatically including what sociologists today term "extended families". Extended families (by the modern definition) generally include grandparents, aunts and uncles, and 1st cousins. But even Western extended families still don't rise to the level of a biblical clan. A biblical clan generally includes all related members of a family who can be connected to a common son of the original founder of the tribe. This can amount to hundreds, even thousands, of family members. Certainly in some cases clan size, the want of power and autonomy, and the distance of time caused some clans to split into two; but even then they recognized their common familial bonds.

In the case of Boaz we have no idea exactly what the relationship was with Elimelech. Rabbi's have fancifully said he was Elimelech's nephew, but there is no evidence of such a thing. Whatever the relationship was, it must have been unimportant to the story, and equally likely it was not a very close kinship as we think of "close" in our time.

It was for the defense of the clan and tribe that the office of **go'el** existed. The concept was that any rights that a man possessed that could be lost due to his inability to perform them could and should be resumed by his next of kin. The closest possible next of kin bore both the

senior position and the senior responsibility to perform those duties on behalf of the man who could not. There were a variety of reasons why a man might have to rely on his next of kin to assume such duties for him, and his own untimely death was among the most common.

In Hebrew society, the closest of relationship after the parents was first brother and then uncle on the father's side. After that it was uncle on the mother's side, and from there it could range to grandparents and then 1st cousins, 2nd cousins, and so on. The father's side always carried more weight than the mother's side. And should one side or the other be a non-Hebrew, the Hebrew side (of course) is what mattered.

One of the real dangers in ancient times was that through intermarriage with foreigners and then death of the Israelite male family leader, Israelite tribal lands could be lost to foreigners. But nearly on par with that was that as time went on it became more and more common for one Israelite clan member to marry someone of another clan; or for one member of clan to marry even outside of their tribe. Either of these caused problems due to the laws concerning land inheritance, and God's Torah that declared that land allotted to Israelite clans and tribes should remain there in perpetuity; and again the **go'el** played a key role in ensuring that none of these cases automatically meant that land from one clan could be permanently lost to another; or that land from one tribe could be permanently transferred to another. Or that the worst case of all scenarios happened: Israelite land might be lost to a foreigner.

Thus perhaps the most common duty of a **go'el** was to purchase land from a kinsman so that it wouldn't be sold to a person outside that man's own clan or tribe. Notice I said clan or tribe as opposed to immediate family. While the land often stayed within an immediate family's possession when a kinsman redeemer interceded, the real goal was that the land remains within the extended family, the clan. The term that was applied to a **go'el's** purchase of the land on behalf of a relative was "redeem". Who's sake was the **go'el** redeeming it for? Again, the clan and the tribe. In fact sometimes it was very costly and quite financially debilitating for a **go'el** to purchase land and redeem it for the sake of his clan; and thus it often was quite a sacrificial act on his part. Further it could be so potentially financially debilitating that the closest next of kin, the closest relative in the family structure who could be a **go'el**, would refuse to do it and then the next closest would have to assume that responsibility. Understand that the refusal of a go'el to do his duty did NOT bring him a criminal penalty, because it essentially was a spiritually driven act; thus it was a matter of conscience. But on the other hand, sometimes it was quite an advantage for that closest relative to get first shot at buying the property, because under many circumstances it became his and he could put it into production or lease it out and make out quite profitably.

Another, and perhaps chief and most somber, duty of a **go'el** was to be a blood avenger (a **goe'l ha'dam**). It was a very important clan duty in ancient society that the nearest of kin hunt down and kill a person who has slain a family member. This idea of family retribution, or the carrying out of justice on behalf of the clan, is by no means extinct in the world today. Islamic society has blood vengeance as a basic tenant of its Law system, and so is common in the Middle and Far East. It wasn't visible to the Western world until recently as we have a huge influx into Europe and America of Muslims who have brought that concept of family vengeance with them and fully intend to continue it as an inviolable religious principle. Thus rather often

today in the news we'll hear of a husband beheading an unfaithful wife, or a father killing a man who had sex out of wedlock with his daughter (and killing his daughter as well), or even a family member killing someone who has offended the family in some way that the offender is not even aware. And this system of blood vengeance was part of the Hebrew system, though not in the same way as it is in Islam.

The Hebrew system (the biblical Torah system) of blood vengeance in defense of the family was the firm belief that God (in order to secure the sacredness of human life) had ordained that a murderer suffers the death penalty. It was common in ancient societies (and again, still is in Islamic society) that under certain circumstances blood-money could be paid by the perpetrator or his family in lieu of execution. There was very recently a case in Yemen where a Yemenite Muslim murdered a Jew; but because of the hate fostered against Jews in all of Arab society the penalty for him was not death (as called for in Islamic Law) but rather a fine of money, a payment of blood-money most of which went to the state and not to the Jewish family.

In the system of justice that God handed-down, such payments of money in exchange for a murderer's life were not allowed and this was for spiritual reasons as much as for fairness and equality. ***CJB Numbers 35:31 Also, you are not to accept a ransom in lieu of the life of a murderer condemned to death; rather, he must be put to death.***

The spiritual reason for not accepting money instead of the criminal's life is that unjustly spilled blood pollutes the land. And the only atonement available (the only means to remove the impurity and all its consequences from the land) is the blood of the killer. While this is contained in the Law of Moses, in fact it is a basic God-principle that was established hundreds of years before Mt. Sinai and we find it in Genesis 4. ***CJB Genesis 4:10 He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands. 12 When you farm the ground it will no longer yield its strength to you. You will be a fugitive, wandering the earth."***

So (and hear this because it is so key in what even our Christian understanding of a ***go'el*** is and does, and thus is part of our Messiah's role) the Blood Avenger was regarded not only as the legal representative of the affected family and clan, but ALSO the earthly legal representative of God Himself who was the highest avenger and nearest kinsman (spiritually speaking).

Yet another duty of a ***go'el*** (should the need arise) was to both the property and the person of a relative who either had to sell his land or forfeit his own freedom and become a bondservant due to satisfy a debt. We find in Jeremiah 32 that the ***go'el*** had not only the duty to redeem the person or property, but also had the right of first refusal to purchase the indebted property before it went up for sale. In other words, in modern terms if one owned a home with a mortgage but lost the home to foreclosure, the nearest male relative had the right of preemption and could purchase the house (to his own benefit) before it ever went up for public auction. In fact a ***go'el*** (at least until the era of the Rabbis dawned and the system was redesigned by these Jewish religious leaders) could even redeem the property back to the clan AFTER it had been sold to a foreigner or non-clan member.

That was still not the end of the duties of a **go'el**; our story of Ruth shows that a **go'el** also had the obligation to marry a next of kin's widow if that was necessary to rescue the land from being lost to another clan, tribe or foreigner. And, to some degree or another, this operated as (or in lieu of) Levirate Marriage especially if there was no brother of a deceased man available to marry the widow IF she was childless.

Thus in the book of Ruth, the marriage of Ruth to Boaz (that we'll see in the final chapter) was not really Levirate Marriage (since Boaz certainly was not a brother of the deceased), rather it was the somewhat extended duty of the go'el of Elimelech's clan (in this case Boaz) to marry the childless widow Ruth not only to rescue land (technically on Na'omi's behalf) but also to provide Ruth with a male-child.

OK, now that I've given you a fairly full range of just what a go'el is, it's time that serious bible students such as yourselves begin to realize that Yeshua HaMashiach is a go'el for all who trust in Him, not merely a Kinsman Redeemer that is but part of what a **go'el** does.

But where did this concept come from that the Messiah would be a **go'el** to God's people; a near relative who had familial obligations? Well first, very early on God was seen as the divine **go'el** and as the one who would redeem His people. Just as the concept of a **go'el** happened shortly after the creation of Adam and Eve (as we read earlier in that passage from Genesis 4), so it was that the concept of redemption happened before it was made part of the Law of Moses on Mt. Sinai. Thus those who would argue that the Law is dead and gone and has no effect on gentile Christians (as wrong as they are about that), still find themselves facing the biblical reality that the concept of a **go'el** and redemption was pre-Law and thus a foundational God-principle that would figure into everything God would ordain (and therefore naturally it would be part of Messiah's character).

There are 33 passages in the Tanach (the Old Testament) that use the term **go'el** (a noun) or its verb form **ga'al** to refer to God. So how does this now connect to salvation?

Well, not surprisingly, the Hebrews developed the idea of God as the **go'el** who produces salvation for His people, and then extended that to His Messiah. Hear that please: I'm saying that Yeshua as a saving Messiah who redeems because He is God is hardly a New Testament invention; rather it is a fulfillment of an Old Testament principle.

Let me show you something about how the Hebrew language rolls all these concepts of salvation, redemption, and Messiah into one and then presents it as a means of "victory".

The Hebrew root word '?? (yud-sheen-ayin) or Y-S (like the sh sound)-and then either a silent or a nearly silent "a" sound, usually pronounced **Yasha**, literally means, "to be or make wide". There are all sorts of derivatives of this word from which we get in the English "save", "to keep alive", or "to live". The prophet Ezekiel (during the time of the exile of the Jews to Babylon) used the term to express the condition of a sinner who has repented of his trespasses against God, and thus by God's mercy having escaped the rightful consequence of sin (which is death), continues to have life.

Now this root word *yasha* that literally means, “to make wide” is not so difficult to understand. Evil and severe danger was also literally thought to be a narrowing condition; so it is from a narrow place (being in a squeeze or in a bind or in a tight spot, we might say today) that the sufferer cries out for help. Thus when that help comes, he is now said to be in a “wide” place. Therefore in the Hebrew mind (and converting that to modern thinking) the idea of moving from a narrow to a wide place is “victory”.

Amazingly we find in Psalm 118 the words *rinnah and Yeshu’ah* (notice that *Yeshu’ah* stems from the root word *yasha*) when used together signifies a jubilant cry of victory from those who have been suffering. The point being that the concept of victory is all wrapped up with the concepts of salvation and redemption in the Hebrew language and thought.

Now as pertains to the Messiah (and I remind you I’m still giving you the Hebrew conception of this) the terms salvation and redemption are utterly identical in purpose and meaning. This is pretty important for a Christian to understand, because too much the “redemption” of the Old Testament is thought to be an inferior concept to the “salvation” of the New Testament. That is not true, and I have taught you for years that we can absolutely interchange the terms redemption and salvation at any point throughout the bible. Since God is the heavenly *go’el*, He is the heavenly redeemer, and thus the heavenly savior. Therefore His earthly Messiah must necessarily be the earthly *go’el*, the earthly redeemer, meaning the same thing as the earthly savior (and all this is understood in the Hebrew context as the Messiah being an earthly representative of the heavenly God).

Now, does this sound and awful lot like our wonderful and glorious master, king, and savior Yeshua of Nazareth? Of course it does. But this also means that Yeshua is also OBLIGATED to be our *go’el*, and to perform all the duties associated with a *go’el*, IF we have become part of His family by means of trusting in Him. Do you hear me? We gentiles join Yeshua’s family by trusting in Him. And Yeshua’s family members are the redeemed. And who are the original redeemed of God? Israel; redeemed at the hand of God, the deliverer, from Egypt. Thus Paul’s metaphor of Romans 11 that has gentile believers in Yeshua grafted into the Olive Tree, Israel.

With that understanding of the amazing and divinely established office of the *go’el*, we’re now able to move further into the book of Ruth and better understand what is about to transpire. We’ll study Ruth chapter 3 next time.