

### The Book of Ruth

#### Lesson 8 - Chapter 4 (End of Book)

We have great deal to cover today, so I'm not going to review our previous lesson. Since our Ruth study is only 8 lessons long (counting today's) I think if you want to go over it again it's not too long of a task.

We'll begin by re-reading the entire final chapter of Ruth, Ruth chapter 4, to refresh our memories.

#### **RE-READ RUTH CHAPTER 4 all**

The legal process to determine just who would assume the duties of Na'omi's family **go'el**, the family redeemer that in Christendom is usually called the Kinsman Redeemer, has begun; would it be Bo'az or the unnamed more senior relative who is first in line to be the **go'el**? The morning after Ruth visited Boaz at the threshing floor Boaz went to the city gate of Bethlehem, waited for the senior family **go'el** to walk by, and also asked that 10 of the recognized city elders attend the public proceeding so as to essentially validate and then notarize the outcome.

Verse 3 begins a very difficult dialogue between Boaz and Mr. So and So to translate and to make sense of; and this is because there is strange changing of verb tenses regarding the current status of Na'omi's land: has it already been sold, or is it only NOW being sold? One verse seems to say that the selling had already occurred (before this meeting), and yet another verse seems to say that what is about to transpire at the city gate is the selling of the land. Because we always read this in English, the difficulty of the Hebrew is oftentimes masked because the translator of your particular English version made the decision that either the land had already been sold, or was in the process of being sold, and so made all the verb tenses neatly match (in English) to reflect his own personal conclusion.

But there is even more trouble contained in these verses, and we talked about some of it last time. In summary the trouble is this: the usual assumption by Christian scholars and commentators (going back centuries) is that Ruth and Boaz were about to engage in Levirate Marriage, and that this marriage solved the dilemma of the land transfer from Na'omi by created creating the needed heir (a son that would eventually be born to Ruth and Boaz). Well, yes and no. You see, what transpires in these passages frankly does not carry out the detailed Torah commandments regarding Levirate Marriage OR the specific Torah-defined duties required of the Kinsman Redeemer. Thus many bible scholars have simply decided that the text has been corrupted, use that as their reason for ignoring what was actually written, and essentially create their own version of the story as a substitute. I will tell you that by doing that, it certainly makes studying this final chapter of Ruth quicker and considerably easier; but I also think we're missing a great deal by not trying to deal with the challenging text of Ruth as it was

recorded.

I hope by now that you all are accepting that the biggest problem we face today in understanding the Bible is that we are Westerners, and that the way we think and reason was birthed in Greek culture, and even more specifically, in the Greek culture as practiced in the Western Roman Empire. But what we read in the Bible is entirely based on Eastern culture, and on ancient Hebrew thinking patterns. Even the New Testament that admittedly was largely written originally in Greek, nonetheless was dictated by Hebrew individuals (like Paul and Peter) who were Easterners; so trying to jot down Eastern cultural thinking patterns in a Western Roman/Greek language and alphabet is inherently difficult and much gets lost in the translation.

The good news is that about half of passages in the New Testament are merely direct quotes taken from the Old Testament, so we can go back and cross reference those Greek NT passages to their original Old Testament Hebrew counterparts and get a much better sense of how to understand them. But it still won't help much when studying the bible until we train ourselves to think in the Eastern Hebrew thought patterns that were the basis for the Scriptures in the first place. The notion that the bible is so mystical and magical that culture, language, era, and even context doesn't matter when reading it is absurd on it's face and is only useful when one simply wants to teach a specific manmade religious doctrine as opposed to what the Word of God actually says.

It is this exact issue that is at play especially in Ruth chapter 4, and so I'm going to delve into some depth in trying to help decipher what is really happening among these Jewish Israelites (who are bargaining at the city gates) as opposed to what it might seem must be occurring to modern gentiles.

First notice in verse 3 that the person who is the central figure in this negotiation is Na'omi, not Ruth, and this is because Na'omi is the widow of Elimelech. Elimelech was the owner of the piece of land in question and thus Na'omi, the only survivor, now represents Elimelech's clan and family. However there is a problem: does Na'omi REALLY own the land since her husband and both of her sons (who would have been the legal heirs of Elimelech's real property) died? The short answer must be **no** because there is no provision in Torah law for a widow to inherit land from her deceased husband. Notice I didn't say that there was no provision for a female to ever inherit land, because indeed the daughters of Zelophehad pled their case to Moses (because Zelophehad had no sons, only daughters) and Moses decided (as God's earthly Mediator) that daughters could inherit their father's real property. But such is NOT the case with Na'omi; the land in question belonged not to her father but to her husband. So the land was not Na'omi's to hold; saying it was Na'omi's land was merely a figure of speech and a simple common way of identifying the parcel.

For the people of that era the issue of what happens to the family land of someone like Elimelech was a constant thought; land was everything to an agricultural-based society. And it was especially so for Israel because the Lord God had embedded the principle that the original owner of a piece of the Promised Land was to maintain it in his family forever. Let's be clear, though, that while the immediate family (extended family in our modern vocabulary) ideally

held on to that land, in reality it was the clan to which the family belonged that was even more important. In other words, while the land could be transferred under a variety of circumstances among the many separate families that formed a clan, it was ALWAYS to stay within that clan. But the hierarchy of land ownership went even further. If by some calamity the original family along with the entire clan were wiped out or incapable of retaining the land, then the next best hope was the tribe to which the clan (and thus the family) belonged. If that clan's tribe were wiped out or incapable of assuming the land then some other Israelite tribe could control it.

Even then there were the Laws of Jubilee that allowed for the return of the land, debt free and at no cost, to the original family or their descendants, although this opportunity only arose once every ½ century.

Further, even though I just spoke in common terms of land ownership, in reality NO Israelite ever "owned" the land in the way we think of it today. Most ownership of land in the Western world is called "fee simple" and it means that a person has absolute control and all rights to that land without limitation and can sell it whenever and to whomever he wants, and such rights of ownership transfer to the new owner in perpetuity. But an Israelite did not ever own the land of Israel he merely owned the USE of the land. He could dwell on it, and grow crops on it, and raise animals on it. The USE of the land was to remain in his family, clan, and tribe forever; however the fee simple owner of the land was Yehoveh. I cannot say this strongly enough; Christians today rather sloppily throw around the phrase that "my house belongs to the Lord God", or that "my car belongs to Jesus". Well that is only true in a spiritual, idealistic, figurative sense. God is not on the deed or title (even if your church might be), and our modern laws provide for fee simple ownership of land and chattel as the standard ownership principle. This was NOT the case with the Promised Land. God LITERALLY and tangibly was the legal owner of the land and an Israelite fully understood that he did NOT have a fee simple ownership of the plot of land upon which he dwelled, farmed, or ranched and this foundational principle was explicitly embodied in the Law of Moses.

So, what WAS Na'omi's relationship with the property that is being discussed here? After all, this is the key to understanding both Na'omi's predicament and her solution to the predicament.

First, now that we better understand the laws of land inheritance in Israel, we must see that Na'omi was NOT in legal possession of the land. For one thing, if she was in legal possession why was she (and Ruth) in such poverty? For another, even if she wasn't physically able or didn't have the skills to farm the land, she certainly could have leased out the field to another and obtained income, however meager.

Second, if Na'omi didn't control the land, who did and when did someone else gain control of the land and under what circumstances? The truth is that only speculation is possible, as this issue is simply not directly addressed in the story. As Frederic Bush, the editor of the World Biblical Commentary on Ruth, says (and I paraphrase), 'the author of this story and the people who read it in much earlier times had information and knowledge about the circumstances that was probably common knowledge; and further, the circumstances themselves probably explained a very logical and usual course of action of that era that would have resulted from

the peculiarities of this case. Thus this is muddled only to our Western gentile minds but not at all to the ancient Hebrews who lived near the time the book of Ruth was written'.

I couldn't agree more. We don't often consciously realize it, but we take an enormous amount of things for granted in our daily conversations and even in books and news articles that are written and read. If a contemporary story takes place in America and it speaks of a monetary transaction, there is no need to explain that the monetary denomination is a dollar, or what a dollar is, or that the dollar went off the gold standard many years ago, or that a dollar has a fluctuating and relative value, and so forth. If the article is about American food, it is not necessary to explain what is defined as food and what is not (beef or bread is food, but worms or plankton is not). But in future times, the conditions will likely be radically different and such precise definitions as what food is and what money is will change and a new normal will exist and the one from 1000 years earlier completely forgotten. Further when a person in 3009 reads about things going on in Florida in the year 2009, it will be quite necessary to research to understand just what the conditions were at this time, and what certain words meant in our day (because languages steadily evolve), and what the laws were, and so on or they'll miss what was being communicated. We face that problem every time we open the Bible, and nowhere is it better demonstrated than here in the 4th chapter of Ruth and the matter of the land inheritance.

Since it can only be that Na'omi did not possess the land, and had no right to hold it or dispose of it (because she was not a legal heir), then one of two things was occurring at Bethlehem's city gate: either the land was in possession of some other unnamed person who had legally acquired it at some earlier point from Elimelech when he was alive, and thus the purpose of Boaz (or the anonymous senior **go'el**) was to redeem it BACK from that unnamed owner; or Na'omi's arrival back at Bethlehem signaled that it was time that the land issue for Elimelech's family be decided by the clan's nearest of kin, the family's **go'el**, so that a clan member officially took control of the land as a matter of pre-emption. In other words, the first situation is one of getting the land returned to the family or clan (redeeming it) and the 2nd situation is a matter of keeping the land from getting transferred out of the family or clan by means of a near relative purchasing it (pre-empting the possibility of it's sale outside of the clan). So which was it?

Clearly it does not seem credible that the land was sitting there, unused, going fallow for no other reason than by the strictest legal sense because Elimelech and his sons had died there was no legal heir to inherit; especially since Elimelech's surviving widow and daughter-in-law were obviously recognized by the entire community as being legitimate family members. Certainly the entire basis of the story is lost if Na'omi still had some control over the land (or more correctly control of the use of it). For one thing, a person who has land has no right to glean in someone else's field.

Thus it can only be that the land had been sold at some earlier point and now it was necessary to get it back into the family and clan by means of redeeming it. It could be that when Elimelech was leaving Judah for Moab that he sold the land (or better, the use of the land) to someone outside of his family and/or clan. Because if a clan member had purchased it, by rights, when Elimelech or his legal heir was available to reclaim it, it had to be returned to the

original owner according to the laws of Torah. In fact, this reality will play a critical role in what the unnamed senior **go'el** (sitting in opposition to Boaz) ultimately decides to do with his opportunity to redeem Elimelech's land. So it can only be that someone outside of Elimelech's clan had purchased the land, either upon Elimelech leaving for Moab or perhaps sometime while he was living there. Therefore, if a member of another clan of Judah purchased it from Elimelech some years earlier (due to Elimelech and his family being in distress) and now Na'omi's return from Moab triggers the issue that someone from Elimelech's clan ought to redeem the land back to the original family and clan, according to the Law of Moses the current owner was owed money by the man of Elimelech's clan who would sign up to be the **go'el**, the family redeemer. Yes, yes, I know this probably has your head spinning, but I remind you that to the people of Ruth's era this was but common knowledge and procedure.

So the situation is this: a member of another clan (likely another clan of the tribe of Judah) currently holds possession of Elimelech's land. Na'omi has returned from Moab as childless widow and now pushes the issue of how to get the land returned to the clan, and if at all possible, to her (technically Elimelech's) family. The importance of this issue is fully recognized by all the community of Bethlehem, and so is Na'omi's plight.

That also brings up the question: how is Ruth involved in all of this? And the answer to that is in verse 5 when Boaz tells Mr. So and So that if he agrees to redeem Na'omi's family land, he will ALSO have to marry Na'omi's daughter in law. But why? The answer is at the end of the same verse: "in order to raise up the name of the deceased an heir for his property".

This statement now raises two more issues: 1) how does Ruth having a child solve the issue of the land for Na'omi? And 2), by what law is there an obligation for Mr. So and So to marry Ruth IF he agrees to redeem the land? Again, most Christian scholars going back centuries have said that Boaz married Ruth due to obligations of the Levirate Marriage laws. And that the Kinsman Redeemer had the legal duty to redeem the land, so that solved the land problem; but neither is actually true according to the Law of Moses.

OK, let's dissect this and see if we can come to some conclusions about it. First, as I said in an earlier lesson, Levirate Marriage played no role whatsoever in this process. Levirate Marriage applies ONLY to the brother of the deceased man being legally obligated to marry his dead brother's widow. There is no extension to any other family member to perform this duty that is contained within the Torah.

Further, while there is an obligation of the family redeemer to redeem land to keep it in the clan, there is NO law of Torah that requires him to marry anybody, nor to father a child to produce an heir for a deceased man. Thus, neither situation applies and we are left scratching our heads as to why all this drama is playing out at the city gates and why it is unfolding the way it is.

In verse 6 the senior Kinsman Redeemer tells Boaz that while he'd be happy to buy the land (to redeem it), he cannot also marry Ruth because (for some reason) it would put his own inheritance at risk. Again, why would marrying Ruth cause his personal inheritance to be put into jeopardy? (I told you this would get complex).



I'm going to tell you the answer to this momentarily, but first I want to explain something to you: what we are seeing from a broader view is that there IS no specific commandment of God that either Boaz or Mr. So and So would find themselves breaking if one or the other did not marry Ruth, give her an heir, and to a degree even if they didn't redeem the land. The circumstances of this case just don't directly apply to the laws of Levirate Marriage or land redemption; so what's the point of this entire exercise?

One of the major things that all generations of God's people (Israelite or gentile Believer) can learn from this story of Ruth is how to carry out God's justice and mercy even when none of the 613 laws of Torah seem to directly apply. And how you manage to do that is by doing something that I have discussed with you on scores of occasions: we discern God's principles that under grid all of His laws and commands. God tells us that the basis for the 10 Commandments is to love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. And that just as the 10 commandments are built upon those two foundational God-principles so are all of His 613 laws built upon the 10 commandments. Thus when we're at point A, and we have on our hands a matter that demands our attention and our action, it is in our court to see how to get to point B, a solution. Under many circumstances we can simply point to one of the 10 commandments or one of the 613 laws and it will give us the proper route to get from point A to point B; but under many more, the route is not obvious or there is not a non-stop flight.

Point A in the book of Ruth is that Na'omi and Ruth are poverty stricken widows who have no children, and have no hope. Co-located at Point A is that the land that belonged to Elimelech is in the hands of someone outside the clan. Point B is to find a way to care for Na'omi and Ruth, along with a way to have the land redeemed. But how do we get there? The most important thing to take from this is, that as God's followers it is our moral obligation to FIND A WAY that is consistent with God's principles even if it is not directly covered by one of His laws. And I contend this is a position that the Hebrews found themselves in regularly and we as Christians find ourselves in regularly as well.

Let's rotate back now to Mr. So and So who decided that it would cause his own inheritance to be put into question if he married Ruth. Here's what happened: he was happy to redeem the land and add it to his family's wealth that would be eventually passed along to his descendants. You see, since Elimelech had no heir (which was Point A in this story), the family **go'el** who redeemed the land got to keep the land (at least, theoretically, until the year of Jubilee). Mr. So and So knew full well that Elimelech had no heir. Thus whatever money this senior **go'el** paid to the mystery man who currently owned Elimelech's land, it would be well-spent because the senior **go'el** would now possess Elimelech's land for himself and his posterity. This was great; he loved it and was anxious to conclude his bargain. But then Boaz threw him the curveball: accepting the obligation as the family redeemer also meant that Mr. So and So would have to marry Ruth. And from Ruth would come an heir for her dead husband, Machlon, son of Elimelech. And because there is now an heir Mr. So and So would be obligated to GIVE the land that he paid money for to Ruth's son. He'd be out the money, and out the land, and this of course diminished his own wealth (also called inheritance). Bottom line: the senior **go'el** would pay redemption money for land he'd soon have to give away to Ruth's son. And remember, this son would NOT be considered his own son, but

rather this son would be considered as Machlon's son. The senior **go'el** would thus get no benefit from paying money for the land or for marrying Ruth, so he declined and deferred to Boaz who had already said he'd be happy to do it all.

So from a legal standpoint, Elimelech's land was posthumously inherited by his son Machlon; and then by means of Machlon's widow Ruth marrying a qualified family **go'el** a proper heir was created for Machlon. Thus the land passed from Elimelech to his son Machlon, and from Machlon to the first son born to Ruth and the family redeemer. The line was now connected from Point A to Point B; even if was hardly a straight line.

What we find out is that whoever agrees to be the **go'el** has the duty to perform all the obligations incumbent upon the **go'el**; he can't do some but refuse to do the others. We also find out that at some point (before the era of Ruth) the same kind of issues of how to deal with childless widows were dealt with by Israel's leaders because there was a void in the Law of Moses for many cases. And they created a tradition (a manmade rule) that a childless widow who had no brother in law to marry her could marry any family member who agreed to be the family redeemer. And this marriage could then produce the needed heir for the deceased husband. And even more the widow Ruth now has a husband to care for her, and by custom, her mother in law Na'omi would be lovingly cared for by Boaz and Ruth. The marriage of Ruth to Boaz solves all the problems that the story of Ruth presents.

The senior go'el cedes his rights to Boaz, and hands his sandal to Boaz as a symbolic gesture used in that era to seal the deal. The 10 attending elders attest to the arrangement, and at that moment (or more accurately once he pays the money to the unknown possessor of the land), the land of Elimelech is redeemed back to the clan. Further Boaz agrees that the first son born to he and Ruth will be in the name of the deceased. Let's be clear than "name" (shem) does NOT mean name as in Bradford, or Smith, or Jones. Rather it means attributes, characteristics, or the rights of inheritance embodied in having an established descendant.

Then after the elders publically notarize the agreement, they pronounce a prayer and a blessing over Boaz and Ruth asking that God would make them very fruitful (in children and descendants) like Leah and Rachael did for Jacob. It is an interesting choice of women's names to invoke because Rachael and Leah had something in common with Ruth: they were all gentiles before their Hebrew husbands married them. It's hard to get away from the fact that gentiles always played a key role in building up of the nation of Israel and in their redemption. In fact, when even the name of Tamar is mentioned as the mother of Peretz (Judah being the father) she too was a gentile woman. And Peretz is mentioned because he was an ancestor of Boaz.

Now the challenges of this final chapter of Ruth don't end with the legal proceedings at the city gate of Bethlehem. Because in staccato fashion we're told Boaz and Ruth had the son that was needed to keep the line of Machlon alive; and in doing so also kept the line of Elimelech from coming to a dead end. The thing is that the verse 14 plainly states that this son of Ruth is see by the women of Beit-Lechem as a redeemer for Na'omi! This passage is another that causes many bible scholars to conclude that this a corrupt text because up to now Boaz has been the redeemer; thus they say that it is not Ruth's child but Boaz that this ought to be

referring to. Nonsense.

In fact this verse links perfectly with the equally perplexing verse 17 that says that it was these same women of Bethlehem who named **Na'omi's** son! Did you get that? Not Ruth's son but Na'omi's. Not only that, but nowhere in the Bible do we find anyone but the mother, and perhaps the father in a couple of instances, giving their own child its name. Neighbors naming your child was unheard of. But you see, that is what is so fantastic about the book of Ruth. The whole community knew that in some strange way the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the resultant first son was far more significant than merely concerning the private family matter of restoring the Elimelech clan line. This matter was profound and far-reaching in ways that they could sense would affect them all, but they didn't know how. And of course in retrospect we know that this son went on to be the grandfather of the future King David, and from David's line came the even more future Redeemer of the entire world, Yeshua of Nazareth.

Let me also point out an important grammatical technicality: when verse 14 says that the women said that Yehoveh has provided Na'omi with a redeemer, it is probably much more accurate to translate it as that Na'omi was provided with **redemption** because the Hebrew word that is usually translated as "redeemer" in this verse is not **go'el** but **ga'al**. **Go'el** is a noun that more or less means The Kinsman Redeemer (a particular person), but **ga'al** is usually a verb that means, "redeeming". In other words the intent is not to indicate a person but rather about an action or a behavior, so the intent is NOT to name Ruth's first son as Na'omi's kinsman redeemer in the same mold as was Boaz.

As a housekeeping matter: the reference to the first son of Ruth as being Na'omi's son is merely a common way of speaking on a number of levels from that era. First the word for son is **ben** and one of its many and varied uses is as "grandson". But on another level this grandson more or less legally replaced Na'omi's deceased son Machlon. And on yet another level, since Na'omi was the widow of the deceased Elimelech, by the legal fiction of designating this male child of Ruth as Na'omi's son it also made him Elimelech's son, and thus establishing the proper heir of Elimelech's line. Trust that I'm not speaking allegory to you, nor convoluting the story line to try and make it all fit. Quite the contrary I'm explaining to you the Hebrew thought pattern and cultural norms for that time, and why we need to take this story as it is and not try to remake to suit our doctrines.

The name the women gave the son was **Oved** (Obed), which means "worshipper" or "the serving one".

The book ends with Obed's descendants, but first traces his ancestors back to Peretz, son of Judah by Tamar. Again notice: the Messianic line begins with a gentile woman (Tamar), and then makes a significant turn with yet another gentile woman, Ruth. Of course both of these gentile women are drawn in to the community of set apart people, Israel, in one way or another. Obed is the father of **Yishai** (Jesse), and Jesse is the father of David. Thus the validity of King David's line and right to throne is established by means of the story of Ruth, and the expectation of a mysterious redeemer that would effect not just Elimelech's line but the entire community is presented.



But let's not let one other connection zoom by us the son of Ruth, the one who redeems, was born in Bethlehem and then perhaps 125 years later that son's grandchild, King David, would also be born in Bethlehem. And then 1000 years after that, Yoseph and Miriam who lived far to the north in Nazareth of the Galilee found themselves in Bethlehem for a few days and there, in the same place that Obed and David were brought into this world, so was Yeshua the Messiah.

And thus ends the story of Ruth.