

Ruth and Bo'az on the Threshing Floor

3: 6-13

DIG: Was Ruth's assumption that a *go'el* also had the duty to marry a widowed relative justified? Why does Bo'az bless Ruth and consider her proposal? How does Bo'az show the kindness of a kinsman-redeemer? For what kindness does Bo'az commend Ruth? How does Ruth foreshadow the Church? How does Bo'az foreshadow Christ?

REFLECT: Not that you have to be perfect, but if you have to make a decision between your feelings and the Word of God, what do you usually follow? Are your feelings the engine that drives your life, or the caboose? What does it mean to have your sins paid in full by Jesus on the cross? Explain this to someone or write it down.

By now both the barley and wheat harvests were over, and it was time for threshing and winnowing. There was no more gleaning and no hired work available for a woman, so Ruth's opportunity to see Bo'az would be drastically reduced. Even if they saw each other it would be in public and her opportunity to talk to him privately would be minimal. Bo'az knew he was Elimelek's kinsman, yet he had done nothing to redeem Elimelek's land. Neither Na'omi nor Ruth knew why. Perhaps he was waiting because technically Na'omi was the widow with first claim on the kinsman-redeemer. Therefore, to bring matters to a head, Na'omi took the initiative of formally waiving her own right to marry the *go'el* (3:1b).⁷³

The narrator quickly leads us with Ruth to a new location. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to (3:6). At this point the rabbis make a comparison between Ruth and Tamar (Genesis 38:1-30). They teach that the merits of the two righteous Gentile proselytes reached their culmination: Ruth and Tamar had clung to the Shechinah and bound themselves up in the eternity of Isra'el to become illuminated by the light of the Messiah.

The spotlight now falls on Bo'az. Things apparently went just as Na'omi had anticipated. After Bo'az had finished eating and drinking to his heart's content, he went over and lay down next to the pile of threshed grain to go to sleep. After years of famine, he now had an abundant harvest. Ruth came in quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down (3:7 ISV). Bo'az would lie down by one pile of grain and his male servants would be scattered in other areas of his property for protection so there was a measure of privacy between the two of them. The Torah said she was entitled to call upon the next of kin to fulfill the various responsibilities of the kinsman-redeemer. Thus, she was making a legal claim in the

approved manner of the time. For Ruth, lying down at the feet of Bo'az was an act of submission. She was placing herself under his authority. **Ruth foreshadows the Church in that she submitted to Bo'az.** The B'rit Chadashah forcefully tells us to submit to God (James 4:7a), and the TaNaKh reminds us to trust in ADONAI with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Despite the lack of explicit clues, it seems like Ruth momentarily delayed in approaching Bo'az. Probably to make sure he was asleep. Then, in accordance with Na'omi's instructions, Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down (3:7b). Bo'az was so tired that he didn't notice her at first. But as the air cooled in the middle of the night, while turning and reaching for his blanket, something startled him. There was a woman lying at his feet (3:8). Adam went to sleep and woke up to discover he'd been through surgery and was a married man. Jacob woke up to discover he was married to the wrong woman! Bo'az woke up at midnight to find a woman lying at his feet. Under the circumstances, "Who are you?" was a natural enough question to be asked. "I am your maidservant (Hebrew: *amah*) Ruth," she said. Notice that she didn't call herself a Moabitess. Now she was the maidservant of Bo'az. She was making a new beginning for herself.⁷⁴

At this point, however, Ruth departed from Na'omi's game plan. At the very moment when we expect Bo'az to instruct Ruth (3:4), she confidently spoke up and said to him, "Spread the corner of your robe (Hebrew: *kanaph*) over me as a token of marriage, because you are a redeeming kinsman (Hebrew: *go'el*) of our family" (3:9). The term spread the corner of your robe implies protection (Deuteronomy 22:30, 23:1, 27:20; Ezekiel 16:8). When marriages are formalized among the Jews, the man throws the corner of his tallit over his wife and covers her head with it.⁷⁵ **This gesture would be the modern-day equivalent of giving an engagement ring. This was, in effect, a marriage proposal.**

During her secret, nocturnal visit to the threshing floor, Ruth proposed marriage to Bo'az. What was surprising about it, was that she supported the proposal by appealing to his status as her kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew: *go'el*), a fact she had learned first from Na'omi (2:20). But it is interesting because nowhere in the TaNaKh does it list marriage of any kind, much less to widowed relatives, among the duties of a *go'el*. In fact, the kinsman-redeemer's main tasks were to restore ownership of alienated clan property by buying it back in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:25-30), and to free fellow clansmen and women from poverty-induced slavery (Leviticus 25:47-55). In addition, the *go'el* was to avenge the killing of a relative (Numbers 35:12, 19-27), and to receive money due a deceased relative (Numbers 5:8). Consequently, was Ruth's assumption that a *go'el* also had a duty to marry a widowed relative justified?

The fact that **Ruth** assumed a marriage duty on the part of **the kinsman-redeemer** strongly suggests that such a custom in fact existed; otherwise the story would lack credibility. More importantly, however, there is evidence that the duties of a *go'el* went beyond those mentioned above. The word's symbolic use suggests that he also may have helped a clan member in a lawsuit (**Job 19:25; Psalm 119:154; Proverbs 23:11; Jeremiah 50:34; Lamentations 3:58**). Moreover, if one assumes that the picture of YHVH as *go'el* reflects Israelite customs, then the *go'el* also was an advocate who stood up for the vulnerable family members and who took responsibility for unfortunate relatives, even dead ones. Therefore, it seems likely that the duty of **the kinsman-redeemer** was a broad one . . . indeed, far broader than the redemptive acts taught in **Leviticus 25** and those typical of the levirate (see Ae - **The Duty of Levirate Marriage**).

Evidently, the *go'el* aided clan members, both the living, who were perceived weak and vulnerable, and the dead. Indeed, it may be especially significant for the book of **Ruth**, in as much as two of the duties concern actions on behalf of the dead. Such actions sought to restore a wholeness that the clan perceived to be lost.⁷⁶ **What Ruth was asking Bo'az to do was to according to the spirit of the kinsman-redeemer. She appealed to him to be the go'el who, at his own cost, would restore wholeness to Na'omi and her family's future that had been shattered.** This took more than a little chutzpah on her part. It was entirely unprecedented in the Jewish culture for a woman to propose to a man, or a younger person to an elder, or a field worker to a field owner.⁷⁷

This caught **Bo'az** off guard. But after the initial shock, he showered **Ruth** with an overwhelming and unexpected blessing, saying to her, "**ADONAI bless you, my daughter.**" The mention of **God's** name is a recognition in all that had taken place, and when he called her "**my daughter,**" it did emphasize the age difference between the two, but for **Ruth** this made no difference at all. **This chesed** (see Af - **The Concept of Chesed**) is **greater than that which you showed earlier** (in her willingness to forsake family, homeland and gods in her devotion to **Na'omi**). Her present **chesed** was that she came to an older man, who was probably **Na'omi's** age, and her willingness to provide **Na'omi** an heir by marrying a *go'el* like **Bo'az** even exceeded her earlier **chesed**. Then he complemented her on having chosen him rather than going after someone younger or richer, "**You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor**" (3:10). A younger man would have had a better prospect, humanly speaking, of providing **Ruth** with children of her own, and thereby with significance.

She did not follow her natural inclinations. **Bo'az** was certain that if she wanted she could have married a rich young man. Otherwise there would be no point in praising her faithfulness to family obligations otherwise. Not thinking of herself, she was willing pass up

the younger men who were not kinsmen-redeemers, acting only out of love for Na'omi. She considered her own happiness to be secondary. She could have married for love or money but chose to marry out of family loyalty. Therefore, her new display of **chesed** would be **greater than** the first. The question is, "What is greater than the salvation of a whole family line?" And the answer becomes, "To become the mother of the royal house of Isra'el (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ai - The Genealogies of Joseph and Mary](#)).⁷⁸

11. Bo'az foreshadows Messiah because he gave Ruth all that she asked. Messiah also said: You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ John 14:14](#) for a fuller explanation of this verse). Then Bo'az comforted Ruth when he said: **And now, my daughter, don't be afraid (3:11a)**. This word of assurance has been given to many of ADONAI's servants: Abraham ([Genesis 15:1](#)), Isaac ([Genesis 26:24](#)), Jacob ([Genesis 46:3](#)), Moses and the nation of Isra'el ([Exodus 14:13](#)), Joshua ([Joshua 8:1](#) and [10:8](#)), King Jehoshaphat ([Second Chronicles 20:17](#)), the Jewish remnant in the Land ([Isaiah 41:10, 13-14, 43:1](#) and [5, 44:2](#)), Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 3:9](#)), Daniel ([Daniel 10:12](#) and [19](#)), Joseph ([Mattityahu 1:20](#)), Zechariah ([Luke 1:13](#)), Mary ([Luke 1:30](#)), the shepherds in the field ([Luke 2:10](#)), Rabbi Sha'ul ([Acts 27:24](#)) and the apostle Yochanan ([Revelation 1:17](#)). You and I can say with these spiritual giants: ADONAI is my Helper; I will not be afraid - what can any human do to me ([Hebrews 13:6 CJB](#))?

Not only did Bo'az calm Ruth's immediate fears, but he also made a promise to her concerning her future: **I will do for you all that you ask. Whatever God starts, He finishes; and what He does, He does well (Philippians 1:6; Mark 7:37)**. It was not Ruth's obligation to do for herself what only Bo'az could do ([3:11b](#)), and it is not our obligation to do what only Christ can do. The Torah says: **The soul who sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4)**, and Ha'Shem didn't seek any way around this: **He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)?** Of course, there is no other unknown kinsman who could redeem a lost world. **Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12)**.⁷⁹

It is noteworthy that **Proverbs 31** describes a woman of character: **her works bring her praise at the city gate (Prov 31:31)**. Using similar language, Bo'az declared: **All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character, especially among the city elders (3:11c)**. Literally, Bo'az says: *All the gate of my people knows that you are a woman of worth*. The idiom is usually lost in translation, but what we see in Ruth is precisely a **Proverbs 31 woman** in the flesh. Her deeds had indeed been praised at the city gate.

How did **Ruth** gain this reputation among the people of **Beit-Lechem**, when just a couple of months previously **she** had been ignored and slighted as an insignificant foreigner? **She** didn't gain **her** good reputation by pushing **herself** on people and blowing **her** own horn. Instead, **she** made **herself** **Na'omi's** servant and worked without complaining in the heat of the harvest day to help **her mother-in-law** survive. People noticed.⁸⁰

At this point in the story a complication arose, **Bo'az** revealed an unexpected, disturbing fact. There was another **kinsman**, unnamed to the reader, who was a closer relative to Elimelek than **Bo'az**, and as such, had the first right to serve as **go'el**. In Israelite custom this duty fell upon the nearest male relative, or if he waved it, to others in an order of priority unknown to us. As an upright **Israelite**, **Bo'az** bowed before that custom rather than scheme to circumvent it. Personal preference gave way to the rights of other relatives.

Such honesty served three purposes for the narrator. First, it injected one last moment of suspense into the story. Having just breathed a sigh of relief, the audience now anxiously wondered, "Will **Bo'az** lose **Ruth** after all?" And Secondly, it presented **Bo'az** as a model of integrity, and, therefore, a worthy ancestor of King **David**. Indeed, that very integrity may explain why **Bo'az** did not exercise the duty of *go'el* earlier; **he** knew that the right belonged to someone else and that right was not to be violated. **Na'omi** and **Ruth** had forced the issue, so **Bo'az** could approach this **unknown kinsman** and get **him** to decide what **he** wanted to do. **His** caution would also enhance **Ruth's** legal claims: All **Isra'el** would know that whatever status **she** might later obtain had come legally, not falsely. Thirdly, by placing an additional obstacle before the couple, it underscored the word of the providence of **God**.⁸¹

Although it is true that **I am a redeeming kinsman of our family, there is a redeemer closer than I (3:12)**. This must have been a bitter pill for **Ruth** to swallow. Just when things were going so well! Scripture doesn't identify **the man** who was **Na'omi's** actual next of kin (**he** would almost assuredly have been an older brother to **Bo'az**, whereas **Bo'az** was only a nephew). But **Bo'az** knew immediately who **he** was, and **he** knew that custom required **him** to defer to this other relative. **He** explained the situation to **Ruth**, swore to **her** his own willingness to be **her go'el** if it were possible, and urged **her** to remain at **his feet until dawn**.⁸²

But once again, **Bo'az** comforted **Ruth**. **He** would take care of this unexpected and unwanted complication. In the morning, **Bo'az** would approach **the man** and question **him**. If **he** wanted to **redeem her**, then well and good. But if **he** did not want to undertake **his duty**, then **Bo'az** would gladly do it **himself**. **Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your redeeming kinsman, good; let him redeem you. But if he is**

not willing, as surely as ADONAI lives . . . I will do it. Lie down until morning" (3:13a). One way or another, Ruth would certainly be taken care of.

12. Bo'az foreshadows Messiah because a kinsman-redeemer must be willing and able to pay the price of redemption. Bo'az declared: As surely as ADONAI lives . . . I will do it (3:13b). Messiah was also willing and able to pay the price of redemption as reflected in His sixth words from the Cross: When He had received the drink, Jesus said in Aramaic: **It is finished** (John 19:30a). He said: **"It" is finished, not "I" AM finished.** The Lord will speak these same words again at the end of the Great Tribulation when He will say: **It is done** (see the commentary on **Revelation Eh - The Seventh Bowl: A Tremendous Earthquake**)! Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but the Bible is written in Greek and this is one word in Greek, *tetelestai*, and it is in the perfect tense, indicating a past, completed action, with continuing, and in this case, permanent results. *Tetelestai* was a Greek word used in accounting. Archeologists found an enormous amount of invoices at a dig in Egypt. Many Jews had fled Jerusalem before the Roman destruction and settled in Alexandria. There they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the international language of the day. In Alexandria, Egypt, archeologists found a large quantity of invoices with *tetelestai*, written on clay tablets. In accounting terms, it means **paid in full. In other words, just as Bo'az was willing and able to pay the price of redemption for Ruth, our sins have been paid in full as a result of Yeshua's death on the cross.**