

Bo'az Obtains the Right of Redemption

4: 1-6

DIG: From Leviticus 25:23-43 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10, what are God's views on property, poverty and posterity? Given her tenuous position, how would the LORD use these decrees to protect Na'omi? What cost was involved for the unknown kinsman-redeemer? If a woman marries a kinsman, how much of her property goes to him? How much to her son? How might this account for the unnamed redeemer's reluctance to marry Ruth? Did Mr. So-and-so do anything wrong?

REFLECT: When have you seen ADONAI as your Kinsmen-Redeemer like Bo'az? Where have you seen God's providence work on your behalf? At what cost do you follow Christ? Do you do the expected and the ordinary thing for Messiah? Or you practice chesed and do the unexpected and the extraordinary?

The Bridegroom: The next morning Bo'az wasted no time in going to the city-gate, where the elders used to meet for the purpose of dispensing justice and dealing with claims and litigations, and there he hailed the unnamed kinsman-redeemer with whom he had spoken the previous night. Meanwhile Bo'az went up to the town gate, where legal transactions were completed (Genesis 23:1-20; Deuteronomy 15:7; Second Samuel 15:2, Second Kings 22:10; Jeremiah 38:7), and sat down there, ready to conduct business, just as the unnamed redeeming kinsman that he had mentioned came along. Bo'az said: Come over here, my friend (Hebrew: *peloni'almoni* meaning something like Mr. So-and-so), and sit down. So he came over and sat down (4:1).

Bo'az took ten of the elders of the town as witnesses and said, "Sit here," and they did so (4:2). The authoritative tone of voice reveals the influential position held by Bo'az, who was a judge.

Then he said to Mr. So-and-so, "Na'omi, who has come back (**shuwb**) from Mo'av, intends to sell the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek (4:3). Property was normally first offered to a member of the family before it was offered to anyone else (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Fs - Jeremiah Buys a Field**) and this is what she was doing. The land belonged to Elimelek before going to Mo'av, but Na'omi wasn't free to do anything with it until **she** came back about three months earlier. **She** was penniless and thus, put it up for sale. The time of planting had passed and it was the time of harvesting, so Na'omi wouldn't have been able to earn any income from the land for a year.⁸⁹

It is important to understand that land portions were part of each family's lasting legacy from generation to generation. Plots of family land could not be permanently sold (**Leviticus 25:23**). Real estate that was "sold" to pay debts remained in the possession of the buyer only until **the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55)**, at which time it was to revert back to the original owner's family. This arrangement would help keep Isra'el's wealth evenly distributed, and it meant that land-sale deals were actually more like long-term leases. Land sold for debt relief could also be redeemed at any time by the seller or his or her *go'el*. As long as **Elimelech** had no heirs, the property sold by **his widow** would automatically become the permanent possession of anyone who acted as **Na'omi's go'el** and redeemed **her** land. Consequently, this made the prospect extremely appealing.⁹⁰

I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." So-and-so replied: **I will redeem it (4:4)**. His **readiness to fulfill his obligation in the first instance was doubtless due to his belief that the property only belonged Na'omi, and that his duty would end with the purchase of the field from her. Aside from the cost of the land, he would make a profit from the crops grown upon it.**

But then Bo'az explained that there was a catch. While **Elimelech** had no surviving heir, the man who would have been **his** rightful heir (Mahlon) had left **a widow**. Therefore, **Bo'az** explained: **On the day you buy the land from Na'omi, you must also acquire** (Hebrew: *qanah* meaning *to purchase* or *to buy*) **Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon (4:5a)**. The word *qanah* is used here as a legal perfect, meaning *a decisive legal transaction*, or broadly, *to marry as part of the legal transaction*. So **Bo'az** informed the court that **Ruth** came along with the property.⁹¹ That changed things. If **Ruth** *did* remarry someone under that principle of levirate marriage (see **Ae - The Duty of Levirate Marriage**), and **she** produced any heir in Mahlon's name, the rights to **Elimelech's** land would automatically revert to **Ruth's** offspring. The only way to eliminate that risk would be to marry **Ruth**. Now the deal seemed less attractive.

The purpose was **to maintain Mahlon's name with his property (4:5b)**. It was extremely important to an Israelite to have an heir living on the family land. If this were not the case, it would mean the disappearance of the family name. To a Jew, this was the greatest tragedy possible. **The rabbis taught that their afterlife was dependent upon having an ancestor living on family soil**. Without this **Elimelech** would cease to exist in the memory of the tribe or the clan. So the purpose here was not merely to retain the land, or to care for **Ruth**, but that having **a kinsman-redeemer** reside on **his** property so that **Elimelech's** family line would be preserved.

At this, Mr. So-and-so shuddered before the heavy responsibilities and gladly transferred his rights to Bo'az by saying: Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate and leave me in poverty. He was probably not rich enough to both redeem the field and bring Ruth into the equation. The issue was not her nationality, but the double financial burden that he simply could not carry. He would have to buy Na'omi's property from assets that were part of his own estate, only to lose that investment and the property when Ruth's first son claimed it as Elimelek's heir. Not only would Ruth's son inherit the property Mr. So-and-so redeemed, but he would also inherit part of Mr. So-and-so's own property, thus depriving his own heirs of their full inheritance. Not only that, he would be responsible for taking care of Na'omi, Ruth, and any children born to her as well.⁹² This is why he said: I cannot redeem it. You redeem it yourself, because I cannot do it (4:6). This cleared the way for Bo'az to act. Mr. So-and-so did nothing wrong. But like Orpah, he did the expected and the ordinary. Bo'az, however, did the unexpected and the extraordinary.

This final scene is all about preserving names. From the concern to preserve the names of Elimelech and Mahlon with their inheritance (4:10), to the wish in the blessing that Bo'az's name would be remembered in Beit-Lechem (4:11), to the similar blessing at the birth of Obed (4:14), to the two names following Obed's name (4:17), to the list of names with which the chapter concludes (4:18-22), throughout this chapter there is the common thread of the desire to keep one's name alive. Although neither Mr. So-and-so nor Bo'az realized it at the time, a lasting name was what was at stake. The one who married Ruth would receive not only a woman of character with an impressive work ethic and the ability to lift and carry eighty pounds of grain, but he would also receive a place in ADONAI's plan. The line of Ruth and Bo'az would continue on to include Obed, then Jesse, then David; Beit-Lechem's most famous son, the king after God's own heart (First Samuel 13:14). By trying to protect his own future, Mr. So-and-so would remain nameless forever.⁹³