

# Bo'az Redeems Ruth the Moabitess

## 4: 7-12

**DIG:** What does it say about Bo'az, being willing to take on all the expenses and duties, when he will get nothing tangible in return? What ancestor of Bo'az was born from the same practice of this Mr. So-and-so (Genesis 38)? How might having a foreigner for a mother (see Matthew 15) have influence his choice of a wife? How did God fulfill the blessing in 4:11-12?

**REFLECT:** When have you faced great physical need? How did God provide for you? How is your story like Na'omi's and Ruth's story of how YHVH cares? Where have you seen the God of Isra'el and Mo'av concern Himself equally for any and all people who put their trust in Him? Who is the "untouchable Moabite" in your life - the one you keep at arm's length? How can you bridge that gap between you? How would your association with "the Moabites" of today affect your status with your peers? How would that affect your relationship with the LORD?

The narrator interrupts the report on the court proceedings with a parenthetical comment concerning an ancient legal custom. On the one hand, it is striking since it interrupts **Mr. So-and-so's** address to **Bo'az**; but on the other hand, it allows the audience to absorb the momentous significance of **4:6**. It also slowed the story's pace slightly, thereby extending the suspense. Finally, its content gave the following ceremony a formality and solemnity it would not otherwise have had.<sup>94</sup>

In the past, this is what was done in Isra'el for the redemption and transfer of property to become final: a man took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was a symbolic act of legalizing transactions in Isra'el (4:7). When the book of Ruth was written this was no longer the custom, that's why the author of the book had to explain it. The custom of taking off the sandal probably relates to the divine commandment to walk on the land and take possession of it (Deuteronomy 11:24), and as we see Abraham doing in Genesis 13:17, and what Joshua is told to do in Joshua 1:3. Taking off your sandal and handing to another was the symbol of the transfer of a possession or the right of ownership. Therefore, **Bo'az** had the right to stand in his stead as *go'el* for **Ruth** and **Na'omi**.

This is not the same thing as the *chalitzah* (Deuteronomy 25:5-11 which deals with a brother not willing to do his duty for selfish reasons and is willing to let the name of his bother perish), because Ruth was not present - only Bo'az. She did not remove the sandal of Mr. So-and-so. Also, Ruth did not spit into his face or forcefully remove his sandal. Bo'az purchased the right of redemption, while the *chalitzah* removed it. Mr. So-and-so's lack of redemption is due to inability and therefore there is no reason to shame him. Furthermore, Bo'az was willing to marry her, so the issue was not if she was to be married, but to whom.

**The Bridegroom:** So what was happening here, was that Mr. So-and-so was released from his obligation and he said to Bo'az, "Buy it yourself." And then came the custom, then he removed his sandal (4:8). Now that the sandal had been handed to Bo'az, the *peloni'almoni* walked off of the pages of the Bible. In the future if anyone would challenged Bo'az's right of inheritance, he could produce the sandal as evidence that a closer kin had relinquished his rights.<sup>95</sup>

Then Bo'az moved quickly to complete the transaction. He announced to the elders and all the people of Beit-Lechem who had formerly shown a sympathetic interest in the two stricken women on their return from Mo'av, and who now witnessed the hour of restoration to their rightful place in the community. "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Na'omi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon" (4:9). All the family members are mentioned again except Orpah. She had also faded into obscurity with Mr. So-and-so. Without saying so, it may be assumed that along with Ruth, Bo'az also took responsibility for Na'omi. This logically followed from the commitment that Ruth had made to her mother-in-law. The women of Beit-Lechem later confirmed this (4:15). Bo'az is a beautiful illustration of the Lord Jesus Christ who became mankind's Kinsman-Redeemer and who makes things right before God the Father for those who trust in Him.<sup>96</sup>

I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead on his own property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses (4:10). This was the heart of the matter. But this statement only marked the "purchase" of the property, Ruth and Na'omi as their *go'el*, the actual marriage takes place in 4:13.

Today's questions, "Why get married?" or "Why bother with a piece of paper?" are to be answered in terms of responsibility to society, and a recognition that our equivalent of the elders and all the people have a proper interest in the formation of a new family group.

Public witness is always an aspect of covenant-making. And the social importance of public witness retains this aspect of the meaning of marriage. But there is a personal value here also. The public witness serves among other things as a support in a marriage against a breakdown in those times when the relationship is under strain. It is a constant reminder that promises were made, obligations entered into, and prayer for grace and resources asked. The vows were not simply a private matter, but publically made and publically witnessed. A sense of accountability to the wider fellowship of believers helps us to maintain our promises and acts to support us in the harder times when our commitment to chesed (see **Af - The Concept of Chesed**) is put to the test.<sup>97</sup>

The family is under attack today (see the commentary on **Exodus Dq - You Shall Not Commit Adultery**). Things that were once thought of as being unimaginable are now commonplace. **As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one" (Ephesians 5:31).** Today, far too often, sex comes before marriage and the couple ends up living in their parent's basement or the grandparents raising the children. What used to be thought of as a shameful act is now looked upon as a badge of honor. The tragedy is the kids growing up today have accepted this as the way things have always been. There is the concept of a "designer marriage," where you will get married the first time, knowing that it won't last, so that you can make all your mistakes on someone you won't have to spend the rest of your life with. Sad. Very sad.

My mother was raised in a Quaker community in Indiana. I have in my house a copy of a document signed by **the elders and all the people** saying that **they** agreed that my great, great, grandparents should get married. This is how it worked: my great grandfather, Ashley Johnson, met my great grandmother, Elizabeth, and they started seeing each other. But they lived in different towns. When it got serious, her church community had him come and live for a year with one of the families in that town. He worked, went to Sunday Meeting, and generally got to know **all the people** there. But more importantly, *they got to know him!* This wasn't a quick process. You can fool people over a short period of time, but when you interact with people for a year they will know all about you. Inside and out. After a year **all the people** agreed that he was fit to marry their Elizabeth.

Only then did they appear in a public meeting where Ashley Johnson took Elizabeth by the hand and declared that he took her to be his wife until death should separate them, and she, in like manner, declared the same thing. Then a document was signed, something like the Declaration of Independence, with their names at the bottom. Ashley and Elizabeth signed first and then thirty-six others also signed, "**Today we are witnesses,**" with their full names. This has been handed down through five generations of my family.

**The Bride:** Everyone loves a good love story, and the people of Beit-Lechem were no exception. Then the elders and all the people at the gate said: We are witnesses, legally notarized the transaction. Then came the blessing: May ADONAI make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and like Leah, who between them built up the house of Isra'el. In the same way that Rachael and Leah built up the house of Isra'el, may Ruth build up the house of Bo'az. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Beit-Lechem (4:11). In other words, Bo'az, make yourself a well-established name through your marriage to Ruth. And through her, have many worthy sons who will make your name famous. The rabbis teach that Ruth lived to see Solomon crowned as king.

Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez (see the commentary on Genesis Jf - Tamar Gave Birth to Twin Boys, She Named them Perez and Zerah), whom Tamar bore to Judah (4:12). Perhaps the most striking aspect of the blessing on Bo'az and Ruth, is the analogy that is drawn between Ruth and Tamar. These two women are both alike and unlike each other. Like Ruth, she too was a Gentile who married into God's family under doubtful circumstances. She too lost her husband and had no child. Both Ruth and Tamar dressed themselves up in pursuit of a child and a future. But that's where the similarity ends. Ruth revealed her identity to Bo'az and received a child legitimately through marriage, whereas Tamar concealed her identity and deceived Judah in order to receive a child outside of marriage. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute in order to trap her father-in-law Judah into having sex with her, so that she might have a child. The end result of both unions, legitimate and illegitimate, was children who, in the providence of God, had an vital part to play in YHVH's greater plan.<sup>98</sup>

The blessing proved to be prophetic: Bo'az and Ruth were married, and ADONAI soon blessed them with a son. What wonderful changes came into Ruth's life because she trusted Bo'az and let him work on her behalf! She went from loneliness to love, from toil to rest, from poverty to wealth, from worry to assurance and from despair to hope. She was no longer Ruth the Moabitess, for the past was gone, and she was making a new beginning. She was now Ruth the wife of Bo'az, a name she was proud to bear.

One of the many images of the universal Church is the bride of Christ. In Ephesians 5:22-23, the emphasis is on Yeshua's love for the Church as seen in His ministries: He died for the Church (past), He cleanses and nourishes the Church through the Word (present), and He will one day present the Church in glory (future). Jesus is preparing a beautiful home for His bride and one day we will celebrate our wedding (see the commentary on Revelation Fg - Blessed Are Those who are Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb).<sup>99</sup>