

Exegetical Notes – Ruth 4:1-12

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Ruth is a story that took place during the days when Israel was ruled by Judges. Those days were a time of moral and religious decline in Israel. The people of Israel were following the mindset of the people who lived around them and frequently ignored the Lord. They wandered into trouble and God sent people to save them from their wandering away from him. These people were called judges.

Ruth is the story of two women, Naomi, a Jewess, who is bitter because of the circumstances of her life, and Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law, who is not Jewish. It is the story of how God works in their lives to bring them blessing.

Ruth 4:1-12

Verses 1-4

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ 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."

"I will redeem it," he said.

- "Meanwhile" (see Ruth 3), Ruth and Boaz agreed that he will act as guardian-redeemer and take Ruth as his wife. However, there was another relative closer to Elimelek who should act as guardian-redeemer. Boaz had a plan to resolve the situation.

- Boaz went to the gate of the city. This was the place where the Elders of that city would gather. He took his place among the Elders to await the arrival of the closer relative. When that person arrived, Boaz explained that Naomi, Elimelek's widow, intended to sell some of the land which she had inherited from her husband. To protect the tribal inheritance, the nearest relative to the deceased had the first option on the property. Before the Elders, Boaz asked the closer relative if he intended to exercise his right as next in line and purchase the property Naomi was selling. The closer relative said that he would exercise his right and purchase the property.
- Prior to this there has been no mention of Naomi having any property to sell or of having any intention of selling anything. In fact, she appears to be destitute and without any means of support before now. This may have been a carefully prepared ruse on Boaz's part to force the hand of the closer relative.

Verses 5-8

⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

- Then Boaz explained that if the closer relative acted as guardian-redeemer in the purchase of the property, he would also need to act as guardian-redeemer to Ruth and take her as his wife. He explained that by law the property he purchased from Naomi would only be held by him in trust for the children born to Ruth.
- The closer relative then declined his rights. He was unwilling to endanger his own estate. Ruth's children could become his heirs, too. Then his property would pass into Elimelek's portion. He was unwilling to allow this to happen. He gave up his rights in favor of Boaz.

Verses 9-10

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

- The deal was sealed before the Elders in the customary way. Boaz was now, officially, Ruth's guardian-redeemer.

Verses 11-12

¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

- The Elders affirmed the deal. They acknowledged that Boaz was the guardian-redeemer and prayed God's blessing on him for accepting this responsibility.
- Though a carefully worked plan, Boaz arranged to fulfill his promise to Ruth and become her guardian-redeemer.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on Ruth 4:1-12. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)