

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Ruth goes to the threshing floor to convince Boaz to become her wife and redeemer
2. aim – to cause us to seek the true redeemer, the One who possesses all of what we need
3. passage – Ruth 3:1-18

b. outline

1. The Realization of Naomi (Ruth 3:1-5)
2. The Request of Ruth (Ruth 3:6-9)
3. The Response of Boaz (Ruth 3:10-18)

c. opening

1. the **strangeness** of this chapter (**read vv. 1-5**)
 - a. **question:** does the request of Naomi seem rather *forward* to you; does her sending Ruth to the threshing floor of Boaz seem rather *aggressive* in nature, sort of *pushy* even?
 - b. **there is a “strangeness” here that is often overlooked in reading the narrative, especially when it is read as a “romantic” story of love and marriage**
 - c. so (**once again**) we will walk through the story and “glean” its details, looking for relevant theological topics and their application to us today

I. The Realization of Naomi (Ruth 3:1-5)

Content

a. the realization by Naomi

1. Naomi has made the “connection” of Boaz to her needs as the former wife of Elimelech – she has come to realize that Boaz can act as a kinsman-redeemer
 - a. he has the *legal authority* to act as this redeemer – he is a member of the family, and is (thus) able *under the law* to redeem property back into the family on behalf of another (Elimelech)
 1. **true:** he is not the most *immediate* redeemer available (**note v. 12**), but he *can* (legally) do this if the nearer redeemer is willing to forego the request to him
 - b. he has the *financial ability* to act as this redeemer – given his landownership, it would appear that he is wealthy enough to purchase Elimelech’s land
 1. **true:** this may be an *assumption* on the part of Naomi, but she probably knows much more about Boaz’s financial situation than the author reveals to us
 - c. he has the *generosity of character* to act as this redeemer – how he responded to the needs of Ruth (and Naomi through her) seems to indicate that he has the character to act in this way too
 1. **true:** this is *another assumption* on Naomi’s part, but (at this point) she really has nothing to lose to find out if Boaz truly is a man of such extended generosity
2. **pause:** what does **4:3, 5** imply about the relationship of the land to Naomi – is she still in ownership of the land, or was it sold by Elimelech? – is Naomi the *actual* owner of the land of Elimelech?
 - a. **possibility #1:** she *does* own the land and is simply trying to keep the land she owns “in the family” by seeking a male heir *in the clan* that can pass it on to a future generation
 1. since her sons are dead (without any children) she needs a new male heir
 2. the phrases “*Naomi ... is selling*” (**4:3**) and “*from the hand of Naomi*” (**4:5**) are literal
 3. so, Naomi requests Ruth to go and seek out Boaz as a husband – this would facilitate the inheritance of the land passing to an “heir” of Naomi (**i.e.** a man marrying the widow of his “brother,” thus keeping the inheritance within the “stream” of the family; **see below**)
 - b. **possibility #2:** she *does not* actually own the land, it having been sold off by Elimelech
 1. the way she speaks in **1:21** – the sense of being “empty” implies that she has nothing
 2. the fact that they were away 10 years – no land to return to = no reason to return
 3. there is no hint of her attempting to return to her land in the storyline
 4. sending Ruth out to glean implies a deep lack of resources not solvable by selling some land
 5. **IMO:** the land was sold before the family left for Moab, and she has come back to nothing

6. and, the phrases of **4:3, 5** are simply ways of saying that she is the “closest” living person to the land in question – its rights of inheritance *would have* transferred from Elimelech to her sons, thus the land is “closest” to her, even though it *actually* belongs to someone else
3. **(either way)** Naomi has come to realize that Boaz can act in the role of *levir* (**i.e.** a husband’s brother)
 - a. **Levirate Marriage** (*lever-it*) = the marriage of a man to his brother’s widow, a cultural expectation designed to preserve various aspects of the deceased man’s life, such as inheritance rights and support for the widow – simply, a brother “picking up” for his dead brother in family life
 1. it was established in the Law as a part of the custom of Israel (**Deut. 25:5-10**)

“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.”
 2. but it predated Israel as a custom in many nations – **i.e.** Onan refusing to fulfill this responsibility for Er with Tamar (**Genesis 38:6-10**) – note Judah fathering Perez with Tamar (**see 4:18**)
 3. in **Matthew 22:23-33**, the Sadducees pose questions to Jesus about a series of hypothetical levirate marriages to challenge the traditional view of the afterlife – he dismisses any role for marriage in eternity, instead focusing on their ignorance of God and the Scriptures
 - a. **in a similar way that he would respond to questions of marriage in our day (see below)**
- b. the request by Naomi**
 1. Naomi has a *significant* “hurdle” to overcome – she needs to establish a male heir that can redeem the family inheritance (from her or from someone else) **and yet she cannot do it herself**
 - a. remember her statement in **1:11b-12** – “*have I yet sons in my womb? ... I am too old to have a husband!*” – she isn’t in a position for a “brother” of Elimelech to marry her and provide *through her* a male heir – she is “beyond” the reach of levirate marriage herself
 - b. however, she has *realized* that Ruth can become a redeemed woman **as a proxy**
 1. notice her use of the word “*rest*” in **1:9** = the security; assurance; provision that comes from a husband – in a patriarchal society, the state of being taken care of by a husband
 2. notice her use of *the same word here* in **3:1**: “*should I not seek rest for you*” = do I not have a *duty* to seek a husband for you, to find the security *you* need in *this* land?
 - c. **LOW:** Naomi requests for Ruth to go and seek out Boaz as a husband in order that Ruth, as a *widow*, would find her own “*levir*” and thus bring redemption back to the family line
 1. Ruth would benefit – she would have a husband to take care of her, she would have children (potentially), she would be “restored” in all that was lost when Mahlon died
 2. Naomi would benefit – she would be able to “repay” Ruth for her loyalty, the inheritance of her husband and sons would be restored, and *she would be taken care of herself by proxy* (**i.e.** Ruth would certainly continue to care for her *former* mother-in-law, even though she would be married to someone *other* than one of Naomi’s sons)
 2. Naomi gives Ruth specific instructions of how to go about asking Boaz to marry her
 - a. “*wash and anoint yourself and put on your cloak*” = make yourself presentable; accentuate your best “feminine” qualities; make yourself appealing to the man
 1. or, a symbolic act indicating that a period of mourning is over and it is time to become attractive, like a woman betrothed (as in God’s anointing of Jerusalem after the exile; **Ezek. 16:9-12**)
 - b. “*do not make yourself known to the man until ...*” = allow him to get to a place of comfort; don’t approach him until after he has finished eating and drinking and is in a “mellow” (receptive) mood
 1. biblically, the eating of bread and drinking of wine are often symbolic of being full, complete, and satisfied in the Lord (**Psa. 104:15**) – **see the Lord’s Supper Celebration below**
 - c. “*uncover his feet and lie down*” = a demonstration of *dependence* and *submission* in the face of a **very bold request** (which she will make in **v. 9**)
 1. what Ruth is about to do *may seem to us* to be very bold, and it certainly seems very aggressive on the part of Naomi to push her daughter-in-law into this
 2. especially from a *modern perspective* (**i.e.** marrying for **utilitarian** reasons)
 - a. **note:** the concept of marriage on an “emotional” connection is a relatively “modern” idea
 1. in most societies (and prior to the 20th C. in the West), marriage was seen more for its value *to society* than it was *to the individual* – marriage “for love” was rare; marriage was far more for mutual support, raising families, and continuing civilization
 - b. the biblical view of marriage *does not* rise or fall on “emotional” connection
 1. **e.g.** the marriage of Eve to Adam was not for love, but for Adam needing a help-meet
 2. the entire basis of marriage was for procreation (“*be fruitful and multiply*”) and for the advancement of human flourishing in the world (“*take dominion*”; **Genesis 1:28**)

- c. thus, the mistake often made is assuming that love in marriage *is an emotion* (i.e. once it fades the marriage is over) – biblically, **love in marriage is a commitment** – a commitment to support and uphold *even when the emotional component is lacking*
 - 1. e.g. God's love is his commitment to a people who are (in their natural state) *unlovable*
- 3. Naomi sends her daughter-in-law to make a bold request of Boaz, believing (see above) that Boaz is the kind of man who *could* and *would* respond positively to it
 - a. **it is the same kind of bold request that we make of Christ when we come to realize that we, too, need a redeemer – when we realize we need a proxy for our redemption**
 - 1. we come to one with the **legal authority** to help us – one who is the very Son of God, authorized by the Father to make atonement and satisfaction for us
 - 2. we come to one with the **fiduciary ability** to help us – one who has the resources, in his own sinless life and atoning sacrifice on the cross to provide us with redemption
 - 3. we come to one with the **generosity of character** to help us – one who loves us (i.e. is fully committed to us *as his own*) and is more than willing to offer himself for our redemption
 - b. coming to **The Table** and eating bread and drinking “wine” is *symbolic* of this bold request = it is our way of reminding ourselves (and others) that we are *fully satisfied* in this Christ – that our bold request has not been rejected, but that Christ has embraced us **because we have been so bold**