

Bible Study: The Book of Ruth

Week 4: Ruth 4



The World behind the text - Background:

1. Chapter 4 is taken up with the negotiations for Ruth and Boaz' marriage – it's within the context of levirate marriage, the practice in many ancient and still in some cultures of the nearest relative of a man marrying his widow, and the children of the marriage being counted as the dead man's children as well. Boaz offers the nearer male relative to Naomi the opportunity to acquire Elimelech's property, but this is not so attractive when Boaz explains this also includes Ruth, because Ruth's children, rather than any he already has, become the heirs. So Boaz agrees to acquire the property and marry Ruth – the men 'shake hands on it' – or the ancient Israel equivalent, exchange a sandal! (4.7-8)
2. At the end of the book, the elders who are Boaz's witnesses bless Ruth. And the blessing is all about women! Rachael and Leah are there of course but so is Tamar (4.12). Do look at her story in Genesis 38 – another down to earth woman who takes courageous action to ensure justice is done.
3. The book looks forward, as well as back – Ruth appears in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.5 – 'toledoth,' literally 'seed,' or 'breedings' or – in Greek – 'Genesis' – were common in the Old Testament to establish the identity of significant figures. But the one in Matthew 1 subverts them by including Tamar, Ruth, the wife of Uriah and Mary – none of them prominent, and all in some way outside 'respectable' norms – the author of Matthew establishes Jesus as on the side of courageous outsiders.

The 'World in Front of the text' – our experience now:

1. What do you know about your family history? Why do you think it is so popular just at moment?
2. Think of weddings you've been too – and maybe your own! – what is cause for rejoicing at a wedding?

The text:

1. What words or phrases immediately strike you?
2. Are the negotiations between Boaz and the unnamed nearer kinsman patriarchal, or is it more subtle? (Why isn't the 'nearer kinsman' named?)
3. Where is God in all this?
4. Does this speak to us today?

Ruth 4

4No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, 'Come over, friend; sit down here.' And he went over and sat down. ²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, 'Sit down here'; so they sat down. ³He then said to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. ⁴So I thought I would tell you of it, and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here, and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.' So he said, 'I will redeem it.' ⁵Then Boaz said, 'The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance.' ⁶At this, the next-of-kin said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.'

7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, one party took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, 'Acquire it for yourself', he took off his sandal. ⁹Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.' ¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹²and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.' ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son

has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18 Now these are the descendants of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, ¹⁹Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, ²⁰Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, ²¹Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, ²²Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

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Final thoughts...

1. A central theme of the book is love – in Hebrew, *chesed* – the faithful, covenant love of God for people – how does that theme emerge?
2. How do the relationships go beyond the social conventions of the time to let love emerge?
3. What other themes do you detect in the book?
4. What in the book has particularly spoken to you?