

What Child Is This?

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 19th, 2010 • Pastor Chris Lankford

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

~Ruth 4:13-15 (NASB)

1) Gateway To The Future

- A) Through each engaging episode, Boaz and Ruth are presented as exemplary of God’s compassion (note Ruth 3:10-13), called “KHESED” (כֶּסֶד) in the Old Testament. Khesed is God’s mercy, His compassion, His lovingkindness.
- B) As the last chapter closes (3:18), we wait with Naomi and Ruth to discover the outcome of Boaz’ promise (3:11-13). Just as Naomi perceives, Boaz is quick to act (3:18), placing himself into the middle of the action (4:1).

- C) Boaz goes to the city gate (4:1), the place where everyone in the city would go out and travel back. In the Ancient Near East, the city gate was the place of official judicial decisions, administrative decisions, and even where the common people of the city would meet with their king (this photo shows the king’s platform next to the opening of a city gate which would have been similar to Bethlehem).



- D) Not long after Boaz sits down at the gate, Naomi & Ruth’s “closer relative” (3:12) who is “the redeemer” (4:1) comes through the gate, and is addressed by Boaz.*
- E) Boaz collects ten elders to sit with he and the unnamed redeemer (4:2), much like a courtroom scene. While the scene does resemble a legal proceeding, the “jury” (in this case) is simply there to witness the proceedings (4:4), not to render a judgment between the two parties.

* פְּלוֹנִי אֶלְמוֹנִי (ploni-almoni), “So-and-So.” The phrase is rendered “friend” in the NASB, NIV, and ESV, but misses the total ambiguity of the reference. This expression is an example of a wordplay termed “farrago” (a confusing mixture of elements). In such an expression, the elements involved often rhyme, and not infrequently one or more of them are without meaning outside of the given expression (e.g., English “hodge-podge”). The idiom occurs in two other contexts in the OT (1 Sam 21:3; 2 Kgs 6:8), where it is clear that the narrator does not wish to give the name of the place meant; i.e., this phrase means something like English “such and such a place.” Further, the phrase is rendered by some LXX MSS (Septuagint Manuscripts) as ὁ δεινα, “such a one” (cf. Matt 26:18), and by the supplementing hand of the OL (Old Latin) as *quicumque es*, “whoever you are.” Finally, given that words cognate to the first element, פְּלוֹנִי, occur in Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, and a modern dialect of Ethiopic with the meaning “someone, a certain one,” it seems reasonably clear that the expression means something like the English “so and so,” an expression used when the speaker cannot recall or does not want to use the name. In this case, I believe the name of the man was known by the author, but these words are used to purposely omit the man’s name from the record, in order to protect he and his family from unneeded embarrassment over his conduct (collected from various sources, esp. *Ruth & Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), by Frederic W. Bush, ©1996, pg. 196).

2) Boaz Makes His Move

- A) Once everyone is set, Boaz proceeds to tell the close relative that Naomi needs to sell the land which belonged to her husband, Elimelech (4:3).
- B) Boaz' intention in sharing this information is clear from his mention of Elimelech as "our brother" (4:3). The land was one of the highest commodities in Israel, and the redeemer was responsible to keep the land in the family (4:4-5)!†
- C) The prospect of purchasing ancestral land from Naomi is appealing to the closer relative (4:4), especially since it would have expanded his holdings and provided more security for a plentiful inheritance.
- D) With visions of a great business deal dancing in his head, Boaz let's the other shoe drop... Not only would the relative be redeeming Naomi's field, but you also get Mahlon's widow, Ruth the Moabitess, in the redemption (4:5).
- E) Immediately, the deal is off! The redeemer tells Boaz and the elders that he "cannot" redeem the land, since it would result in destruction (4:6). And just like that, the right of redemption is given and sealed for Boaz (4:7-8).
- F) The threat of losing some of his inheritance, and the potential fruitlessness of the investment scares Naomi's redeemer away... Enter our hero, Boaz...

† It is difficult for us, in suburban Long Beach, to fully grasp the importance of the scene between Boaz and Naomi's unnamed kinsman redeemer. It is most important to understand how important it was for an Israelite to have an heir living on the family land. The loss of land and heirs amounted to personal annihilation -- the greatest tragedy imaginable. An Israelite's afterlife depended upon having descendants living on ancestral soil. Without them, he ceased to exist. To "raise the name of the dead" (v. 5), then, was to provide an heir to keep the deceased in existence on the ancestral property (over his inheritance). Thus the purpose here was not simply to retain the land or to care for Ruth, but to ensure that Elimelech's family line survived. (collected from various sources, esp. *The Book of Ruth*, (NICOT), by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., ©1988, pg. 244).

3) Undeserved Redemption

- A) Just as quickly as the redeemer retreats, Boaz jumps in and redeems the land from Naomi (4:9), and also "acquires" Ruth the Moabitess to be his wife (4:10).
- B) Note that the driving force behind Boaz' redemption is the complete fulfillment of Ruth's dream (cf. 3:9), provision and "filling" for the emptiness of Naomi (4:10; KHESED)!
- C) The things which troubled the closer relative, do not seem to bother Boaz at all! Boaz desires to marry Ruth, and Boaz desires to champion his future wife's desire to secure a future for Naomi -- truly God's great KHESED love!
- D) The elders pronounce wondrous blessings and well wishes on Boaz & Ruth (4:11-12), foreshadowing the future with their well-wishes for "seed" (offspring) for the couple.

4) Miraculous Seed

- A) Boaz and Ruth get married, and soon thereafter, Ruth gets pregnant and has a baby boy (4:13). The baby is clearly Ruth's, but because of Boaz' redemption, it is derivatively Naomi's own son -- because he preserves Elimelech and Mahlon's family/clan name (4:14-15).
- B) Naomi cares for the child, even nursing the boy (4:16), almost certainly as a symbolic act of receiving/accepting the child as her own. But then, comes the real shock!
- C) The baby's name is revealed -- Obed (4:17). OBED! The same Obed who was Jesse's father, who was the father of David -- the great King of Israel (4:17-22). And of course, the line of David will lead to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, born to Mary and Joseph (Matthew 1:1-25).