

The romance of redemption (Part 7)

Questions to consider:

We have seen that God romances us, is faithful to us and his love is ultimately demonstrated in the price our redeemer paid. But what about our part in the romance? What excites God about our part in the relationship? How do we demonstrate our love for him?

Ruth 4.9-22 (NIV)

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!” 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.” ¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸ This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ²¹ Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, ²² Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

v9-10 you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of ... Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired ... Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property

With the purchase of the land came the obligation to care for both Ruth and Naomi. The proceedings here procured for Boaz the right to marry Ruth. Effectively, their intention to marry had been witnessed, and therefore they were engaged from that moment onwards. The actual marriage is recorded in 4.13. Given how much Ruth loved her and the evidence of the six measures of barley Boaz had given to her, Naomi knew she would be welcome to live with them.

In chapter 1 Ruth appeared to have given up on her best chance of marriage by leaving her native land of Moab and putting her faith in the God of Israel. But as Ruth put God first, He brought her into a relationship greater than she could have imagined.

Boaz acted as goel willingly, without compulsion, showing no reluctance to state openly that he had acquired Ruth, the Moabitess. Boaz is not ashamed of her past and he accepts her for who she is now. Likewise our redeemer is not ashamed of us (Hebrews 2.11). This link between the story of Ruth and Boaz as symbolic of us and Jesus is also seen in Isaiah 54.4-8:

“Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame ... and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband ... your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth ... ⁸ ... with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer.

If Boaz could love an outcast, redeem her, and bring her into fellowship with himself, God can love all the outcasts of the world, redeem them, and bring them into fellowship with himself.

v11 like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family (house) of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem

Unlike the nearer kinsman-redeemer who saw Ruth as a liability, the elders and other townspeople recognised that Ruth was honourable, comparing her to Rachel and Leah.

Here are a series of blessings, first spoken by the town witnesses (v11-12) and then many months later (after the marriage and pregnancy) by the town women (v14-17):

- v11 **for Ruth** that like Rachel and Leah God enables her to conceive, and builds up the ‘house’ (see the introduction to Part 4’s focus on ‘house’) of Israel through her.
- **For Boaz** that (v11) he have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem and (v12) that his family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.
- **For the child** that (v14) he become famous throughout Israel.
- **For Naomi**, that (v14) she was not left without a kinsman-redeemer, and that (v15) her life would be renewed and she would be sustained in her old age.

Rachel, one of Jacob’s wives was “buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” (Genesis 35.19). Leah, Jacob’s other wife, was the mother of Judah, their namesake ancestor (Genesis 29.35). Rachel and Leah had been the mothers of the tribes of Israel. They were honoured women. Identifying Ruth with them is both a prayer that she will bear many children as they did, and acknowledges that like these women, Ruth is honourable.

v12 Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah

Perez was born as a result of a levirate marriage, from which Boaz descended. To us this does not mean much. But Boaz was of the clan of Perez and that clan had settled in Bethlehem. So to Boaz this would have been very significant. In Genesis 38 Tamar, the widow of Judah’s first son, Er, when denied a levirate marriage to Judah’s remaining son, Shelah (38.14), took matters into her own hands with her father-in-law, Judah (38.18). She bore twins, one of whom was Perez (1 Chronicles 2.3-5).

As with the reference to Rachel and Leah, so here they were praying that Boaz and Ruth would have a large family. This offspring comes from God’s blessing on this marriage (the offspring the Lord gives you), as was the case for Rachel (Genesis 30.22) and Leah (Genesis 29.31).

v13-16 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife ... the Lord enabled her to conceive ... ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him

Now the time periods advance rapidly. 3.1 to 4.12 were one day and night, and the next day. Then an unknown period of time until the marriage in v13. Also in v13 at least nine months of pregnancy. Then in v16 an unknown period of time in which Obed was cared for, not only by Boaz and Ruth, but also Naomi.

Twice in a matter of hours Ruth was asked “**Who are you?**” (3.9 and 3.16). The questions draw our attention to Ruth’s changing social status. The Hebrew demonstrates this, but it is easy to miss in translation:

- 2.10 ‘Nochriyah’ Foreigner
- 2.13 ‘Shipah’ Beneath a lower servant
- 3.9 ‘Amah’ Maidservant, eligible for marriage
- 4.13 ‘Lishah’ Wife

v14 **a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel**

Status was passed on through the father. For example, to be a Priest your father had to be a Priest. Here this refers to Obed, not Boaz. The women recognised that this child would be a *goel*, receiving that status from his father and pointing forward to the birth of a more significant kinsman-redeemer descending from Boaz in Bethlehem!

v14-15 **Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer ...¹⁵ ... For your daughter-in-law ... is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth**
Ruth is Naomi’s greatest blessing (v15 **better to you than seven sons**). Naomi is experiencing overflowing blessings where before there was only emptiness, and it is all from God (v14 **the Lord, who this day**).

v14-17 **The women said to Naomi ...¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!”**
Notice the role of the women of the community:

- 1.19 the women exclaimed, “**Can this be Naomi?**” (It may be that the women in 4.14 were the same group of women as in 1.19.)
- 2.8 Boaz had encouraged Ruth to stay “**with the women who work for me**”.
- 2.22 Naomi had encouraged Ruth to “**go with the women who work for him**”.
- Here again there were women who recognised that in the face of all of the difficulty Naomi had experienced, the conclusion of the matter was far better than anything that could have been anticipated. It was the community women who name the son born to Naomi.

The focus on women is evident throughout this book. There was the focus in chapter 1 on Naomi as wife, mother and widow, and on her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, as well as on Orpah and Ruth each returning to their “mother’s” house (1.8). The unique (in the Bible) dialogue between women (1.14-18). The focus on widows and their rights to glean, and for a levirate marriage. The focus on Naomi as mother and as mother-in-law to Ruth. The role of Ruth as daughter and daughter-in-law to Naomi. The comparison of Ruth to Rachel, Leah, and Tamar and her implied comparison to Rahab (mother of Boaz). Ruth was a wife, than a childless widow, later a remarried wife and mother, and in the verses that follow, a matriarch of the line of Jesus!

The focus in v14-17 is not on Ruth nor on Boaz, but on Naomi and the child. Why? The story began with Naomi's loss and ends with her gain. It began with death and ends with birth. A son to whom? Not to Ruth, but to Naomi!

- 1.4 suggested that Ruth was unable to have children. In 4.11 the townspeople pray for Boaz and Ruth, knowing that Ruth was married for ten years without a child. They remembered Rachel whose womb the Lord had opened long before, and they prayed that God would make Ruth like Rachel and Leah. v13 makes it very clear who caused this child to be conceived. God gave the child.
- 1.12 Naomi suggested that there was no hope that Ruth could marry and raise up children to continue the family line. But God was preserving a godly man, Boaz, to do just that. Naomi herself admits that this was God's doing in 2.20. She recognised that behind the "accidental" meeting of Ruth and Boaz was the *hesed* of God.
- 1.16 we learned that at the root of Ruth's commitment to Naomi, was Ruth's commitment to Naomi's God. So it was to God that Naomi owed the amazing love of her daughter-in-law.
- 2.12 says that when Ruth came to Bethlehem with Naomi, she was coming to take refuge under the wings of God. Therefore it is owing to God that Ruth left her home and family, to follow and serve Naomi. All along it was God turning Naomi's setback into joy. His grace was at work in her life even though initially Naomi was not aware of it.
- Again and again it was God who was at work in the bitter setbacks of Naomi. When she lost her husband and sons, God gave her Ruth. When she could think of no kinsman-redeemer to raise up offspring for the family name, God gave her Boaz. When barren Ruth married Boaz, God gave the child.

v17 "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed

This was a great joy for Naomi, but also further heartache for Ruth. In that society not being able to have children would have weighed on Ruth. She was married 10 years and had no children. Now she gave birth to a child and that newborn would be almost inseparable from his mother. But her selflessness is seen yet again in that, despite those strong maternal desires, culturally Obed was not her son, but the son of Naomi. She had given up her family in Moab, and now she was giving up her son. After all that had happened to her, her son was not her own.

[It would be interesting to do a study comparing this part of Ruth's story to the story of Hannah, whose son Samuel was in a sense not her own, and to the story of Mary, whose son Jesus was in a sense not her own. Indeed Ruth bore a goel and Mary the ultimate goel.]

For Naomi to be holding Obed, Ruth would have given him to her and would be close by. Throughout the book Ruth was repeatedly identified as the outcast, the Moabite. But here we have the contrast between her, the Moabite, and Obed, one of the people, an heir to Naomi's property and to Boaz's status as goel. This child is not only welcomed and embraced as Naomi's child, but is also embraced by the women of the town, as is seen by the fact that they are the ones who give this child his name. Obed means "servant" and he is the forefather of the ultimate servant of the house of Israel, Jesus our kinsman-redeemer!

v17 [He was the father of Jesse](#)

From here the time period shifts again, this time to multiple generations.

v18-19 [Perez was the father of Hezron,](#) ¹⁹ [Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab](#)

Hezron was in the list of children who went to or were born in Egypt (Genesis 46.8-15) and was the leader of the Hezron clan (Numbers 26.21). His son Ram (1 Chronicles 2.9) was the father of Amminadab (1 Chronicles 2.10) the father-in-law of Aaron (Exodus 6.23), who married his daughter Elisheba.

v20-21 [Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,](#) ²¹ [Salmon the father of Boaz](#)

Elisheba was the sister of Nahshon; so Aaron the Priest was Nahshon's brother-in-law. Moses appointed Nahshon as the military leader of the tribe of Judah (Numbers 1.7; 2.3; 10.14). He is recorded as having been the first to bring an offering of dedication to God's tabernacle (Numbers 7.10-17) – this was Boaz's grandfather, showing that Boaz had a strong lineage of faithful followers of God! Salmon (1 Chronicles 2.10-11) married Rahab (Matthew 1.5). He participated in the conquest of the promised land, settling in Bethlehem.

The genealogy in v21 differs from what we would expect. Boaz took the place of Elimelek. Instead of losing everything, as the unnamed nearer kinsman-redeemer had feared, Boaz gained a preeminent place in the history of Israel.

v22 [Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David](#)

Samuel is assumed to be the human author, possibly after he had anointed David, because the language in Ruth has many similarities to his speeches in 1 Samuel. It stops with David, not Solomon as would have been expected, and does not say 'king' David, implying that it was written when Saul was king.

The divine author is evident through the consistent links between Ruth and the rest of the Bible – from the story of Judah hundreds of years earlier in Genesis 38, to that of Jesus in Revelation 5 thousands of years later. The whole Bible is a romance. It finishes with the wedding of the redeemer and his bride, and they live happily ever after!

Speculation

- Every prayer was a prayer of blessing and got answered. No exceptions. Therefore that meant that Orpah (1.8) would also have found rest in the home of another husband.
- The witnesses prayed that Ruth would bear many children. All the other prayers in the book were answered, so why not this one? It suggests that aside from Obed she bore other children.
- Ruth became daughter-in-law to Rahab who, given Boaz was older, may not have been living by that time. If Rahab was still alive, then in addition to Naomi, Ruth would have had the added tutelage of another foreign woman who had fitted into Bethlehem society.

- It took 7-10 days for Naomi and Ruth to travel by foot from Moab to Bethlehem. Ruth married a wealthy man. By horse/donkey/camel, perhaps with a cart, the journey would have been easier and quicker. One week or less. Given they lived that close, it is reasonable to assume that Ruth would have visited her father and mother from time to time, or they would have visited her. Given her loving nature, she would have wanted them to get to know their grandchildren and for those grandchildren to get to know their Moabite heritage.
 - David and his family were given safe-haven by a Moabite king (1 Samuel 22.3-4). Why did a Moabite king do that, given the hatred that had existed between the Israelites and Moabites for generations? Perhaps it was because David still had Moabite features inherited from Ruth, and was able to claim links to his Moabite family?
- Could it be that the fields in which the shepherds were at the birth of our redeemer (Luke 2.8) was the land that Boaz had redeemed?

Conclusion

Ruth is a story for people who wonder where God is when one tragedy after another attacks their faith. It is a story for people who wonder whether a life of integrity in tough times is worth it.

God can make a way where there is no way. Even when we cannot see it, He is working on our behalf. All three men died, leaving the women without husbands and without children. The book of Ruth gives us a glimpse of the hidden work of God during the worst of times.

God demonstrates his love for us by giving us a whole new identity and new family. The way that he does this is through redemption – he makes us new through redemption. The love of God comes first. While we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5.8). Then we enter into his redemption. He gives us a new identity and makes us a new creation.

We see this in Ruth's complete transformation throughout the book. She was the most unlikely suitable wife for Boaz, and yet became his wife. Ruth was in a helpless position regarding her future. She probably saw herself as barren and as a foreigner in a land where, as a Moabite, she was rejected. Her future looked very bleak, especially because her only hope of a better future was to marry a man of status. In a foreign land with a low status and a mother-in-law to care for, this was very unlikely. This highlights the love and acceptance of Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer, in marrying her and bringing her into a new identity in his household. Now she is accepted and fertile (evident in the son she has). She was redeemed from bondage, poverty and death. God was intimately involved in her life, all the while also working through her to achieve his eternal purposes.

In this romance we have seen several themes:

- **Grace (*hesed*)**
The story of Ruth ends with the promise of God's faithful love, his *hesed*, overflowing not just into the ordinary, everyday lives of two widows and a farmer, but through David's greater Son, into our lives as well. The story of Ruth shows us that God measures faithfulness of the heart by our taking refuge in him, regardless of whether we are wealthy landowners (Boaz) or poverty-stricken foreigners (Ruth). It

shows us that he is faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to him and live in bitterness toward him (Naomi).

- ***God is relational***

The whole book is about the romance (relationship) between Ruth and Boaz, and seen from the vantage point of Revelation 5, between our redeemer and his bride (you and me). Ruth was socially isolated. Other than Naomi, she had no one. In 2.4 we saw that Boaz enjoyed a good relationship with his workers, and in 2.9 that he recognised Ruth's need for social inclusion and relationship building. He encouraged Ruth to work with his female servants, which would give her company and help her build friendships. He not only saw to her physical needs, but also her social and emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, the women of the community (chapters 1 and 4), the elders of the community and the townspeople who prayed for Boaz and Ruth (chapter 4), all point to the importance of being in relationship (Hebrews 10.25).

- ***Adoption into the family/house of God***

The phrase "mother's house" is only used four times in the Bible, each time in relation to a cherished daughter (in Ruth, in the story of Rebekah and Isaac, and twice in the Song of Solomon). The interplay between daughter-in-law and daughter, as seen in 2.14, show Ruth the daughter-in-law as the Moabite/outside the family, but that as daughter she is part of the family of God (John 1.12-17). This is also seen in her changing social status from foreigner (2.10) to wife (4.13), a family member.

- ***Serving one another***

2.5-6 called our attention to the role of the unnamed 'servant', the Holy Spirit, who introduces Boaz and Ruth to each other, as he did Rebekah and Isaac in Genesis 24. In 2.13 Ruth is 'Shipah', beneath a lower servant, and in 3.9 'Amah', a maidservant. Jesus was a servant leader, and just as he personally served his disciples (John 13.4-5, 26), so Boaz personally served Ruth (2.14). In 4.17 her child is named Obed, meaning 'Servant', pointing forward to Jesus. Matthew 20.28: [just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.](#)

- ***Fear instead of faith***

Instead of trusting God, Elimelek feared what would happen and left Israel, dying in a foreign land. Instead of trusting God, as Ruth did, Orpah returned to her mother's house and we hear nothing more about her. There was a focus on preserving the family name through the levirate marriage, and yet the nearer kinsman's fear of what would happen to his family's name ended with that family name not being remembered at all.

- ***Faith and the Holy Spirit***

There are repeated connections to Abraham, the father of faith, beginning with the unnamed servant who is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit "[will not speak of himself](#)" (John 16.13), but instead, "[the Helper ... will testify of Me](#)" (John 15.26). Why did these blessings come into Ruth's life? God rewarded her faith. Ruth had been shown favour, not because of anything she did, but because she sought refuge under his wings (2.12). The story took place between the Passover festival and the Feast of Pentecost – the Holy Spirit is the leaven of the bread of Christ – in Acts 1.4-8 Jesus tells his disciples wait for his Spirit (the leaven). Why? Acts 1.8: "[you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to](#)

Me”, which is demonstrated on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1) when the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples and about 3,000 people came to know our redeemer (Acts 2.41). Just as the unnamed servant had a critical role in bringing together Ruth and Boaz, and Rebekah and Isaac, so the Holy Spirit’s role is critical in our salvation. He brings us and our redeemer together.

- ***God works in eternity, and yet cares for us individually***

The story of Ruth teaches us that when we follow God, our lives always mean more than we think they do. For the Christian there is always a connection between the ordinary events of life and the amazing work of God in history. Everything we do in obedience to God, no matter how small, is significant. Serving a widowed mother-in-law, gleaning in a field, falling in love, having a baby. For the Christian these things are all connected to eternity, because God’s love (romance) towards us flows into every area of our life.

God’s plan of redemption was evident hundreds of years before Ruth. Jacob prophesied over Judah in Genesis 49.9-10: [You are a lion’s cub, Judah ... ¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.](#)

In Revelation 5 Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah (v5), the root of David (v5) and the lamb who was slain (v6). Genesis 49.9-10 prophesied that the eventual Davidic king would rule not only Israel, but the nations (the world). Note that in Revelation 5.5 Jesus is the ‘root’ of David. Not only does he descend from David, but he was before David! Similarly, Micah 5.2: [But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.](#)

Our redeemer paid the price for everyone. Ruth was a Gentile. Ephesians 2.11-13 (NLT): [Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.](#)

We started in Revelation 5. The story of Ruth helps us to understand redemption and gives context to everything that follows in the rest of Revelation. In Revelation 5 is the ultimate title deed, God’s last will and testament, his sealed orders for the ending of history. Until this point nobody knew the ending. It was sealed in the scroll of redemption. The end of everything and the beginning of the new is all based on the foundation of redemption, God’s love for and romance with us. No one was worthy to open that scroll because it required someone who had faced the same pressures as all people do and yet came through victorious. It means that the judge will be someone who understands fully the pressures of human existence. Someone needed to be found who would be the executor of God’s last will and testament. Who? There is only one who is worthy. Our kinsman-redeemer, Jesus. Fully God and fully man! His love and actions to fulfill his plan of redemption for our welfare are the foundation for what follows. It is through the lens of the romance of redemption that the rest of the book of Revelation is to be understood.

For Jesus to be our kinsman-redeemer, he had to be:

- A kinsman of Adam.
It had to be a man that opened the seven sealed scroll. It was a title deed to the earth which Adam had forfeited and which Jesus purchased. He became flesh (our kinsman, John 1.14) and was lifted up on the cross as the Son of Man (our kinsman, John 3.14-15; Hebrews 2.14-17).
- Able
That is, sinless (1 Peter 2.21-24; 1 John 3.5; Hebrews 7.25).
- Willing.
As we see in the story of Ruth with one kinsman-redeemer declining, Boaz did not have to redeem (Romans 3.23-24, Hebrews 12.2).
- Assume all the obligations.
4.5 and 4.10 show that by redeeming the land, Boaz was buying it back for the descendants of Elimelek. But Elimelek had no living descendants. Therefore, an obligation on Boaz, that was part of the law of redemption, was to raise up offspring for Elimelek, and that meant marrying Ruth. Jesus met all the obligations (Philippians 2.5-11).

Having looked at the romance God has with us, through the romance of Boaz and Ruth, we have seen God's incredible love for us. Revelation 5 reveals Jesus as our kinsman-redeemer and how his sacrifice demonstrated his love for us. As with Ruth, he gives us a new identity, and brings us into intimate relationship with himself. As with Ruth and Naomi, he takes us out of hopelessness, and gives us hope and a future. But a romance involves two people. The love goes both ways. How do we demonstrate our love for him? What excites God about our contribution to the romance? What is it that we 'do' to show our love for him? The answer is in Ruth 2.12. When we take refuge under his wings, when we are under the covering of the hem of his garment, when our faith is in him – that is what thrills him, what excites him (Hebrews 11.6). Ruth committed herself to him in chapter 1 and her journey of faith continued from that point. So it is with us. Through faith our relationship with our redeemer grows. Ruth did not know what the outcome would be when she committed herself to Him. She did not know what the outcome would be when she ventured into the fields to glean. She did not know what the outcome would be when she went to the threshing floor and lay at Boaz's feet. But she trusted God. Her confidence was in God. As we journey through life with faith in God, we are engaging in a romance, in a loving relationship with our redeemer, who loves us more than we can ever understand. In the book of Revelation, as illustrated in the book of Ruth, we see that redemption leads to a marriage between Jesus and his bride (us), and we live happily forevermore in the most intimate, loving and faithful relationship!