

Commentary on Ruth 4:1-10

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, August 28, 2011**, is from **Ruth 4:1-10**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary*.

(Ruth 4:1) No 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.

In God’s providence, God arranged for this meeting with perfect timing, which would encourage Boaz that his desire to marry Ruth, even though she was a Moabite, was approved by God and within His will for them. Ruth had totally committed herself to God and His people, His people were her people and their God was her God, and she had demonstrated that fact through her actions in caring for Naomi, not just in words only. Because they both loved and obeyed God, they would not be unequally yoked, which would have been contrary to the will of God.

(Ruth 4:2) Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, “Sit down here”; so they sat down.

Business and other important meetings often took place at the city gate, where residents of the city and those who lived outside the city often passed and gathered. The Bible taught that in every valid transaction and in criminal trials there must be at least two reliable witnesses. In this case, Boaz wanted ten witnesses who were recognized as elders of the city. They would not only be witnesses, but if they had objections to his business proposal and marriage to Ruth they could voice them.

(Ruth 4:3) He 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.

The next-of-kin had the primary responsibility to care for the widows and orphans in their family. The law required that the next of kin marry a widow who had no children, so the name and property of the deceased could be maintained through their children in the name of the deceased. The Sadducees used this law in an argument against the resurrection when they questioned Jesus (see Matthew 22:23-33).

(Ruth 4:4) So 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.”

Though Boaz wanted to marry Ruth, he honestly offered the land to the next-of-kin who was prior to him knowing that he might lose the opportunity to marry Ruth. The next-of-kin was more than willing to add the land to his possessions. The sale of the land could provide for Naomi as a widow and potentially keep the land in the family name, if the next-of-kin married Ruth.

(Ruth 4:5) Then 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.”

When Boaz learned that the man wanted the land, he further explained the full requirement of the law of God, that if the next-of-kin (the kinsman redeemer) acquired the land he was also acquiring Ruth, the Moabite. Naomi could not have more children, for she was past childbearing age, but Ruth, her daughter-in-law, could bear children. The next-of-kin would need to marry the Moabite woman, Ruth, and eventually give the land to any children he had through her, for neither Chilion nor Mahlon had children through their Moabite wives.

(Ruth 4:6) At 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.”

When the kinsman redeemer heard what the situation fully required of him, he declined the offer. Perhaps it would complicate matters for his own sons if he would ever need to give the sons of Ruth the land he acquired when they married. Perhaps he shared a common prejudice against Moabites, even though Ruth had proven to the residents of Bethlehem her loyalty to God and His people as one of His people. The land he wanted; but he did not want the responsibility for Ruth and any children he might have through her.

(Ruth 4:7) Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one took off a sandal and gave it to the other; this was the manner of attesting in Israel.

The action of passing a sandal to another could be seen and testified to, and would probably be an aid to memory. At least one of the ten witnesses would remember this business transaction should it ever be questioned. This type of action and dependence on memory was vital prior to the ability to execute written contracts. If the witnesses did not remember the exact time of the transaction, they should be able to remember the sandal being passed and that the event did occur.

(Ruth 4:8) So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, “Acquire it for yourself,” he took off his sandal.

The next-of-kin passed his sandal to Boaz, because he was passing his responsibility for Naomi and Ruth to Boaz along with the right to buy her land. The author of the *Book of Ruth* carefully explained the tradition of the sandal and the application of the law of God at that time to those who were not familiar with the tradition due to changing times. The transaction was a legal transaction and the *Book of Ruth* teaches that no matter what a person’s background, if they totally commit themselves to God they can become a part of the people of God and legally marry into the people of God with full rights and responsibilities.

(Ruth 4:9) Then 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.

Boaz acquired the inheritance which would cost him a purchase price (not told to us in the *Book of Ruth*). It would include caring for Naomi for life. He wanted the witnesses to remember that he had acquired everything and not just the inheritance of one of Naomi’s two sons, should the transaction ever be disputed.

(Ruth 4:10) I 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.”

Ruth is constantly identified by her ethnic background as a Moabite. Boaz was going to marry a Moabite, and he wanted this recorded as part of the transaction for the land. Ruth had proven her worth to her mother-in-law, to Boaz, to the residents of Bethlehem, to the people of God, and to God. She was a doer of the word and not a listener only. No one objected to this marriage, and Ruth became an ancestor of King David and Jesus the Messiah (see Matthew 1:5-6). Boaz pledged to do exactly as the Law of God required.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10, which describes the Levirate Law (a law regarding marriage for widows and next-of-kin). Why might this law be important in some ancient societies and tribes?
2. Why might the practice of the Levirate Law be less important in contemporary societies today?
3. How might the practice of Levirate Law be disruptive of people’s lives and societies today?

4. Based on his behavior, describe some of the character qualities of Boaz. Why might these qualities make him a suitable husband for Ruth?

5. Based on her behavior, describe some of the character qualities of Ruth. Why might these qualities make her a suitable wife for Boaz?

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