

King David's ancestry

Ruth 4:1-22

This chapter is like the final episode in what TV producers call a "mini-series." It contains several scenes and a concluding postscript (4:18-22). Humanly speaking, the final outcome turns on the decision of a moment (4:6). But unlike a mini-series, there is undeniable evidence of providence (<http://www.studydrive.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5128>), which "those who have eyes to see" understand.

Boaz sets out to honour his commitment to Ruth. This involves him in legal proceedings which, in those times, took place in the city gate. The nearest relative defaults on his obligations when, it appears, it involves him in polygamy or, perhaps, threatens his financial prospects. Boaz seizes the moment and publicly gains the right to purchase both the land and, indirectly, Ruth. The result is redemption of Naomi, her land and Ruth. As it turns out the child that eventually is born will be the grandfather of the most famous king, David.

What's going on in this section

- How do both of the provisions in God's law for families and for Israelites who fell into debt come together in this episode? (4:2-5, cf. Lev 25:23-25 and Deut 25:5-10)
- Because the gate(s) was the only means of entering or leaving, it was the most frequented place in the city. As such, the gate became an obvious place for negotiations and public announcements. When you review 4:1-11, how many different individuals and groups can you identify?
- Verse 7 describes another peculiar custom. Before you dismiss the practice, remember in some countries we today put a lot of confidence in a piece of paper as giving evidence of ownership of land (in Australia it's called "the title"). Before the advent of paper, transfer of ownership of the most fundamental commodity, land, was publicly witnessed. And, unlikely as it may seem to us, according to Ruth, a sandal was given. Can you think of other public transactions with peculiar customs?
- Giving a sandal may not be a surety, but an expression of humiliation. It is almost certainly the intent of giving a sandal in Deut 25:7-10. Only slaves and those who had been humiliated in judgement by God went without shoes (Is.20:2, 3). What might Naomi's nearest relative be saying, if he is humiliated in refusing to redeem her land?
- In verse 11, Rachel and Leah, Jacob's wives are remembered. How could Ruth become like them? (v. 11b. cf. Gen 35:23-24).
- Read Gen 38. How could anyone bless Boaz by bringing to mind an act of prostitution and incest? Hint: what was the name of one of the twins born from the incestuous act? (Gen 38:29 cf. Ruth 4:18).
- In order to understand why Perez features so prominently in the last chapter of Ruth (4:12, 18) it is important to understand the expectations that surrounded his family line. What does Gen 49:8-10 say about Judah's descendants? This enigmatic statement has always been interpreted as predicting that the Messiah would come through the line of Perez.

What about us here and now

- Earlier in the story both Naomi and Boaz pray/wish/bless Ruth (1:9, 2:12). Do you think they ever imagined how their prayers might have been answered? Do you ever imagine what might happen if God were to act when you casually say "God bless you"?
- Both Boaz, at the town gate, and Ruth, at the grain pile, renounce taking matters into their own hands to establish what we might call today "our destiny." In a society where "taking control" is seen as a positive virtue, what important insight do we neglect? (Hint: Are we the only ones who control events?)

So what can I do?

- Do you ever try to directly/indirectly tell God what to do in your prayers? How can Ruth's story help you change from prescribing how God should act, to accepting his providence?
- Think for a few moments about what you knew of Ruth before doing these studies. What was the understanding/insight/moment when this little book endeared itself to you?
- In 1 Sam 2:30 God says "Those who honour me, I will honour." How is this demonstrated in Ruth? What would it take for you to really believe this promise? What would you have to stop/start doing in order to realise this promise in your life?