

Introduction

We've reached the climax of the account in Ruth now. We will find out how the nearer kinsman handles the offer of the property and levirate marriage, and how Boaz was enabled to marry Ruth. But first, it will be instructive to study about the Jubilee and how it relates to land tenure in Israel.

The Jubilee Year

The main passages here at Lev. 25 and 27, along with Num. 36:4.

1. In Lev. 25:1-7, we see the land is to rest every seventh year. In addition, the year of Jubilee was every 50th year (25:8-13). Each person returned to his possession (inheritance). The Jubilee year was the great leveler which allowed fairness and avoidance of oppression in the economy of Israel (25:14-17). It was done this way because the land actually belongs to God (25:23-24), not to specific individuals. They "leased" it according to the productivity of the field for the number of years until the Jubilee (25:16). Since the land was to remain fallow for the Sabbath year and the jubilee year, and these two came back to back in years 49 and 50, then the question would be raised, "How are we going to get enough food to eat?" The answer was that the Lord would "command My blessing on you" so that the land would produce in year 48 enough for years 49, 50, and most of 51 until the harvest could come in (25:18-22).
2. The Lev. 27:16-25 passage deals with the law of dedicated things and how the year of Jubilee plays into it. Israelites could dedicate their own land, or one they were leasing, but then depending on to whom the land returns at Jubilee, the priest could keep it or not.
3. The passage in Numbers tells of the situation of the daughters of Zelophehad. Recall that in Num. 27:1-11, the five daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses and asked him for a special ruling in their case since there were no brothers in their family (see also Josh. 17:3-6). This ruling gave the LORD opportunity to clarify how land was to be inherited in cases where families did not have any direct line of descent. The issue in Num. 36:4 is that if they marry outside of their own tribe, the land they inherited from their father would permanently be transferred out of their home tribe to the other tribes at the year of Jubilee. In other words, we see that there are some complications to the "land tenure" system in such special cases.

Connection of Office of Redeemer and Levirate Marriage – vv. 1-6

Regarding the first responsibility, that is, to redeem the land, the closer kinsman could but was not required to buy the land. The law indicated that he may do so (Lev. 25:25). In fact he agreed to do it. He was generous at this point. Think about it—if someone came up to you out of the blue one day and said, "Friend, I'm offering you the chance to buy a 10-acre parcel of property. It will cost you \$75,000. You are doing it to help out a family member." And you say, without a bit of hesitation, "OK, I'll do that." That may be a bit of a stretch on your budget, perhaps? But you are willing to do it.

However, when the second responsibility is revealed, that is, the marriage to a woman to raise an heir for the family, then you realize, yikes, I'm already married, I already have kids that an inheritance is laid out for, and to get another wife, have an heir, and there goes \$75,000 of my inheritance out the window because it is invested in the land that he will get. It might be best for me to let someone else do this!" Not only that, but this woman is a Moabite and you don't know anything about her. May give you some second thoughts, and if there are any doubts, you are probably more than willing to let the next guy do it, who does not suffer such disadvantages as you do.

A difficult concept to understand is how Boaz, the closer kinsman, the elders at the gate, and all Israel ultimately, understood the connection between the redemption of land

and the raising up of the name of the dead, Mahlon, and ultimately that of his father Elimelech as well.

Davis and Whitcomb (p. 168) say "Boaz, at this point, used some legal skill, for strictly speaking, the kinsman redeemer was not responsible to fulfill every legal obligation of the go'el. Boaz, however, connected the two and made one contingent upon the other."

But there may be a practical connection if we consider the five possible cases that could have occurred with Ruth and with the property.

1. **No one** redeems the **property** nor marries **Ruth**.
Naomi would sell the land to someone and it would return at Jubilee.
2. **Closer kinsman** redeems **property** and marries **Ruth**.
The heir will take a chunk of his inheritance, or Jubilee may play into it somehow. In this and the remainder of the cases, there is an heir thrown into the mix that affects the inheritance of whoever purchases the property.
3. **Boaz** redeems **property** and marries **Ruth**.
As it turns out. The closer kinsman has no inheritance problems this way.
4. **Closer kinsman** redeems **property** and **Boaz** marries **Ruth**.
It seems as if Obed would get rights to the land at the Jubilee if not before. Boaz might even have been able to buy back the land from the closer kinsman as it would ultimately belong to Obed.
5. **Closer kinsman** marries **Ruth** and **Boaz** redeems **property**.
Boaz did not care much about the property per se, but more about helping Ruth. He obviously was in love with her. The kinsman would not take this option because it would have the same problem as #2.

In every case other than #1, an heir is born, and the property ultimately goes to that heir. Because of the connection between the heir and the property that the heir will inherit, there seems to be a connection between the two offices of the redeemer (redemption of property and levirate responsibility), at least in this case. The closer kinsman was stuck between the desire to help Naomi and Ruth but could not. Boaz had no such trouble, apparently had no family, and was rich enough that some loss of inheritance would probably be no big deal anyway. The personal cost involved did not affect him.

Completion of the Transaction and the Sandal – vv. 7-10

It was ancient tradition to seal a transaction by transferring a sandal from one person to the other. The person giving up the sandal was saying that he gave up his right of redemption, that the exchange was completed. See Deut. 25:9.

Blessing of the People, Elders and Women – vv. 11-17

The people and elders at the gate pronounced a blessing on Boaz so that his house would be full of children through Ruth (vv. 11-12). Boaz married Ruth and a short while later they had their first child, Obed. Naomi's friends then blessed the Lord and her for what God had done (vv. 14-15, 17) and particularly wished that the child's name would be famous in Israel. And so it is! What a blessing to grandma Naomi who helps Ruth with the raising of Obed (v. 16).

Conclusion – vv. 18-22

The end of the book gives us an important clue to why it is in the canon of Scripture—namely, that it gives the lineage and family history of David the king. Boaz and Ruth are key people in this lineage. Some information is not out of order to explain how Ruth, a Moabitess, came to be in the congregation of Israel and in the kingly line, for that matter.

What beauty came out of the ashes of the period of the Judges. During that time, "there was no king in Israel" and "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." And let me say this—"right" in their own eyes was not often "right" in the eyes of God. Yet Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi were Mosaic-Law-abiding people and they did things the godly way. May it be so with us, dear friends.