

4. AT THE CITY GATE

RUTH 4:1-12

Boaz and another kinsman negotiate

¹As for Boaz, he had gone up to the gate and no sooner had he sat down there when the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, "Come over, would you; sit down here." And he went over and sat down.

²Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here"; so they sat down.

³He then said to the next-of-kin, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is offering for sale the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech.

⁴So 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."

⁵Then 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."

⁶At 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."

⁷Now 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.

⁸So when the next-of-kin said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he took off his sandal.

Boaz is fulfilling the promise made the previous night to Ruth (see 3:12-13).

He explains the situation to the man who is Elimelek's closest relative, and who, therefore, has the first right to purchase the land and so keep it in the family.

The man agrees to purchase the land, until he is informed in verse 5 that, along with the land, he will acquire the widowed wife of Elimelek's son, thus carrying out his duty to ensure the continuance of Elimelek's line. He does not want to support Naomi and Ruth and the child he would produce for Elimelek, knowing that the land he was purchasing would revert to this child. He formally renounces his claim (verse 6) in favour of Boaz, the next in line (verse 4).

This is the only text to mention the custom mentioned in verse 7. Perhaps there was a custom whereby the person ceding the right to redeem property gave the shoe that would have traversed it to the person who was redeeming it.

In the presence of the ten elders of the city (see verse 2) and the people gathered at the gate, Boaz formally states that he is carrying out the role of 'redeemer' (verses 9-10). In this way he ensures that Elimelek's name will continue to be associated with his property. He will also take Ruth as his wife, to ensure that Elimelek's dead son will continue to exercise his right 'at the gate', that is to say, at the assembly that meets to decide matters concerning the community. Boaz will exercise his right for him.

Verses 11-12 contain three blessings. Ruth was barren for the ten years of her marriage in Moab (see 1:4). They pray that she will 'build up the house of Israel'. Rachel and Leah were Jacob's ('Israel's') wives.

Secondly they pray that Boaz will be fertile: 'produce children' and so 'bestow a name'.

The third blessing concerns the prosperity of Boaz's 'house'. The story of Tamar and Judah also involves an application of the levirate custom (see Genesis 38).

⁹Then 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 Elimelek and all that belonged to Kilion and Mahlon.

¹⁰I 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."

¹¹Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May YHWH make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem;

¹²and, through the children that YHWH will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

