

RUTH 4

Ruth 4:1–5

In biblical times, the gates of town functioned as the town square. Every public act of significance, including business and legal transaction, happened there. Men gathered there daily to exchange news and conduct business. This meant witnesses were readily available and business could be easily accomplished.

“Such a one” is a Hebrew phrase that identifies a person without providing the given name. There is no exact English translation, but it is roughly comparable to the English phrase “so and so.”

When Naomi and Ruth’s nearest *go’el* arrived at the gate, Boaz invited him to perform his duty by purchasing the property of Elimelech in order to provide for Naomi. Two things could be happening here. First, Naomi needed funds from the land to survive, and it was part of the responsibility of the *go’el* to purchase the property so that it would stay in the family and provide the widow money to live on. The second possibility is that Elimelech had sold the land before he left for Moab and as *go’el*, the relative would buy back the property and give it to Naomi to keep it in Elimelech’s family.

Ruth 4:6–12

At first the *go’el* agreed to buy the property, but when he was reminded that the law also required him to marry Ruth, he declined because if he and Ruth had a son, his other property could transfer to the family of Elimelech and not remain in his name. Therefore, he told Boaz to be the *go’el*.

Taking off a sandal and giving it to someone was a ritual that asserted the giver was offering their property rights to the recipient.

The witnesses attested to the transaction and offered a blessing on Ruth that her posterity would be as great and prolific as that of Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the house of Israel.

Ruth 4:13–22

After the marriage, Ruth gave birth to a son named Obed (meaning “servant”). Obed was the grandfather of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The story ends with Naomi’s friends proclaiming the great blessings Naomi had been given by the Lord. Earlier in the story, Naomi thought God had abandoned her, and thus she felt emptied. But now the Lord had filled her with posterity, protection, and love. Her friends’ pronouncement that her life had been restored brings the theme of being emptied and then filled to a conclusion.

Ruth is praised for being better than “seven sons” to Naomi. Seven is used here in its symbolic meaning of perfection.

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