Rut (Rut) ~ Part 3

Rut gives us a concrete example of the **Lord's** personal and particular love for his bride. It is a small story within the larger story of redemption found throughout the whole **Bible**. It helps us to keep sight of the personal, intimate, familial nature of redemption - of **God's** love for his beloved. And **Rut 4** brings this story of redemption to a close. The first half of the chapter (4:1–12) shows **Bo'az** seeking to resolve the matter of a closer relative who may choose to marry **Rut**. These verses do not feature **Rut** herself, but they show the legal process by which **Bo'az** redeems her. This may disappoint anyone hoping for a romantic wedding scene. But understanding the legal transaction **Bo'az** and this other relative discuss will help us see how wonderful **Bo'az**'s redemption of **Rut** is - just as understanding the theological depth of **Yeshua's** redemption should increase our appreciation of it. For redeeming **Rut** is not straightforward: there is a price to pay. The question is: which man will pay it?

The morning after the night before, **Bo'az** goes up to the city gate and sits down (**4:1**). Legal transactions, judicial proceedings, and official business were all conducted at the city gate (Genesis 23:18; 34:20, 24; 2 Samuel 15:2–6; Proverbs 22:22; Amos 5:12, 15). It was a spacious place for people to assemble in, like a modern-day courthouse. Further, it was also the best place to find someone. Everyone in the city regularly passes through this gate. So **Bo'az** sits here, waiting for the other potential redeemer to come through.

Rut's Appeal to Bo'az

3 [1] Na'omi, her mother-in-law, said to her, "My daughter, I should be seeking security for you; so that things will go well with you. [2] Now there's Bo'az, our relative - you were with his girls. He's going to be winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. [3] So bathe, anoint yourself, put on your good clothes, and go down to the threshing-floor; but don't reveal your presence to the man until he's finished eating and drinking.

In view of **Bo'az's** relationship to the family and his kindness and generosity thus far to **Rut**, perhaps he could be persuaded to take the further step of marriage. At the end of the barley harvest, in late May or June, the barley had to be winnowed, tossed into the air with a fork, allowing the wind to carry away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain fell to the ground. At night, someone guarded the grain against theft or animals. Apparently, this was **Bo'az's** night to be on duty. Dressing as **Naomi** instructed would not only enhance **Rut**'s attractiveness to **Bo'az** but also symbolize the end of her mourning for her husband (2 Samuel 12:20), signaling her willingness to remarry.

[4] Then, when he lies down, take note of where he's lying; later, go in, uncover his feet, and lie down. He will tell you what to do." [5] She responded, "I will do everything you tell me." [6] She went down to the threshing-floor and did everything as her mother-in-law had instructed her. [7] After Bo'az was through eating and drinking and was feeling good, he went to lie down at the end of the pile of grain. She stole in, uncovered his feet and lay down.

Naomi instructed **Rut** to go to **Bo'az** when he was asleep and uncover his feet, or, more precisely, **"***uncover the place of his feet."* By this act, **Rut** was inquiring about **Bo'az's** willingness to fulfill the role of family redeemer, to take her as wife and provide for her. (see note at 4:5–8 in the next post).

[8] In the middle of the night the man was startled and turned over, and—there was a woman lying at his feet! [9] He asked, "Who are you?" and she answered, "I'm your handmaid Rut. Spread your robe over your handmaid, because you are a redeeming kinsman."

Whereas her mother-in-law had anticipated **Bo'az** taking the initiative in the conversation, **Rut** responded to **Bo'az**'s question about her identity with a clarification of her purpose. She asked him to spread the corner of his robe over her as a symbolic statement of a marriage commitment (Ezekiel 16:8). The request also involved a wordplay, since spread your cloak over me literally means *"spread your wing over me,"* inviting **Bo'az** to become the answer to his own prayer in 2:12 that she might find refuge under the wings of the **Lord**.

[10] He said, "May Adonai bless you, my daughter. Your latest kindness is even greater than your first, in that you didn't go after the young men, neither the rich ones nor the poor. [11] And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you everything you say, for all the city leaders among my people know that you are a woman of good character.

Bo'az's first words, *"My daughter,"* showed he had not been misled by the situation's potential ambiguity. He declared himself willing to pay the social and financial costs of welcoming this despised outsider into his family. **Bo'az** rightly saw **Rut**'s proposal as another act of covenant faithfulness (Hb **chesed**) on **Rut**'s part. Just as she had left her own household and family to be with **Naomi**, so now she was subordinating her own interests to **Naomi**'s. In the Hebrew ordering of the OT, the book of **Rut** comes immediately after the book of Proverbs, which closes with a description of *a woman of good character* (Proverbs 31:10).

[12] Now, it is true that I am a redeeming kinsman; but there is a redeemer who is a closer relative than I am. [13] Stay tonight. If, in the morning, he will redeem you, fine!—let him redeem you. But if he doesn't want to redeem you, then, as Adonai lives, I will redeem you. Now, lie down until morning."

Even though **Bo'az** was a near relative of **Naomi**, someone else had a prior claim to act as redeemer. Yet **Bo'az** reassured **Rut** that one way or another, she (and **Naomi**) would be redeemed

[14] She lay at his feet until morning; then, before [it was light enough that] people could recognize each other, she got up; because he said, "No one should know that the woman came to the threshing-floor." [15] He also said, "Bring the shawl you are wearing, and take hold of it." She held it while he put six measures of barley into it; then he went into the city.

If it became widely known that **Rut** had visited **Bo'az** that night, people would wrongly assume that **Bo'az** had taken **Rut** as wife or that they were guilty of sexual impropriety. **Bo'az** was unwilling to preempt his close relative, who had first right of refusal to **Rut**, so getting **Rut** home before daylight kept wrong impressions from forming. To seal his commitment (and perhaps also to provide **Rut** with an excuse for being out so early), **Bo'az** gave her six measures of barley. If the unspecified measures are seeds, then that would be around 80 pounds, an enormous load. Yet the lack of a measure may be intended to focus attention on the number six, which often represents incompleteness in the **Tanak**. Even this generous gift is incomplete. **Rut** still awaited the final installment of **"seed"** that would accomplish her rest.

[16] When she came to her mother-in-law, she asked, "Who are you? My daughter?" She told her everything the man had done for her. [17] Then she added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said to me, 'You shouldn't return to your mother-in-law with nothing." [18] Na'omi said, "My daughter, just stay where you are, until you learn how the matter comes out; for the man won't rest unless he resolves the matter today." [1]

On **Rut**'s return, **Naomi** asked her literally, **"Who are you? My daughter?"** This is the same question **Bo'az** asked in 3:8. Was **Rut** merely an awkward, embarrassing duty to **Naomi**, or would she give **Naomi** an enduring place in Israel's genealogies by providing a son? The answer depended on what transpired overnight. This was the real nature of **Naomi's** question, as evidenced by **Rut**'s answer.

In your workplace, you may feel overlooked or undervalued. **Rut's** bold approach in seeking **Bo'az** shows that sometimes you must take the first step. Identify a colleague who might benefit from your support, maybe a person who's struggling with workload or feeling isolated. Approach them and offer your help, and you'll not only foster a supportive environment but may also inspire others to uplift someone in need.

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[1] Rut 3:1-18.