

A Tale of Two Redeemers, Part I (Ruth 4:1-6)

That very morning (v.1-2):

- Boaz had ensured Ruth at her nocturnal visitation that he would settle the matter of “redemption” between him and the nearer kin (3:11-13, 18).
- Boaz may have gone immediately from the threshing floor to the gate. This “gate” would be equivalent to the city hall, a place where business was conducted. It would have been located on the ground floor where the residents of Bethlehem would come in and out of the city.
- Just as Boaz sat down, the redeemer who has been alluded to thus far (2:20; 3:12) walked by. Boaz identified this man as “friend” (ESV).
- “Friend” is not the best translation. The Hebrew reads “Peloni Almoni” and is an example of a farrago, which is a wordplay where at least one word is used outside of the given expression (Joe Schmo, helter-skelter, hodge-podge, heebie-jeebies, hocus pocus, etc, etc). The closest English equivalent can be “Mr. So and So.”
- Peloni Almoni would give a less-than-desirable bitter taste in the mouth of the Jewish audience. Interestingly, Peloni Almoni turned aside (from wherever he had been going or planned on doing): he listened to Boaz and was not offended by the name.
- After Peloni Almoni sits down next to him, Boaz assembled ten elders. These men were distinct citizens who were involved judicially in civic disputes (Deut. 21:18-19; 22:13-15; Judg. 8:14-16; 1 Sam. 11:3). It appears the quorum for this kind of meeting required at least ten of the elders. Boaz has considerable influence in Bethlehem.

1. Law of Redemption (v.3-5)

The “redemption of the land” (Lev. 25) provides three conditions for land that has been subjugated by an outsider to revert back to the original clan owner:

- A. The seller’s nearer/closest redeemer must come and redeem the land of “his brother.” (Lev. 25:25b).
 - B. If the seller has no redeemer, but can acquire money to purchase it back, he can re-purchase the land himself (Lev. 25:25-26).
 - C. In the year of jubilee, the land reverts to the seller without payment (Lev. 25:28).
- Boaz informs the elders (as well as Peloni Almoni) that Naomi, who has returned from Moab is “selling” the land that belonged to “our” relative Elimelech. “Selling” may not be the best term as widows are nowhere in Scripture given the authority to own the land. Land cannot be sold permanently (Lev. 25:8-16, 23).
 - There are no legal codes that allow widows to own land. The normal practice is for their sons to inherit the land. If there were no sons, it would be given to the daughters, who were to marry within the same clan. If there were no daughters, it would pass to the husband’s brothers, and then eventually to the clan. The land must stay within the clan (Num. 27:4-11, 36:6; Deut. 21:15-17). The goal of the law of redemption was to keep the property within the clan.

How is Naomi allowed to “sell/transfer” the title to the land without lawful endowment?

- A. Elimelech could have left the field vacant, uncultivated, and under no supervision as he and his family settled in Moab. Naomi returns to a barren field, hence, why Ruth must glean. While in Moab, Elimelech endowed Naomi with managerial right.
- B. Elimelech could have granted temporary usufruct rights to a clan member.
 - Why is Ruth gleaning in this case, if Naomi returns to plentiful harvest?
 - How does Naomi have the right to sell/transfer her husband’s estate?
- C. Elimelech could have sold the land to a non-clan member in desperation.
 - If so, why is this third party owner absent from the meeting?

Main point: Naomi wants to sell the land to a clan member of closest kin to her deceased husband, Elimelech. Whatever Naomi is doing, she is allowed to do.

2. Levirate Marriage (v.4-6)

- Traditionally, the *levirate* is a Latin translation for the Hebrew word that means “brother/brother-in-law” and refers to legal, moral, and ethical responsibilities that a brother/brother-in-law has to his deceased “brother” (Deut. 25:5-10; Gen 38).
- The goal of the *levir*:
 - To produce an offspring for the deceased brother to prevent his name from being blotted out permanently from Israel.
 - To prevent alienation of the family estate to another tribe.
 - To provide security for the widow (the widow would become the brother’s wife as he performed the levirate role).

The greatest tragedy for a clan was the loss of the land, and the blotting out of the name from the registration/citizenship book. In many cases, there is an overlap of the law of redemption and the role of the levirate. Is there any in the book of Ruth?

Peloni Almoni agrees to purchase/redeem the property (v.4). In the mind of Peloni Almoni, this is a great investment. Since Naomi is old, she cannot have children. If she has no children, Elimelech’s land will permanently belong to him. What of Ruth? She is a Moabitess. The law does not specifically speak to her.

Before the meeting is adjourned, Boaz informs Peloni Almoni who he gets if he redeems the land of Naomi and Ruth. If Peloni Almoni refuses to include Ruth with the redemption of the land, Boaz publicly declares his intention: he will marry Ruth and provide a child on behalf of Elimelech. As a result, his name is not blotted out, and his property can remain with the nuclear family unit. Previously, Ruth is simply “Ruth” (1:4, 14, 16), “Ruth the Moabitess” (1:22; 2:2, 21), “daughter-in-law” (1:22; 2:22), or the “foreigner” (2:10). Now, she is the “wife of the deceased” (v.5).

Legally, Peloni Almoni is not required to carry out the *levir*, as he is not the brother of Mahlon, or Elimelech. Neither is Boaz. However, Boaz takes the Levitical and Deuteronomic laws as neither exhaustive nor restrictive.

Peloni Almoni is stuck in a tremendous dilemma:

- A. Peloni Almoni can agree to redeem the field and marry Ruth. If he has a child, he will lose that field once that child comes of age. If Peloni has no other children, that child will inherit both Elimelech’s and Peloni Almoni’s property.
- B. He can choose to redeem the field and not Ruth. If he chooses this route, he would be socially scorned as a cheap and miserly man who has left two widows to their own poverty with no personal sacrifice.
- C. If he chooses to redeem the field, he could marry Naomi, and allow Boaz to marry Ruth, he may have the same problem as #1: that field would belong to the son of Boaz and Ruth.
- D. Boaz has already stated his desire to marry Ruth and redeem the land. Peloni Almoni can cede to Boaz as the next kin.

If the levirate law/custom was in effect, Ruth would have had no right to go to Boaz at night and ask him to “redeem” her. Additionally, he would not have been able to praise her for refusing to go after young men if Peloni Almoni was lawfully the *levir*.

In trying to preserve his name and his future, Peloni Almoni is forgotten.