

## Dating Ruth

When was Ruth written? How can we know? Why does it matter?

Examining the customs central to the story: levirate marriage and redemption by the *go'el*

### Levirate marriage:

Example of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38

Deuteronomy 25:5-6

*When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, <sup>6</sup>and the first-born whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. <sup>7</sup>But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me." <sup>8</sup>Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, "I have no desire to marry her," <sup>9</sup>then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, "This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house." <sup>10</sup>Throughout Israel his family shall be known as "the house of him whose sandal was pulled off."*

Do the laws of Leviticus disagree?

Leviticus 18:6

*You shall not expose the nakedness of your brother's wife. It is your brother's nakedness.*

Leviticus 20:21

*And a man who will take his brother's wife: it is an impurity. He has exposed his brother's nudity. They will be childless.*

### Kinsman Redeemer

Leviticus 25:25

*If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold.*

And see also: Num 35:19 and Deut 19:6 has the *go'el* as an avenger of blood, the nearest male relative, who would vindicate a wronged member of the family. The *gō'ēl* also recovered stolen property (Num 5:8), and was obligated to buy back a family member reduced to slavery (Lev 25:28 ).

What is going on in the book of Ruth – a levirate marriage? A kinsman's redemption? And can the way in which Boaz envisions his "date" with Ruth help us date the book? And (SPOILER ALERT) if not...

... what can it tell us about the society that produced it?