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REDEEMER TYPOLOGIES AND THE CHARACTER OF RUTH

THOM BUNNELL

Thom Bunnell is a graduate of BYU with a bachelor's degree in ancient Near Eastern studies with a Hebrew emphasis.

Ruth's character in the book of Ruth has been an inspiring example for centuries. The book begins and ends with a family line. The book of Ruth therefore may seem to be primarily concerned with telling the story of David's (and ultimately, in the Christian tradition, Jesus') genealogy. Although establishing Davidic lineage may be a central purpose of the narrative, it is also an undeniably powerful story of a woman's selfless devotion. The attractiveness of the book is further enhanced because the story chronicling Ruth's encounters is short and manageable. Also, unlike so many other biblical narratives, Ruth has no scandal. There are no characters worthy of condemnation or disgust. As Garber states, "There is no villain in the story. No reprehensible act is done by any character."¹ It is hard to dislike Ruth in her devotedness or Boaz in his selflessness. But Ruth stands out as much more than a good example in a novella interestingly mixed with poetry and prose.

Even if the redemption of Elimelech's family, with the overt use of the Hebrew לָאָדָם ("redeemer," "kinsman")² throughout the book of Ruth, is not the main purpose of the narrative, it is hard *not* to address this topic. Redemption is an important aspect of the work. Consequently, when virtually all commentaries evaluate the book of Ruth, Boaz is immediately declared the redeemer of the novella.³ Boaz serves as the redeemer type when he marries Ruth in chapter 4. He becomes the bridegroom while the heroine of the story becomes,

1. P. L. Garber, "Ruth, Book of," *IB* 4:131-33.

2. BDB, לָאָדָם, 145-46.

3. There are too many commentaries to list them all, but some relevant ones that recognize Boaz as the redeemer include: Edward F. Campbell Jr., "Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary" in *Anchor Bible* 15 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 1975; Frederick W. Bush, "Ruth/Esther," in *WBC* 9 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books), 1996; Daniel I. Block, "Judges/Ruth," in *New American Commentary* 6 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 1999.

quite literally, a bride. However, the dimensions of Ruth's character go further. After evaluating redeemer typologies in Hebrew scripture, I conclude that Ruth's greatest representative type, above heroine, bride, and symbol of Israel, is that of redeemer.

What Is a Redeemer? A Preliminary Typology⁴

What is a typology? A type is a person or thing that serves as a symbol or representation of something else. In this case, Ruth serves as a type, i.e., a symbol, example, or representation, of a redeemer. In this paper I will develop a basic typology for redeemers and redeeming figures in the Hebrew bible. It is outside the scope of this paper to evaluate the entire corpus of ancient Near Eastern documents in order to create a composite set of typologies covering the entirety of Near Eastern cultures in antiquity. Instead, I will present typologies specifically about redeemers as they are presented in the Masoretic text. Within Hebrew scripture, the concepts of "redemption," "to redeem," or "redeemer" are generally translations of the words גֹּאֵל, פֹּדֶה, or כֹּפֵר with גֹּאֵל being the most common.⁵ Though not used equally, each word provides insight into the meaning and function of a redeemer in ancient Israel. On closer inspection of these words as they are used, and other redeemer types, we see certain elements common to redeemers in Hebrew scripture that allow us to create a redeemer typology. This typology can then be used to qualify a character as a redeemer type.

Proposition 1: A redeemer is related to the redeemed.

Jennifer Clark Lane has commented that "to the Israelites, a redeemer was a close family member responsible for helping other family members . . . the family relationship was the reason the redeemer acted on behalf of his . . . kinsmen."⁶ Chapters 25 and 27 of Leviticus expound the role of a kinsman as

4. John Lundquist, "What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *Temples of the Ancient World* (eds. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 83–117. I have used Lundquist's typology model applied to temples of the ancient Near East and applied it to redeemers. There is a stark difference between a "redeemer type" and a "type of Christ." A "redeemer type" is based on explanations found in the Hebrew text only; thus, just because a figure may serve as a "type of Christ," that does not necessarily mean they qualify as a "redeemer type." For example: Jonah remained in the belly of the fish three days (Jonah 1:17) before being "resurrected" and placed on dry ground and, consequently, can be seen as a type of Christ. This circumstance is not fitting with redeemer typologies, so Jonah may be a "Christ type," but he does not serve as a "redeemer type."

5. Garber, "Ruth," 132–33.

6. Jennifer Clark Lane, "The Lord Will Redeem His People: 'Adoptive' Covenant and Redemption in the Old Testament," in *The People Shall Be My People And Thy God My God: The 22nd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1993), 49.

redeemer: Yahweh commands, “If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem (גאל) what the relative has sold” (25:25).⁷ Outside of the Torah, the book of Ruth serves as a prime example of the responsibility of a near relation to redeem a kinsman.⁸ Isaiah further expounds upon the relationship between kinship and redemption. With Yahweh as the MT’s obviously prime example of a redeemer, the poetic prophet Isaiah exclaims, “For *you are our father*, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are *our father; our Redeemer*” (63:16; emphasis added).⁹

Proposition 2: A redeemer recovers that which was lost, whether that be a person, property, a life, or the soul.

The two Hebrew roots used most often for redemption, גאל and פשא, “designate a process by which something alienated, or at least subject to alienation, may, in some circumstances, be recovered for its original owner.”¹⁰ This *something* referred to can be anything that has the potential to become lost or forfeit. It applies, as is described in Leviticus chapters 25 and 27, mainly to the physical things such as land, cattle, family, and other things of temporal or monetary worth. That which is redeemed can also be intangible, such as one’s life (Exod 21:29–30) or one’s soul (Pss 49:6–9). In the latter part of Genesis, Jacob in a blessing to his son commends the angel “who has redeemed (גאל) [him] from all harm” (48:16). Job affirms in a eulogy, “For I know that my Redeemer lives” (19:25), and this redeemer will authenticate Job’s claims of innocence and justify his good name. In these instances both the “evil” Jacob speaks of and Job’s slandered reputation exist only as concepts but are still redeemable. As such, there is nothing that can be lost, whether physical or abstract, that is outside of the redeemer’s power.

Proposition 3: The redeemer provides for the temporal needs of the redeemed, which may include deliverance from distress.

Not only does a redeemer recover that which is lost but also continues to provide for the temporal needs of the redeemed. For example, Yahweh not only recovered the Hebrews’ freedom that was lost to the Egyptians, but he sustained Israel in the wilderness through manna (Exod 16:14–16), quail (Exod 16:12–13), water (Exod 17:5–6), and protection. In Job, Eliphaz counsels the

7. All biblical citations are either the author’s translation or from the NRSV.

8. I choose not to deal with this here as this will be dealt with more in depth in a later portion of this paper.

9. Isaiah also declares Yahweh to be a family relation in 22:21 and 9:6, among others.

10. R. C. Denton, “Redeem, Redeemer, Redemption,” *IDB* 4:21.

man of misfortune to seek God who provides for his people: “He will deliver you. . . . In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the wild animals of the earth” (Job 5:19–22). As a first step, God will deliver (or redeem) a person, and, following this, he remains the constant temporal provider for the redeemed. Zwi Werblowsky states succinctly, “The ‘God of my salvation’ so often referred to by the Psalmist seems to be precisely . . . a saviour from distress.”¹¹

Proposition 4: A redeemer must have the physical capacity to redeem.

As McGee notes in the title of his eighth chapter, “The redeemer must possess the ability to redeem,”¹² whether it is through having the capacity to supply a ransom or the strength to force redemption. Yahweh was said to redeem Israel through his greatness by bringing them “out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (Deut 9:26). In speaking to Yahweh, the prophet Nehemiah presents Israel as “your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand” (Neh 1:10). Moses, another redeemer type for Israel,¹³ never offered Pharaoh ransom for the Hebrews or recompense for their release. Instead, his redemption of Israel was accomplished by the divine power given to him by the God of Israel.

One may also redeem by ransom, giving something in place for the redeemed. In response to a person being gored by a man’s ox, the law states, “The ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is imposed on the owner, then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption (פדיום from פדה) of the victim’s life” (Exod 21:29–30). Only by paying the specified price could a man ransom himself from death, being redeemed from death to life. In the book of Ruth, Boaz mentions he has “acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon,” and he “acquired” Ruth to be his wife (4:9–10).

11. R. J. Zwi Werblowski, “Types of Redemption: A Summary,” in *Types of Redemption* (eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowski and C. Jouco Bleeker; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 246.

12. J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 144.

13. Moses should be an obvious biblical redeemer type for readers of the Hebrew Bible. He was the leader who freed the Hebrews from bondage under the Egyptians; Moses petitioned God for food, securing the traveling Israelites’ temporal salvation; Moses brought the children of Israel to the land promised them by covenant to Abraham, etc.

Proposition 5: The redeemer's impetus to redeem is a righteous one and is often related to a covenant.

Redeemers are not forced to redeem grudgingly; instead, righteousness and love motivate their action. Isaiah declares, "Zion shall be redeemed (פדה) by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness" (1:27). In Exodus we read, "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed (לגל); you guided them by your strength to your holy abode" (15:13). Perhaps the prime example of benevolent redemption surfaces in the story of Joseph of Egypt.¹⁴ After being betrayed by his family and sold into Egypt as a slave, Joseph rose to a position of power and prominence such that "only with regard to the throne (was Pharaoh) greater than (Joseph)" (Gen 41:40). As the prophesied famine hit Egypt, Israel and his sons needed to appeal to Egypt for food. With the dispensing of grain under the control of Joseph, the betraying brothers had to ask for grain from their betrayed brother. In an exemplary act of merciful kindness, Joseph redeemed his estranged family by providing them with bread and water (Gen 42:25), thus saving them from imminent death and demonstrating a righteous motive of love and forgiveness.

A covenant may also provide the motivation and impetus for redemption. Deuteronomy 7:8 makes this clear: "It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed (פדה) you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (emphasis added). In an imploring hymn, the Psalmist petitions God to "remember (his) congregation, which (he) acquired long ago" (74:2), clearly calling upon Yahweh's covenant with the patriarchs to be their protector and redeemer. By the nature of covenants, redemption because of a covenant is only granted when the stipulations of the covenant are met. For example, when extending the Abrahamic covenant to Isaac, the Lord promised Isaac seed, land, and the blessing of the earth because "Abraham obeyed (the Lord's) voice and kept (his) charge, (his) commandments, (his) statutes, and (his) laws" (Gen 26:4-5). The covenant relationship itself normally involves certain promises of redemption between the two parties. Through covenant, Lane comments, "People, are 'adopted' into a new relationship . . . (and) their kinsman . . . becomes their redeemer."¹⁵

14. Joseph, the son of Jacob, actually fills many of these redeemer types. His story in full can be found in Gen 37-43.

15. Lane, "The Lord Will Redeem His People," 50.

Proposition 6: The redeemer may come in an unexpected form or appearance.

Although the ultimate image of the redeemer is Yahweh himself, a redeemer can come in any form, even in an unexpected one. While speaking of some future redeemer, Isaiah admitted that “he [the redeemer] had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (53:2). The Hebrew Bible is replete with examples of redeemers in unexpected form. Certainly Abraham and Isaac must have seen a ram as an unexpected substitute to redeem the son from death (Gen 22:12–13). David, a young shepherd boy, was an unexpected deliverer from the Philistines, and from his initial appearance one would never have considered him to be the redeemer and uniting force of Israel (1 Sam 16–17). As mentioned above, Joseph was certainly the last person his rebellious brothers expected to owe their temporal redemption too. Redeemers are not limited to a certain stature or appearance. As evidenced by the substitute ram in the case of the sacrifice of Isaac, a redeemer need not necessarily be in human form.

Proposition 7: The redeemer is the defender of the fatherless,¹⁶ orphans, widows, and the impoverished.

A redeemer is one who makes provisions for the fatherless, the widow, the orphan, and the indigent. The Lord’s protection of orphans and widows is described in Proverbs 23:10–11: “Do not remove an ancient landmark or encroach on the fields of orphans, for their redeemer (גאל) is strong.” In both Psalm 68 and Psalm 82, the writer “extols the God of triumph because of His righteous character with this same motif.”¹⁷ Psalm 68 reads, “Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (v. 5), while 82 exclaims, “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (vv. 3–4).¹⁸ The Psalmist also praises the virtue of the ideal king who redeems these social groups: “The helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan” (10:14). In judgment and condemnation of the earthly kings of his time, Isaiah states, “Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow’s cause does not come before

16. Though it may seem redundant, one who is fatherless is not necessarily an orphan. Ruth and Orpah are examples of un-orphaned, fatherless women.

17. Richard D. Paterson, “The Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and Extra-Biblical Literature,” *BSac* (July 1973), 229.

18. Other passages that portray God as the redeemer of these groups include Exod 22:21–24, 23:6; Deut 10:18, 27:19; Isa 54:4–5; etc.

them” (1:23), thus indicating that it was the king’s job to act as the redeemer for these groups.

Ruth as Redeemer

These seven propositions about redeemers validate Boaz as a redeemer in the book of Ruth: he is related to those whom he redeems (proposition 1), he recovers lost items (proposition 2), he delivers the women from distress and provides for their temporal need (proposition 3), he has the capacity to redeem (proposition 4), his impetus is a righteous one (proposition 5), he is an unexpected option (proposition 6), and he recovers Ruth by a marriage covenant and redeems both Ruth and Naomi, impoverished, fatherless widows, from their newfound situation of poverty (proposition 7). In light of the seven typologies of a redeemer, then it must be concluded that Ruth, not only Boaz, also exemplifies a redeemer. Ruth is much more than merely the metaphoric “bride” to the salvific “bridegroom” as she is most often portrayed. Instead, the text shows that these typologies apply to her,¹⁹ making her an impressive type of the biblical redeemer.

First, Ruth is a relative of the person whom she redeems, Naomi. One may argue that Ruth’s Moabite ancestry means she is not related to any of the characters in the narrative, seeing as she had no children with Mahlon. There is merit to this claim as Ruth is not technically blood related to anyone in the narrative until the last few verses of the story when she begets Obed. However, in Israel, “by making a covenant with the Lord, the people of Israel enter into his family.”²⁰ Ruth enters into the covenant with Yahweh at the end of chapter 1, thereby making her a relative of Naomi (fulfilling proposition one). Ruth’s final reply to her mother-in-law stands out as probably the most well known verses in the whole book:

But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” (1:16–17).

This passage is more than simply an ardent, impassioned promise made by a daughter who has grown to love her mother. Its particular structure and language implies a covenant. The *Bible Student’s Commentary* says it well:

19. It is not necessary for a person to qualify as a redeemer type by embodying *all* of the typologies. Not every redeemer type will possess every quality. There simply needs to be an overwhelming showing to argue that one was meant to fill the type.

20. Lane, “Thy People Shall Be My People,” 54.

To show how serious she was, Ruth swore by the name of the Lord with a type of oath that was only found in Israel (see 1 Sam 3:17; 25:22; 1 Kings 2:23). Such an oath, which may have originally been accompanied by certain signs or ceremonies, was actually a self-malediction in which the speaker invoked the wrath of the Lord if he should prove unfaithful to the solemn condition that followed it. Ruth thus swore that nothing short of death would separate her from Naomi. Naomi was reduced to silence. She finally realized how deadly earnest Ruth was in her determination to go with her; so she stopped urging her to return to Moab.²¹

In doing this, Ruth established herself as equal to Naomi and Israel as part of the family of Yahweh, thus making her, the redeemer, related to the redeemed. By the same token, if Ruth's connection to Naomi is established by covenant, then clearly the covenant (which she swears in the name of the Lord) is the motivating factor for the actions she takes, which lead to the redemption of herself and Naomi (proposition 5).

Perhaps the most telling factors that define Ruth as a redeemer type are what she recovers as a redeemer. Indeed, it is Boaz that, through marrying Ruth, recovers the lost property of Elimelech, but there is much more that is recovered than lost property and a dying name in the book of Ruth. Ruth is a Moabitess. As such, she is a daughter of Lot, the brother of Abraham. Lot, not being the covenant brother, was estranged from the blessings of the Lord. By making her covenant to Naomi and her marriage to Boaz, "The holiness lodged in the seed of Lot . . . and the holiness lodged in the seed of Judah joined (together) to produce the grandfather of David."²² By joining the family of Lot with the covenant line of Abraham, redemption comes to an entire nation separated from Yahweh's blessings. Though Boaz is the redeemer of Elimelech, he was not a Moabite, and as such he cannot be credited with the redemption of Lot's family. Ruth alone deserves this honor and thus fulfills proposition two.

Ruth redeems more than her family line. By the end of chapter 1, Naomi has lost hope in her ability to redeem her family.²³ Consequently, she urges her daughters-in-law to return to their original homes where they might receive better provisions. Her declaration to the Bethlehemites clearly shows her despair: "Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara (מָרָא, "bitter"), for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty" (1:20–21). When Ruth chose to covenant with Naomi, to be her companion, Naomi's lost hope was redeemed. Again, this redemption can

21. C. J. Goslinga, "Ruth Commentary," BSC 6:527.

22. Zlotowitz, *Megillas Ruth*, xlvii

23. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 473.

only be credited to Ruth. Furthermore, Ruth also redeemed Naomi temporally, fulfilling proposition 3. Apparently aware of Israel's laws, it was Ruth who suggested that she go glean in the fields to provide for her small family. She was only aware after the fact that the field belonged to a potential kinsman-redeemer, as evidenced by the phrase, "As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz" (2:3). Had the field not belonged to Boaz, Ruth might not have ultimately married Boaz, but she still would have been the source of redemption for herself and her mother-in-law from destitution and starvation, making Ruth at the same time both a temporal provider from distress and a defender of the fatherless, the orphan, and the widow.²⁴

The fact that Ruth is from a people abhorred by the Israelites,²⁵ and that she is a woman of neither real means nor talents makes her, as a redeemer of Israel, rather unexpected (proposition 6). More than this, though, I believe it is her dedication to the Lord of Israel that sets her apart. There is no temporal reason why Ruth should have sworn fidelity and companionship to Naomi and her people. As Naomi had suggested, their family's situation was all but impossible to recover from. This makes Ruth's redemption all the more miraculous. Her impetus was righteous and virtuous. It was a love of Naomi and of the culture she had come to embrace that made her reply so ardently, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!" (1:16). By her invoking the name of the Lord in verse 17 we see that she was fully converted to the religion of Israel, and that this conversion ran deep enough for her to abandon the land of her nativity and dedicate her remaining years to her new family and God. With the aforementioned examples it is hard not to see how all of the redeemer typologies combine together in Ruth, making her a redeemer.

In making this claim I anticipate one major concern, specifically the fact that a redeemer is almost exclusively portrayed as a man in Hebrew scripture. Although in Hebrew scripture redeemers are almost always men, almost always is not always. Corrington comments, "There are some models in biblical Judaism . . . in which the redeemer is envisioned as a woman or a woman acts as redeemer."²⁶ Consider the words of Hosea when he "likens Yahweh (the ultimate redeemer) to a mother or nurse who draws the infant Ephraim with the 'leading strings' of (maternal) love out of Egypt, and through the wilderness

24. Though we can only assume by Naomi's age and the fact that she didn't return to her father's house that she is fatherless, we believe Ruth is by the injunction of Naomi to "go, return each to her *mother's* house" which she makes in verse eight of chapter one.

25. An example of Israel's stance on Moab can be seen in Deut 23:3-5.

26. Gail Paterson Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviors and Formative Christianity* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1992), 55.

(Hos 11:3–4).²⁷ The woman Rahab in the book of Joshua presents us with another redemptive woman. As the Israelites were preparing to cross the Jordan River under the direction of Joshua, they sent spies into Jericho to assess the potential military threat. When the guards of Jericho searched for the Hebrew spies, Rahab, a prostitute, hid them safely in her home. In return for her aid, Rahab petitioned the spies:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death (Joshua 2:9–13).

In her heroic defense of the spies, and in a language that denotes a faith in the redeeming God of Israel of which she had heard, Rahab secured her family and their property's safety, redeeming them from the death that would come with the destruction of Jericho. From these examples we see that it is possible for a woman, such as Ruth, to be a redeemer.

The theme of redemption is very prevalent in the book of Ruth. Boaz is clearly a phenomenal redeemer type in the text and represents the many attributes of a redeemer outlined in this paper. However, these attributes also help us to see that Boaz is not the only redeemer the story has to offer. Ruth, as I have argued, also meets the criteria for a redeeming figure. Ultimately, "The redemption of Ruth was accomplished because . . . she chose to enter a covenant, both with Naomi and with the Lord. These covenants gave her access to blessings from the Lord,"²⁸ which entitled her to join the ranks of not only Boaz, but Moses, David, and others as one of the great redeemer types of the Hebrew Bible.

27. Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation*, 55.

28. Kerry Muhlestein, "Ruth, Redemption, Covenant and Christ," in *Proceedings of the 2009 Sperry Symposium* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 204.