

Ruth 4:5

by Mark S. Haughwout

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Introduction

Ruth 4:5 contains two textual difficulties which are possibly related to one another. The word **וּמֵאָה** reads fine in this verse in the context of Boaz saying that the field will be bought from both Naomi and Ruth, however the apparatus to the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) suggests that it should be read as two words with the letter Gimel having dropped out (**וּגַם אֶת**). Additionally in this verse we find the unexpected form **קִנִּיתִי** which is a first person singular perfect instead of the expected 2nd person singular perfect. Both of these problems will be discussed below.

Explanations of the form **קִנִּיתִי**:

Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley (Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar):

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar demonstrates that verbal forms ending with yud can be other than first person, however this seems to be limited to feminine second person and does not seem to include masculine second person (44h - p121).

BHS

The BHS (fifth edition) apparatus records that the Qere (traditional reading) for this verb is **קִנִּיתָהּ**, which is also close to what one would expect based on the context. This reading is supported by at least three Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts. The apparatus also suggests that the verb should perhaps be read as the imperative **קִנֵּה** based on the non-Hebrew versions. We would expect a 2nd masculine form in Ruth 4:5 if Boaz is indeed telling his relative that the relative must also acquire Ruth.

Concordance Results for קנייתי:

The form קנייתי occurs in five other places in the Bible – Genesis 4:1, 47:23; Ruth 4:9,10; and Ecclesiastes 2:7. All five times it is used as a first person singular perfect verb.

The 2nd masc. form ניתק occurs seven times in the Bible – Exodus 15:16; Isaiah 43:24; Jeremiah 13:1,4, 19:1; and Psalms 74:2, 139:13. Although the use in Psalm 139:13 is strange it is clear that in all of these passages this is the standard 2nd masculine singular perfect form. However the form suggested by the BHS Qere – קנייתה is unattested elsewhere in the Bible. The final Hey occurs in some final yud (final hey) verbs – compare גליטה in 2nd Samuel 7:27 and גליה in 1st Chronicles 17:25.

Other Unusual Verbal Forms in Ruth:

Strange forms do occur elsewhere in the book of Ruth, including: תדבקיך (2:8); יקצרוך (2:9); ישאבון (2:9); תעשין (3:4); תדעין (3:18). Myers counts a total of ten archaic forms in Ruth (Myers p11). However a form with a final yud that refers to a man in the second person is unattested.

Waltke

Waltke refers to קנייתי in Ruth 4:9 as a ‘perfective’ form (Waltke p488 – 30.5.1d-26). This may be the same form appearing in 4:5 and thus ‘I acquire (here and now)’. The occurrence in 4:5 might also be what Waltke calls a ‘epistolary perfective’(29a-b), thus ‘I am acquiring’ or it could be the ‘perfective of resolve’(30-32) and thus ‘I am going to acquire’. קנייתי should also be compared to מכרה in 4:3 where Naomi is ‘selling’ or ‘is going to sell’ but not ‘has sold’.

Considerations for קניתי

I agree with Campbell on the rejection of the idea suggested by T.C. Vriezen of translating the Ktiv as ‘I *zealously maintain* with regard to Ruth the right to raise up...’ (ABC p146). The root of the word clearly implies to buy or acquire (cf. Gen. 4:1). Any attempt to deal with the Ktiv must reflect this basic understanding of the meaning of the root, both in the surrounding context of the book of Ruth and elsewhere.

Sasson makes a strong case for the rejection of the Qere by arguing against tying together the law of Levirate marriage and the law of the Kinsman-Redeemer (K.R.) (Sasson p125ff). The law of the K.R. and the law of levirate marriage were two different laws, though the later would have implications for the former, the K.R. (of property) cannot be shown to be linked to ‘raising up the name of the deceased’ (see Sasson p126). That levirate marriage was only required of brothers, is shown in the book of Ruth itself, in Naomi’s discussion with her daughters-in-law in 1:11. Clearly Naomi knew she had other close relatives (2:20 - מגאֵלנוּ), but she did not have other sons.

The Qere is however supported by the reading found in the LXX, Peshitta and Targum which all understand that Boaz is telling the K.R. that the land and the necessity to marry Ruth are linked. Even if the law does not explicitly link the two, Boaz may be deliberately doing so because he is simply looking out for Ruth’s best. Another possibility is he may want her for himself and knows that by linking the two he will discourage the closer redeemer from exercising his right.

One must also consider that the Ktiv is a result of a scribal error. The similarity of Yud and Hey in paleo-Hebrew makes such an error easy. However the explanation of

a scribal error here would go against the rule that ‘the more difficult reading is likely the original reading’.

Considerations for וּמָאֵת:

The mem in וּמָאֵת may be an ‘enclitic mem’ (ABC p146) and is apparently very rare in the bible. Campbell states that he prefers this explanation (ABC p146) over the idea of a scribal error resulting in a dropped out gimmel (discussed below), for he says that וּמָאֵת is emphatic in 4:10 and thus would not be expected in 4:5 (ABC p151). I disagree and believe that if Boaz is contrasting his acquiring Ruth with Mr. So-and-So¹ acquiring the field, then an emphatic use seems fully justified. The emphatic would serve as a warning of potential financial loss to Mr. So-and-So.

Although it is generally not wise to claim a letter has dropped out without sufficient support from either some Hebrew texts or from the early translations or at least from tradition, there may be reason, in spite of the lack of such evidence, to believe a letter has dropped out here. If a gimmel has dropped out, we could read this word as two words: וּמָאֵת, which would then make sense of the verb קָנִיתִי as it stands in the text. With the addition of the gimmel, the text could then read ‘...in the day that you have bought for yourself the field from the hand of Naomi, I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the deceased, to raise up the name of the deceased upon his inheritance.’

This reading would make sense in light of the relatives reply to Boaz that the relative cannot ‘destroy’ his own inheritance. If Boaz marries Ruth and produces an heir for Mahlon, then that heir would inherit Mahlon’s field, and the unnamed relative would

¹ as Greenstein aptly refers to him based on 4:1

forfeit what he just spent in order to acquire the land, thus destroying his own inheritance. (Greenstein makes this point in his article in endnote #112).

Simply adding this gimmel does seem to solve the textual problem here, but one cannot not arbitrarily add letters to the sacred text for the sake of solving ‘problems’ in a text. Yet there may be evidence that the gimmel did indeed drop out. A couple of verses earlier in 4:3, Naomi is said to be the one selling the field and no mention of Ruth is made. Indeed, nowhere in the bible do we have an instance where a deceased husband’s land gets passed to a daughter in law. Actually the whole circumstance here is interesting. The land is said to belong to Elimelech. Though the land would have gone to his sons upon his death, they died childless. The question is then ‘to whom does the land belong’. Verse 4:3 indicates that Naomi at least was able to sell the land.

In verse 4:10 we have even greater evidence for the dropped gimmel in 4:5. In fact verse 4:10 reads almost exactly the way 4:5 would read if the gimmel were inserted. The question then, is when did this gimmel drop out? Interestingly, the gimmel in paleo-Hebrew was a very simple letter, similar to both modern Hebrew’s vav and to the vav in paleo-Hebrew. Additionally, paleo-Hebrew does not have a mem-soffit form which helps mark the end of a word. According to Jan de Ward (BHQ textual commentary), the Vulgate indicates that we are dealing with two words, but that the gimmel did not ‘drop out’ but rather was accidentally replaced by a vav. However this solution works equally well with the Ktiv and the Qere – ‘you must also acquire Ruth’. Ward also points out that the Targum specifically adds the statement ‘you must acquire her by levirate marriage’.

My explanation of Ruth 4:5

Regardless of the Qere or Ktiv reading for קניתי, it is obvious that the Mr. So-and-So understood that the land he was going to redeem would end up in the hands of Ruth's son (regardless of whether he or Boaz married her), and therefore he and/or his sons would suffer financial/property loss. I would not dare to add a gimmel to the sacred text and therefore, have to reject the emended reading proposed for ומאת that simply adds the gimmel, though I am more open to the gimmel having been replaced by the vav. I would however suggest that the footnote in BHS be cross-referenced to 4:10 and I would also suggest a similar footnote for the foreign language translations of the Bible.

Another suggestion I would consider is that in verse 4:5 Boaz is saying 'in the day the you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, I have acquired (the field) from Ruth the Moabites...(by marrying her and producing an heir)'. Such a reading may be forced, but at least requires no emendation to the text and allows the Ktiv to stand.

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