This paper concerns itself largely with an attempt to give a new interpretation to that small part of Israelite law implied in the story related in the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth presents a unique interrelationship of the ancient Israelite customs of the *ge'ulah* ("redeemership") and the levirate (the exact meaning of this term will be discussed in the article. In general, it is the custom of remarrying a widow within the husband’s family.). Moreover, both of these customs are essentially connected to the ownership of land, which was considered, in principle, inalienable. The interpretation of Ruth depends on the understanding one has of the levirate. The levirate is witnessed to clearly in only two other Old Testament texts, Genesis xxxviii and Deuteronomy xxv 5-10. Most scholars, however, see discrepancies and inconsistencies between these texts and Ruth, especially Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy the levirate appears to be compulsory; in Ruth it is apparently not. In Deuteronomy the levirate seems limited to brothers only; in Ruth the person who is supposed to fulfill the levirate obligation is a very distant relative. Also, it is not clear in the book of Ruth whether Boaz or his son is the *go'el*.

Most scholars choose to interpret these "contradictions" as differences in actual custom, assigning the custom seen in Ruth to one historical period and the one in Deuteronomy to another. Is this necessary? It has not before been seen as significant that while Deuteronomy is an actual legal text, Ruth and Genesis xxxviii are stories. It is on this basis that we find the "contradictions" not contradictions at all, but only differences in the forms of the texts.

Although both the custom of the *ge'ulah* and that of the levirate have long been recognized in the book of Ruth, all the implications of their interdependence have not been investigated. How the principles upon which the levirate is based alter the external manifestation of the *go'el's* obligation, and also how the *ge'ulah* affects the outcome of the levirate will be discussed in this paper.
Millar Burrows, perhaps more than anyone else, is responsible for the present understanding of the book of Ruth and of the development of the levirate ¹). He maintains that it is possible to have two different forms of this custom at two different periods. In this way Ruth is allowed to give evidence for the practice of the levirate just as legitimate as Deuteronomy's. Because of its differences from Deuteronomy xxv 5 ff., Burrows says, Ruth must be given a pre-exilic dating and be considered an earlier form of the levirate than Deuteronomy. Yet, Burrows dismisses out of hand the possibility that the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis xxxviii can offer evidence for the understanding of the custom.

Burrows' theory is that the law in Deuteronomy xxv developed out of an originally Canaanite document which he attempts to reconstruct on the basis of Alt's theory of the structure and origin of Israelite law ²). The original casuistic Canaanite law Burrows "reconstructs" as follows: "If brothers live together and one of them dies and leaves no son, the dead man's wife shall not be married outside to a stranger. Her brother-in-law shall come into her and take her to himself to wife. But if it does not please the man to take his sister-in-law, he shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'It does not please me to take her', and he shall take his sandal off his foot" ³). Burrows considers that the original Canaanite law implies that the widow is part of the inheritance which the brother receives; i.e., he considers the levirate a matter of the heir's right and by no means his obligation. This law, then, he considers sufficient to explain the legal background of the Ruth-Boaz story. The deuteronomic redactor of the Canaanite law, when he brought the law into the Israelite corpus, made very significant alterations: 1. The levirate marriage was essentially changed by the insertion of an "apodictic" Israelite law: "The wife of the deceased shall not be married to a stranger, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her and take her as his wife, performing the levir's duty. The first son that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel" (Deuteronomy xxv 5b-6). This insertion


²) Burrows, JBL 59 (1940), p. 23 ff.

³) Ibid. p. 30.