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THE “CEREMONY OF THE SHOE”: A RITUAL OF GOD’S ANCIENT COVENANT PEOPLE

Another common act made extraordinary by the ritual experience is the act of clothing, or investiture. This is, in part, no doubt due to the social function of clothing, meaning that we often use clothing as a form of communication in which we inform others as to how we define ourselves and our relationship to the greater community. Apparel associated with the feet is particularly symbolic of abstract principles such as movement and ownership. Alonzo Gaskill's paper addresses the investiture and divestiture of the shoe in its biblical context and demonstrates that something as simple as taking off a shoe could establish, via ritual, a profound covenantal relationship. —DB

“**P**UT OFF THY SHOES FROM off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). So spoke the premortal Jehovah to the prophet Moses—and so practiced ancient and modern Hindus, Muslims, Hare Krishnas, and various other faith traditions. Shoes have played an important role in establishing sacred space and sacred rites from the beginning of time. However, the removal of one’s shoes as a ritual act or gesture is not always about sacred soil. As a singular example, the ancient practice of levirate marriage is often associated with the removal of the shoes—but entrance into sacred space is not at the heart of the act. Indeed, an entirely different connotation is implied.

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In this paper we will examine the “ceremony of the shoe” as it appears in Ruth 4, with its common interpretations, likely implications, and significant relations to Latter-day Saint temple practices.

Levirate marriage is the name given to the ancient law requiring the surviving brother of a deceased man to unite in an intimate relationship with the childless widow of his brother. This was done in order to raise up seed unto the name of his prematurely deceased sibling (see Deuteronomy 25:5–6).¹ As with many Hebrew laws, levirate marriage had accompanying rituals requisite for its formal and legal enactment. Thus, near the end of the Deuteronomic passage dealing with this law comes an explanation of what a woman should do if her surviving brother-in-law (or *levir*) refuses to marry her. We read: “Then shall his brother’s wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother’s house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed” (Deuteronomy 25:9–10).

We know that the practice of levirate marriage was known in biblical times at least as early as the writing of the Pentateuch and remained culturally acceptable perhaps as late as the penning of the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 20:28). Unfortunately, there is some confusion surrounding this rite; namely, it is common for scholars to make blanket assumptions about this law and its ritual enactment in scripture and history—perhaps in part because what does appear in scripture regarding levirate marriage is scant at best. Thus commentators will sometimes see in certain cultic practices or biblical passages what appear to be parallels between those rites or verses and the law of levirate marriage. However, many of these suppositions are not necessarily warranted.

For an example of one such unwarranted assumption, we turn to the book of Ruth and the story of Boaz’s marriage to that icon of faithfulness and devotion, Ruth. In the fourth chapter of Ruth we read: “Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe” (Ruth 4:7–8).

At least as early as the first century, commentators were reading the Ruth passage as an example of levirate marriage. Josephus clearly saw the ritual portrayed in the book of Ruth as a representation of this rite, as is evidenced by his comments in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*. He wrote that Boaz "bid the woman to loose his shoe and spit in his face, according to the law; and when this was done [Boaz] married Ruth, and they had a son within a year's time."² Likewise, Methodist commentator Adam Clarke (circa 1760–1832) wrote that the laws explaining what was happening in Ruth 4 are "given at large in Deut.xxv.5–9."³ Like Josephus and Clarke, most scholars, whether LDS⁴ or non-LDS,⁵ tend to see the rite described in Ruth 4 as a biblical example of levirate marriage.

Admittedly, on a superficial level there appear to be significant correlations between the passages in Ruth 4 and those in Deuteronomy 25. In the end, however, there are a number of reasons why Ruth chapter 4 is likely not intended to be a representation of a traditional levirate marriage ritual.⁶

First of all, unlike the widowed woman in Exodus chapter 25, Ruth does not spit in the face of the man who refuses to marry her, which many sources indicate is a requisite part of the ceremony of levirate marriage.⁷ One commentator noted that the Boethusians, or Sanhedrin, "held that the *yevamah* is required actually to spit in the levir's face and this is also stated in two manuscripts of the Septuagint, in Josephus's *Antiquities*, and in some of the apocryphal books, but the talmudic scholars held it to be sufficient if the elders see her spitting."⁸ Since Ruth neither spits in the face of her intended, nor on the ground, hers cannot be a levirate marriage. It will also be noted that the unnamed male kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) in the story of Ruth incurs no disgrace when he declines to play his part.⁹ If this is an example of levirate marriage, it runs contrary to scripturally dictated practice.

Second, in the story of Ruth and Boaz it is *not* the woman who removes the man's shoe. Rather, the unnamed male kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) is depicted as removing his own shoe. This too is contrary to the law surrounding levirate marriage and contrary to what happens in the Deuteronomic passage in question.¹⁰ Thus, again, something other than the standard levirate marriage ceremony is being depicted here.

Third, in the book of Ruth the unnamed kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) is *not* Ruth's husband's brother—as is required by Jewish law. He appears to be, at best, a distant relative.¹¹ Thus, again, this cannot be an effort to fulfill the custom of levirate marriage. Something entirely different is being depicted here.

Fourth, the words for the levirate obligation (*yābām*) and for the kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) are totally unrelated. *Yābām* can mean either “husband's brother,” or to perform the duty of such to “a brother's widow.”¹² However, the book of Ruth does not use *yābām* but rather the term *gō'ēl*, which indicates a redeemer (particularly of consecrated things or people) or an avenger and signifies that these roles are performed based on the authority of kinship. A “kinsman-redeemer” purchases a relative from slavery (actual or potential); a “kinsman-avenger” provides justice on behalf of a relative.¹³ Of course both concepts are in the image of God as Redeemer—but the implications and linguistic connotations are entirely different. Thus, again, the connection between levirate marriage and the rite depicted in Ruth 4 seems stretched.

Fifth, Obed—the son born to Boaz and Ruth—is spoken of as the son of Boaz rather than as the son of Ruth's deceased husband, Mahlon (see Ruth 4:18–22; Septuagint Ruth 4:13). This would be contrary to levirate marriage, which is primarily for the purpose of raising seed up to a deceased brother.¹⁴ In other words, when the *levir* fathers a child through his sister-in-law, it is not considered his offspring, but rather the offspring of his deceased brother. Since Obed is described as being Boaz's son, the rite performed in Ruth 4 cannot be an example of levirate marriage.¹⁵

Finally, one text notes: “In biblical law the levir [or brother-in-law] does not require a formal marriage (*kiddushin*) to the *yevamah* [or sister-in-law] since the personal status tie, the *zikkah* between them, arises automatically upon the death of the husband of the *yevamah*.”¹⁶ Elsewhere we read: “If a man died childless, his widow was not free to remarry but was considered to be already betrothed to his brother.”¹⁷ Thus, whereas levirate marriage did not require—nor allow—a marriage contract to be initiated (as the couple were considered already married), in the book of Ruth a formal marriage is expected and, in the end, performed. Thus the

rites depicted in Deuteronomy 25 and Ruth 4 appear to be different—one having to do with the loss of a family member and the other to do with something that is potentially different altogether.

So if Ruth 4:7–8 is not an example of levirate marriage, what is it? While we cannot say for certain, and the chapter offers us little by way of clues,¹⁸ there are a couple of elements which may at least help us to form a hypothesis about what the author intended his audience to understand. Our primary focus here will be the removal of the shoe. However, we must be cautious to approach the passage exegetically rather than eisegetically¹⁹ if we wish to avoid the pitfalls encountered by previous exegetes.

In modern as well as ancient cultures, shoes have served not only a practical function but also an aesthetic one. However, when employed in Biblical ritual, shoes have an almost exclusively symbolic purpose.²⁰ For example, they can represent one's preparation for a task (see Exodus 12:11; Ephesians 6:15; Matthew 10:10; Mark 6:9). Sometimes they imply the status of the wearer—freedom for the shod (see Luke 15:22) and enslavement or poverty for the barefoot individual (see 2 Chronicles 28:15; Isaiah 20:2). In contrast, going barefoot is occasionally utilized as a sign of mourning (see 2 Samuel 15:30; Ezekiel 24:17, 23).²¹ Finally, perhaps the most commonly associated meanings have to do with the removal of shoes when one enters hallowed ground (see Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15; Acts 7:33).²² Thus, we see footwear as more than a convenience and more than an accessory. Shoes, slippers, and sandals are important symbolic articles for ancient and modern Israel—God's covenant people. Aside from the aforementioned symbolic uses of the shoe or slipper, there is one additional use worthy of our examination. It is the ceremony of the shoe²³ alluded to in the Hebrew Bible, in the records of ancient Mesopotamia,²⁴ and in the sacred rites of modern covenant Israel.

It appears from a number of sources, scriptural and otherwise, that the transfer of property in ancient times was accompanied by a rite or ritual consisting primarily of the removal of shoes. The Hebrews referred to this ritual by the name of *halitzah* ("to draw off").²⁵ One text notes, "When someone sells his property . . . he loses permanently or temporarily his legal right to it . . . and he 'lifts up his hand or foot from it, and

places that of the new owner in it.' Thus it is logical to conclude that this expression which had at first only a legal meaning developed into a symbolic meaning. Then the biblical tradition took a further step. The 'lifting up of the foot' became more concrete and real with the 'pulling off of the shoe.'²⁶ This act before witnesses was a legal attestation²⁷ that the party divesting itself of a particular piece of property was doing so willingly—and had formally and officially relinquished all future claims to that particular piece of property.²⁸ The removal of the sandal, slipper, or shoe at the end of the rite signified that the transaction was completed and that the ritual was legally binding.²⁹ One commentary described the meaning of the rite as follows: "A person's garments are, so to speak, part of himself, and . . . if a person removes his garments in order to show his willingness to deprive himself of everything in life, he ought also to remove his shoes."³⁰ This same author continues:

Amongst the Hebrews business transactions took place publically in the market-place so that the presence of the whole community, or at least ten of the elders, served to confirm them. (Gen. xxiii.) . . . As an aid to the memory, therefore, there arose the custom of drawing off the shoes in transferring a possession or domain. (Ruth iv, 7.) The idea was that the person who gave up a possession should show by removing his shoe that he was thus divesting himself of something before the witnesses. This could then be regarded as a public declaration that he was withdrawing from the property and handing it over to another person.³¹

Because the shoe was a natural symbol of possession, the removal of the same implied divestment.³² As noted, this act (although symbolic) had binding, legal implications clearly understood by all who were called upon to witness the rite,³³ and in a time when the ability to write was greatly limited, it allowed even the illiterate to participate in legal transactions. Because of biblical evidence and extracanonical support, scholars believe that this rite was at one time very widespread in the ancient Near East.³⁴

Although the common assumption that the rite depicted in Ruth 4 is traditionally seen as an example of levirate marriage, it appears likely that it is instead a prime example of the ceremony of the shoe. The salient portion of Ruth reads: "(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, 'Buy it yourself.' And he removed his sandal" (New International Version, Ruth 4:7–8).³⁵ One commentary on this passage states:

When the unnamed³⁶ kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*) arrives the next morning at the city gate, Boaz is waiting for him. The dialogue is brief. Boaz brings together the kinsman-redeemer and 10 elders. In typical patriarchal fashion the subject matter is not the women—Naomi and Ruth—but rather the dead man Elimelech's land. Boaz tells the kinsman-redeemer that Naomi is selling it and he is the first in line to acquire it. . . . The kinsman-redeemer agrees to redeem Elimelech's land. Boaz, however, counters that the Moabite Ruth is part of Elimelech's property. Since Elimelech's daughter-in-law is still able to provide an heir for her dead husband's name and land, the kinsman-redeemer is, in effect, committing himself to providing that heir by buying the land. . . . This new information changes things. It is one thing to buy land—and convenient that being a close relative to the deceased gives one the first option to do so. It is quite another thing to realize that the land will ultimately belong to the son whom one will raise up for the deceased. The kinsman-redeemer understands the purchase of Elimelech's land to entail risk to his own inheritance and so declines the opportunity to purchase it. He then passes on to Boaz the right to redeem the land. . . . A narrative parenthesis explains the significance of what happens next. . . . Transfer of right or ownership of property was solemnized not by a handshake nor by a written contract as it is today but by each party's removing his sandal and giving it to the other.³⁷

So the subject is the transfer of property—specifically land (traditionally associated with this ritual), but also Ruth, who, in an ancient patriarchal milieu, would have had the status of property in such circumstances.³⁸ Here the removal of a shoe symbolizes the fact that rights to the land Elimelech once owned—and rights to his daughter-in-law (who might provide a legal heir)—are now being transferred.³⁹ Indeed, one commentator noted that Ruth 4:7 “is best understood as an overly terse way of describing shoe symbolism in two different kinds of transaction; in an exchange transaction, the parties exchanged shoes, while in the matter of giving up the right of redemption, the one ceding the right gave his shoe to the one taking over the right.”⁴⁰ As noted above, the right to freely walk on or dwell upon an estate belonged only to the owner—and the shoe served as the perfect symbol of the right of possession.⁴¹ Anciently, the foot symbolized power or possession (see Psalm 8:6; Psalm 36:11; Joshua 10:24) as well as territorial claims (see Deuteronomy 1:36; 11:24; Joshua 1:3; 14:9).⁴² Here the kinsman-redeemer (*gō’ēl*) was acknowledging that he had willingly divested himself of his natural right to Elimelech’s former property. Thus one commentator states that the book of “Ruth has preserved the older meaning of the shoe ceremony—a renunciation of a right.”⁴³

Of course, it is possible that at some point in history there was a connection between, or blending of, the ceremony of the shoe and levirate marriage⁴⁴—after all, the latter of these was not solely concerned with producing a male heir for a deceased relative. It was just as concerned, if not more so, with the perpetuation of family property within the immediate family.⁴⁵ Regardless, clearly the meaning of the rite described in the book of Ruth is different from that of levirate marriage, and it appears that there are limited connections that can be made between these two rites. Despite involving the removal of a shoe, the context of the Deuteronomical rite shows that what is intended is significantly different from what is represented in the book of Ruth.

The connections sometimes made between the ceremony of the shoe and the removal of footwear when entering sacred space are not so tenuous, however. As noted above, a prime message in the removal of shoes during ritual is that one is divesting oneself of ownership or property. It

is a legally binding acknowledgment that what was once yours is no longer such, of your own free will and choice. We see examples in scripture of individuals removing their shoes upon entering sacred space, Moses (see Exodus 3:5) and Joshua (see Joshua 5:15) being the chief among them. In what sense are they divesting themselves of something when they perform such an act? The answer to that question seems obvious. In his fourth-century *Instructions to Initiates into the Mysteries*, Cyril of Jerusalem stated, "As soon, then, as ye entered [the inner chamber], ye put off your tunic [or street clothes]; and this was an image of *putting off the old man with his deeds*."⁴⁶ In the spirit of Cyril's comments, it seems fair to say that the removal of shoes upon entering sacred ground symbolizes the temporary divesting of oneself of the world and its ways—exchanging temporal property for a spiritual residence. It is a symbolic effort to set aside the natural man and the things of this fallen world in order to consecrate one's life and embrace the things of God, including his presence, glory, and Spirit. Thus, one typologist wrote, "putting off shoes on entering a holy place represents leaving earthly contact outside . . . and [divesting] oneself of vice."⁴⁷ Another source states, "Shoes are necessary only on the earth because of the filth of the ground. By removing them, we symbolically leave the world outside the Lord's sanctuary."⁴⁸

Elsewhere we read of a connection between the ceremony of the shoe and the removal of one's footwear when entering sacred ground; anciently, "washing was a symbol of consecration, and it was necessary for the worshiper to wash his garments previous to his taking part in any special sacred function (Lev. xvi, etc.), but as shoes, on account of the material from which they were made, could not be washed, they were removed as an act of consecration."⁴⁹ Thus, when you and I participate in the ordinances of the temple, we technically divest ourselves of the world via approaching the temple physically clean and also via removal of not only our street clothing but also our shoes. Such actions do not constitute the ceremony of the shoe, but they do prepare us to divest ourselves of the world in the ordinances of the house of the Lord—and they do suggest a subtle connection between the ceremony and our actions of preparation.

We now turn our attention to the specifics of how this ancient rite of property transferal specifically relates to God's modern covenant people and their worship patterns today. The symbolic meanings underlying the ceremony of the shoe, as delineated in this paper, seem germane to modern temple worship.

First of all, removing shoes as part of the covenant-making process in ancient Semitic societies signaled the participants' willingness to divest themselves of some possession—often property which they formerly had a right to. Then is it not possible that the rite manifests their hope of gaining something better through the fulfillment of their part in the covenant?⁵⁰ For example, when Adam and Eve willingly partook of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they divested themselves of Eden (with its ease and luxury) in hopes of gaining the celestial kingdom.⁵¹ They made a choice to renounce that property because they knew something better awaited them.

Similarly, in the holy temple, patrons symbolically divest themselves of their inheritance in the premortal existence (i.e., the "first estate") so that they can live in the "lone and dreary world" (the "second estate")—all in the hopes of gaining the celestial kingdom.⁵² Thus, like Adam and Eve—or Ruth's unnamed kinsman-redeemer—we once willingly covenanted to relinquish our right to remain in the premortal existence because we knew something better awaited us, namely, the celestial kingdom. We made a trade, as it were. We took a calculated risk. In the temple, when entering into that covenant with God, we physically remove our shoes as a symbolic statement that such was done of our own free will and choice, and with the knowledge and belief that God will fulfill his portion of that covenant by preparing for us a "promised land," even the celestial kingdom. John Tvedtnes has suggested that "the Hebrew for sandal (*na'al*) is probably a wordplay with (*nahal*), meaning 'inheritance.'"⁵³ So the removal of the footwear when participating in the ceremony of the shoe actually highlights what that rite is about. It suggests to the participant that inheritance (or land) is the focus—and in a temple context those lands are the premortal existence, Eden, and the yet-future celestial kingdom.⁵⁴

On a related note, David R. Mace explained that in biblical times, "possession of the land and marriage with the widow went together."⁵⁵ Relating this idea to the story of Ruth, there appear to be symbolic implications in this concept. Just as the land and the bride are connected in the story, so also do the promised land (or celestial kingdom) and membership in the Church (which is the "bride of Christ"—see, for example, Ephesians 5:22–33) go together. It is through the restored rites of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ that those who believe become Christ's "bride" and lay hold upon an inheritance in the land which belongs to him.⁵⁶ We each seek a place in the celestial kingdom of our God. The ceremony of the shoe highlights that desire and our commitment to connect ourselves to the Bridegroom, that redemption might take place and an inheritance might be received. Of the symbolism inherent in the story of Ruth, one commentator wrote that Boaz "is a type for the Lord Jesus who owns the field and who marries those who were formerly foreigners and strangers, but who put their trust in Him and become His bride, the church."⁵⁷ Symbolically speaking, removal of the shoe is a ritualistic way of exhibiting faith in the Bridegroom and his ability to save or redeem. The early twentieth-century Scottish linguist and typologist Harold Bayley saw connections between the shoe or slipper and Christ. He noted that just as a shoe protects the wearer and shields him or her from dirt—"by taking it upon itself"—so also does Jesus shield those who seek to be his bride from the spiritual dirt we call sin.⁵⁸ This has relevance in the story of Ruth, both because Ruth and Boaz seem to typify the Church and her Bridegroom, and also because of Boaz's role to redeem Ruth via shouldering her burden and taking upon himself her trial—just as Christ willingly shoulders our burdens and takes upon himself our trials. Significantly, as in the story of Ruth, we must seek out a covenant relationship with Christ (our Bridegroom) and, metaphorically speaking, offer him our shoe as a representation that we have given up all we have because we trust in him and in all that he has promised to do for us and give to us.⁵⁹

As the evidence shows, levirate marriage and the ceremony regarding the transferal of property are not equivalent, or even harmonious, rites.

Indeed, as one commentator noted, “they are in open conflict” with each other.⁶⁰ Thus, rather than assuming that the book of Ruth preserves a traditional example of the former Deuteronomic rite, it seems more fitting to draw from Ruth’s experience a message about property or inheritance rites and their application to our modern covenant relationship with Christ and the work which we do in his holy temples.

Notes

1. See David R. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 95, 113. See also Richard Kalmin, “Levirate Law,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:296.
2. Flavius Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews,” in *The Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1981), 121.
3. Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1930), 2:201.
4. See, for example, James R. Baker, *Women’s Rights in Old Testament Times* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 140–48; Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 74; Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 213; Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 228.
5. See, for example, Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Judges and Ruth* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 306–7; Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 161; Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*, 2:201; Kalmin, “Levirate Law,” 4:296.
6. Mace notes that Ruth “is not a very good illustration” of levirate marriage “because there are several irregularities in the account—so much so that some scholars have doubted whether it is really an instance of the levirate at all.” Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 98. See also Kalmin, “Levirate Law,” 4:296.
7. See Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971–72), 11:126. See also Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1987), 6:193n65; Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews,” 121; Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 97, 110; Baker, *Women’s Rights*, 147; E. John Hamlin, *Surely There Is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 59.
8. Roth, *Encyclopaedia*, 126.

9. See Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 100; George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 2:848.
10. See Deuteronomy 25:7–10; Roth, *Encyclopaedia*, 122, 126, 130; David Bridger, ed., *The New Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Behrman House, 1962), "Halitzah"; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 193–94; Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 99; Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews," 121; Baker, *Women's Rights*, 147; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 848.
11. See Roth, *Encyclopaedia*, 122; Bridger, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Halitzah"; Ginzberg, *Legends*, 193–94n65; Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 99; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 848; Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 59.
12. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 386; Claude F. Mariottini, "Onan," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:21; Victor P. Hamilton, "Marriage (Old Testament and Ancient Near East)," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:567.
13. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Lexicon*, 145; R. B. Taylor, "Avenger of Blood," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 80; A. R. S. Kennedy and A. G. MacLeod, "Kin (Next of), Kinsman, Avenger of Blood, Go'el," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 550–51.
14. See Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 101, 103.
15. See Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 99; Campbell, *Ruth*, 160–61. See also Baker, *Women's Rights*, 148, who sees this problem in the text but seems dismissive of it (as he is a proponent of the theory that the book of Ruth is a case of levirate marriage).
16. Roth, *Encyclopaedia*, 124.
17. Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 674. I express gratitude to Dr. RoseAnn Benson for bringing this source to my attention.
18. Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 847.
19. Whereas *exegesis* is the practice of drawing out of a text the original author's intended meaning, *eisegesis* is reading into a text with preconceived notions held by the reader. The former is appropriate methodology, whereas the latter does violence to the text and is often pejoratively referred to as "proof-texting."
20. E. A. Speiser, "Of Shoes and Shekels," in *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 77 (1940), 15; Frank E. Eakin Jr., *The Religion and Culture of Israel: An Introduction to Old Testament Thought* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), 238.
21. Maurice H. Farbridge, *Studies in Biblical and Semitic Symbolism* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), 214, 224.
22. I say this is the *most* common connotation not because it appears the most frequently in scripture, as it certainly does not. Simply put, lay Latter-day

- Saints more often than not gravitate toward this meaning when they contemplate the removal of shoes. Of course, this is a generalization, but in my experience there is a statistically high number of Saints who make this connection, even when it is not intended by the passage.
23. Speiser, "Shoes," 18. See also Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 57; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 849.
 24. Records from Nuzi, an ancient Mesopotamian city, attest to a ceremony of property transfer or land ownership wherein the person selling (or transferring property) must remove his shoes as evidence that the transfer had indeed taken place. See Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 58.
 25. Bridger, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Halitzah."
 26. Ernest R. Lacheman, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 56 (1937), 53, 56. Thomas Thompson and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *Vetus Testamentum* 18 (1968): 92, make a similar claim.
 27. Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 274; Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), "shoe, sandal"; Speiser, "Shoes," 15; Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 271; Eakin, *Religion and Culture*, 238; G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Ruth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), cited in Cundall and Morris, *Tyndale Commentaries*, 306; Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 312–13; G. M. Tucker, "Shorter Communications: Witnesses and 'Dates' in Israelite Contracts," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966): 42.
 28. As one commentator put it, "The meaning of this custom was that the adopter would never go again and put his foot in his former property." Lacheman, *Biblical Literature*, 53. Elsewhere we read that by removing the shoe he was "intimating in this that, whatever right he had to walk or go on the land, he conveyed and transferred it. . . . This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel." Leslie F. Church, ed., *The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), O.T. 293. See also Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 97–98; Tucker, "Shorter Communications," 44.
 29. Cundall and Morris, *Tyndale Commentaries*, 307.
 30. Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 223–24.
 31. Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 9.
 32. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 98.
 33. One commentator on the rite noted: "To confirm whatever was agreed upon, one man drew off . . . his sandal. . . . It is a curious custom, but at least its unusualness would mean that it attracted attention, and this probably was its object. . . . People would know of the agreement reached." Cundall and Morris, *Tyndale Commentaries*, 306. Elsewhere we read: "A man renouncing property

- rites removed a sandal . . . , a gesture that everyone understood and considered binding if witnessed by the elders." "Great People of the Bible and How they Lived," *Readers Digest* (Pleasantville, NY: Readers Digest, 1974), 133, cited in *Old Testament: Genesis–2 Samuel (Religion 301) Student Manual*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 263.
34. See, for example, Thompson and Thompson, *Vetus*, 90.
 35. One commentator noted that, in the book of Ruth, "the delivering of a shoe signified that the next-of-kin transferred to another a sacred obligation." Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 9.
 36. According to Jewish legend, the unnamed kinsman-redeemer was Boaz's older brother, Tob. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4:34 and 6:188n34.
 37. Alice L. Laffey, "Ruth," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 557. See also Church, *Matthew Henry Commentary*, 293.
 38. See, for example, Speiser, "Shoes," 18; Laffey, "Ruth," 557.
 39. Campbell, *Ruth*, 150.
 40. Campbell, *Ruth*, 150.
 41. See James Strahan, "Ruth," in *A Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Arthur S. Peake (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1919), 272. "The Halakah explains Ruth 4:7 to refer to the form of acquisition known in rabbinic jurisprudence as Halifin, consisting in the handing over of an object by the purchaser to the seller, as a symbolical substitute for the object bought." Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6:194n65.
 42. See Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 58.
 43. Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 849. "The shoe ceremony at the Bethlehem gate was probably like signing a document of transfer. . . . The purpose of the ceremony was to give legal status to a transfer of responsibility involving 'redeeming and exchanging' (4:7)." Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 57–58.
 44. One commentator suggests that perhaps "the Book of Ruth was written late, at a time when the old custom [of *levirate marriage*] had been modified." See Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 100.
 45. See Hamilton, "Marriage," 567.
 46. Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical Lectures," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers—Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 7:147; emphasis in original. Hugh Nibley offers the following rendering of the passage: "Immediately upon entering you removed your street clothes. And that was the image of putting off the old man and his works." Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 280; or Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 516.

47. J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 152.
48. John A. Tvedtnes, "Priestly Clothing in Bible Times," in *Temple of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 671.
49. Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 273.
50. See Farbridge, *Symbolism*, 9, 224; Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 1021; Allen C. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 911–12; Douglas R. Edwards, "Dress and Ornamentation," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:234. Typologist J. C. Cooper noted that shoes represent control. Thus, removal of the shoe symbolizes the relinquishing of control. See Cooper, *Illustrated Encyclopaedia*, 152. W. C. Hazlitt noted that the Semites were not the only ones to use the "ritual of the shoe" as a symbol for divestment rites. He wrote: "It appears to have been a custom among the Chinese for an official, on relinquishing his duties, to suspend his shoes in a conspicuous place." W. C. Hazlitt, *Dictionary of Faiths and Folklore: Beliefs, Superstitions and Popular Customs* (London: Bracken Books, 1995), "shoes."
51. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 203. This perspective is unique to Latter-day Saints.
52. Of course, from a gospel perspective, the forfeiture of the premortal world (or "first estate") is permanent only in that we will never again be in that same state (as spirits abiding in the presence of the Father). However, those who successfully traverse the mortal experience will certainly return to the Father, then inhabiting this earth as a celestialized orb. Hence, our forfeiture of the "first estate" is somewhat tentative.
53. The quote continues: "The medial consonants are both pharyngeal fricatives, one voiced and the other unvoiced." John Tvedtnes, cited in Baker, *Women's Rights*, 157n26.
54. One might argue that the temple rite during which one removes one's shoes is different from the rite of removal of shoes depicted in Ruth 4—particularly since during the endowment *all* ceremonial temple clothing is removed, not just the shoes. However, in Ruth 4 it is only the shoes which are taken off. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that in the temple the removal of the shoes is its own rite, even though it is performed alongside the ritual of clothing. This is evidenced by the fact that one puts on ceremonial clothes twice during the temple endowment, but one removes and replaces the shoes only once—specifically when Adam and Eve leave Eden and you and I metaphorically leave the premortal realm. Thus, the rite of clothing and that of the removal of shoes are separate, even though they are once placed side by side in the temple. Therefore, the distinctions between the ceremony of the shoe in Ruth 4 and that which takes place in the holy endowment are more perceived than real.

55. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 106.
56. Matthew Henry drew a similar analogy. See Church, *Matthew Henry Commentary*, 293. Of course, Christ received his inheritance of the land just as each of us does—through obedience to the Father.
57. Walter L. Wilson, *A Dictionary of Bible Types* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 48. Typologist Ada Habershon wrote: “Boaz was a type of Christ . . . as the lord of the harvest, the near kinsman, the supplier of wants, the redeemer of the inheritance, the man who gives rest, the wealthy kinsman, and the bridegroom.” Ada R. Habershon, *Study of the Types* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dregel, 1974), 134. See also Joseph Fielding McConkie and Donald W. Parry, *A Guide to Scriptural Symbols* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 22; Kevin J. Conner, *Interpreting the Symbols and Types* (Portland, OR: City Bible, 1992), 110, 111.
58. Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Inquiry into the Origin of Certain Letters, Words, Names, Fairy-Tales, Folklore, and Mythologies* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1990–93), 1:227.
59. Their covenant depicted by the removal of the shoe appears primarily focused on the surrender of temporal things, or property. However, the connotation or implications in temple worship is that we are surrendering more than just property (that is, the premortal abode), but also our personal wills. In return Christ is said to offer us the celestial kingdom and to make us as he is. Thus today something highly spiritual is implied through a rite that initially had a rather temporal focus.
60. Mace, *Hebrew Marriage*, 104. See also Hamlin, *Theological Commentary*, 58, 59. As another example of the misapplication of the “ceremony of the shoe,” some see connections between this rite and the selling of slaves in Hebrew Bible times. For example, in Amos 8:6 we read: “That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes.” See also Amos 2:6. Of this verse David Noel Freedman and Francis I. Andersen wrote: “The circumstances of this nefarious and strictly illegal practice of buying and selling debtors into slavery is what the prophet [Amos] is talking about.” Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 801. E. A. Speiser, however, noted: “The ordinary interpretation of this saying that the poor could be enslaved for so trifling a thing as a pair of shoes is unconvincing . . . and economically improbable.” Speiser, “Shoes,” 18. See also Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 312. Speiser rejects a literal reading of the verse, insisting instead that some connection to the ceremony of the shoe is intended by the text. Speiser adds this: “Shoes . . . must be regarded in such instances as token payments to validate special transactions by lending them the appearance of normal business practice.” Speiser, “Shoes,” 17. True, slaves were seen as property and thus the owner had a right to them—and in this regard one might conjecture some connection between the passage and the “ceremony of the shoe.” However, the context of the passage at hand

suggests that these were not slaves in the proper sense of the word (i.e., those without legal rights). Rather, these were individuals who had incurred debt through the dishonesty and trickery of corrupt merchants. Thus they were not slaves in the traditional sense of the word—and therefore the ceremony of the shoe would have had no place in this context. Indeed, the traditional interpretation of this passage (Amos 8:6) has to do with sandals as representations of the derisory amount of money a human's worth had been reduced to. See, for example, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, "The Twelve Minor Prophets," in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 1:315; Robert Martin-Achard and S. Paul Re'emi, *International Theological Commentary: Amos and Lamentations—God's People in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 58–59; Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 801–2; Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible*, 840; Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary*, 675. See also David Allan Hubbard, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joel and Amos* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 220–21. Thus, contra Speiser's interpretation, most commentators see nothing ritualistic taking place in this passage.