



Ruth - Chapter Three

Summary of Chapter Three

Naomi hatches a plan to bring Ruth to closer attention to Boaz. He would be at the threshing floor all evening, would dine there and then sleep on the floor. Ruth was instructed to prepare herself in her best clothes and perfume, go to Boaz but not be seen by him until he was asleep. She was then to go under the covers and sleep at his feet, a sign of great respect and loyalty.

When Boaz awoke at midnight he was startled to find a woman in his bed but when he realised it was Ruth he understood the worthiness of her actions, that they were not promiscuous and that, as a close relative, though not the closest, there was a course of action he must take.

He instructed her to stay with him until morning but to leave without being seen. As a parting gift he gave her a generous amount of barley to sustain her and Naomi. On returning home, Ruth recounted to Naomi all that had happened and that Boaz had said he would resolve the matter.

IV. Ruth 3:1-18 - Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing-Floor

This third scene depicts the second crucial encounter between Ruth and Boaz, framed by the recurrence of Naomi calling Ruth 'my daughter' (v.1 and v.18). Several uses of 'know', Hebrew *yada*, and related terms from the same root, are woven into this scene: 'kinsman' (v.2), literally 'one known' or 'do not make yourself known' (v.3); 'observe (or 'know') the place where he lies' (v.4); 'the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman' (v.11); and 'until you learn (or 'know') how the matter turns out' (v.18).

¹ Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you.'

Ruth 3:1

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her. The time of the harvest was over, and certainly Ruth and Boaz had been around each other much in the weeks covering the barley and the wheat harvest (2:23). They had much opportunity to get to know each other. However, there is no evidence that a real relationship was developing; Ruth was a worker and Boaz a wealthy landowner and employer. They were not paired off as a couple with one-on-one time with each other; rather, they spent their time together in the context of a group - the men and women who worked for Boaz in the harvest. So over the period of the harvests, Ruth and Boaz got to know each other pretty well - by seeing what kind of people the other was around a larger group.

I need to seek some security for you. Naomi knew that life for Ruth would become even harder if she did not have a man to provide long-term food and shelter, and for her to have children of her own. Refer to the comments made on 1:8-9 and 4:13.

So that it be well with you. Naomi knew that Ruth could best be taken care of if she was married, so she suggested that she appeal to Boaz for marriage and by having children, as confirmed by: <<*Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you*>> (Deuteronomy 6:3). The Hebrew word for security in v.1 is the same word used in Ruth 1:9, where Naomi hoped that her daughters-in-law would find rest and security in the home of a new husband. This Hebrew word *manowach* speaks of what a home should be - a place of rest and security.

² Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor.

Ruth 3:2

Now here is our kinsman Boaz. The literal translation is: **Is not Boaz our relative?** The rhetorical question connects our kinsman Boaz and security or rest in 1:9 and v.1 here.

One might easily think that this was inappropriately forward of Naomi to suggest this to Ruth. It is possible to think that Naomi plotted with Ruth to make her a man-trap, to go out and hunt down a reluctant Boaz for marriage. Not at all; Naomi's suggestion to Ruth was rooted in a peculiar custom in ancient Israel - the meaning behind the Hebrew word *goel* or kinsman-redeemer. She is simply reminding Ruth of the role that Boaz could legally play.

The *goel* or kinsman-redeemer had a specifically defined role in Israel's family life:

- He was responsible to buy a fellow Israelite out of slavery: <<*If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien's family, after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them*>> (Leviticus 25:47-48).
- He was responsible to be the 'avenger of blood' to make sure the murderer of a family member answered to the crime: <<*The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence*>> (Numbers 35:19).
- He was responsible to buy back family land that had been forfeited: <<*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*>> (Leviticus 25:25).
- He was responsible to carry on the family name by marrying a childless widow: <<*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, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 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.' Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, 'I have no desire to marry her', 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.' Throughout Israel his family shall be known as 'the house of him whose sandal was pulled off'*>> (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Therefore the kinsman-redeemer was responsible to safeguard the persons, the property, and the posterity of the family. Words from the root *g'l* are used with a variety of meanings in the OT, but the fundamental idea is that of fulfilling one's obligations as a kinsman. If the closer relative or Boaz did not fulfil this duty towards Elimelech, who was now deceased, then the direct family and name of Elimelech would perish. Perpetuating the family name of Elimelech and every man in Israel was thought to be an important duty. These protections

showed how important it was to God to preserve the institution of the family in Israel and that it is also important to him today.

He is winnowing barley tonight. The winnowing took place during the breezes that begin after sundown, refer to the comment made on 2:17-18.

The threshing floor. This was located to the east of the city so that the westerly wind carried away the chaff. Ruth, leaving the city, goes <<**down to the threshing floor**>> (v.3); Boaz, leaving the threshing floor, goes <<**up to the [city] gate**>> (4:1).

The harvesting process sees the husks and straw removed by threshing, and they are lighter than the edible kernels; when a farmer tosses threshed wheat into the air, the wind drives away the chaff. This process is often used as an analogy for God's judgement: <<*The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish*>> (Psalm 1:4-6), and: <<*His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire*>> (Luke 3:17).

³ Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

Ruth 3:3

Wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes. This is perhaps a sign that her mourning for her late husband was now over, as it was for David following the loss of one of his children: <<*Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate*>> (2 Samuel 12:20). She must make herself attractive, like a betrothed woman: <<*Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, ear-rings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head*>> (Ezekiel 16:9-12), and meet Boaz at the right time: after he has finished eating and drinking: <<*You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound*>> (Psalm 4:7), and: <<*You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the*>>

human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart>> (Psalm 104:14-15).

⁴ When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.’ ⁵ She said to her, ‘All that you tell me I will do.’

Ruth 3:4-5

To uncover his feet and lie down there will demonstrate her dependence on him in view of her bold marriage proposal (v.9). It is sometimes suggested that ‘his feet’, literally ‘the place of his feet,’ Hebrew *margelot*, is a euphemism for sexual contact, but there is no evidence for this and it would be out of place in this story. In the culture of the day, this was understood to be the role of a servant - to lay at their master’s feet and be ready for any command of the master. So, when Naomi told Ruth to lie down at Boaz’ feet, she told her to come to him in a totally humble, submissive way.

The sages understood Ruth’s conduct as being fully for the sake of Heaven. Two women, Tamar and Ruth, sacrificed themselves for the sake of the tribe of Judah. Naomi decided that the best course of action, however daring and unconventional, was for Ruth herself to approach Boaz under the most intimate of circumstances and remind him of his responsibility to his uncle’s family (v.9). Then, convinced of her sincerity, his compassion for her bitter plight might be evoked.

One should not lose sight of the larger picture: Ruth came to claim a right. Boaz was her *goel*, her kinsman-redeemer, and she had the right to expect him to marry her and raise up a family to perpetuate the name of Elimelech. However, Naomi wisely counselled Ruth not to come as a victim demanding her rights, but as a humble servant, trusting in the goodness of her redeemer. In effect, she said to Boaz, ‘I respect you, I trust you, and I put my fate in your hands and in the hands of your God.’

He will tell you what to do. Of course, this was a situation that had the potential for disaster if Boaz should mistreat Ruth in some way. But Naomi and Ruth had the chance to get to know Boaz, and they knew what kind of man he was - a good man, a godly man, one to whom Ruth could confidently submit.

All that you tell me I will do. Ruth was submitting to Naomi as would any good child: <<*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*>> (Ephesians 6:1), and: <<*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord*>> (Colossians 3:20).

⁶ So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. ⁷ When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Ruth 3:6-7

She went down, uncovered his feet, and lay down. Ruth was true to her word, humbly and wisely received the counsel of her mother-in-law Naomi: <<**All that you tell me I will do**>> (v.5).

He went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. There was a good reason why Boaz slept at the threshing floor. These were the days of the Judges, when there was much political and social instability in Israel. It was not unusual for gangs of thieves to come and steal all the hard-earned grain a farmer had grown. Boaz slept at the threshing floor to guard his crop against the kind of attacks described in: <<**Now they told David, 'The Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and are robbing the threshing-floors'**>> (1 Samuel 23:1). More importantly, it had been a long and hard day's work, Boaz had dined well and he was in a contented mood, pleased with the way the day's work had progressed.

She came quietly. Ruth moved in stealth so as not to awaken Boaz, as described in other accounts: <<**But Jael wife of Heber took a tent-peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground – he was lying fast asleep from weariness – and he died**>> (Judges 4:21), and: <<**So David and Abishai went to the army by night; there Saul lay sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head; and Abner and the army lay around him**>> (1 Samuel 26:7).

⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! ⁹ He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.'

Ruth 3:8-9

At midnight the man was startled and turned over. This was an amazing scene. It could be well imagined that Boaz was indeed startled, waking up in the night as he turned in his sleep, knowing that someone was out there but not being able to see clearly because of the darkness and the sleep in his eyes. Since one reason for Boaz to be there was to protect against thieves, it must have given him quite a shock to wake up and know someone was there. However, his shock quickly turned to wondering when he found out the visitor was a woman. This would present him with further problems if any of his workmen were to discover Ruth with him.

Ruth, your servant i.e. a maidservant, Hebrew 'amah, is unlike a slave-servant, refer to the comment made on 2:13, and was one who enjoyed the privileges of an Israelite household, for example: <<*But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns*>> (Exodus 20:10), and could give birth to an heir: <<*Then she said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.'* So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her>> (Genesis 30:3-4).

Spread your cloak or wings. Although this is an expression for 'the edge of your garment', spread in order to claim her in marriage, here it evokes the mention of the Lord's 'wings' in 2:12 and Boaz as an embodiment of the Lord's character.

For an interesting analogy with the incident when Jesus healed a sick woman, refer to the comments made on Luke 8:45-56 on the web site.

You are next-of-kin or kinsman-redeemer. Refer to the comment made later on 3:12-13.

Ruth was saying, in effect, "As a close relative, you are obliged to redeem the estate of my husband in accordance with Leviticus 25:25, otherwise Naomi will be forced to sell it." Ruth added, "Take me too, so that the name of the deceased will be perpetuated on his property (Rashi).

¹⁰ He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.'

Ruth 3:10

May you be blessed by the Lord, you have not gone after young men. Apparently, there was a considerable age difference between Ruth and Boaz. It also seems that, because of this, Boaz considered himself unattractive to Ruth and had therefore ruled out any idea of a romance between them. It also shows something else wonderful about Ruth: she based her attraction to Boaz more on respect than on image or appearance.

This last instance of your loyalty or kindness; that is, Ruth claiming Boaz as her redeemer (v.9). It was a greater act of kindness, given the implications of redemption. The first act of kindness was that shown earlier to Naomi (2:11). Boaz was impressed that Ruth was not merely seeking marriage with eligible young men but one that met the requirements of the God of Israel.

¹¹ And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman.

Ruth 3:11

I will do for you all that you ask. Boaz made Naomi look brilliant in her advice to Ruth. The plan worked perfectly.

A worthy woman, uses the Hebrew expression *‘eshet khayil*, that also means a virtuous woman, as used in: <<***A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels***>> (Proverbs 31:10). Therefore, he recognises that Ruth would make an excellent wife and mother. Refer to the comments made on 2:1, where Boaz was described as prominent; and 4:11, where the prayer is that Ruth will become as worthy as Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the patriarchs.

¹² But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. ¹³ Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.’

Ruth 3:12-13

There is another kinsman more closely related than I. The order of these relations is: brother, uncle, cousin, or close clan relative: <<***If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien’s family, after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them, or their uncle or their uncle’s son may redeem them, or anyone of their family who is of their own flesh may redeem them; or if they prosper they may redeem themselves***>> (Leviticus 25:47-49), <<***And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the Israelites a statute and ordinance, as the Lord commanded Moses***>> (Numbers 27:11). The use of this term, Hebrew *ga’al*, for ‘kinsman-redeemer’ is separate from the way the same word is used for the Lord ‘redeeming’ Israel, for example: <<***Say therefore to the Israelites, “I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement***>> (Exodus 6:6), and: <<***In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode***>> (Exodus 15:13); and as confirmed by NT usage of ‘redemption’. Boaz may only claim his right of redemption if the other redeemer is not willing, as confirmed by: <<***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.' Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, 'I have no desire to marry her', 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'>> (Deuteronomy 25:7-9).

Boaz agreed, but said that the privilege of redemption should be offered first to Elimelech's brother, a closer relative, who had rights under the law. Rashi does not clarify whether the brother here was Boaz's father or uncle.

As the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you is a solemn oath as also seen in: <<*And he replied, 'They were my brothers, the sons of my mother; as the Lord lives, if you had saved them alive, I would not kill you'*>> (Judges 8:19), and: <<*Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me and placed me on the throne of my father David, and who has made me a house as he promised, today Adonijah shall be put to death*>> (1 Kings 2:24).

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognise another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.'

Ruth 3:14

It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor. Boaz is concerned for propriety and for his and Ruth's good reputation. He did not want any ill-founded rumours to spread in the community: <<*So do not let your good be spoken of as evil*>> (Romans 14:16), and: <<*We intend that no one should blame us about this generous gift that we are administering, for we intend to do what is right not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of others*>> (2 Corinthians 8:20-21).

¹⁵ Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city.

Ruth 3:15

Six measures of barley. Boaz' ample supply was not only a generous gesture; it would also confirm his intentions to Naomi (v.17).

¹⁶ She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for

her, ¹⁷ saying, ‘He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, “Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.”’

Ruth 3:16-17

Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed literally means ‘with nothing,’ as in 1:21, and is confirmed by: <<*And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed*>> (Deuteronomy 15:13). Boaz functions in the story as the channel of the Lord’s recompense (2:12) and kindness (2:20) to Naomi.

¹⁸ She replied, ‘Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.’

Ruth 3:18

The man will not rest, but will settle the matter today. This was a time of considerable anxiety for Ruth. She had claimed her right to marriage, and would be married. The only question was to whom would she be married? Would it be to Boaz, or to the nearer kinsman-redeemer? The issue would be decided that very day as Boaz would go straight into the city to resolve the issue: <<*Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act*>> (Psalm 37:3-5).