

Ruth

Chapter 3

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 But 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 And she replied, “All that you say I will do.” 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings[a] over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” 10 And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. 12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.” 14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” 15 And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’” 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.”

3:1-18 Ruth 3 is the turning point in the book because Naomi conceives of a plan that can resolve the dilemma of the two impoverished widows. If Boaz would marry Ruth and act as “redeemer” (3:9), he would obligate himself to support both the widow he marries and the widow of the man whose property he redeems (4:3). Moreover, through the marriage the LORD could provide an heir who would give the family new and continuing life. The LORD will bless the plan with a far greater outcome than Naomi envisions here: from the union of Boaz and Ruth, the family line will lead to King David (4:17–22) and eventuate in David’s greater Son, Jesus, “the Christ” (Mt 1:1, 5, 16), “who is God over all, blessed forever” (Rom 9:5). (CC)

3:1 Naomi’s awakened hope (cf. 1:8–13) now moves her to undertake provision for Ruth’s future. (CSB)

seek rest for you. Naomi plays the matchmaker seeking a husband for her daughter-in-law. Arranged marriages were common in Israel (Gn 24; Jgs 14:1–10). (TLSB)

3:2 *winnowing barley tonight.* In the threshing season it was customary for the landowner to spend the night near the threshing floor to protect his grain from theft. (CSB)

threshing floor. Located on a hilltop, c 30 ft in diameter with a compacted clay or rock surface. (TLSB)

3:3 Ruth is instructed to prepare herself like a bride (see Eze 16:9–12). (CSB)

Wash ... anoint ... put on. Ruth prepared herself as a bride does for her husband with washing, anointing (olive oil, perhaps with perfume), and special attire. (TLSB)

cloak. Concealed her identity. (TLSB)

go down to the threshing floor. Women were not normally present at the evening revelries of the threshers (v. 14). (CSB)

eating and drinking. Harvest was a time of festivity (Isa 9:3; 16:9–10; Jer 48:33). (CSB)

As is commonly said, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” (TLSB)

3:4 *observe the place where he lies.* No amount of darkness could hide the embarrassment associated with approaching the wrong man! (TLSB)

uncover his feet and lie down. Although Naomi’s instructions may appear forward, the moral integrity of Naomi and Ruth is never in doubt (see v. 11). Naomi’s advice to Ruth is clearly for the purpose of appealing to Boaz’s kinsman obligation. Ruth’s actions were a request for marriage. Tamar, the mother of Perez (4:12), had also laid claim to the provision of the levirate (or kinsman-redeemer) law (Ge 38:13–30). (CSB)

The night’s chill would waken Boaz. In light of v 9, the uncovering of Boaz’s feet symbolized Ruth’s proposal for marriage. (TLSB)

3:5–6 Ruth was faithful to her vow in 1:16–17. (TLSB)

3:7 *his heart was merry.* Taken in moderation, wine is a gift of God that gladdens the heart (Ps 104:15). Boaz was a righteous man; therefore, it would be wrong to infer that he was drunk. He was content from a good meal and with knowledge of a bountiful crop. (TLSB)

3:8 *startled.* Out of a deep sleep. (TLSB)

a woman lay at his feet! Women would not be staying at the threshing floor. (TLSB)

3:9 *your servant.* Earlier, Boaz treated her as a member of his familial clan (2:19). (TLSB)

Spread your wings over your servant. A request for marriage (see Eze 16:8); a similar custom is still practiced in some parts of the Middle East today. There is a play on the words “wings” of the Lord (2:12) and “corners” (lit. “wings”) of the garment (here), both signifying protection. Boaz is vividly reminded that he must serve as the Lord’s protective wing to watch over Ruth. (CSB)

wings. Hbr *kanaph*, the outer garment that ancient men wrapped about themselves in the day and used as a blanket at night. A wife finds rest under the protective wing of her husband, just as Israel finds rest under the protective wing of Yahweh (2:12). Paul compares the relationship of Christ to the Church as a husband to his bride (Eph 5:25). Naomi’s gamble was that Boaz would be favorably impressed by Ruth’s loyalty and would agree to her marriage request. (TLSB)

As in their first meeting (2:2, 5), Ruth again took the initiative and surprised Boaz. As she then in hunger had sought food as sustenance for life, so here, the destitute widow sought life through a family. When Boaz realized that the person next to him was a woman, his first thought may have been that a prostitute had sought him out by mistake. Naturally, he will have conducted his interrogation in a whisper so as not to make matters embarrassing by arousing others through loud talk. (CC)

3:10 *blessed.* Similar to the greeting in 2:4; Boaz underscores the reality of the Lord's commitment to Ruth. (TLSB)

have made this last kindness greater than the first. By now, Ruth's virtue was known throughout Bethlehem. She could have married for love or for money, but she married for the sake of family loyalty. Though Ruth could have approached a young man her own age, she approaches Boaz, who is approximately the same age as Naomi. This is more evidence of the virtue of this woman. She thinks not of herself, but of Naomi, redeeming the property, and providing an heir for the family. All that Ruth does is motivated by fidelity to the Lord and His covenant. Boaz implies that he, too, trusts in Yahweh and sees His hand in all that Ruth does. (TLSB)

3:11 *I will do for you all that you ask.* Boaz agrees to marry Ruth. (TLSB)

worthy woman. See Pr 31:10. The Hebrew for this expression is similar to that used of Boaz in 2:1; thus the author maintains a balance between his descriptions of Ruth and Boaz. (CSB)

Boaz promised to settle the matter first thing in the morning with the man who was more closely related to Naomi and thus had the prior claim as redeemer of the inheritance. But the introduction of the factor that there was such a nearer redeemer is disturbing to us, the audience, and revives the tension in the story. This is another parallel to the patriarchal narratives, where obstacles frequently increase tension, but serve to demonstrate how God fulfilled his purposes despite them. (CC)

3:12 *redeemer nearer than I.* How Boaz was related to Ruth's former husband (Mahlon) is unknown, but the closest male relative had the primary responsibility to marry a widow. Naomi instructed Ruth to approach Boaz because he had already shown himself willing to be Ruth's protector. Boaz, however, would not bypass the directives of the law, which clearly gave priority to the nearest relative. (CSB)

Boaz cannot act alone, according to the Law (Lv 25:25). Like Ruth, Boaz modeled fidelity to the Lord and His covenant. (TLSB)

3:13 *Remain.* It would not be safe to be out late at night, esp for a young woman. Additionally, if she were seen, it would raise many questions. There is no reason to assume that Ruth or Boaz went beyond what Naomi said in vv 1–4, by engaging in sex. (TLSB)

as the LORD lives. Boaz commits himself by oath (cf. 1:17) to redeem the family property and to arrange Ruth's honorable marriage. (CSB)

Boaz willingly subjects himself to divine punishment should he not keep his word to Ruth. (TLSB)

Boaz was going to redeem the situation much like today when a person says he will redeem the time. Out of fidelity to the God of Israel and His covenant, Boaz was going beyond the letter of the Law (Lv 19:18; Mt 22:39; Rm 13:9–10). He was going to live by the spirit of the Law. He would provide the economic means in case the primary redeemer would not. He was also consenting to Ruth's desire to mother an heir to perpetuate the names of Elimelech and Mahlon. (TLSB)

3:14 *Let it not be known.* Scandalous rumors would have been exceedingly harmful, making it difficult for Boaz to pursue Naomi's and Ruth's claims to the family estate. (TLSB)

3:15 Boaz goes beyond the requirement of the law in supplying Ruth with grain from the threshing floor (see 2:15). (CSB)

garment. Ruth had frequently returned from Boaz's field in the evenings laden with grain; carrying grain in her garment would disguise it from curious eyes. She worked long hours to ward off poverty; carrying grain would quiet, not raise, suspicion about her activity. (TLSB)

six measures. A generous gift. (TLSB)

3:16 Most likely, Naomi slept little that night. (TLSB)

daughter. A tone of loving-kindness, but it also reflects how Naomi now viewed Ruth—as her daughter. (TLSB)

3:17 *empty-handed.* Again the empty-full motif. (CSB)

Through Boaz, the Lord was now reversing the “bitterness/Mara” of earlier days (1:20–21). Naomi returned from Moab empty. The full measure of grain would fill their bellies and anticipates, in due course, seed to fill Ruth's womb. (TLSB)

3:18 *Wait.* The Hebrew underlying this word is translated “sat” in 4:1. Thus the author prepares the reader for the next major scene, in which Boaz sits at the town gate to see the matter through. (CSB)

Ruth was not to worry. Naomi's plan for Ruth to find rest under the loving headship of a husband would soon be fulfilled. (TLSB)

Ch 3 Naomi acts in faith and hope as she sends Ruth to Boaz as a potential redeemer. These women do not simply take matters into their own hands. Their actions are based on the promises in God's Word, which sets a marvelous example for us. We can always approach our Redeemer, Jesus. • Lord Jesus, through Your Gospel promises, work in us so that we follow the example of Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and our father-in-faith Abraham, who waited patiently and received what was promised (Heb 6:15). Amen. (TLSB)