

Ruth

Chapter 3

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? ² Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.” ⁵ “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. ⁷ When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. ⁹ “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” ¹⁰ “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.” ¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “Don’t let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor.” ¹⁵ He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. ¹⁶ When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷ and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’ ” ¹⁸ Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled 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)

Ruth 3 parallels Ruth 2 since, in each chapter, scenes with Ruth and Naomi enclose the main scene with Ruth and Boaz. In chapter 2, the main scene is 2:3–17, enclosed by 2:2 and 2:18–22, and in chapter 3, the main scene is 3:7–15, enclosed by 3:1–6 and 3:16–18. The narrator, by reusing key (or related) words from earlier chapters, indicates that chapter 3 at least begins to resolve the problems of chapters 1 and 2, and that Boaz is the key in settling matters. Those key words include “security, rest” (מְנוּחָה) in 1:9 and “security, resting place” (מְנוּחָה) in 3:1; “acquaintance” (Qere מוֹדַע) or “relative” (Kethib מְיָרֵעַ) in 2:1 and “relative” (מוֹדַעַת) in 3:2; “wing” (כַּנְפֵּי) in 2:12 and 3:9; “faithfulness” (דָּקָה, *hesed*) in 1:8; 2:20; 3:10; “an honorable gentleman” (אִישׁ גְּבוֹרַת חַיִל) in 2:1 and “an honorable woman” (אִשְׁתׁ חַיִל) in 3:11; and “empty” versus “full.” Other key terms that are concentrated in chapter 3 (but were largely or entirely absent from chapters 1–2) serve to bind this chapter together with repetition and interrelationship: תַּרְגֵּם, “threshing floor” (in Ruth only in 3:2, 3, 6, 14); שָׁכַב, “lie down” (in Ruth only in 3:4 [three times], 7 [twice], 8, 13, 14); and גָּאַל, “redeem” (seven of its twenty-two occurrences in Ruth are in this chapter: 3:9, 12 [twice], 13 [four times]; this includes the participle גֹּאַל, “redeemer”). (CC)

Ruth 3 divides neatly into two sections. First, Naomi divulges the plan to Ruth, who pledges to carry it out (3:1–6). Then 3:7–18 narrates Ruth’s implementation of the plan and the result. In addition, the entire chapter also has a chiasmic structure:

- A Naomi’s plan (3:1–4)
- B Ruth obeys Naomi (3:5–6)
- C First Boaz lies down, then Ruth (3:7–8)
 - D Ruth requests that Boaz be the redeemer (3:9)
 - E Boaz praises Ruth and promises to fulfill her request (3:10–11)
 - D’ Boaz agrees to redeem, but another one is closer (3:12–13)
- C’ They both remain lying there until early morning (3:14)
- B’ Ruth brings the grain to Naomi and reports to her (3:15–17)
- A’ Naomi’s final counsel to Ruth (3:18) (CC)

3:1-2 “Should I Not Seek for You Security?” (3:1–2)

Interestingly enough, Ruth is not mentioned by name in this act (chapter 3) until she identifies herself to Boaz (3:9). Nevertheless, the context clearly indicates that in 3:1–4 Naomi speaks to Ruth, who replies in 3:5 and then acts in 3:6. In 3:1 the narrator further identifies “Naomi” as Ruth’s “mother-in-law,” perhaps to indicate that the spotlight now turns to Naomi as the one who unfolds a plan for Ruth. (CC)

As mother-in-law to a foreigner, Naomi had no compelling duty to try to arrange a marriage for Ruth, who was only her daughter-in-law and a Moabite. Nevertheless, Naomi practically assumed the role of Ruth’s mother as she spelled out a plan for her, again addressing Ruth as “my daughter” (3:1), as she had in 2:2, 22. In this context, that familial term is meant more literally than when Naomi called Ruth and Orpah “my daughters” in 1:11–13, where her emphasis was that they should obey her, especially because of her age seniority, which also made it impossible for her to bear sons who could become their husbands. (CC)

Here Naomi assumes the role of Ruth's mother in order to be her matchmaker. Naomi is free to seek an Israelite husband for Ruth since Ruth has been welcomed into Israel by Boaz, a relative of Naomi's deceased husband (2:1) who treated Ruth as if she were a member of his clan (2:12, 14–16, 21). That Naomi's plan might include marriage for Ruth is indicated by מְנוּחָה (*manohah*, "security, rest," 3:1), which recalls the cognate term and synonym מְנוּחָהּ (*menuhah*, 1:9), which Naomi used for a husband's home when she first discussed her concern for the remarriage of her daughters-in-law. (CC)

Naomi's opening question, "Should I not seek for you security?" does not seek an answer, but is really an emphatic declaration with the implication of obligation, "I *should* seek for you security," for Naomi assumes the maternal duty to better Ruth's circumstances. Likewise, the following idiom, "so that it will be good for you," in this context refers to marital happiness, children, and security. Although Naomi does not explicitly say that she is seeking a husband for Ruth, the narrator's art has made this obvious enough to the hearer and reader. (CC)

That Naomi here began to answer her own prayer (1:9) shows how divine and human actions coincide: God acts through his believers as his instruments. That they appear to seize the initiative to take advantage of their opportunities (*carpediem*) is really God acting through them in *his* opportunities (this is a major theme in Ecclesiastes, especially 3:1–14). (CC)

Winnowing (Ruth 3:2) was the climax of the harvest process. For after the ears of grain were reaped and gathered, the kernels were freed from their husks and stalks by threshing, as large amounts were trampled by animals, who might pull a threshing sledge. Then, large wooden forks were used to lift away the straw, before the kernels were separated from the husks by winnowing, namely, tossing them into the air with a shovel, letting the wind blow away the chaff, or by sifting with a sieve. The west wind usually blew strongly in the afternoon, but the evening was better for winnowing because the wind was not so strong as to blow the kernels away with the chaff (see Jer 4:11–12). The kernels were collected as grain while the straw became fodder and the chaff fuel. (CC)

In the Ruth story, the time is early June, around Shavuoth or Pentecost, after the harvests of barley and wheat, which together lasted about seven weeks. Even though the harvests were completed (2:23), some barley still had to be winnowed (see the textual notes on 3:2). That Boaz ended his day of work with a satisfying supper need not refer to feasting after the entire harvest had been winnowed, but merely to partaking of the day's main meal. The season of harvest and fruitfulness is a natural time for courtship (the plan in chapter 3), marriage (4:10), and the conception of children (4:13). (CC)

The setting for Ruth 3 revolves around "the threshing floor" (3:2). A wealthy landowner would have his own private threshing floor. Those farmers who were less well-off would bring their grain to the village's common threshing floor for threshing, winnowing, and sieving. The common threshing floor was a public place that could be used for important social activities,⁴³ although the more important transactions that involved witnesses were conducted at the town gate (see Ruth 4:1–2). (CC)

Naomi's plan is based on two premises. First, Boaz is a close relative who has proven his clan faithfulness through his overflowing generosity to Ruth (chapter 2). Second, this night presents a golden opportunity for Ruth to approach him secretly. Boaz likely took advantage of the propitious early evening breeze for winnowing the barley. Then after dark he would eat and drink (3:3) before going to sleep (3:4, 7). To guard the grain from thieves (cf. 1 Sam 23:1), Boaz himself evidently would take the night watch on this night, as Naomi had ascertained in advance, perhaps through town gossip. (On other nights he may have delegated this duty to his foreman [cf. Ruth 2:5–6].) (CC)

However, this plan also entailed a danger. In the fertility religion and culture of the native Canaanites and of Israel's neighbors, the threshing floor on festive occasions was a site for sexual licentiousness, and pagan influence led to such immorality in Israel too (Hos 9:1). The danger, then, is that Ruth and Boaz might fall into the sin of intercourse before marriage. This danger is suggested not only because the encounter would take place at "the threshing floor" (3:2–3, 6, 14) in secret at night, but also because other Hebrew vocabulary in 3:3–4 can, depending on the context, have sexual connotations (see the commentary below). The dramatic tension created by this danger at the start of chapter 3 is not resolved until after Boaz and Ruth have passed the night chastely (3:7–14) and they part (3:15–16). (CC)

3:1 Naomi's awakened hope (cf. 1:8–13) now moves her to undertake provision for Ruth's future (see note on 2:2). (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 *Tonight he will be winnowing.* See note on 1:22. 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)

3:3-4 "Note the Place Where He Lies Down" (3:3–4)

Ruth was to prepare and dress herself—at first glance, as if for a betrothal, which would include bathing, anointing with perfumed olive oil, and wearing one's most festive dress and jewelry (Ezek 16:8–10; Esth 2:12; see also Song 1:10–12; 4:9–11). However, the "cloak" (3:3) Ruth was to wear was an ordinary outer covering, not a fancy dress, and there is no mention of jewelry. But for the widow Ruth to lay aside her mourning attire and wear normal clothing signaled that her period of mourning was over and she was returning to normal life (see Gen 38:14, 19; 2 Sam 12:20; 14:2), which may include marriage. Likewise, for her to bathe and freshen her skin with fragrant olive oil indicated that she was no longer in mourning and was available for marriage.⁴⁷ Her symbolic message was not to entice Boaz to adultery, but to help him understand that she was making a marriage proposal. (CC)

In the culture of that time and place, young single women (that is, young teenagers) could more or less freely converse with men of their town. However, it was unheard of for a woman to

approach a man and propose marriage directly, for that would make her appear as immoral as a prostitute. Marriages were properly and almost always arranged: the bride's parents and brothers negotiated the marriage on her behalf, either with the groom's parents or with the groom himself. (CC)

Considering the cool night air, Ruth also wore a large outer wrap or shawl (3:15). As she went down to the threshing floor (3:3, 6), which evidently was on a somewhat lower elevation, she must carefully take note of Boaz, but must not let herself be noticed or "known to the man" (3:3). When Boaz had seen her in chapter 2, probably she still had been wearing her drab mourning attire, so now he would not recognize her in her ordinary clothing and shawl unless she identified herself to him (as she will do, but not until 3:9). Naomi refers to him as "the man" (3:3; also 3:18), as does the narrator (3:8; also 3:16), and Ruth is called the "woman" (3:8, 11, 14), heightening the sexual tension in this man-woman scene. Naomi anticipated that after Boaz finished his work he would be "eating and drinking" (3:3), but she did not mean that Boaz might get drunk and lapse into immorality (as if to allude to Lot and his daughters [Gen 19:32–35]), but only that he would be in good spirits, for, unless one was too poor, wine would be expected at a full meal, especially after the harvest season. (CC)

Not every detail of Naomi's instructions was included by the narrator in 3:1–4. Some details of her guidance are only revealed by what Ruth did during the actual encounter. The proposal Ruth speaks in 3:9 must have been prescribed for her by Naomi, even though it was not recorded in 3:1–4. At this time Naomi also must have told Ruth to tell Boaz that she (Naomi) was ready to transfer the right to redeem the property of her deceased husband, Elimelech, even though the narrative of the encounter (3:7–15) omits Ruth passing on that information, which Boaz divulges in 4:3 (he must have learned it from Ruth). The narrator's style often reserves informing the audience of some facts and reveals them only later during a major conversation. (CC)

Boaz would soon drop off to sleep after his satisfying meal (3:3), and Naomi told Ruth to approach and draw back the corner of Boaz's mantle to expose his feet, then lie down herself (3:4). While not explained here, in light of 3:7–8 it is evident that Ruth was to take care not to awaken Boaz suddenly, which might cause a commotion, arouse others lying nearby, and so make public Ruth and the plan. Instead, she was to let the cool air on his exposed feet gradually and calmly arouse him from sleep. Then he could inquire about her intentions (as he will do in 3:9) and decide the course of action for them both, as Naomi anticipates here: "He himself will tell you what you should do" (3:4). (CC)

By telling Ruth to "uncover the place of his [Boaz's] feet" (3:4), Naomi used—and the narrator included—a Hebrew verb that in other contexts can describe sexual immorality. Indeed, a number of Hebrew terms in 3:2–4 can, depending on the context, pertain to or be associated with sexual intimacy: "threshing floor," "tonight," "know," "eat," "drink," "approach," and "lie down." The question may thus arise for us, the story's audience, whether Naomi wanted Ruth to entice Boaz to sexual activity. (CC)

However, Ruth's actions, including her lying next to him, together with her attire and anointing, should rather be interpreted (as they were by Boaz) in the context of what she had to say (3:9) as an implied request for marriage. The obvious objective of Naomi was marriage for Ruth (3:1; cf.

1:9, 11–13), and so she would not have counseled Ruth to engage in behavior that Boaz might interpret as a seductive wish for intercourse. It is evident that Naomi and Ruth trusted Boaz as a pious, “honorable gentleman” (2:1) who would not misinterpret Ruth’s motive nor succumb to an opportunity for immorality (see below on 3:7–10). Nevertheless, considering his good spirits and the secrecy of the situation, besides the possibility of being discovered together by a third party, the plan involved a great deal of risk. (CC)

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)

“All That You Say to Me, I Will Do!” (3:5–6)

Ruth demonstrated again her full devotion to Naomi, carrying out with unquestioning obedience the instructions of her plan completely. Like Esther (“if I perish, I perish,” Esth 4:16), she went ahead with the plan, despite the dangers involved. Ruth here reminds us also of the matriarch Sarai, who obediently acquiesced to Abram’s plan to identify her as his sister rather than wife, because the heathen Egyptians would kill the husband in order to obtain a beautiful wife, but should negotiate with a brother for his sister, which could give Abram the opportunity to save them both (Gen 12:11–13; see also Gen 20:11–13; 24:29–60). When Sarai recognized that it was God’s will for her to agree to Abram’s plan (later confirmed by them being delivered from harm and keeping many gifts [Gen 12:16, 20]), she may have said to him in effect what the Virgin

Mary replied to the archangel Gabriel: “Be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). (CC)

As both a man and a woman were involved and culpable in the first sin (Gen 3:6–19), so it was appropriate that not only a man but also a woman would parent God’s redeemed people of the old covenant (Gen 12:2, 5; 18:10). While a woman was the first to sin and did so by disobeying God’s Word (Gen 3:6; 1 Tim 2:14), God’s design was for the Savior to be born from a woman (Gen 3:15; cf. 1 Tim 2:15), from a virgin, untouched by a man, who received God’s Word in faith and entrusted herself completely to his will (Is 7:14; 9:5 [ET 9:6]; Lk 1:27, 34, 38). God’s plan of salvation placed Mary at risk of being charged with adultery (Mt 1:18–20) and would bring her untold grief (Lk 2:35; Jn 19:25–27). (CC)

Though Sarah’s faith was mixed with doubt and laughter (Gen 18:9–15), she, like Mary, received the power to conceive according to God’s promise (Heb 11:11). The matriarch was willing to take the risk and bear the ridicule of bearing a child in her old age (Gen 21:1–2, 6–7). (CC)

Likewise Ruth, the future matriarch (Ruth 4:17–22), responded in faith when she was confronted with Naomi’s risky plan for her. Ruth did not retract her oath of fidelity to Naomi and her confession of faith in the LORD (1:16–17). If Ruth were discovered in a compromising situation at night with Boaz (“an honorable gentleman” [2:1], probably already married with children), she would be totally disgraced and her life ruined. If she had refused to cooperate with Naomi, she could have had the prospect of marriage to a younger man, possibly more to her liking, perhaps even a wealthy man (3:10–11). But Ruth, who had come to trust in the LORD (1:17; 2:12), agreed to carry out Naomi’s plan because it meant not just marriage for herself, but more importantly, the redemption of her mother-in-law’s doomed family (3:9, 13; 4:9–10, 14). (CC)

This would fulfill God’s will for the continuation of an Israelite family, from which the Redeemer would come for the whole world (Rom 9:4–5). The LORD would give conception to Ruth (Ruth 4:13) as he had to Sarah (Gen 21:1–2) and would to Mary (Mt 1:18, 20). Ruth the Moabitess would receive the honor of becoming an ancestress of Israel’s royal family, the dynasty of David (Ruth 4:17–22), which, in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), would culminate in “the Son of David,” “the Christ” (Mt 1:1, 5, 17). (CC)

3:7-18 Ruth 3:7–18 relates the story’s climactic turning point with a high level of “dramatic tension and suspense.” The key events of chapter 2 took place during the daytime, but in chapter 3 they are between sunset and sunrise. The narrator “shrouds the story in the dark dress of mystery and intrigue.” Appropriately, this act teems with ambiguity, innuendoes, and double entendres, creating unnerving suspense and thrusting the heroine and hero into “a crucible of moral choice.”⁴⁸ Because Ruth’s actions at the threshing floor propose marriage and suggest her sexual availability to Boaz, the audience may ask, Did they have intercourse? The author’s purpose is for us to appreciate just how tempting the situation was so that he can then highlight their chastity and honor by showing that they did not succumb to temptation. Ruth and Boaz remained models of faith and faithfulness by refraining from sexual intimacy, which is to be reserved for marriage. (CC)

Most of the action in 3:7–18 corresponds to Naomi’s earlier instructions to Ruth in 3:1–6. Yet as this narrative unfolds, it includes additional features that were absent from the earlier account, and these have prompted questions about the relationship between the two scenes in this chapter. Answering those questions requires a knowledge of typical Hebrew narrative style. When an event is anticipated and then occurs, or takes place and is then recalled, usually much of the information is repeated in both of the descriptions. Extensive repetition can reinforce that God is faithful to fulfill his Word or that God’s people are faithful in the fulfillment of their vocations. Here, the repetition of key Hebrew vocabulary reinforces that in 3:7–18 Ruth was faithful in carrying out Naomi’s instructions in 3:1–6 to the letter. (CC)

Yet in repetitive Hebrew narrative, the second account often furnishes additional details that could have been included in the earlier account but that were omitted for one reason or another. Possible reasons for their earlier omission include brevity; to reserve the presentation of details until that point in the story at which they are most relevant; or to maintain suspense, since the audience cannot assume that the whole story has already been told. This narrative technique has been called “dischronologized” information, but “delayed disclosure of information” or “progressive revelation” would be better. Use of this technique does not mean that the added details are a misrepresentation or somehow are to be contrasted with those mentioned earlier. In most cases, the two sets of details are meant to complement each other, it being part of the storyteller’s art to fill out the sum of the hearer’s knowledge by degrees.⁵³ This is especially true in the style of storytelling where most of the details are transmitted in dialogue. This style preserves an element of mystery, particularly in the book of Ruth, with its buildup in suspense to a climactic resolution. (CC)

An example of this narrative technique is in 2:21, where, as part of Ruth’s recounting to Naomi of the words and actions of Boaz, Ruth reported Boaz’s invitation for her to glean in his field throughout the harvest season—an invitation not mentioned previously in the narrative of Boaz’s conversations with Ruth and with his workers about letting Ruth glean (2:8–16). There is no hint that Ruth’s report to Naomi is a fabrication; instead, it is fully credible in the context. It is also borne out by the narrator’s summary in 2:23 and is easily harmonized with Boaz’s earlier reported statements in 3:8, 15 (see also 3:7, 11). Similarly, Ruth’s report to Naomi in 3:17 includes words by Boaz that were not recorded in the earlier account of his speech in 3:15, but there is no reason to doubt that Boaz spoke those words and that for literary reasons the narrator chose to include them only later, in Ruth’s report. (CC)

Chapter 3 has further examples of this narrative technique. Thus, Naomi’s instructions to Ruth speak only of Boaz “eating and drinking” (3:3), whereas the narrator’s later description of the actual events adds to those two actions that Boaz also felt himself in a good mood: “Boaz ate and drank and his heart was in good spirits” (3:7). It is possible that Naomi’s earlier words had been fuller than those recorded by the narrator in 3:3; she may have told Ruth to wait “until he has finished eating and drinking, for then his heart will likely be in good spirits.” Likewise, Naomi’s recorded counsel was that Ruth should wait until Boaz “lies down” (3:4), but she may have also advised Ruth to wait until he had fallen asleep, as he obviously had in 3:8 before the strategy (uncovering his feet) eventually caused him to awake. Lastly, although the earlier record of Naomi’s instructions did not stipulate what Ruth was to say to Boaz (3:4), it is likely that Ruth’s carefully worded, twofold petition to Boaz (3:9) had been prescribed by Naomi. (CC)

Supporting this line of interpretation for the narrative is the repeated notation that Ruth acted according to Naomi's instructions. First Ruth promised, "All that you say to me, I will do!" (3:5), then the narrator stated, "She did according to everything that her mother-in-law had commanded her" (3:6). This must mean that every one of the actions by Ruth, including her words, had been planned out and imparted by Naomi; no element was added, altered, or neglected by Ruth as she carried out the stratagem. If we did not hold to this tack of interpreting the Hebrew narrative as a progressive and true revelation of the events, then the story would not be credible as presented and we would open ourselves to one needless speculation after another. (CC)

A final example results from comparing chapter 3 with chapter 4. We can presume that when Ruth spoke to Boaz according to Naomi's plan (articulated in 3:1–4 and executed in 3:6–9), Ruth mentioned the disposition of Elimelech's family property. We can infer this because Boaz in 4:3 announces Naomi's intent to transfer the property. Even though Ruth 3 records no discussion—either between Naomi and Ruth or later between Ruth and Boaz—about the disposition of the property, those two discussions must have taken place since on the next day (3:18b; 4:3) Boaz publicized Naomi's intent. This inference is consistent with the designation of Boaz as a redeemer, first by Naomi, speaking to Ruth in 2:20 ("he is even one of our redeemers"), then by Ruth, speaking to Boaz in 3:9 ("you are a redeemer"), since the chief duty of a redeemer was the redemption of the family inheritance. This inference also explains Boaz's initial response to Ruth, in which he tells her about the closer redeemer (3:12–13), and his actions the next day at the town gate (4:1–10). However, the narrator delays mentioning the disposition of the property until 4:3 to indicate that the real estate is of minor importance compared to the possibilities of marriage for Ruth and the continuation of Naomi's family line. (CC)

In chapter 3, the suspense continues over whether Naomi would receive an heir to carry on her family and whether Ruth would find a husband. These two themes were introduced to the audience in chapter 1 (1:5, 9–13, 21). The events in chapter 2 heightened the prospect of marriage for Ruth when Boaz took a special interest in her (2:8–16). Naomi's plan for Ruth as reported by the narrator (3:1–4) directs us, the audience of the story, to concentrate further on the possibility of marriage for Ruth. But when she addresses Boaz as "a redeemer" (3:9), and he formulates his strategy for redeeming her (3:12–13), this raises further questions. Why does Boaz pledge that either he or the closer redeemer will redeem Ruth (3:13)? Is it not rather Naomi who should be redeemed through the acquisition of the estate of her deceased husband, Elimelech? How can that redemption be connected to marriage to Ruth? How can Boaz be so confident that he will fulfill both objectives ("All that you say, I will do for you!" 3:11), and why does Naomi place so much confidence in him (3:18)? (CC)

These questions will be resolved in chapter 4, where Boaz both redeems the estate put up for transfer by Naomi and marries Ruth (4:9–10). The LORD himself provides the solution by granting to Ruth the conception of a son, who becomes the "redeemer" for Naomi (4:13–14). The narrator delays until the closing verses of the book the greatest surprise: by God's grace, the unlikely union of Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess eventuates in the birth of David (4:17–22). Yet the family line will continue further, culminating in David's greater Son, Jesus Christ (Mt 1:1–17), the Bridegroom of his church (Eph 5:21–33) and the Redeemer—not just for Israel (Lk 24:21), but for all people (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Titus 2:11–14). (CC)

3:7-8 “Then She Approached in Secret” (3:7–8)

After a hard day’s work during the winnowing phase of the final harvest, that is, after the barley and wheat had been reaped and threshed, it was customary for the field owners to relish a substantial meal and then sleep on the threshing floor, each one next to his pile of grain to guard it against thieves. Because Boaz was in the process of winnowing barley (3:2), his heap of grain would not yet have been removed for safe storage. Since Boaz “went to lie down at the edge of the grain heap” (3:7), there is a hint that Boaz may have been lying separate enough from other sleepers, yet accessible enough to enable a secret visit without Ruth disturbing anyone else—another suggestion of a divinely designed opportunity. (CC)

Boaz ate well and, presumably, drank some wine before going to sleep, but there is no implication that he became drunk, unlike Lot (see the third textual note on 3:7). Naomi will have known Boaz well enough to expect him not to become inebriated but to be in good spirits, especially after a little restful sleep, which would also prove to sharpen his wits to make a wise reply, and so she could say to Ruth, “He himself will tell you what you should do” (3:4). Of course, one is much more receptive to a bold request after a good meal and some sleep than before. (CC)

Ruth would have sufficiently hidden herself and waited in the shadows thrown by the fire of the cooked meal, wrapped in her outer cloak and shawl for warmth, and possibly also to avoid being recognized. She then noted where Boaz made his bed, as Naomi had instructed her in 3:3–4. She may have had to wait some time until she could be sure that no one else would observe her actions and until she could be reasonably certain that Boaz had fallen asleep. She approached him noiselessly and undetected. Shrouded in the night darkness, the identities of “the man” and “a woman” (3:8) are momentarily inexplicit even for the readers. (CC)

Stealthily, Ruth drew back his wrap to expose his feet and lay down at his feet as a symbol of humility (3:7, exactly as Naomi had prescribed in 3:4). Ruth “lay down” (3:7), as Naomi had instructed (3:4), and the verb (נָשָׁא) often connotes slumber, but Ruth may have found it difficult to fall asleep as she would have been tense with excitement over her clandestine role, the most critical one of her life. Boaz is the object of dramatic irony in this situation, blissfully enjoying a good night’s sleep after a hard day’s work and a satisfying meal, oblivious to a young woman lying at his feet, and about to awaken to her momentous proposal. Even though the audience from its vantage point already knows what has transpired, the storyteller enhances the interest by portraying from Boaz’s own perspective how he discovered the identity of this woman. (CC)

Boaz’s outer garment no longer protected his feet against the night air. After a few hours, during the middle of the night, when an event may take place that is the turning point in a narrative, the cool air finally sent a chill from Boaz’s feet into his body so that he shivered and awoke (3:8). This is the only fitting reason why Ruth had exposed his feet. Now aware of his cold feet, Boaz turned and bent over to cover them. With Ruth lying beside his feet, Boaz may have accidentally touched her, or, if there was sufficient moonlight, he may have seen her shape. Possibly aided by the smell of her fragrant oil (“anoint yourself,” 3:3), he discovered the presence of a woman. Through this stratagem by Naomi (3:4, 7), Ruth induced Boaz to awake gradually and silently, whereas another method may have so startled him that he would have cried out and thus would

have disturbed and aroused others sleeping nearby. Of course, all this had to be done after others in the area appeared to be asleep. Naomi had thought out everything to the smallest detail! (CC)

The awakening of Boaz is the moment of greatest tension, for Ruth has placed herself under his power. He could expose her visit by awakening others, who likely would assume she had come for immoral purposes. Or he could reject her silently, dismissing her in disgrace. He might be tempted to exploit her for a secret moment of sinful pleasure. Or will he act in faith as “an honorable gentleman” (2:1) and grant her petition? (CC)

Much of the Hebrew vocabulary in 3:7–8 has the potential for sexual innuendo (see the textual notes on 3:3–4, where this vocabulary first appears). However, this man and woman both believed in “the LORD,” whom Ruth confessed in 1:16–17 and Boaz in 2:4. In faith both entrusted themselves wholly to him and committed themselves to live according to his divine covenant with them. Thus, as the text indicates, they spent the night together in chastity. Nevertheless, one must consider the strong temptation such a situation would present, as well as the good possibility that they could have been discovered sleeping adjacently, and then the likelihood that some would misconstrue what had happened. Hence it is always advisable for an unmarried couple scrupulously to avoid close proximity at night. (CC)

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 the corner of your garment over me. 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)

“Spread Out Your ‘Wing’ over Your Handmaid” (3:9a–c)

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)

Ruth's response undoubtedly had been carefully scripted by Naomi for her. She likewise would have replied in whispers, immediately identifying herself by name and twice with a significant designation: "I am Ruth, your *handmaid*. Spread out your 'wing' over your *handmaid*" (3:9). Earlier, Boaz had graciously elevated this converted foreign woman to the level of being an Israelite "maidservant" (הַפִּזְזָה, *shifhah*), even one of his own "maidservants," although Ruth confessed that she was unworthy of that status (2:13). Now Ruth's self-identification amounts to a declaration that she presents herself no longer on the level of a menial Israelite "maidservant," but rather on that of a "handmaid" (אֲמָהָה, *amah*, twice in 3:9), a woman who was eligible for marriage, either as the wife of a slave or as a concubine of a freeman or landowner such as Boaz. Still, both a "maidservant" and a "handmaid" referred to a girl or woman who was servile. Ruth refrains from calling herself an אִשָּׁה, "woman," or another self-identification that could refer to a free or even a privileged Israelite woman. (CC)

Social convention in ancient Israel was to use a lower term for oneself than one was entitled to. Thus, Jacob called himself Esau's "servant" (Gen 33:5). Abigail called herself David's "handmaid" (1 Sam 25:24, 25, 31) and subsequently, when she accepted his offer to take her as a wife, she called herself both his "handmaid" and his "maidservant" (אֲמָהָה and הַפִּזְזָה, 1 Sam 25:41, the same Hebrew terms Ruth applies to herself in Ruth 2:13; 3:9). Ruth, by designating herself as Boaz's "handmaid," humbly but firmly requested that Boaz accept her into his household. After all, on the first day he met her, Boaz had already treated her as a member of his extended family that included household workers (2:8–9). Even though Ruth had responded by thanking him for treating her as "one of [his] maidservants" (2:13), that was an understatement, for he had granted her far greater privileges than a mere maidservant would enjoy. His further welcome of her into his table fellowship confirmed that he had accepted her as a full and related member of his clan (2:14–16). Ruth's self-appellation here that she is "handmaid" (3:9) is the logical consequence of his prior gracious treatment of her. (CC)

Ruth well realized that Boaz's simple question, "Who are you?" (3:9) sought not just identification but also "What are you doing here?" In answer, she went on to request, "Spread out your 'wing' over your handmaid" (3:9). She thereby asked more than for him to (in English idiom) "take her under his wing," although the expression does imply granting her protection and security, as also in passages where the LORD shelters his people under his "wings" (plural) like a parent bird its fledglings, even as Jesus longed to do for Jerusalem (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34). Thus Boaz had acknowledged that Ruth, the foreigner who was converted to faith in the LORD (Ruth 1:16–17), had come "to seek refuge under [the LORD's] wings" (2:12). (CC)

But here, as in Ezek 16:8, the idiom means that a groom would symbolically "spread out" his "wing" or the "hem" of his garment over a bride as he takes her in marriage. Ruth was clearly proposing marriage to Boaz. In a way, by making the marriage proposal, she assumed the role of a man. Such initiative by a woman in proposing marriage is unique in Scripture.⁶⁵ One may compare her role here with her role toward Naomi, in which she acted as a conscientious son by assuming responsibility for the care of her mother-in-law. However, the very form of her

marriage proposal is that of a request to him, “Spread out your ‘wing’ over your handmaid” (3:8), showing that it is Boaz, the man, who must carry out the necessary actions to take her to be his wife, as he will promise to do in 3:11 and will carry out in 4:5–10. With a man to lead, she is the submissive woman, dependent on his decision. Her words, together with her smelling sweetly, no longer wearing her mourning attire, and lying beside Boaz at night, conveyed her availability for marriage and desire for him to lead. Ruth, then, who officially had no male protector, sought Boaz’s protection not only as a relative of his by marriage, but rather through marriage. (CC)

Our Lord Jesus had longed to collect and protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Mt 23:37). That expression in context coincides with Boaz’s prayer for Ruth that the LORD, under whose wings she had come to seek refuge, would reward her (Ruth 2:12). Jesus was offering the inhabitants of Jerusalem not only his protection from the coming punishment and disaster (Mt 23:36, 38) but also the intimate familial relationship with God the Father through himself, God the Son. He was rejected by most of the Jewish leaders, but in the millennia since then many Jewish people and vast numbers of Gentiles have found refuge and communion with God through faith in him. Ruth’s use of “wing” (Ruth 3:9) in the relational sense of marriage is a bridge between the imagery as used by both Boaz and Jesus (Ruth 2:12; Mt 23:37) and the picture of Christ’s marriage to the church, his body and bride, comprised of all baptized believers, Jew and Gentile alike (Rom 11:11–24; Eph 5:25–32; Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9–10; 22:17). (CC)

“For You Are a Redeemer!” (3:9d)

Many commentators presume that Ruth proposed marriage by calling Boaz a “redeemer” (גֹּאֵל, *go’el*, 3:9), as if a redeemer was obligated to marry a widow of one of his relatives, that is, in a levirate marriage. However, in the Law of Moses the legislation for the institution of the redeemer is separate from that for the levirate duty (Deut 25:5–10), and the legislation about redemption never includes levirate marriage as one of a redeemer’s responsibilities. Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, the deceased husband of Naomi (Ruth 2:1), and so he was eligible to be a redeemer for Naomi, as she had said: “He is even one of our redeemers” (2:20). But Boaz was not a brother of Elimelech, so he was not obligated to unite with his deceased brother’s widow, Naomi, in levirate marriage. (CC)

Much less was Boaz obligated to marry Ruth. Boaz would have had to have been a brother of Mahlon, Ruth’s deceased husband (4:10), in order for the levirate law (Deut 25:5–10) to require him to unite with Ruth, who would have been his deceased brother’s widow. In that case, Boaz would have been a son of Elimelech. Moreover, since levirate marriage was an institution established by God’s Law, given through Moses, it would not have required a secret nightly visit by Ruth to propose it. (CC)

By calling Boaz “a redeemer,” Ruth was appealing to his relationship to Naomi, whose deceased husband, Elimelech, was from the same clan as Boaz (2:1). If Boaz would act as a redeemer according to Israelite Law, he would redeem Elimelech’s inheritance (see 4:3), and this would also obligate him to support Naomi, widow of the deceased, for the rest of her life. Therefore, when Ruth follows her request for marriage (“Spread out your ‘wing’ over your handmaid”) with

this appeal to Boaz as “a redeemer” (3:9), she indicates to Boaz that she is not simply asking for marriage for her own sake; her greater concern is the welfare of her mother-in-law, who properly would be the person Boaz could redeem (as he does in 4:3–4, 9). This reveals to Boaz that Ruth is not acting alone, but in concert with Naomi, and indeed on her behalf and for her sake. This helps explain why Boaz will praise Ruth’s “faithfulness” (*hesed*, 3:10), since her petition to Boaz as “redeemer” (3:9) is yet another fulfillment of her pledge to remain faithful to Naomi and to the LORD (1:16–17). (CC)

Ruth’s words implicitly request Boaz to act as redeemer for the sake of Naomi. This was only a request, not a demand, for Boaz was not the nearest, primary redeemer, but, as Ruth said, only “a redeemer” (3:9). In fact, Boaz was the second in line, because another man was more closely related to Elimelech than Boaz was (3:12; that closer relative is the one called “the redeemer” in 4:1–8). The existence of the closer redeemer was certainly known to Naomi, who had surely told Ruth about him. Hence Boaz’s announcement in 3:12 that the other redeemer was nearer was not news to Ruth; it is included in the narrative at that point for the benefit of the audience. (CC)

In Scripture, it is only Ruth (3:9) and Boaz (3:11–13; 4:4–5, 9–10) who associate the institutions of redemption and levirate marriage with each other. This association had no precedent in Israelite Law or custom, but it provided a unique rescue for the destitute women and surely was part of Naomi’s plan for Ruth (see 3:1–6). (CC)

In addition to appealing to Boaz’s relationship to Naomi, Ruth, by calling Boaz “a redeemer” (3:9), likely alludes to his prior acts of kindness toward her. It is obvious in the story so far that Boaz had befriended Ruth magnanimously. He had already protected her from harm and hunger throughout the harvest season (2:8–9, 14–16, 21), and so he had acted as a kind of de facto “redeemer” in a broader sense (not the technical, legal sense). One might paraphrase her request, “Spread out your ‘wing’ over your handmaid, for you are a redeemer,” as “Marry me, for you have been my protector.” Instead of this protective relationship being only temporary and informal, she was requesting Boaz to assume it permanently. She asked him to accept her into the security of his household as a concubine or wife, so that he would continue to be the agent of divine blessing in her life, and in a greater way. (CC)

Still, she presented this as a proposal, not as a demand. Naomi and Ruth obviously intended for Boaz to marry Ruth (see the commentary on 3:1–6), but Ruth did not and could not demand marriage by Boaz (or by any redeemer) as a right. If anyone was obligated to marry Ruth, Naomi would have told her that at the beginning, but instead Naomi had indicated that it would be hopeless for Ruth to seek a new marital future with her in Judah (1:11–13). Ruth’s proposal of marriage echoed Boaz’s prayer for her (2:12). She was practically saying to Boaz, “If the LORD is to protect me, let it be through a man’s protection,” and, “Since it was you who prayed to the LORD for me, may he fulfill that prayer through you.” (CC)

We in our times of need may envision only a supernatural solution from God. We may pray to the LORD wondering whence or whether help will come. Yet he has already sent his salvation to us in the form of a man, his Son, Jesus Christ. He became incarnate as our Redeemer to procure our deliverance from every trouble, whether physical or spiritual. His perfect life and vicarious death on the cross atoned for all our sins. His resurrection on the third day guarantees our own

final passage from this vale of tears to resurrection and everlasting life on the new earth. Until then, Christ sustains us through his Word and Sacraments, as we hear his Gospel, recall our Baptism into his death and resurrection, and receive his body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins, in his Holy Supper. He may also help us often through the words and actions of fellow human believers. While we may pray for such divine help through others, we should constantly be aware of opportunities we have to be the agents through whom God answers the prayers of others through our aid to them. (CC)

3:10-11 “May You Be Blessed by the LORD” (3:10–11)

Boaz answered Ruth’s marriage proposal with the story’s longest speech (3:10–13). The first half of it comprises the central climax of chapter 3, for Boaz here acknowledges Ruth with effusive praise and promises to fulfill her request. Indeed, he understood Ruth fully as having made a proposal not only for marriage, but also for redemption.⁷⁸ Boaz also acknowledged Ruth’s proposal as an expression of faithfulness to Naomi and faith in the LORD in whom she had come to believe (1:16–17) and in whom she had sought refuge (2:12). Boaz first pronounced a blessing upon her, that she be “blessed by the LORD” (3:10; cf. Lk 1:28). This is a thanksgiving benediction, which prays that God would shower his grace upon a person who had performed a special act of fidelity or kindness in an everyday life situation in response to God’s faithful magnanimity (see 2 Sam 2:5–6; Ruth 2:20). Her faith itself was a gracious gift worked in her by the LORD. Boaz’s prayer that she would be blessed still further by the LORD means that he, by his free and unmerited grace, would grant her every spiritual and bodily need and preserve her in the one true faith unto life everlasting. (CC)

It is remarkable how readily a believer, filled with the Holy Spirit, pronounces a blessing on fellow believers (Ruth 2:4, 19, 20; 4:11–12, 14–15). The LORD had commanded Israel to worship and swear by his name alone (Deut 10:20), and these blessings that invoke his sacred name are prayers and acts of worship. Such calling upon God hallows his name, as does fidelity to his Word in doctrine and daily life: “God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it.” (CC)

Michael Moore makes a good case for a “blessing-of-foreigners trajectory” in the OT. He identifies this blessing of Ruth by Boaz as such, for a member of the LORD’s covenant people is blessing a converted foreigner in the LORD’s name. In other such blessings that Moore identifies, it is a non-Israelite who blesses a worshiper of the LORD or his people (Gen 14:19–20; Ex 18:10–11; Num 24:5–9; 1 Ki 10:8–9). The blessing in Ruth, also in contrast to the others, is familial and humble rather than national and triumphal, for the context deals with the agony of survival, not the glory of conquest. It is a powerful theological statement of faith in the God who keeps his promises and who can use any person to accomplish his gracious will. The Talmud (*Yebamoth*, 76b–77a) already concluded that Boaz was justified in marrying a Moabitess and that Ruth is a legitimate ancestress of David, thus rejecting nationalist hyperethnicism. Since Ruth had been converted to faith in the LORD (Ruth 1:16–17), the marriage did not violate the Torah’s commands against Israelites intermarrying with foreigners. (CC)

Boaz then praised Ruth for not seeking her marital fortune among the town’s eligible young bachelors, although her personal advantage would be marriage with a young man who more likely could provide for her until their children would be old enough to do so. The eligible young

bachelors appear as foils for Boaz. This contrasts what would not happen (her marriage to a young man) with what might well happen (marriage to Boaz). Incidentally, it also implies a significant age difference between Boaz and Ruth, since “the young men” (3:10) would be nearer her age. The opposites in the phrase “whether a poor man or a rich man” highlight economic situations, but, as a merism, the major stress is all-inclusive: she sought out none of the young men, regardless of their advantages in respect to love, status, or wealth. She was driven not by *eros* (passion) or greed but by “faithfulness” (*hesed*, 3:10) and love in the biblical sense. (CC)

By his statement, Boaz recognized that Ruth, a foreigner without a resident Israelite father, brother, or son, was a free agent who could marry by her own choice. Ruth’s “first” act of “faithfulness” (3:10) was her self-sacrifice in leaving her family and people in order to cling to Naomi and the LORD (1:14–17; 2:11). To fulfill that pledge she demeaned herself to work hard at the menial task of gleaning (2:2, 7, 17) in order to care for Naomi. She did not try to marry herself out of such toil, nor did she deviate from her confession of lifelong fidelity to Naomi and her God (1:16–17). Her “last faithfulness” (3:10) was following Naomi’s counsel to seek out Boaz and ask him to be their protector and redeemer. Ruth was the only person able to carry out those two acts of faithfulness (*hesed*). Yet, in neither case was she legally obligated to do so, particularly not as a foreigner. But as a converted believer, she in faith voluntarily took upon herself the obligations of her Israelite familial relationship among the people of God. (CC)

In light of Ruth’s faithfulness, Boaz confesses that Ruth is “an honorable woman” (3:11). Her “last faithfulness” (3:10) was greater than all her previous labor in the field, for this meant sacrificing the rest of her future, possibly with the best of the young bachelors, by seeking acceptance into Boaz’s household as probably no more than his second wife or concubine. She chose to make this sacrifice to preserve her solidarity with Naomi for her sake, trusting that the LORD would care for her. If Ruth married into another family, her close relationship with Naomi would end, and with it the survival of Naomi’s family. But for Ruth to propose to Boaz that he act as “a redeemer” (3:9) meant primarily that he would care for Naomi. For the only applicable redemptive function in this case was that of acquiring the ancestral land of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion (4:9), which meant looking after Naomi, Elimelech’s widow, as well. (CC)

Strictly speaking, what Ruth proposed and Boaz agreed to was not a levirate marriage, where a brother marries the widow of his deceased brother (Deut 25:5). However, Boaz realized that the purpose of this marriage as intended by Naomi and Ruth was essentially comparable to the levirate marriage, namely, that the deceased’s “name may not be blotted out in Israel” (Deut 25:6), or, as Boaz put it, “to perpetuate the name of the deceased on his inheritance” (Ruth 4:5, 10). The basic difference was that according to the Law of Moses (Deut 25:5–6) and patriarchal custom (Gen 38:8), levirate marriage required a man to marry his brother’s childless widow, whereas the marriage of Ruth and Boaz was not a levirate marriage, for it involved a more distantly related redeemer (2:1, 20), who was not obligated by Law or custom to marry his relative’s widow. What Naomi and Ruth therefore requested from Boaz, and what he agreed to, was that he not only arrange to redeem the property inheritance of Naomi and Ruth’s family, but that he also marry Ruth for the purpose of raising up an heir to Elimelech and Mahlon—which also involved caring for Naomi. All this meant a great sacrifice on the part of Boaz, but it would fulfill the spirit of the Law of Israel’s covenant that a family remain viable and continue to

inherit their divinely given land as a down payment of their place in the eternal kingdom of God, the new heavens and new earth. (CC)

Boaz then reassured Ruth, calming her fears and promising to help her, and added more praise (3:11). With “all that you say” and “the whole gate,” he repeated the quantifier כָּל, “all, whole,” that intensifies for emphasis. The town gate, where everyone went in and out of the walled city, was the place to meet and exchange news and gossip. Ruth was well-known by all as an “honorable woman” (3:11), one of faith and high moral virtue (see the textual notes), a model of the kind of woman described in Prov 31:10–31. This title accorded her by Boaz, as a counterpart to the narrator’s introduction of Boaz himself as “an honorable gentleman” (Ruth 2:1), in effect accepted her into his clan, not merely as a servile “handmaid” (3:9) eligible to become a concubine, but even as a free woman who may become his full-fledged wife. Indeed, he declared himself ready to marry her along with redeeming her. (CC)

It is quite significant that Boaz, an honorable man of stature in the community (2:1), would pay serious attention to Ruth, the destitute foreign widow, and even grant her momentous request (3:9). That he respected her highly is not only evidence that he honored her faith in the LORD, but also that women in Israel’s society in principle were accorded great respect. (CC)

Ruth’s role has been completely reversed. The destitute foreign widow, scavenging the fields as the lowest of the low, has gained the best of reputations, not by seeking it but because of the gift of faith in the LORD and her resulting self-sacrificial faithfulness to him and his covenant people. Ruth and Boaz were, respectively, young and old, foreign and native, poor and well-off, but those opposites were bridged by their common faith in the LORD, who extends his grace to all believers, and by their shared values as members of the one family of God—the church, the body of Christ. (CC)

The audience breathes a sigh of relief that Boaz blessed Ruth (3:10) instead of cursing her for her brazen proposal. He did not censure the women’s dangerous plan, but warmly accepted it (3:11), as if he had only been waiting for the offer. Yet, Boaz agreed to marry Ruth neither because she was honorable nor because he loved her, but rather out of faith in the LORD and duty to the LORD’s covenant, as he later declared publicly twice: “to perpetuate the name of the deceased on his inheritance” (4:5, 10). If he had been infatuated with erotic love, Boaz would scarcely have addressed Ruth as “my daughter” nor stressed a blessing for her faithfulness and her honor (3:10–11). This and the primary subject of redemption (3:12–13) demonstrate that his motivation was not merely human love but fidelity to the LORD and his covenant, here in respect to Naomi’s family. (CC)

In Bethlehem Ruth had gained a reputation for faithfulness through her diligence and devotion to Naomi and her LORD. Character and reputation are like flower and fragrance; the fragrance is strongest after the flower matures and blossoms. Yet the reputations of Boaz and Ruth were not simply the result of the maturity of their human characters. Rather, the godly reputation of each was an outgrowth of the LORD’s own holiness and righteousness, imputed to them through faith in him who does not forsake his faithfulness (2:20). As we confess him and our own unworthiness, he is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (see 1 Jn 1:8–9). All who trust in him who is ever faithful receive his salvation (e.g., ET Pss 13:5–6; 25:5–

7; 31:5–7). He graciously grants them virtues as his spiritual gifts (Prov 3:33–35; Rom 12:6–8; Eph 4:1–3, 7). (CC)

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

kindness ... you showed earlier. See 2:11–12. (CSB)

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)

woman of noble character. 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)

3:12-13 “Then I Will Redeem You Myself” (3:12–13)

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)

Now, if the closer relative should insist on fulfilling his redemptive duty, then Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi must let him. But if not, Boaz swore on oath “as the LORD lives” (essentially, “as surely as the LORD is the living God”) that he then would carry out the redemption (3:13). Boaz thereby assumed in effect the new role of redeemer. His oath was the strongest possible statement of intent because it invoked the living LORD by name and called upon him to enable Boaz to fulfill his pledge. At the same time, the honesty and principles of Boaz are here evident as he honored the rights of another Israelite regardless of his own resolve. The fact of the nearer relative also explains why Boaz had not yet done more for Naomi and Ruth. For the sake of maintaining proper order, he had already done all he could without disgracing or insulting the other member of God’s people. (CC)

The audience is left here in an ambiguous quandary, not knowing at this time how Boaz intends to fulfill Ruth’s request. This amounts to a “temporary gap” in the story. Ruth and Boaz possibly discussed the matter then in greater detail, but the narrator wanted us, the audience, to be held in suspense as to just what Boaz could have in mind for his procedure the next day. How would he manage to succeed at negotiating both the redemption of the inheritance and his marriage to

Ruth? We are also to keep in mind that, for the sake of the story's suspense, there must be some conceptual confusion as well. For the original Israelite audience would have known that redemption here properly ought to refer not to marriage, but only to the recovery of the ancestral property, to which Ruth had no direct attachment. So, how can redemption and marriage be combined and handled in one transaction? (CC)

Boaz also has Ruth's immediate safety and honor at heart. He bids her to remain there during the night to protect her from physical harm or from being found out by a third party while venturing home at such an hour, thereby bringing disgrace upon her and ruining any chance of their success. He employed the same Hebrew verb, לָּלַי , "spend the night" (3:13), as did Ruth when she promised always to "lodge" with Naomi (1:16). This Hebrew verb seldom is used in contexts with sexual overtones, and its context here dispels any lingering doubts of intercourse or abuse. Boaz did not succumb to the temptation of extramarital sex. (CC)

Again, although the focus is on Boaz acknowledging Ruth as a household member and agreeing to be her redeemer, Naomi, as Elimelech's surviving widow, must also be included in the redemption because it necessarily concerned the family's inherited land to which her fate was connected (4:9, 14). The question of redemption here did not involve redeeming from slavery, avenging a murder, or assisting in a lawsuit (which are involved in, e.g., Lev 25:47–49; Num 35:19; cf. Job 19:25; Ps 130:7–8). Therefore, as the audience must suppose, here it dealt with disposition of the land (Lev 25:24–25). (CC)

It is noteworthy here that in the ancient Near East property was not attached to a person as landowner, but to the family or clan. Thus, the sale of property to a third party did not automatically extinguish the rights of the relatives of the seller. This understanding became law for Israel in that any land that had been sold to a third party (excepting houses in a walled town) was to be returned to the original family at the Jubilee. This meant that the sale of land effectually involved not the land itself, but its usufruct, that is, the estimated value of its crops until the next Jubilee (Lev 25:10–18, 23–34). The family's attachment to its land inheritance was related to its genealogy, and that meant that the survival of a person's name in his genealogy was linked to maintaining the inheritance within the family (see Num 27:4). (CC)

Although the redemption would involve Naomi—since she was the widow of Elimelech, the original property owner—it would not ordinarily involve Ruth. For she was merely a widowed (former) daughter-in-law of Elimelech and a foreigner; she had no living Israelite husband, father, brother, or son, nor did she even have a relative who was a resident alien in Israel. She was not legally attached to Naomi or her family's land. This is why she could not demand Boaz's service, but only request it. But if Boaz agreed to be Ruth's redeemer, that meant he would deal with the land of her deceased husband, Mahlon (4:10), which was also the land of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech, Mahlon's father (4:9), and that redemption would then involve Naomi. For Boaz to redeem Ruth (3:9, 13) he would have to marry her, for she must be married in Israel to an Israelite in order to be the means through whom the redemption of the Israelite land could proceed. (CC)

Boaz probably explained his intentions more explicitly to Ruth than what the narrator reported. But the narrator preferred to keep the audience in suspense here until the final act, chapter 4. He

has his hearers on the one hand thinking about marriage, but they also knew that a redeemer who is not a *levir* (a brother-in-law of the widow) had no obligation to marry her. This conundrum is the mystery at this point that creates suspense in the story, complicated now by the existence of a closer kinsman who was the primary one obligated to become the legal redeemer. Naomi, who had earlier spoken to Ruth about Boaz as “one of our redeemers” (2:20), of course knew from the start that someone else was more closely related than Boaz, and she would have explained this to Ruth too. But considering Boaz’s generous care for Ruth in chapter 2 and the reluctant disposition of the closer redeemer (see 4:6), Naomi much preferred to approach Boaz. (CC)

What Boaz discussed (3:12–13) was no revelation to Ruth, but including his speech was the narrator’s way to divulge it specifically for the first time to the audience. Just when we may think that Naomi and Ruth have issued a proposal to Boaz that he surely will accept, surprise: there is a closer redeemer! This complication creates added suspense—not for Naomi and Ruth, but for us, the audience of the master storyteller. The suspense for the two widows was, first, whether Boaz would accept their request, and, second, how he could manage to overcome this barrier to become both their redeemer and Ruth’s husband. Possibly none of these three slept any more that night: Naomi and Ruth were too worried about what might happen, and Boaz was planning how he should handle the matter with the nearer kinsman. (CC)

3:12 *a kinsman-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 surely 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)

3:14-15 “Let It Not Be Known That the Woman Came to the Threshing Floor” (3:14–15)

Ruth was anxious to vacate the premises very early in the morning while it was still too dark for her to be recognized by anyone. It is probable that work began in the villages already before dawn, so her walking about that early would not arouse suspicion. Now, one thing that Boaz thought to himself is reported, for Hebrew narration may relate what one says to oneself no differently than what is spoken to another. He took an extra precautionary measure to make Ruth’s going into town so early appear natural. Because winnowing was men’s work, a woman on the threshing floor then would arouse serious suspicion. For if it would become known that Ruth had visited him at night, the ensuing scandal would make it impossible for him to represent her and Naomi at the gate honorably. This is another parallel to the Tamar story: as Judah kept his visit with Tamar secret (Gen 38:21–23), so Boaz shrouded Ruth’s visit with him. (CC)

Boaz had Ruth hold out her outer wrap for him to fill it up with barley grain (3:15); this was probably a large shawl. At least it was strong enough to hold “six [measures] of barley” (3:15). Much of the barley, compared to the wheat, was by this time threshed, winnowed, and ready for use. The implied measure could not have been an ephah, since Ruth in 2:17 had gleaned one ephah (enough for herself and Naomi for a week or two), and six of them probably would have been over two hundred pounds, too heavy for Ruth to carry. It was likely the סֵאִה (*se’ah*; so the Targum), three of which constituted an ephah. Six seahs might weigh between sixty and ninety pounds, which would still be manageable for a young peasant woman accustomed to carrying heavy loads. This was twice as much as she had gleaned that first day (2:17). Why does the narrator call the amount “six [seah measures]” instead of “two ephahs,” or why does he not use some other measure of quantity that would require a different number to indicate the total amount of grain? Because six is the number of days in the week for labor and service, and seven that for rest (Ex 20:8–11), the “six” measures symbolize that the time of labor is over, to be followed by the hoped-for rest. (CC)

After tying up the corners of the shawl, Boaz would have lifted it up and placed it upon her head, which is how it was customary to carry a heavy load. Since grinding kernels into flour was the first work for a woman in the early morning, Ruth’s carrying grain would appear natural. But Boaz’s oversized present was also an earnest of his promised action—a kind of betrothal gift. For this, it was of far too little value, but it was the only thing Boaz had at hand, and he gave all that Ruth could carry. Boaz was the possessor of seed in two senses, helping two widows survive with seed for the stomach, and willing to preserve the family line with seed for the womb.¹²⁰ After bestowing seed of the first kind and pledging the second, Boaz himself went into town to prepare for his upcoming business at the gate. (CC)

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)

3:16-18 “How Are You, My Daughter?” (3:16–18)

When Ruth arrived home, Naomi heard her arrival. In the Hebrew, the first part of Naomi’s inquiry (אֵינְךָ), literally, “Who are you?” 3:16) is identical to Boaz’s question at the threshing floor (3:9), which sought Ruth’s identity when he noted the presence of a woman but identification by sight was impossible in the dark (see 3:14). When Ruth reached home, it still may have been too dim for Naomi to recognize her, and so the question could be taken literally as a request for identification. In that way “the storyteller masterfully assures his readers that Ruth reached home unseen—the secret of her meeting with Boaz is safe.” (CC)

Yet Naomi also addressed Ruth as “my daughter” (3:16 and again in 3:18), suggesting that she did recognize her. Naomi’s double use of the same familial term of endearment Boaz had used for Ruth earlier (“my daughter,” 3:10) reinforces the growing relationship between Naomi and Boaz through their mutual “daughter,” Ruth. When consideration is given to how Ruth replied to Naomi (3:16b–17), it is clear that Naomi was really asking what had been uppermost in her mind all night, namely, how Ruth had fared with Boaz. Therefore, the likely sense of her inquiry is, “How did your mission go?” (see the textual notes). A parallel to “Who/how are you, my daughter?” (3:16) may be Isaac’s question, “Who are you, my son?” (Gen 27:18), since Isaac sought not only to clarify whether the person was Jacob or Esau, but also to ask about the result of the mission on which he had sent his son (Gen 27:19–20). (CC)

It should not be disconcerting to the audience that the narrator did not bother to include in Ruth’s reply a full report of all that she had done, for she had simply carried out Naomi’s instructions (3:1–6). More important was to relate that Ruth told Naomi all that Boaz had done. “Then she told her all that the man had done for her” (3:16) parallels “Then she told her mother-in-law him with whom she had worked” in 2:19 and is a counterpart to “He himself will tell you what you should do” in 3:4 (cf. Boaz’s statement to Ruth in 2:11: “It has surely been told me all that you did for your mother-in-law”). Ruth’s statement in 3:17 is the last time she speaks in the book. In the first three chapters, Ruth often was the speaker and the subject of activity, but hereafter speech will instead be about her, and she will be the object of activity. (CC)

The narrator, quoting Ruth, has only one point to add in 3:17 to what he had previously reported about the threshing-floor scene. Ruth told Naomi the reason that Boaz had given her for offering the gift of barley: she should have something to present to Naomi, so “You shall not come empty-handed to your mother-in-law!” It was customary to send a gift home with a visitor.¹²⁷ Thus, in Ruth both chapters 2 and 3 end with gifts of grain. (CC)

Moreover, a Law and Gospel theme throughout the Scriptures is that God will impoverish the ungodly but he will fill his poor and hungry believers with all good things (e.g., 1 Sam 2:5–7; Job 22:9; Lk 1:53). A dialectic of “empty” versus “full” runs throughout the book of Ruth that involves both family (dead versus living) and food (famine versus satiety). Upon returning from Moab, hungry and bereft of her husband and sons, Naomi lamented, “I went away full, but empty the LORD returned me!” (1:21). Now Boaz uses the identical Hebrew term (רָקִי, “empty”) but

in a negated context (“not ... empty,” 3:17), so that here it is a synonym of terms in Ruth that can mean “full.” The LORD is using Boaz to fill his humble believers as an analogical prophecy of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. (CC)

Boaz’s words reveal his concern not only for Ruth but also for her “mother-in-law” (3:17), who returned to Bethlehem “empty” (1:21). At least in respect to the threat of hunger, she now has relief. The literal use of the same term (“empty”) here does not counteract her earlier emptiness, but it signals a potential prospect. It demonstrates that Naomi is part of the bargain, for if marriage with Ruth were the only objective, there would be no point in earmarking the gift for her “mother-in-law.” Naomi had felt “empty” because of her childlessness and the famine. The donated seed to fill the stomach appears as a kind of down payment to her for what Boaz was about to do in fulfillment of both parts of the women’s request (3:9): marriage to Ruth and redemption for Naomi. (CC)

Because Naomi was functioning as Ruth’s guardian (3:1), it would be appropriate for Boaz to present a “bride price” to her family as proof of betrothal. However, since the primary redeemer might be willing to redeem and marry Ruth (3:13; see 3:18 and 4:5–6), it would be premature to make a pledge of betrothal already, and a “bride price” ought to be of much more value from a man of some means than a mere bushel or two of barley. (CC)

The close of chapter 3 mirrors that of chapter 2, with grain coming from Boaz and Ruth giving it to Naomi (2:18; 3:17). As at the end of the first two chapters (1:20–21; 2:22), Naomi, who opened this act with a speech (3:1–4), is also here the last person to speak (3:18). Although no overt emotion is revealed in her response, it is obvious that she was very pleased by the outcome. All had turned out at least as well as she had hoped. There was nothing more for her and Ruth to do now (cf. 3:3–5) but “sit still” and wait to see how “the matter will turn out” (3:18). Ironically, the idiom *נִפְלַג דְּבַר*, literally, “a word/ matter falls,” elsewhere has the connotation “to fail,” although it is used to emphasize that not a single promise of God failed to come true (Josh 21:46; 1 Ki 8:56). Nevertheless, the use of that Hebrew idiom here may have raised apprehension in the minds of the Israelite audience. However, using the word for “word, matter” (*דְּבַר*, *dabar*) without the article reflects the style of an aphorism, here referring to what lies only in God’s hands, as if to say, “No one can know what God will do,” but the LORD is ever faithful (2 Tim 2:12–13). (CC)

Naomi’s command for Ruth to “Sit still” (Ruth 3:18) indicates satisfaction with how Ruth had carried out her plan, dispelling any thought that Ruth deviated in any way from Naomi’s instructions or that Ruth had left anything unfinished. Further, it implies that Boaz also reacted to her plan much as she had expected of him. She had put her trust in him that he would neither take advantage of Ruth in the precarious situation nor reject her. As he had not disappointed Naomi’s confidence in him, so she could trust in his promise (3:11, 13). *Midrash Rabbah Ruth* adds here, “The yea of the righteous is yea, and their nay nay.” The Lord Jesus had used similar wording about the swearing of oaths: the Christian is always to speak the truth and simply to wait for God to fulfill his good and gracious will (Mt 5:34–37). (CC)

At this juncture, when they could only sit at home and await the outcome, Naomi knew that their fate was in the best of human hands: Boaz would surely do his utmost to fulfill their hopes. For

she knew his integrity and determination well enough that, once the process had been set in motion, he would leave no stone unturned until the affair was fully settled that very day. He “will not rest” (3:18) until he had obtained “rest” for them, and in saying that Naomi “could offer him no greater praise.”¹³⁸ In a sense for her and Ruth, “the drama ceases to be their story and becomes the story about them.” (CC)

Of course, their future truly rests in the hands of the LORD (cf. Deut 33:27), who will guide the hands of Boaz. It is God himself who has been working in the actions of those who believed and trusted in him and seized his given opportunities. While the narrator himself closed each of the first two chapters (1:22; 2:23), this time the narrator need not supply the act with the last word to point the action forward to the last chapter of the drama (Ruth 4). No comment retards the pace as the “story now rushes irrevocably toward resolution.” (CC)

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 (see note on 1:21). (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)