

Ruth Chapter 3

Verses 1-13: Because widows were usually destitute in biblical times, God provided for their well-being through Levirate law, in which the nearest relative would marry and care for a widow (Deut. 25:5-10).

Encouraged by Ruth's day in Boaz's field, Naomi instructed Ruth in the way she should go to insure a brighter future.

Ruth carefully followed Naomi's directions to solicit redemption by Boaz, while the LORD had prepared Boaz to redeem Ruth.

Only one potential obstacle remained, a relative nearer than Boaz.

Ruth 3:1 "Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?"

"Be well":

Naomi felt responsible (just as she did in 1:9), for Ruth's future husband and home.

Naomi had great love for Ruth.

She had worked hard to furnish a living for herself and Naomi.

Ruth's mother-in-law wanted to see Ruth do well.

She probably had seen Ruth and Boaz together from time to time on a friendship basis.

She probably also, knew that they cared for each other.

Verses 2-6: Naomi's plan probably seemed illogical to Ruth, who did not understand Jewish laws and customs.

Yet out of respect for her mother-in-law and her religion, Ruth promised to do everything Naomi instructed.

Ruth 3:2 "And now [is] not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor."

"Threshing floor":

Usually a large, hard area of earth or stone on the downwind (east), side of the village where threshing took place (loosening the grain from the straw and winnowing).

“To night”:

Winnowing (tossing grain into the air to finish separating the grain from the chaff), normally occurred in late afternoon when the Mediterranean winds prevailed.

Sifting and bagging the grain would have carried out past dark, and Boaz may have remained all night to guard the grain from theft.

The “threshing floor” was a public area where animals trampled the barley heads to separate the grain from the chaff.

Boaz slept there to protect his grain from thieves.

Naomi knows that Boaz will be at the threshing floor, because that is what they do at end of harvest.

Boaz is their near-kinsman.

Ruth's husband had died without having a child.

The law of their land was that the brother would marry the wife, and give the first child the name of the dead brother.

In this case, the brother is dead also.

Boaz is the nearest of kin.

This is found in (Deut. chapter 25:5-6).

"Winnowing" was when the grain was thrown up in the air several times to separate it.

This removed the chaff from the grain.

They sometimes remained all night with their grain on the floor of the threshing floor.

Verses 3-4: Naomi instructed Ruth;

1. To put on her best appearance; and
2. To propose marriage to Boaz by utilizing an ancient Near Eastern custom.

Since Boaz was a generation older than Ruth (2:8), this overture would indicate Ruth's desire to marry Boaz, which the older, gracious Boaz would not have initiated with a younger woman.

Ruth 3:3 "Wash thy self therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: [but] make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking."

As a bride prepares herself for marriage (see Ezek. 16:9).

"And anoint thee":

Not with aromatic ointments, as great personages, both men and women, used as Aben Ezra notes, but with common oil. Ruth being a poor widow that she might look sleek and smooth.

"And put thy raiment upon thee":

That is, her best raiment; for it cannot be supposed that she was now without clothes.

Or else her ornaments as the Targum.

Her mother-in-law advises her to put off her widow's weed.

The time of mourning for her husband being perhaps at an end, and put on her ornamental dress she used to wear in her own country, and in her husband's lifetime.

Jarchi interprets it of her Sabbath day clothes.

"And get thee down to the floor":

To the threshing floor where Boaz was winnowing, and which it seems lay lower than the city of Bethlehem.

"But make not thyself known unto the man":

Some understand it, that she should not make herself known to any man, not to any of the servants of Boaz.

Who, though they knew her before, when in the habit of a gleaner, would not know her now in her best and finest clothes, unless she made herself known to them.

But rather Boaz is meant, to whom it was not advisable to make herself known.

And who also, for the same reason, though he might see her at supper time, might not know her because of her different dress.

And the rather he is particularly intended, since it follows.

"Until he shall have done eating and drinking":

When Naomi thought it would be the fittest time to make herself known unto him in order to gain the point in view, marriage with him.

Ruth was to prepare herself by washing and smelling good.

She was to dress attractively, and go down to where Boaz was working.

She was not to interrupt his work by letting him know she was there.

She should wait out of sight, until all of the workers have eaten and gone to their respective homes for the night.

Ruth 3:4 "And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do."

On the threshing floor, under the open air, in order to sleep, and take rest.

"That thou shall mark the place where he shall lie":

The spot he shall lie on, and the direction in which he shall lie, whether east, west, etc.

That when the light shall be taken away, and the darkness of the night come on, she might pretty easily find the place where he lay.

"And thou shall go in and uncover his feet, and lay thee down":

Go into the threshing floor, or to the place where he lay down and gently lay aside the covering upon his feet, whether a blanket, or rug, or his own long clothes, with which his feet were wrapped, and then lay herself down at his feet.

This seems to be advised to, in order to give him a hint that there was somebody at his feet.

"And he will tell thee what thou shall do":

Being a judge of Israel, and expert in the law, he would inform her whether he was the next kinsman, and had the right of redemption or not.

And what methods must be taken, and what rites used, in order to her marriage with him, or another person.

This seems that Naomi has figured out a way to trap Boaz into marrying Ruth.

I think Naomi has realized, during these months that Boaz has known Ruth, that they love each other.

This particular marking of the spot where he lay, and also Ruth uncovering his feet has to do with him being her near-kinsman redeemer.

She is making it clear to him that she wants to marry him.

Boaz was possibly a bit shy in making his feelings about Ruth known, so Naomi has figured out a way for Ruth to show her feelings for Boaz.

Boaz can accept her or reject her, as she lies down beside him.

In their customs, it was not out of line for Ruth to expect him to become her husband.

He is the nearest kin of her husband.

We can assume from this, that Ruth already knew the feelings of Boaz, even if he had not expressed those feelings in words.

It will now be up to Boaz to tell her to go or stay.

Ruth 3:5 "And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do."

Having the highest opinion of her piety and prudence, and being confident she would never advise her to what was contrary to true religion and virtue.

"All that thou sayest unto me I will do":

Observe every instruction and direction she gave her, and attend strictly to every circumstance pointed out to her, as she did.

Ruth follows the advice of Naomi.

Ruth 3:6 "And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her."

From the city of Bethlehem, from her mother-in-law's house there, to the threshing floor of Boaz, which was at some distance from it, and lower.

"And did according to all that her mother in law bade her":

Both before she went, and after.

She washed and anointed herself, and put on her best clothes before she went down.

And when she was there, taking care not to make herself known to any, especially to Boaz, and marked the place where he lay down after he had supped.

Ruth probably was not as familiar with the law of the near-kinsman redeemer as Naomi was.

She followed Naomi's instructions exactly.

Verses 7-10: Ruth's actions at the threshing floor demonstrated her dependence on Boaz.

Lying at Boaz's feet was an act of submission, a request that required him to decide whether or not to protect her.

She made a bold marriage proposal, perhaps because Boaz's age prevented him from proposing to her (3:10), yet she did so humbly and honorably, in accordance with Jewish levirate law.

Ruth 3:7 "And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down."

"His heart was merry":

Using the same language of 3:1 ("rest" ... "be well"), Boaz is described as having a sense of well-being which is most readily explained by the full harvest in contrast to previous years of famine (Judges 18:20; 1 Kings 21:7).

It appears that, after he had eaten and drunk he was tired and lay down to rest.

He probably went to sleep.

It appears that while he slept peacefully, Ruth slipped in.

She uncovered his feet and lay down beside him.

Ruth 3:8 "And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet."

So long Boaz slept without knowledge of any person being at his feet, and so long Ruth had lain there.

But awaking, and perceiving something at his feet, which pressed them, it made him look about and feel, and so affected him.

"That the man was afraid":

Though a man, and a man of spirit, he was afraid, a panic seized him, not knowing but it might be a ghost, a spirit, or a demon.

"And turned himself":

To see who it was.

"And, behold, a woman lay at his feet":

Which he knew by putting his hand upon her head, as Jarchi thinks, and so knew her by her headdress, or vail.

Or rather by her voice, as Aben Ezra.

When Boaz lay down, there was no one at his feet.

He was startled when he realized someone had lain down at his feet.

He realizes it is a woman.

He would have been even more frightened, if this had not been Ruth.

Ruth 3:9 "And he said, Who [art] thou? And she answered, I [am] Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou [art] a near kinsman."

"Near kinsman" (Hebrew *goel*), designates one of the social institutions among the Hebrews.

Two of his many family responsibilities are in evidence in the Book of Ruth.

1. He was charged with redeeming family property that had been lost or was about to be lost by sale (4:3; compare Lev. 25:25-34);
2. He was obligated to marry the widow of the deceased near relative so as to raise up children to the name of the dead (4:5; compare Deut. 25:5-10).

The law of near kinsman operated on the principle of degree of closeness of relationship.

Boaz brings both duties to bear as one issue in the case of Ruth (4:3-5).

Naomi's instructions to Ruth to seek out Boaz are apparently in accordance with social propriety in that the widow could initiate proceedings relative to the securing of the "goel".

Ruth's request that Boaz "spread" his "skirt over thine handmaid" is a symbolic pledge of marriage (Ezek. 16:8-14).

It reflects a well-known custom in the ancient Near East that is still practiced in some quarters.

The Lord had so moved in the lives of Boaz and Ruth that the duties of family institutions were reinforced by a genuine love for one another.

Accordingly, Boaz took special measure to see that no impropriety would mark the occasion (verses 11-14).

“Spread therefor thy skirt over thine handmaid”:

Ruth righteously appealed to Boaz, using the language of Boaz’s earlier prayer (2:12), to marry her according to the levirate custom (Deut. 25:5-10).

In the dark he could not see who this was, so he asked?

What a pleasant surprise for him, when he discovers this is Ruth.

She is at his feet because she feels she is his handmaiden.

He still can accept her, or reject her at his time.

"The spreading of his skirt over her" would show he had accepted his duty as her near-kinsman.

He would be her protector as her husband.

Ruth 3:10 "And he said, Blessed [be] thou of the LORD, my daughter: [for] thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich."

“Kindness”:

Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi, the LORD, and even Boaz is commended by Boaz.

“Not young men”: Ruth demonstrated moral excellence in that;

1. She did not engage in immorality;
2. She did not remarry outside the family; and
3. She had appealed for levirate redemption to an older, godly man.

He had observed that Ruth was not a loose woman.

She had not sought a husband of the young men, whether rich or poor.

He had great admiration as well as love for Ruth.

He is saying that, the blessing that came upon him by her choosing him, was the greatest of the kindness she had shown.

He was very pleased.

Ruth 3:11 "And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou [art] a virtuous woman."

“Virtuous”:

In all respects, Ruth personifies excellence (Psalm 31:10).

The same language has been used of Boaz (“a man of great wealth” see 2:1 for meaning of wealth “valor”), thus making them the perfectly matched couple for an exemplary marriage.

Everyone was aware of the fact that Ruth was a virtuous woman.

Ruth would have been a wonderful wife for anyone, because of her strength of character.

Boaz is willing to accept her as his wife.

Ruth 3:12 "And now it is true that I [am thy] near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I."

“A kinsman nearer than I”:

Boaz righteously deferred to someone else who was nearer in relationship to Elimelech.

The nearer relative may have been Boaz’s older brother (4:3) or Boaz may have been his cousin.

The fact that the neighbor women said “A son has been born to Naomi” at Obed’s birth would suggest the brother or cousin relationship to Elimelech (4:17).

This is certainly not what Ruth wanted to hear.

She wanted Boaz to be her husband.

There is someone closer related than Boaz, however.

Ruth 3:13 "Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, [that] if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, [as] the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning."

“I will do the part of a kinsman to thee”:

Boaz willingly accepted Ruth’s proposal, if the nearer relative was unable or unwilling to exercise his levirate duty.

“As the LORD liveth”:

The most solemn, binding oath an Israelite could vow.

Boaz and Ruth loved each other, and they wanted to marry.

They had to live by the law God had given though.

She spent the night with him, but did not become his wife that night.

They would wait for the answer from the other near-kinsman.

Verses 14-17: Ruth left early in the morning so that no one would misunderstand what had taken place and dishonor either of them.

Boaz further showed his care for Ruth by sending her home with more grain, not “empty-handed (1:21).

Ruth 3:14 "And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor."

“Lay at his feet”:

According to the text, no immorality occurred.

Boaz even insisted on no appearance of evil.

She must leave early to keep her good name.

No one was to know she spent the night at his feet on the threshing-floor.

They each wanted to protect the honor of the other.

Ruth 3:15 "Also he said, Bring the veil that [thou hast] upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six [measures] of barley, and laid [it] on her: and she went into the city."

“Six measures”:

The Hebrew text gives no standard of measurement, but some translations use the word ephah.

However, 6 ephahs would weigh about 200 pounds, far too much for Ruth to carry home in her shawl.

Therefore, deemed most reasonable is 6 seahs (60-80 pounds), which would have been twice the amount Ruth had previously gleaned (see 2:17).

The veil here, was more like an apron than a face covering.

Regardless of what it was, he filled it with barley for her to take back with her.

The amount of barley was all she could conveniently carry.

Ruth 3:16 "And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who [art] thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her."

To Naomi, in Bethlehem.

"She said, who art thou, my daughter?

It being near dusk, she could not discern her, or perhaps she put the question before she opened the door and saw her.

Though one would think, if Ruth had called to her, she would have known her voice.

Rather therefore the particle may be rendered, "what" or "how", instead of "who"; and the sense be, what had befallen her?

What success had she had? How had things gone with her? Was she married or not?

Or rather, had she got a promise of it?

Or was it likely that she should be married?

With which the answer agrees.

"And she told her all that the man had done to her":

What kindness he had shown her, what promises he had made to her, and that either he, or a nearer kinsman, would marry her, and redeem her husband's estate.

Naomi asked her if she was now Boaz's wife.

Ruth really did not know how to answer this, except to tell her exactly what happened.

Ruth 3:17 "And she said, These six [measures] of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law."

Which she laid down before her, which was a proof of his kindness to her, that she was acceptable to him, and had well sped.

Of these six measures (see Ruth 3:15), which by some are allegorically interpreted of six blessings that should be bestowed upon her.

As the spirit of wisdom, understanding, etc. (as Isa. 11:2), so Jarchi; or of six persons that should spring from her.

As David, Daniel, and his companions, and the King Messiah, as the Targum.

"For he said unto me, go not empty unto thy mother in law":

Which, as it expressed a regard to Naomi.

And a compassionate concern for her support, so would give her assurance of the success Ruth met with, she would relate to her.

She had brought back all the barley she could carry, to show Naomi of his good intentions.

Ruth had probably told Boaz of Naomi encouraging her to do this thing.

He wanted to show appreciation to Naomi also.

Naomi had approved of the possibility of Ruth being his wife.

Ruth 3:18 "Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

In times of waiting, often the best thing a person can do is to "sit still" and draw strength from God (Exodus 14:13; Psalm 46:10).

As Boaz waited to discern God's will, Naomi and Ruth waited to discover it.

Naomi knew that Boaz was a man of integrity and would fulfill his promise with a sense of urgency.

They needed to wait on the LORD to work through Boaz.

Naomi knows that Boaz will get this settled as quickly as possible, because he wants to marry Ruth.

Ruth is undoubtedly a little concerned, because she wanted Boaz for a husband, not the other near-kinsman.

Naomi feels in her heart that this will work out for Ruth and Boaz.

She knows they love each other.

She also knows that God blesses those who keeps his commandments.

Boaz had already proved he was a godly man.

Ruth Chapter 3 Questions

1. Naomi had great love for _____.
2. She tells Ruth that Boaz is their _____.
3. Where would Boaz be that night?
4. What was the law of their land about a near kinsman?
5. What is "winnowing"?
6. What did Naomi tell Ruth to do to herself, before she goes to Boaz?
7. Why was she not to go in, until he had finished eating and drinking?
8. After Boaz went to sleep, what was Ruth to do?
9. Why is Naomi trying to get Boaz to marry Ruth?
10. How does Ruth answer these suggestions of Naomi?
11. When Boaz went to sleep, what did Ruth do?
12. When did Boaz wake up?
13. What did he realize, when he woke up?
14. What question did Boaz ask the woman at his feet?
15. What would "the spreading of his skirt over her" show?
16. What had Boaz noticed about Ruth's character?
17. He called her a _____ woman.
18. How did he feel about Ruth choosing him?
19. What bad news does Boaz give her in verse 12?
20. What does Boaz ask Ruth to do?
21. Is Boaz willing to marry Ruth?

22. Why did she rise very early in the morning?
23. What did Boaz give her to take with her?
24. What did Naomi ask Ruth, when she saw her?
25. What did this question mean?
26. How did Ruth answer her?
27. What was the gift of barley for?
28. What did Naomi tell Ruth to do about the situation?
29. Why is Ruth concerned?
30. Why does Naomi believe this will work out for Ruth and Boaz to marry?