

Ruth Bible Study

Chapter 3

Read 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)

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print at the end of the “questions” section.**

1. Naomi’s opening question, “Should I not seek for you security?” (v. 1) 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 saying, “so that it will be good for you,” in this context refers to marital happiness, children, and security. (CC)

How does Naomi’s question show her love for Ruth?

2. What is the setting that Naomi is describing in verse 2
3. Look at verse 3a. How does this signal a change in Ruth’s mourning status to wanting to be married?
4. Why would Naomi add the cautionary note in 3b?
5. It was harvest time and that would include a good meal and drinks to celebrate. How might that be helpful for what Naomi was suggesting for Ruth?
6. 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). How do verses 7-9 explain the reason for this approach?
7. How did Ruth once more demonstrate her devotion to Naomi?
8. Why do you think Ruth identified herself as his “servant?”
9. While giving herself a humble title, how does she show her boldness in verse 9?
10. How does Boaz assure Ruth in verses 10-14?
11. How does Ruth once more proceed with great humility (v. 14)?

12. How does Boaz show his care for Ruth and Naomi (v. 15)?
13. Look at verses 16-18. What in verse 18 shows that Naomi is beginning to see the Lord's hand at work and trusting the Lord?
14. What is your favorite verse in this study and why?

Some Answers to the above Questions:

- 1. 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 Moabitess. 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. (CC)**
- 2. 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, although the more important transactions that involved witnesses were conducted at the town gate (see Ruth 4:1-2). (CC)**
- 3. 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. 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. Her symbolic message was not to entice Boaz to adultery, but to help him understand that she was making a marriage proposal. (CC)**
- 4. In the culture of that time and place 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)**
- 5. 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)**
- 6. 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)**

7. 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,” Esther 4:16), she went ahead with the plan, despite the dangers involved. (CC)

8. 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). (CC)

9. 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. 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)

10. 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. 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)

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. 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. (CC)

11. 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. 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. (CC)

12. 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). 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. 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)

13. Now 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)