

## Ruth Chapter 3

- OUTLINE:** I. Naomi's plan (1-5)  
II. Ruth and Boaz (6-15)  
III. Good news (16-18)

### I. NAOMI'S PLAN

Naomi first mentions security for her daughters-in-law before they part is Moab.

<sup>9</sup> *The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' (1:9)*

Ruth and Naomi are dependent on the results of Ruth's daily gleaning supplemented by Boaz's generosity. Now the harvest is ending so the future looks desperate. Naomi's risky plan for Ruth to take the initiative in soliciting Boaz is stealthy but Ruth willingly agrees. There are many ambiguous implications and innuendos to suggest this meeting is unconventional (or scandalous). Although this is like a levirate marriage, none of the participants claim it to be so.

Naomi does not spell out what Ruth can expect Boaz to do, or what Ruth is to say. Ruth's response indicates her compliance with Naomi's plan even if it breaks with tradition.

### II. RUTH AND BOAZ

The threshing floor was set apart from daily activities. Grain was threshed and winnowed, and it was a place for communal gathering and feasting. Ruth's preparations involve leaving her widow's clothing, indicating a new phase of her life.

<sup>8</sup> *I passed by you again and looked on you; you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. (Ezekiel 16:8)*

Events at the threshing floor are not described precisely but are highly suggestive, in a sexually charged atmosphere, using ambiguous language, full of mystery, as Ruth elicits a commitment from Boaz.

The mood at the threshing floor is one of feasting, rather than an ordinary meal, as:

<sup>3</sup> *You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. (Isaiah 9:3)*

But contemporary readers would know that the threshing floor was not a suitable place for a respectable woman after dark.

Ruth tells Boaz (v9): "*Spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.*" In this, Ruth departs from Naomi's instructions, and presents an interpretive puzzle at the heart of the book. Were Ruth's requests for a redeemer deliberately vague, or were the responsibilities so well-known that no explanation was necessary?

Redemption is a key theme of the book. (Occurs 9 times as a noun and 12 as verb.) It has physical, economic and spiritual dimensions, and in the Bible implies protecting vulnerable relatives. God is the metaphorical redeemer of Israel.

### III. GOOD NEWS

Naomi is anxious to know the results of her plan (V16). Hence her three questions. The focus here is on Boaz, not Ruth, but the reader knows that Ruth's words have elicited Boaz' commitment.

Ruth's added words (V17) are her last in the book. They focus on bread, perhaps to reassure Naomi that she will be provided for within the household.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why is Naomi so concerned with Ruth's security?
2. What indications does the text give that there is more implicit than expressed in Naomi's instructions to Ruth to meet with Boaz?
3. Why do you think the narrator relies on suggestion to tell of this encounter between Ruth and Boaz.
4. Explain how a foreign woman approaching a man sleeping after feasting will ultimately benefit Israel.
5. What might have startled Boaz at midnight? (v8)
6. Ruth does not wait, as Naomi instructed, for Boaz to tell her what to do. What do you think Ruth is actually asking Boaz, who, like the reader, must interpret her words? (v9)
7. How do Ruth's goals compare with Naomi's and Boaz'?
8. Ruth is only one of seven women in the Bible to be "blessed of the Lord". What does the reader infer from this?
9. What are Ruth's first and second acts of loyalty? (v10)
10. Boaz sends Ruth home to Naomi with six measures of grain. What does this symbolically show?