

Exegetical Notes – Ruth 3:1-18

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Ruth is a story that took place during the days when Israel was ruled by Judges. Those days were a time of moral and religious decline in Israel. The people of Israel were following the mindset of the people who lived around them and frequently ignored the Lord. They wandered into trouble and God sent people to save them from their wandering away from him. These people were called judges.

Ruth is the story of two women, Naomi, a Jewess, who is bitter because of the circumstances of her life, and Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law, who is not Jewish. It is the story of how God works in their lives to bring them blessing.

Ruth 3:1-18

Verses 1-6

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. ² Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in 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.

- After having lived in Judah for some time, Naomi decided that it was time for her to find a home for Ruth in which Ruth would be well provided for. It turned out that Boaz, in whose field Ruth had been working, was a close relative of Naomi through her husband's family. Perhaps Naomi had learned this only with the passage of time. He is, in fact, their closest relative, except one (see verse 12).

- At the time of harvest, the owner of the grain and the men who worked for him stayed all night with the grain while it was being threshed to protect it from thieves. They drank and partied all evening.
- Naomi told Ruth to dress in her finest and to go to the threshing floor knowing that Boaz would be there. Ruth was to sit quietly apart from them while the men partied. When the party was over and Boaz laid down to go to sleep, Ruth was told by Naomi to go to Boaz and “uncover his feet.” The phrase means that she was to offer herself to him as his wife and then follow his instructions.
- Ruth did all that Naomi told her to do.

Verses 7-9

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; he turned—and there was 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 guardian-redeemer of our family.”

- When Boaz had had enough of the party, he went off to a quiet spot away from the other men, laid down, and fell asleep.
- As he slept Ruth came and laid down next to him.
- In the middle of the night, Boaz awoke to find Ruth lying next to him. He asked who she was and she told him she was Ruth, the daughter -in-law of Naomi, the widow of Elimelech and that he (Boaz) was her “kinsman-redeemer.” The term used by the NIV, “guardian-redeemer,” is an attempt to eliminate the apparent sexist word “kinsman” (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10, Leviticus 25:47-49, Numbers 35:19-21). The kinsman-redeemer’s role was to provide for a member of his immediate family who was unable to provide for herself. He was obligated to marry the widow of his deceased relative and to provide a child for her who would “redeem” her husband’s inheritance.
- Ruth asked Boaz to cover her with “the corner of his garment.” She was requesting that he become her kinsman-redeemer. She was asking him to protect her and to provide for her as her husband.

Verses 10-13

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 the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

- Boaz blessed Ruth for choosing him as her kinsman-redeemer. He considered her request and honor. He agreed to accept responsibility for her and to honor her request. However, there was another relative who was closer to Elimelech than was he. This person had first claim to act as Ruth’s provider.
- Boaz invited Ruth to stay with him for the night. He promised that the next day he would go to the other person and ask him his intentions related to Ruth. If the other relative wanted to act as kinsman-redeemer, he would step back. However, he would act as kinsman-redeemer if the other relative declined.

Verses 14-18

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know 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 placed the bundle 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.”

- Ruth spent the night beside Boaz. In the morning, she quietly slipped away before anyone knew she had been with Boaz. He told Ruth that the whole thing must be kept secret.

- He gave Ruth a supply of grain for her to take back to Naomi.
- Ruth told Naomi all that had happened. Naomi told Ruth to wait patiently. She said that Boaz would not be content until matters were settled with the kinsman-redeemer.

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