

PREFACE

Along with theology, commands and doctrine, history and songs, God's word contains lyrical beauty. I would suggest that when one approaches the story of Ruth with an understanding of what is going on and why, it vies with the Song of Solomon for poetic beauty. The story of Boaz and Ruth is not just about two people who happen to be in the family line that culminates in the Messiah; it illustrates the order and wonder of the God-ordained marriage, and thus is an elegant representation of Christ and His church.

A WOMAN OF EXCELLENCE (3:11) AND A MAN OF RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER

More than just leaving Ruth alone and letting her glean, Boaz instructed his workers to pull some grain from that which had already been bundled and leave it for her.

Now, the average ration for a male worker would have been about one to two pounds of grain per day. As a result of Boaz's generosity, Ruth left that first day with enough for Naomi and herself for several weeks.

Read Ruth 2:17.

1 ephah of barley = 221 litres = ½ to 2/3 bushel = almost 6 gallons = 29-50 lbs.

As we might imagine, at this Naomi was stunned, and asked where Ruth had worked that day. When her mother-in-law heard the name Boaz she was overjoyed, for this man was one of their closest relatives^{nasb}. The NIV captures v20 nicely.

"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

[More on this later.](#)

Ruth took Naomi's advice and remained at the fields of Boaz until the end of harvest—which would have lasted about seven weeks. After that, Naomi one day approached Ruth about her future.

Read Ruth 3:1-2.

Sidebar: What takes place next in this story must be understood in the context of *its* time—not ours. We live in an age of coarse, unbridled promiscuity, an age where young women and men wear what used to be called *underwear* out in the open for all to see, an age in which very often first dates end in a bed. The dignity and beauty of the night-time scene between Ruth and Boaz is revealed only when we interpret it by the standards and behavior of *their* times, rather than adding into it the prevalent attitudes and behavior of our own.

Naomi's first instruction to Ruth, however, is timeless: *Girl, get yourself dolled up and looking your best.*

Read Ruth 3:3-5.

OK. This seems a bit weird. But let's continue with the story.

This was the night that Boaz and his servants would be winnowing the grain they had just harvested. The threshing floor in Bethlehem—a cleared and well-trampled patch of dirt—was below the town proper, so one would “go down” to the threshing floor. And as we have already seen, Boaz is a regular guy, so while wealthy landowners would typically leave this work to the hired help, Boaz is there himself, helping with the work and eating and drinking with the men.

When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry,

Don't read drunkenness into this. Harvest was a joyous time, and Boaz was happy and contented. His belly was full and he was feeling good.

he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.

It was now dark, and Ruth had remained in hiding. Once Boaz had lay down and was snoring, Ruth approached and quietly uncovered his feet and lay down.

It is important for us to remember that Ruth is not there to *seduce* Boaz; she is there to have him fulfill his role as kinsmen-redeemer. This *was* a risky enterprise that could have been misinterpreted by others (hence the darkness). But as we shall see, neither Ruth nor Boaz do anything improper, and Boaz is careful that Ruth not be seen by anyone else, so as to harm her reputation in the town.

It is not clear why she “uncovers his feet.” Two possibilities occur to me:

- she literally removes the covering (his cloak) from his feet so they will get cold later and wake him; or
- this may refer to her lifting the cover from his feet so as to place a portion of it over herself for warmth.

You see, Ruth did not lie down *next to* Boaz; she didn't cuddle up to him to spoon. She lay down *at his feet*, perpendicular to him (“crossing the T”).

David Guzik: Some might think this was a provocative gesture, as if Ruth was told to provocatively offer herself sexually to Boaz. This was not how this gesture was understood in that day. In the culture of that day, this was understood as an act of total submission.

In that day, this was understood to be the role of a servant—to lay at their master's feet and be ready for any command of the master. So, when Naomi told Ruth to lie down at Boaz's feet, she told her to come to him in a totally humble, submissive way.

Don't lose sight of the larger picture: Ruth came to claim a right. Boaz was her *goel*, her kinsman-redeemer, and she had the right to expect him to marry her and raise up a family to perpetuate [her husband's line]. But Naomi wisely counseled Ruth to not come as a victim demanding her rights, but as a humble servant, trusting in the goodness of her kinsman-redeemer. She said to Boaz, “I respect you, I trust you, and I put my fate in your hands.”

JFB: Boaz probably slept upon a mat or skin; Ruth lay crosswise at his feet—a position in which Eastern servants frequently sleep in the same chamber or tent with their master; and if they want a covering, custom allows them that benefit from part of the covering on their master's bed.

Suddenly Boaz wakes up to discover someone sleeping at his feet. In the dark he cannot immediately identify who it is.

Read Ruth 3:8-10.

This story is chock-full of typology of Christ, which we will look at in a moment. Pay attention to the details in v8: note that Boaz “bends forward,” or “turned himself.” What happens when one turns over in bed—especially when one is startled in the middle of the night? The covers are pulled. When she first lay down at his feet, Ruth had carefully pulled some of his cloak over herself, but when he suddenly awoke and twisted his body, the covering was pulled off her—which makes her request in v9 to “spread your covering over your maid” make perfect sense, on a practical level.

But there is much more going on here. Still to this day there are parts of the Middle East where as part of the marriage ritual the man will place the corner of his garment over a maiden—or a widow—signifying his willingness (or desire) to marry the woman. But it goes beyond that, as is suggested by the NKJV and ESV.

He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” (Ruth 3:9)

Listen to the Lord God speaking in Ezekiel 16:8.

“Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord God.

Beyond matrimony, this act signifies *protection*—a man accepting the responsibility to care for and protect a woman—just as the Lord God, through Ezekiel, said He would to Jerusalem.

In her request—and Boaz immediately understands the true meaning of the request—Ruth is saying, *You are a kinsman-redeemer in our family line, and I call upon you to fulfill that role in my life, as protector and husband.* She was not just telling him she was cold; she was telling him she needed him for a husband and for his protection.

Sidebar: There is no mention in the book of Ruth (or elsewhere) that Boaz was already married. He could have been, but it would be an odd omission from the story. If Boaz is considerably older than Ruth, which seems to be the case by his own words, it would be almost unthinkable in that culture that he would not be married. So it may be that he was a widower.

Now, more about this “kinsman-redeemer.”

[Turn please to Deuteronomy 25.](#)

In ancient Israel the continuation of the family line was very important. The Mosaic Law included remedy for a woman whose husband had died before leaving a son to carry on the name.

Read Deuteronomy 25:5-6.

The text goes on to say that if the brother refuses to redeem his brother's name, he is to be publicly shamed. It is not stated in this text, but the tradition was that if the first brother refused, the same remedy could be found in other relatives.

Though this may seem strange to modern ears, I am impressed by the generosity and kindness of this act on the part of what was referred to as a "kinsman-redeemer." He would take the widow as a wife into his family, knowing that her first son after that would not be his, but his brother's—so named and bequeathed, as if the first brother were still living. What an unselfish act.

In his response to what Ruth said in v9, we see that Boaz understood immediately that she was not just asking for a little more covering against the night air.

Read Ruth 3:11.

Not being a woman, and not being a parent, I am supposedly ill-equipped to give counsel regarding that which transpires between mother and daughter. On the other hand, perhaps this affords me some dispassionate distance for a clearer perspective.

I think every mother *and* father should include the book of Ruth in every daughter's instruction. Had I one, I think I would be instilling the lessons from this story at the earliest opportunity. What character Ruth displays! Everywhere she went people recognized her as a woman of quality, of virtue, of noble and modest character.

- Do you want to know how to behave when events are not going your way? Look to Ruth.
- Do you want to know how to respond when you have lost everything? Look to Ruth.
- Do you want to know what to do when you are poor and cannot put food on the table? Look to Ruth.
- Do want to know how to behave around men when you need a husband? Look to Ruth.

Let's close with what David Guzik has to say about the presence of Christ Jesus, in type, being woven throughout this story.

- The kinsman-redeemer had to be a family member; Jesus added humanity to His eternal deity so He could be our kinsman and save us.
- The kinsman-redeemer had the duty of buying family members out of slavery; Jesus redeemed us from slavery to sin and death.
- The kinsman-redeemer had the duty of buying back land that had been forfeited; Jesus will redeem the earth that mankind "sold" over to Satan.
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, was not motivated by self-interest, but motivated by love for Ruth. Jesus' motivation for redeeming us is His great love for us.

- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, had to have a plan to redeem Ruth unto himself - and some might have thought the plan to be foolish. Jesus has a plan to redeem us, and some might think the plan foolish (saving men by dying for them on a cruel cross?), yet the plan works and is glorious.
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, took her as his bride; the people Jesus has redeemed are collectively called His bride (Eph_5:31-32; Rev_21:9).
- Boaz, as kinsman-redeemer to Ruth, provided a glorious destiny for Ruth. Jesus, as our redeemer, provides a glorious destiny for us.

It all comes back to the idea of Jesus as our kinsman-redeemer; this is why He became a man. God might have sent an angel to save us, but the angel would not have been our kinsman. Jesus, in His eternal glory, without the addition of humanity to His divine nature might have saved us, but He would not have been our kinsman. A great prophet or priest would be our kinsman, but his own sin would have disqualified him as our redeemer. Only Jesus, the eternal God who added humanity to His eternal deity, can be both the kinsman and the redeemer for mankind!