



Ruth 3

If you're new to this study and have not recently read the book of Ruth, take just a few minutes to read through chapters 1 and 2 before you start. It's a delightful short story, and it's best enjoyed by starting at the beginning.

1. Read Ruth chapter 3 *Ruth comes to Boaz at the threshing floor*

We have found the book of Ruth to be delightful so far, but when we come to Chapter 3 and read it with 21st century eyes, we find the narrative account to be perplexing. What was Naomi thinking when she told Ruth what she should do? What did Ruth imagine would likely happen when Boaz woke up? How are we to comprehend Ruth's behavior here?

We need to understand the background of Ruth's culture, and we need to appreciate how their culture differs from ours.

We live in a bureaucratic society. We have a vast array of governmental agencies, bustling corporations, and professional services that pave our roads, deliver our mail, educate our children, take away our wastewater, and provide delivery of our food. None of that was available for Ruth and Naomi.

Ancient Israel was a tribal society. In a tribal society, the *family* is the core of everything. If you were a man, your vocation would be dictated by your father's vocation. Your economic status was determined by your family's economic status. The safety net for the weak, the disabled, and the elderly operated within and through the family.



The core family of Hebrew culture consisted of a patriarch, his wife, his adult sons and their wives, and their children—at least three generations—all living on the family farm. Everyone worked to support the family and to cultivate the family land.

The patriarch held both the authority and responsibility for all the family members. If someone in the family suffered a crisis, a good patriarch would use his own resources to rescue (*redeem*) and restore the family member. If a family member were captured and enslaved by an enemy, a good patriarch would go to enemy territory and offer his own life to rescue (*redeem*) the captured family member. A good patriarch would be willing to give his life to *redeem* a kinsman—a family member who was in trouble.

The term *Kinsman-Redeemer* is used to describe a male family member who steps in to take responsibility for a relative who is in trouble or in need.

2. Go back to chapter 2 and read Ruth 2:19-23 *We have a kinsman!*
 - a. Given our understanding of tribal society, explain why the situation that Naomi faced when she returned to Bethlehem was so devastating.

In Israelite Law there is a provision called *Levirate marriage* which was given to ensure that a family line would continue even if the last male heir of the family died. In that case, the brother of the deceased man was obligated to marry the childless widow and father a son for her. The son born to the widow would be considered to be son of the deceased man. Through this practice, the deceased man's land and inheritance would be passed on within the family line. (See Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

The man who marries the widow and enables her to produce an heir is the Kinsman-Redeemer. He generously provides his own resources to *redeem* the family's heritage in Israel.

- b. What was Naomi's ultimate desire for her daughters-in-law? (See Ruth 1:9)

- c. Why would the discovery of a close relative in Bethlehem be significant to Naomi?

- d. What is the purpose of the law of Levirate marriage? What problem does it solve? See Leviticus 25:23-25 and Deuteronomy 25:5-6.

Naomi has learned that there is a close kinsman in Bethlehem, a man of integrity. Naomi desires the very best for her beloved daughter-in-law. It seems preposterous to us, but Naomi wants to arrange a wedding. Naomi is hoping that Boaz will agree to be their Kinsman-Redeemer by marrying Ruth and enabling Ruth to produce an heir for the line of Elimelech.

3. Read Ruth 3:1-5 *Naomi plans an encounter and a proposal*

It would not be appropriate for a single woman of Ruth's low status to publicly approach an older man directly, so Naomi makes a plan for Ruth to be at Boaz's feet when he wakes up in the night. If Boaz is the man of high character and kindness that Naomi hopes he is, he will hear her request and he will protect Ruth and her reputation.

- a. What dangers did Ruth face in doing as Naomi directed her to do?

- b. What will be the outcome for Ruth and Naomi if Boaz rejects Ruth's request and is unwilling to serve as Kinsman-Redeemer for them?

4. Read Ruth 3:6-13 *Ruth trusts in the Kinsman-Redeemer*

- a. When Boaz awakens to find Ruth at his feet, she says to him, “*I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer (a close relative).*” The Hebrew term translated “wings” (referring to the corner of his garment) has been used before, in Ruth 2:12. How does this previous use of the term clarify what Ruth was asking in Ruth 3:9?

When Ruth asks Boaz to be their redeemer, Ruth is asking Boaz to take on a costly obligation—to bring Ruth and Naomi under his patriarchal authority and protection. Ruth is asking Boaz to marry her according to Levirate marriage law.

- b. How does Boaz respond to Ruth’s request? (Ruth 3:11)
- c. What does Boaz’s response reveal about his character?



- d. How does Ruth’s request differ from our modern notion of romantic marriage? How was the commitment and responsibility of marriage different in the ancient culture than it seems to be today?

e. What high praise does Boaz give to Ruth?

f. Note that the term that Boaz used to praise Ruth is also used in Proverbs 31:10. What does Proverbs 31 teach us about the benefits of marrying a woman of noble character?

Proverbs 31:10-12

A wife of noble character who can find?
She is worth far more than rubies.
Her husband has full confidence in her
and lacks nothing of value.
She brings him good, not harm,
all the days of her life.

g. What suspense still remains in the story? (Ruth 3:12-13)

5. Read Ruth 3:14-18 *Boaz is willing to be the Kinsman-Redeemer*

a. How did Boaz protect Ruth at the threshing floor that night?

b. How did Boaz provide for Ruth the next morning?

The concept of a Kinsman-Redeemer and marriage-as-redemption seems very odd to us, but it was a merciful provision for the strengthening and survival of the family unit. Understanding this practice is helpful for us as Christians because the notion of Kinsman-Redeemer gives us insight into Christ's love for *His* family—the family of faith—all who have put their trust in Him. It foreshadows what Jesus has done for us as He purchased our redemption.

