

Chutzpah (Ruth 3)

1. The Plan of Naomi (v.1-5)

- For the first time, Naomi is seeking Ruth's well-being with no strings attached. She wants Ruth to find "rest" (1:9; 3:1). "Rest" includes a happy marriage, prosperity, and many children (Deut. 4:40; Ps. 127, 128). Naomi wants to force a meeting with Boaz, as it has been seven weeks with no advancement in their relationship (2:23).
- Boaz is winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Winnowing was the process through which the outer shell of grain (chaff) was removed.
- He is celebrating what appears to be a successful harvesting season with a time of eating and drinking (v.3). He will be "merry" and in a "good mood."
- Naomi had commanded Ruth to "wash, anoint, and put on your cloak" (v.3). If Ruth was wearing her "mourning" cloak, Scripture provides no prescription for this. If she had been wearing her mourning cloak, it would have been for at least seven weeks.
- Nearly every word in verse 4 is used as sexual euphemisms or idioms in Scripture: to lie down and uncover his feet/legs (Ex. 4:25; Lev. 18:6-19; Deut. 27:20; 28:57; 1 Sam. 17:6; 1 Sam. 24:3; Ezek. 16:25) is vague, and can have many connotations, depending on the context.
- Naomi's goal is to startle Boaz with the chills of the night air. Ruth will either uncover his feet and lay there (as an act of submission) or uncover his torso and lie next to him (as a prostitute). Does Ruth understand Naomi's ambiguous words?
- What does Naomi mean, in that Boaz will "tell you what to do"? How mindful is Naomi of the law of seduction (Ex. 22:16-17)?

2. The Proposal of Ruth (v.6-9)

- Ruth did all that Naomi had commanded her to do. Boaz is sleeping at the end of the heap of grain (v.7), which is where the winnowed grain was collected. This detail is provided because of the location: it is more secluded, and a place where there can be no interruptions by outsiders.
- Ruth was successful in watching Boaz from a distance, unseen. She came softly, uncovered his legs, and laid down at his feet (v.8). This happened "at midnight."
- Boaz is startled as he turned over and asks, "who are you?" Since it was midnight, he may have been unable to identify who this person is.
- Ruth does not refer to herself as a Moabite (2:6), nor as the widow of Mahlon (4:9). She introduces herself again as Boaz' servant. However, this word "servant" (amah) is different from the word "servant" (shiphah) in 2:13. Shiphah suggests a person who is possessed by another (as a slave), or even a laborer. "Amah" (3:9) is the title of a non-slave status that is marriageable. Amah suggests a woman who is weak and desires to come under the "protection" of a male. Ruth is now signaling to Boaz (not captured in the English) that she is marriageable.
- Instead of leaving anything to chance or passion, Ruth tells Boaz what to do!
- She commands him to "spread his wings over her" which is a euphemistic idiom for marriage (Ez. 16:8-9). This is *chutzpah* (Yiddish word capturing that boldness, brashness, and daring demand of Ruth): a younger woman proposing to an older man. This poor Moabite widow that owns nothing is telling a rich Israelite man to marry her! Ruth asks Boaz to be the vehicle for his previous benediction (2:12). Boaz can be those wings!
- The narrator has identified Boaz and Ruth as the "man" and "woman" (v.8). There is tension in the developing plot that has the potential to spiral out of control.

3. The Promise of Boaz (v.10-16)

- Startled, Boaz graciously responded to Ruth as "my daughter" which immediately indicates that he has not misread her intentions.

- Boaz praises her (v.10) for her "greater" expression of kindness (hesed). The first act was her loyalty and commitment to Naomi, despite the tremendous cost (1:16-17). Ruth left her father, mother, friends, land, country, and prospects of marriage and children for Naomi, a disgruntled and embittered widow who is too old to have children and beyond marriageable age. This second act of kindness (hesed) is perceived by Boaz to be greater: he suspects Ruth's desires to produce an heir to Naomi's estate (although not explicit).
- Boaz is humbled that she would choose him over other men. After she had changed her mourning clothes, she made herself available for him and no other man, rich or poor.
- Both Ruth and Boaz are identified as worthy people (2:1; 3:11). Ruth is known among the townspeople as a "woman of strength." Ruth is the personification of lady wisdom in her trustworthiness (Prov. 31:11), industry (v.9,13-15, 27), shrewdness (v.16, 18), generosity towards the needy (v.20), and efficiency (v.29). She is praised at the gates (v.31).
- Boaz promises to do all that she asks (v.11). However, there is one problem: there is closer kin than Boaz, whom Boaz will yield to. Everything will be settled in the morning after Ruth is dismissed home. Boaz commands Ruth to remain until the morning, as it would have been dangerous to depart at midnight during the time of judges (1:1) in a place that is known for prostitution (Hos. 9:1).
- She chooses to lay down at his feet (v.8) and remained there (v.13-14). The word "lay/laid" in the Hebrew means "to lodge." This is the same word Ruth used towards Naomi (1:16; 3:13). There is nothing promiscuous about this scene.
- Boaz did not spread his garment over her. There is a closer clan member to Elimelech (v.12).

4. The Prospect of Rest (v.14-18)

- Rising early, while it was still dark, Boaz requested Ruth's second garment. We are informed that Ruth had at least two garments on: a cloak (v.3) and a shawl/cape (v.15). This second coat/shawl would have provided warmth for her through the night and was subsequently used to store the six scoops of grain in. It was so heavy (perhaps 70 lbs.) that Boaz placed the grain on Ruth (v.15).
- Boaz' gift to Ruth early in the morning was three-fold: First, it would communicate that Ruth had come early to collect grain. This would not have been an unfamiliar sight, as she is known to be industrious (2:2, 23; 3:11). Second, it was to end gossip or false accusations that may have otherwise emerged if Ruth was seen leaving Boaz' secluded area (v.7). Third, it was a symbolic present to Naomi.
- When Ruth arrives home (2:18), Naomi asks her "Who are you"? The Hebrew can mean: "How did you fare?" "How did it go?" "What happened last night?" She inquires, not because she is unable to recognize her, but wants to know if Ruth's identity has changed (v.16).
- Ruth did not answer her question. Instead, Ruth forwarded a message from Boaz that the reader was not privy to: "You (Ruth) must not go back empty-handed."
- This is the first time Naomi has ever received grain from Boaz with a message. This word "empty" is the same Hebrew word used previously (1:21) in Naomi's complaint of departing from Bethlehem "full" to arriving "empty". Clearly, this is not in reference to food (as Naomi departed with her family because of the famine). "Full" then refers to progeny, as Naomi had departed from Bethlehem with a husband and children, only to return with none. Naomi confirms this, by encouraging Ruth to be patient, as Boaz will not "rest" until all of this is settled.
- This barley seed is not a bride price, but instead symbolic of the natural seed that he desires to provide for Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech. Where does Ruth fit in with this picture? What commitment does Boaz have to the land, Naomi, Elimelech, and Ruth?