

Bible Study June 2020: the Book of Ruth

Christ Church Woodley

Chapter 3: Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing-floor.

³ One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home^[a] 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.

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^[b] of our family."

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."

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^[c] 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 her¹⁷ 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."

Footnotes:

1. Ruth 3:1 Hebrew *find rest* (see 1:9)
2. Ruth 3:9 The Hebrew word for *guardian-redeemer* is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25-55); also in verses 12 and 13.

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3. Ruth 3:15 Most Hebrew manuscripts; many Hebrew manuscripts, Vulgate and Syriac *she*
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A. Outcomes from the Bible Study on 17.6.20

- a. It is hard to read Boaz's approach, but we can say that he is decent and supportive; he may or may not have been calculating and have taken a decision early on to try and win Ruth for himself. Even if he did, his behaviour is decent and generous throughout.
- b. Boaz is according to the text, a 'go'el' (2:21-23), that is, a 'kinsman-redeemer'. This role is notable for the duties it includes: looking after, ransoming or avenging a relative. However, those duties seem to have had corresponding rights, including the right to marry the person concerned.
- c. Ruth is an active, industrious woman, and this is appreciated by Boaz. He asks initially to whom she belongs? She belongs to Naomi, because she is dedicated to her, but she has no other allegiances.
- d. Naomi's story is one of mixed allegiances as well as mixed fortunes: She began in Judah. moved to Moab, and returned to Judah. We do not know if she compromised her religion in the process, but Ruth is clear; she has adopted Naomi's God. The providence that follows her decision is clear.

B. Points to consider in advance of the meeting on 24.6.20

- a. Ruth goes along with Naomi's plan, but Naomi remains in the background. Does this surprise you?
- b. If this is a story of seduction, who is seducing whom?
- c. Boaz has had a drink or two. Is the drink in charge of his actions?
- d. Boaz says that there is a higher claim than his to be Ruth's guardian-redeemer. In the light of this knowledge, is their behaviour honourable?
- e. Verse 3:9 says something like "spread your wing over your maidservant because you are a redeemer" (depending on translation used). The Hebrew 'wing' is sometimes reinterpreted as cloak or garment. If we leave it as 'wing' the phrase becomes symbolic. How do you read the symbolism?
- f. Ruth and Boaz are both described in the Hebrew as "people of strength". Are they compromised by this incident, or is their strength being used in a purposeful way?
- g. In the Magnificat we read that God has sent the rich empty away. Naomi left Judah full, but returned empty. Ruth is sent home at the end of this episode but not empty. (translated 'empty-handed' 3:17). Is fullness the same state as blessedness?