

Ruth 3:1 – 15

Background

<p>³ Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. Ruth 3:3</p>	<p>Some commentators have suggested that Ruth is fashioning herself as a bride, and thus to be seen would be to tip her hand. Most consider her remaining hidden to be an issue not of propriety but of appropriate timing.¹</p>
<p>⁴ But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.”</p>	<p>The author doesn't come right out and tell us why Naomi chose this sexually tempting strategy to win Boaz for Ruth. There will be a clue later, but for now the writer seems to want us to feel suspense and ambiguity.... The Hebrew is just as ambiguous as the English. Perpendicular? Parallel? Overlapping? Whatever Naomi's motive was, the situation is one that could lead us into a passionate and illicit scene of sexual intercourse, or into a stunning scene of purity, integrity, and self-control.²</p>
<p>⁷ And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! ⁹ He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”</p>	<p>The text of Ruth does not suggest a blatant sexual act but is provocative in its ambiguity. Ruth uses a phrase that elsewhere is used to refer to betrothal and marriage. It is also clear from Boaz's response in the next verse that she has requested marriage. Naomi had not advised her to be this bold, but the outcome of marriage was certainly what Naomi had in mind.³ She [Ruth] is making a claim on Boaz which has important social, legal and religious overtones.⁴ Boaz knew the law of the kinsman-redeemer. To marry a relative's widow and restore her to blessing, the candidate must satisfy three criteria. One, he must be a relative, the closest relative willing to assume the role of kinsman-redeemer. Two, he must have the means to pay the entire debt owed by the widow and her family. Three, he must have the power to remove anyone who wanted to remain on the widow's property after all debts were paid.⁵</p>
<p>¹² And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.</p>	<p>The benefits that derived from functioning as a kinsman-redeemer required that a sequence of priorities be established. Closer relatives were therefore given the opportunity to exercise that function first.⁶</p>
<p>¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”</p>	<p>Aside from the natural desire to preserve the reputation of both Ruth and Boaz (the word used in v. 13 for staying the night does not have sexual connotations), Boaz was anxious not to jeopardize the legal matters of the following day by any shadow of immorality.⁷</p>

¹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews & Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary – Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 279.

² John Piper, *A Sweet & Bitter Providence: Sex, Race, and The Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2010), 84.

³ Walton, et al., 279-280.

⁴ A. Graeme Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 273.

⁵ Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams – God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2005), 118.

⁶ Walton, et al., 280.

⁷ Walton, et al., 280.