

Chapter 3

- III. **Tension**: Naomi seeks to establish seed for Ruth from Boaz through physical allure but fails (3:1-18).¹⁰³
- A. **Selfish Action**: Naomi plots to get seed from Boaz for Ruth through physical allure (3:1-4).¹⁰⁴

Having realized that has shown kindness to Ruth and suspecting it is because of some physical attraction (?), Naomi moves just as Tamar did, to try to obtain the seed through physical allure (and deceit since at this point it does not appear as though Naomi is pursuing the Levirate marriage, but a physical relationship based on allure). However, Ruth will act faithfully to obtain her legal right to the Seed, just as Tamar did, but differently in a proper covenant manner.

The scene shifts to the conversation between Naomi and Ruth. The instigation for such a plot is the desire for seed through one who can (and should) provide it, that is, Boaz. However, the motif here is much the same as that of Tamar and Judah, and the allusion is unmistakable. Tamar was a widow, but had the right of seed, yet Judah was not willing to provide his obligation to her and send in his last son. (The sons who were to provide seed, Er and Onan, had died as Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Chilion). Thus Tamar tricks him, playing on his sexual drive to provide him with the seed. Here Naomi seems to be thinking on

¹⁰³ This section is marked out by Naomi's plot. Her plot is to secure Boaz for Ruth through romantic means. While it appears that she was aware of the Levirate marriage law, she chooses to use non-legal (non-covenant) means to secure Boaz as a husband. However, it appears that she did not connect the *goel* (Leviticus 25) to the Levir (Deuteronomy 25) as a requirement. (It is possible that she did not think anyone would do it since it was not profitable for themselves, as was the repurchase of the field.) Note however, that it is more likely that Naomi did not think of him as a proper levir (likely Ruth's uncle-in-law) but implements a necessary marriage for an heir through physical means. If Boaz was her uncle then what Naomi was doing was suggesting incest unless she knew about his ability under the Levirate marriage. That Naomi may have been (and is reluctantly suggested) has precedent in Genesis in the story of Lot and his daughters where they provide seed through incest in Genesis 19.

¹⁰⁴ While Naomi's imperative in 3:3 is telling her to cease her period of mourning (cf. 2 Sam. 12:20), if Naomi had knowledge of the Levirate marriage requirement, she should have suggested that Ruth continue her mourning appearance). It is clear that Naomi is plotting to find Boaz in his best mood with Ruth at her best (with no reminder of her dead husband, i.e., mourning clothes). What Naomi is suggesting is hardly the ritual of the Biblical Levirate marriage. Naomi had sought Ruth's best interests before (1:8ff.) but tried to fulfill it apart from covenant. Note here also that the word that Naomi uses for 'kinsman' is not *goel* but is the word for 'kindred' or 'friend'.

the same path. Boaz is the rightful goel, and it appears Naomi does not realize it, or if she does, it is doubtful whether he will play his part and so Naomi plots the allure, whether intended for illicit sexual liaison or not (e.g., proposal of marriage?). Thus Naomi has Ruth duplicate Tamar's feat, that is, to remove her mourning clothes and head for the threshing-floor in an alluring motif and find Boaz in a willing manner. However, one is not dealing with Tamar and Judah, but with Ruth and Boaz. Ruth will confront him straightforwardly according to covenant, and Boaz will respond in a covenant manner.

There are many additional motifs that Naomi appears to have as a pattern. Lot had brought forth Ruth's very ancestors, the Moabites, through their incestuous molestation of their father in a drunken evening. Thus Naomi may feel that she is justified in sending this Moabite to perform similarly to her forbearers (since Naomi never seems to feel that she is under the Israelite God). Laban had deceived Jacob into a marriage with Leah after having gotten him drunk and then sending her into his tent on the wedding night. Thus Naomi appears to have gotten her ideas from her forefathers in the text of Genesis, yet she follows their scheming and does not pursue legitimate means.

3:1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? 2 "And now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were?¹⁰⁵ Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your *best* clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man¹⁰⁶ until he has finished eating and drinking.¹⁰⁷ 4 "And it shall be when he lies down,

¹⁰⁵ This is a reference to the maids (lit.: "girls") of chapter 2. It appears that Naomi is connecting Boaz' relationship ("friend") as that act of raising Ruth up to the status of his 'maids'. In other words, the relationship established in the field is the relationship Naomi is emphasizing here, not that of a legal *goel*. Since it was the time of the Judges, perhaps Naomi sees this elevation to "maids" as something that Boaz had done for less-than-honorable reasons.

¹⁰⁶ This sequence of "knowing" (Heb. "yada") and "man" (Heb. "ish") is only found in Genesis 19:8 (Lot's daughters), Judges 11:39 and 21:12 other than in this verse. Both times it refers to knowing in a sexual manner. However, the question of what Naomi thought would possibly happen is not directly stated, but it is the times of the Judges. Sexual involvement is not out of the question for there are many sexual innuendos in this passage suggesting that the atmosphere was there. Note that a man and a woman alone in the middle of the night after eating and drinking was a far cry from the legal marriage that was to be done in the gate of the city during the daylight hours in the presence of witnesses.

¹⁰⁷ The phrase "eating and drinking" may indicate that he has moved to a very comfortable, relaxed state, or simply may indicate that of eating dinner and becoming satisfied. However, when the term "merry" ("yatob", lit.: good) is added then only Judges 19:6 comes to mind. This is the event where the father-in-law had delayed his Levite (who had his daughter as concubine) by plying him with wine and food.

that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do."

- B. **Obedient Response**: Ruth obeys Naomi's plot to entice Boaz into providing Seed, but requests covenant obedience (3:5-7).¹⁰⁸

3:5 And she said to her, "All that you say I will do." 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down.¹⁰⁹

- C. **Covenant Response**: Boaz responds to Ruth by interpreting her actions as a desire to raise up children to Naomi based on covenant (3:8-13).¹¹⁰ He promises her redemption.¹¹¹

Recall that Naomi was a childless widow herself and that the nearer kinsman and Boaz were legitimate brothers who could perform the feat required

¹⁰⁸ Note here that Ruth does not use the same word that Naomi does for kinsman. Ruth uses the word for 'close relative', *goel*. In addition, Ruth requests that he "spread his covering" over her, a phrase later used of marriage between YHWH and Israel in Ezekiel 16:8. While Naomi has suggested a romantic(?) means to marriage, Ruth has suggested a legal covenant means. Note that this "covering" was used of Boaz in 2:12 when he recognizes her desire to come under YHWH's "wings". Now Boaz will provide that covering for Ruth on behalf of YHWH. Psalm 91:4 uses the same phrase as 2:12.

¹⁰⁹ Speculation abounds as to the nature of this middle-of-the-night approach. Certainly the terms of sexual innuendo are present.

¹¹⁰ Note that here in 3:10 Boaz indicates that he is much older than Ruth, since she could have gone after younger men. This reinforces that Boaz takes Ruth's reasoning as that of covenant as opposed to physical or financial. (Younger men, rich or poor would indicate that she might have been drawn based on physical appeal. The covenant requirement that she marry in the family was not based on physical or financial appeal.

Boaz admires Ruth once more for honoring her mother. This time, however, Ruth's sacrifice was greater. She was now willing to marry for her mother-in-law, not just gather food. Note that Naomi herself was a childless widow and qualified for the Levirate marriage herself. Yet she was too old to bear children. Thus it appears that a proper Levir for Naomi was Boaz and Ruth is offering to bear children on behalf of the childless widow, Naomi.

¹¹¹ Note that there is nothing here to infer that Boaz is distressed over an unseen roadblock (the nearer kinsman). What the language does say is that Boaz is responding that the covenant will be kept. Either the nearer kinsman will marry her, or Boaz will do it. Either way she will be married.

of the Levir. However, as Naomi acknowledge in Ruth 1, she is too old to bear children. Thus, it appears that Ruth is, due to Genesis 2:24, going to act to provide inheritance to Naomi through a proper Levir, that is the nearer kinsman or Boaz. This will be remarkable to Boaz who recognizes that she is not being selfish at all, having given herself to the proper Levir, whether rich or poor, for the sake of Naomi.

3:8 And it happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. 9 And he said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative."¹¹² 10 Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 "And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. 12 "And now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. 13 "Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning."

D. **Covenant Response:** Boaz acts to protect Ruth's honor (3:14).

E. **Summary:** Naomi recognizes Boaz' faithfulness to find them a redeemer (3:15-18).¹¹³

¹¹² Ruth is the first to relate *goel* (Leviticus 25; land) to the provision of seed (Deuteronomy 25). In fact, Naomi does not seem to put the two together, or else she does, but feels that Boaz won't comply without enticement. Nevertheless, Ruth combines them, seeing that the redeemer (*goel*) of Leviticus 25 (who is in the family) is also the one who takes on the responsibility of providing seed in Deuteronomy 25. She relates the two to Boaz, who immediately recognizes the connection of the two to the heart of YHWH reflected in His people.

¹¹³ Again Naomi's voice closes this section by pointing out Boaz' covenant faithfulness. Boaz is going to insure the covenant is fulfilled, whether through him or through the other kinsman. Note also here that Boaz continues to follow the covenant, reminding Naomi (poor Israelite and widow) that while he is now searching for fruitfulness of the womb, he continues to provide the fruitfulness of the field.

Naomi's question to Ruth is the same as Boaz asked Ruth in 3:9, literally, "Who (are you)?" She is asking Ruth if there has been a change in her status (e.g., with respect to marriage or children). The verb here for "turns out" (NASV) is literally "falls" or "cast down" indicating that the while they do not know whom she will marry, they are assured of seed. Naomi's comment regarding the sureness of Boaz' commitment is included so that the reader's perception of Boaz' word and deeds are confirmed as covenantal exceptional.

Chapter 4

IV. **Resolution:** Boaz legally establishes marriage for Ruth through covenant obedience.¹¹⁴

A. **Covenant Action:** Boaz first presents the case of Naomi's land to the nearer relative and to the elders at the gate of the city (4:1-4a).

4:1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has¹¹⁵ to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother¹¹⁶ Elimelech. 4 "So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy *it* before those who are sitting *here*, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem *it*, redeem *it*; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem *it*, and I am after you.'"¹¹⁷ And he said, "I will redeem *it*."¹¹⁸

B. **Covenant Reaction:** The nearer relative acts to repurchase the land of Naomi's (selfishly) to keep it in the family (4:4b).¹¹⁹

C. **Covenant Action:** Boaz informs him of the additional requirement of the covenant to bring up children to Mahlon by Ruth (4:5).¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ This section is marked out by Boaz' covenant response to find a husband for Ruth.

¹¹⁵ This is a *qal* perfect, which is difficult to translate, but likely implies that she holds the right of the land. However, I would suggest that it should be translated a past perfect, thus stating that Naomi has had to sell the land.

¹¹⁶ This may imply that Boaz and this unnamed *goel* were actual brothers of Elimelech, making Boaz Naomi's brother-in-law.

¹¹⁷ This was explicit within the covenant of Leviticus 25 that the *goel* was to repurchase a field lost through financial woe.

¹¹⁸ Thus, the *goel* here is willing to fulfill his obligation under the covenant. However at this point it does place the land back into the family. Whether he had to restore it to Naomi personally is a question, since his repossession kept it in the family generally. However, even if he did restore it to her, it would become his on her death since there was no heir.

¹¹⁹ The nearer kinsman acts to repurchase the land according to Lev. 25:25.

¹²⁰ The nearer kinsman was eager to obey the covenant when it benefited him, but uneager when it required a sacrifice. He was to marry her according to Deut. 25:5-10. The

4:5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire¹²¹ Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name¹²² of the deceased on his inheritance."

- D. **Non-covenant Reaction:** The nearer relative greedily rejects covenant requirements, rejecting the land and Ruth as wife based on the dilution of his own inheritance (4:6).
- E. **Narrator's Cov. Exp.:** Removing the sandal was the manner of attestation that the redemption right had been given to another (4:7).
- F. **Covenant Reaction:** The nearer relative removes his sandal (4:8).
- G. **Covenant Action:** Boaz calls the witnesses that he has acquired the field and Ruth (4:9-10).

Levirate marriage was a means of bringing up seed to the deceased man. However, the kinsman-redeemer act was to preserve the family's (at times the deceased) land. If the deceased had no children then on the widow's death the land would pass to the brother. Thus for the brother to bring up seed to his deceased brother meant that he would not inherit the land, but the child would. In addition, the child may also be considered his own and share in the inheritance of his sons. Thus the Levirate marriage was a sacrificial consideration for the Levir on behalf of the widow. This appears to be the difficulty of Onan in Genesis 38:9.

¹²¹ It is at this point that Boaz connects the *goel* of Leviticus 25 with Deuteronomy 25 and the Levirate marriage, just as Ruth appears to do in chapter 3 at the threshing-floor. The willingness to purchase the field according to covenant established him as a member of the family by his own admission, and thus seed for the continuance of the line and the inheritance would be sourced from the same covenant provider.

¹²² There is always the question as to how Boaz qualified as a Levir since he was, at closest, the uncle (by law) of Ruth and would have been the brother-in-law of Naomi. However, if one goes back to the story of Judah and Tamar (and granted this may not be the best example of the Levirate marriage) on which this story bears very close parallels, Judah provided the seed for his daughter-in-law, which did fulfill the requirement. The contrast to this story is Lot and his daughters, who are provided seed through their own father (incest) and not from their husband's seed. However, Naomi as a childless widow would have qualified for a Levir as well, and Boaz and his brother were qualifiers. So if Ruth is standing in for Naomi then she is bringing up a child to Naomi. Thus follows the assessment by the women of Bethlehem that Naomi has a child.

- H. **Covenant Reaction:** The elders and witnesses witness and ask a blessing on Boaz to produce progeny to the line of Jacob (4:11-12).¹²³

¹¹ And all the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "*We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem.*"
¹² "Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD shall give you by this young woman."

Note here the mention of Perez and Tamar.

- V. **Relief:** Boaz and Ruth provide covenant blessing of the womb to Naomi, but the deliverance of mankind is provided through Ruth (4:13-22).¹²⁴
- A. **Covenant Blessing:** Boaz marries Ruth, and the Lord blesses them with a child (4:13).¹²⁵
- B. **Covenant Response:** Women respond that Naomi has been blessed by the Lord through Ruth (whom she sought to send away) (4:14-15).
- C. **Response of Naomi:** Enjoys blessing of child (4:16).
- D. **Covenant Response:** Women recognize Naomi's womb has been blessed and thus she has Seed through her husband and Ruth and Boaz (4:16a).

¹²³ The reference here to Tamar, Perez and Judah bears great similarity to this story. Tamar was widowed and Judah was to send one of his sons to her as a husband, but was reluctant to follow up on the responsibility. Tamar then tricked Judah into it, and she bore Perez. It was very similar since the Levirate marriage allowed the Davidic (and Messianic) line to continue in both cases. Also the restriction of marrying outside the family is very prominent in both. In neither case is the brother ultimately the Levir.

¹²⁴ This section is marked out by the result of the covenant obedience. Not only children are provided but ultimately the seed of the woman. Note that Naomi receives progeny through Boaz and Ruth and their covenant obedience. What Naomi had lost at the beginning, YHWH had provided at the end. But not only that, had Naomi's common sense plans been successful she would never have received the immensely greater blessing that YHWH brought about.

¹²⁵ When Boaz fulfills the marital responsibility he is responding to the covenant. This was the requirement, to raise children. This is not implying romance, but covenant responsibility.

- E. **Conclusion:** The blessing of the womb through Ruth through Boaz to Naomi is David the king (4:17b-22) a blessing far beyond a simple child.¹²⁶

Note here the genealogy begins with Tamar!

NOTE: This genealogy goes back to Perez by Tamar and Judah, exactly where Genesis left it. It goes to David where 1 Samuel 17 will again pick up the Seed line. The point of the book is that God is guiding this Seed line through a disobedient time, that of the Judges.

¹²⁶ The ultimate blessing of this covenant obedience of Ruth and Boaz is the provision of ultimate blessing of David the King, the forerunner of the ultimate Seed of the Woman, Christ. David is the greatest of the Old Testament Covenant means of blessing to the nation (as Boaz had been to Naomi). Ultimately Jesus will be that Covenant-Blessor to all Israel to all nations.