

# Ruth 3:1-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ruth/ruth-3/ruth-31-5/>

*Naomi comes up with a plan to get Boaz to marry Ruth.*

Naomi might not have pitched in to help in the physical work, but she apparently has been busy coming up with a plan that would benefit both Ruth as well as herself. In Jewish law there was a provision that covered the case of a widow without an heir. Naomi's plan takes advantage of this provision, whereby the closest in kin had an obligation to redeem a widow by taking her as a wife and raising children that would benefit and continue *the widow's* family line (rather than their own). This would allow the widow's land to remain in her family.

The Genesis 38 story of Tamar centers around this Levirate marriage, or "kinsman redeemer" provision. In the story of Tamar, her husband is wicked and dies before she gives birth to an heir (the Lord took him.) According to the kinsman redeemer custom, Tamar became the wife of Onan, one of the deceased husband's brothers. The story of what follows is in Genesis 38:9-10:

*Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother. But what he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord; so He took his life also.*

This passage shows the kinsman redeemer tradition, with the husband's brother Onan taking Tamar as a wife. It also demonstrates that the offspring of the marriage would "*not be his.*" It is obvious the offspring would be Onan's biological child, and he would be the natural father. But the offspring would not bring economic benefit to him and his family business. The first child born to Tamar by Onan would be deemed the heir of the deceased brother, and entitled to claim the deceased brother's share of inheritance, an inheritance that might otherwise benefit Onan. This explains why Onan would waste his seed on the ground to prevent a birth. It also explains why it displeased God, because it was selfish on multiple fronts.

This is background to understand why Naomi introduces the plan as being a means to *seek security for Ruth*. Having a husband gives immediate security, and having an heir provides an inheritance for her family line. What is the plan? It is for *Boaz our kinsman* to become Ruth's kinsman redeemer. Naomi's plan involves Ruth making a proposal of marriage. The proposal will take place at the harvest.

Naomi knows that Boaz will winnow *barley at the threshing floor tonight*. Winnowing was a step in the harvest where the grain was gathered into one place, then pitched into the air in order to separate the heavier grain, which would fall back to the ground, from the lighter chaff, which would blow away into the wind. The process involved the workers maintaining vigilance over the gathered crop by sleeping at the threshing floor during the night.

She encourages Ruth to put on her best clothes, wash and wear perfume. There is no mystery in this strategy. Naomi wants Ruth to be as attractive as possible. Then Ruth is to *go down to the threshing floor*. Her job at this point is to observe Boaz. Naomi tells Ruth to watch and wait until Boaz has finished his dinner and, perhaps, celebratory consumption of beverages. Then she is to *notice the place where he lies* to sleep for the night.

Her job at this point is to *uncover his feet and lie down*. We aren't told exactly what this looked like. But the passage makes it clear Ruth was laying close enough to Boaz to startle him at some point during the night, and he *bent forward* to speak with her *lying at his feet* (Ruth 3:8). Perhaps she pulled the cover from his feet, and laid down perpendicular to Boaz and waited to be noticed. This would seem to say "I am your servant and want to be your wife." Naomi knows Boaz well, and predicts to Ruth that at this point *he will tell you what you shall do*.

Ruth does not question Naomi's plan, which seems remarkable. Without a strong trust in both Naomi as well as Boaz, this scheme would seem to be fraught with potential for abuse, and risk to Ruth. We already know there was risk of physical abuse for single women who were gleaning in the fields. We can imagine that at harvest time, particularly at the threshing floor amongst harvest celebrations, the potential for abuse would grow substantially.

But Ruth immediately answers *All that you say I will do*. We are not told Ruth's reasoning, but we can infer that she had assessed the character of Naomi and Boaz and determined that she was willing to place herself into the most vulnerable of circumstances, fully trusting that they would seek her best interest. Ruth had already committed herself to Naomi. And she had observed Boaz's care of her throughout the harvest to this point. She completely commits herself into their hands.

This episode foreshadows the reaction of another childless woman who will answer the angel announcing she will give birth to a child as a virgin. Mary answered *Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38). Mary's child will be one of the descendants from the inheritance that will be created through this proposal, as Ruth is in the lineage of Jesus.

### **Biblical Text**

**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? <sup>2</sup> Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. <sup>3</sup> 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 man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup> It shall be when he lies down, 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."<sup>5</sup> She said to her, "All that you say I will do."**