

## Becky Bereans – Ruth 3

### Review

Last time, we found Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz during the barley harvest. We saw that the beginning of the barley harvest coincides with the end of the Passover festival which Christians celebrate at Easter, and the wheat harvest that follows coincides with the Feast of Weeks which Christians celebrate at Pentecost. We briefly considered the significance of Boaz becoming Ruth's kinsman redeemer at the same time of the year that Jesus – the Kinsman Redeemer of all mankind – sacrificed His life on the cross as our Passover Lamb. Finally, we examined God's provision for widows, orphans, and sojourners in the Law of Moses by ordaining that portions of the harvests were to be left for the poor to glean.

### Ruth 3

Let's read Ruth 3 together before we delve a little deeper into the Law concerning redemption of widows and family inheritance for men who die childless and the story of how Ruth claimed Boaz as her own kinsman redeemer.

### The Law Concerning Redemption and Inheritance

In order to understand what we read in Ruth 3, we must first take a more comprehensive look at God's Law concerning the inheritance of the land and its redemption in cases where it was sold outside the family.

Recall that the land was allocated by tribe after its conquest by the Israelites (Joshua 13-21). The Israelites were permitted to sell their land to others; however, during the year of jubilee (every fiftieth year) the land returned to its original owning clan.

***8**“You shall count seven weeks <sup>[שָׁבֻעַ šabāʿ sabbaths]</sup> of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. **9**Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. **10**And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. **11**That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. **12**For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.*

***13**“In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. **14**And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. **15**You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. **16**If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. **Leviticus 25:8-16 [ESV]***

After the division of the kingdom upon the death of Solomon and the Babylonian exile which followed, the jubilee return of the land to the original owning tribe became virtually impossible. Some of those who returned from the exile couldn't prove their genealogies, so were unable to validate their claim to their tribal allowance. Of course, this problem was greatly compounded by the diaspora of

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70AD and the Nazi holocaust of the twentieth century. Today in Israel, most Jews can't prove their tribal origin, and many don't even know the tribe from which their ancestors came. In the state of Israel today, the majority of the land conquered under Joshua is occupied by the Palestinian people. So even if their tribal allocations were known, most Jews couldn't return to their ancestral lands.

**ASIDE** – Something really intriguing is that the tribe of Levi has a genetic marker that is unique to them. Thus, the Levites who will serve in the future temple may be readily identified despite the loss of the genealogical records. Indeed, all the vestments, implements, and servants required to reinstitute the temple sacrificial system are already in place.

The Law also made some specific provisions for the inheritance of the land. During our last meeting, the case of the daughters of Zelophehad was mentioned. Their father had died during the wilderness wandering, without fathering any sons. His daughters appealed to Moses for an inheritance, and Moses then brought the question to the LORD.

***6And the LORD said to Moses, 7“The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father’s brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them. 8And you shall speak to the people of Israel, saying, ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. 9And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 10And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. 11And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. And it shall be for the people of Israel a statute and rule, as the LORD commanded Moses.’”*** Numbers 27:6-11 [ESV]

The law makes only one specific reference to the redemption of widows...

***5“If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. 6And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.*** Deuteronomy 25:5-6 [ESV]

Obviously, this part of the Law doesn't really apply to Boaz in his role as Ruth's redeemer, since Boaz was not the brother of Mahlon – Ruth's deceased husband. Although it is not specifically stated in the Law, the redemption and care for widows by the surviving family members was apparently tied traditionally to the laws concerning the redemption and inheritance of the land as we shall soon see when we take up our study of Ruth 4. Naomi and Boaz obviously recognized the opportunity if not the strict requirement for Boaz to redeem Ruth as we shall soon see.

**NOTE** – The tradition of the redemption of widows by their brothers-in-law pre-dates the giving of the Law to Moses by God and even the Egyptian enslavement. We know this from the case of Tamar – Judah's daughter-in-law who took matters into her own hands when Judah refused to allow his sole surviving son to redeem her (Genesis 38)

## The Threshing Floor of Boaz

Now that we have studied the Law and traditions for redemption and inheritance in ancient Israel, we can better understand the remainder of the story of Ruth and Boaz.

***<sup>1</sup>Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? <sup>2</sup>Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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.” <sup>5</sup>And she replied, “All that you say I will do.” <sup>6</sup>So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup>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. Ruth 3:1-***

**<sup>7</sup> [ESV]**

By the time Ruth arrived at Boaz' threshing floor, he and his men would have been exhausted from working all day to harvest, thresh, and winnow the barley for days on end. The men stayed at the threshing floor overnight to protect the harvested grain from wild animals and thieves. It was clear by this time to Naomi if not Ruth herself that Boaz was interested in marriage to Ruth. But in ancient Israel marriages were arranged by the parents of the bride and groom, often through a professional marriage arranger. Since Ruth's parents were Moabites and Boaz' parents were presumably deceased, Boaz found himself in a quandary as to how he might arrange the desired marriage to Ruth. Furthermore as we shall soon see, Boaz was not the closest relative who might be called upon to redeem Mahlon's inheritance and through marriage to Ruth Mahlon's family name. Ruth herself had not apparently made any move on her own part to claim Boaz as her redeemer, although it was fairly clear at least to Naomi that Ruth also wanted to marry Boaz. Knowing all this, Naomi took it upon herself to arrange for Ruth and Boaz to come together.

But what in the world does the uncovering of Boaz' feet have to do with the matter? In ancient Israel, feet were considered a lowly part of the body. Even touching someone else' feet was an act of deepest humility – such as Jesus Himself demonstrated when He washed His disciples' feet on the night He was betrayed to be crucified. This attitude toward the feet continues today in Middle Eastern cultures. Even showing someone the bottoms of one's feet is considered insulting – in effect asserting one's superiority over that person. Thus, when Ruth lay down at Boaz' feet, she was humbling herself before him – in essence offering herself to him as his servant.

***<sup>8</sup>At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! <sup>9</sup>He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings <sup>[חַנְּךָ kānāp]</sup> over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” Ruth 3:8-9 [ESV]***

Although Israel is an arid country which gets very warm during the day, it can also get quite chilly at night during the early spring when the barley harvest takes place. Thus, at midnight Boaz was likely stirred awake despite his fatigue by his uncovered feet being cold. Remember also that this midnight conversation between Ruth and Boaz took place in total darkness on a mountaintop far from the lights of any town.

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The Hebrew word translated in the ESV as wings is כַּנָּפִי *kānāp*. Obviously, Boaz didn't have actual wings. The word can also mean the fringe or corner of a garment. But by asking Boaz to cover her with his garment, Ruth was also asking Boaz to be her protector – her redeemer. The CSB translates this phrase more appropriately as *“Take me under your wing.”*

**NOTE** – Ruth needed to ask Boaz to be her redeemer. He could not offer himself to her in that role unless she first chose him. She needed to claim the redemption she knew he could provide. In the same way, everyone who has come to a saving faith in the Gospel of Jesus – our Kinsman Redeemer – must also lay claim to the redemption only He can provide by confessing with our mouths His lordship over our hearts and our lives (Romans 10:8-10).

***10** And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. **11** And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. **12** And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. **13** Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”*

**Ruth 3:10-13 [ESV]**

Apparently, Boaz had already done his homework with regard to redeeming Ruth, and as we shall see in the next chapter he had already formulated a plan for dealing with his potential rival for Ruth's hand. In this he confirmed that Naomi's instinct on the matter – no doubt bolstered by considerable “discussion” among the women of Bethlehem around the city well – proved correct. In verse 10, we can also deduce that although Boaz was quite wealthy and honorable, he was by no means in the flower of his youth. Although Ruth was a widow, she was evidently still quite young - certainly much younger than Boaz.

***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.” **15** And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. **Ruth 3:14-15 [ESV]***

Nothing immoral occurred between Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor that night. How could it with all the other men sleeping next to the harvested grain along with them? Nevertheless, then as now in a small town like Bethlehem tongues do have a tendency to wag unjustly. Boaz was aware of this of course. So in order to preserve Ruth's reputation and his own, he made sure that Ruth was off and away from the threshing floor before first light. The six measures of barley with which he sent her home to her mother-in-law were by way of a modest dowry for Ruth. This was purely an act of kindness and honor since no dowry would have been required in the case of a kinsman redeeming a widow.

***16** And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, **17** saying, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’” **18** She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”*

**Ruth 3:16-18 [ESV]**

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Evidently Naomi knew quite well that Boaz was a man of his word and a man of action. We can almost feel the joy welling up in Naomi to replace the deep bitterness she expressed when she first returned from Moab to Bethlehem.

### **Looking Ahead**

Next time we'll finish up our study of this sweet little book, seeing the fulfillment of Naomi's, Ruth's, and Boaz' hopes, and the foreshadowing of the hope of redemption in Christ for all mankind that the marriage of Boaz and Ruth helped to bring about.