

SERIES: BOOK OF RUTH
“Rest”
Ruth 3

Jesus said, **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹ **Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** (Matthew 11:28-29 (NET))

One of the most appealing words in this text of invitation is the word “rest”. It is used twice. As with the English definition of the word “rest” the Scriptural definitions are many. The basic idea of the root is “tranquility.” It implies the absence of strife, war, or trouble on the one hand, and worry or anxiety on the other. It may also imply the absence of a pressing obligation, or again, of some disturbing element that mars a relationship between individuals.¹ Other aspects include 1) *beṭ aḥ* “security,” “a feeling of confidence”; 2) *nūaḥ* “settle down,” “rest”; 3) *ḥ āraš* “be silent,” “be inactive”; 4) *dāmā* “be silent”; 5) *dāmam* “be motionless, physically quiet”; 6) *ša. ānān* “ease,” “undisturbed, without anxiety” and 7) *šābat* “cease, rest from activity.”

I liked the summary of one Bible Dictionary: It is *God’s* rest into which all persons are encouraged to enter. The weekly day of rest is a reminder and a reflection of that rest. The rest of the Israelites in the Promised Land after their wilderness wanderings is a symbol of God’s eternal rest that his people will share. The rest that Christ gives to those who come to him (Mt 11:28) is a foretaste and a guarantee of the divine rest that awaits them. The rest after death of believers who have fallen asleep in Christ is a blissful intensification of the reality of this experience: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord They may rest from their labors” (Rv 14:13, RSV). But the completion of this rest in its inexpressible fullness will take place at the return of Christ, when at last all who are his will be fully conformed to his likeness (1 Jn 3:2). Salvation will be consummated as they are clothed with imperishable, glorified bodies (2 Cor 5), and the renewed order of creation in which righteousness dwells will be established (2 Pt 3:13).

This will be the climactic point of all history and the moment of the entry of God’s people into the full and unending enjoyment of his rest. The completion of the redemption purchased by Christ at the cross will mean rest and freedom from all sin, and this in turn will mean rest and freedom from all sorrow, pain, suffering, persecution, frustration, injustice, and death (Rv 7:9–17; 21:1–7). The rest of mankind, moreover, will involve the rest of God’s whole creation as it is brought to the perfection of that glorious destiny for which it was intended from the very beginning (cf. Rom 8:19–25).²

What got me thinking about all this is that the word “rest” is placed like bookends around the third chapter of Ruth. In the first verse it is the word “security” (NASB, NKJV, NRSV), “a home” (all other translations), literally it is “rest”. In the last verse, it is the word “rest” in all translations, except The Message, which translates it “to fool around”. Just as “favor” was the key word for chapter 2, so “rest” is the key word for chapter 3. Another set of brackets around chapter 3 is conversation by Naomi. In v. 1 we are eavesdropping at the home of Naomi as she

¹Harris, R. Laird ; Harris, Robert Laird ; Archer, Gleason Leonard ; Waltke, Bruce K.: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. electronic ed. Chicago : Moody Press, 1999, c1980, S. 953

²Elwell, Walter A. ; Comfort, Philip Wesley: *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (Tyndale Reference Library), S. 1121

speaks to Ruth. Ruth then leaves and hours later returns to Naomi's home and at the end of the chapter we again in the home eavesdropping on Naomi speaking to Ruth. This chapter is filled with direct dialog. The chapter revolves around "finding rest" and is a great picture of two ways Jesus brings rest to a person's life. The chapter progresses through a plan, a proposal, a problem, a precaution, a provision, and finally patience.

A number of weeks has passed in the white space between chapters 2 and 3. The harvesting and gleaning have come to an end. Exposure and time have been sufficient for the relationship between Boaz and Ruth to ripen. Just as it is time to participate in the next step of harvesting a crop, so it is time to move the relationship to the next level. Naomi has a plan.

I. **The plan** (3:1–5) is explained.

1. **The Explanation of the plan.** Naomi has a "method in her madness" as we say. She has a very clear rationale and justification for her plan.

The chapter opens with a term of endearment, "My daughter", which shows the continuing good relationship between these two women. Ruth is called "my daughter" five times in this chapter. Naomi then continues with an **idiomatic, negated rhetorical question** that is the equivalent to an affirmation:³ "shall I not ...?" Many translations change the question into a positive statement. The question begs an affirmative answer: of course I will!³

The question actually has two parts. **First**, as her mother-in-law, Naomi asks if she should not provide⁴ "rest" (NIV "home") for her daughter-in-law. The word *mānôah*, [which OT judge had a father by this name? Samson, Jgs 13:24], means a "place of rest," derives from the same root as *mēnūh* *â* [rest] in 1:9 ["**may the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband**"] and speaks of the security and tranquility that a woman in Israel longed for and expected to find in the home of a loving husband. **Second**, she defines the purpose of her quest for *mānôah* for Ruth: that it may go well for her (contra NIV, "where you will be well provided for").⁵ This is a general statement by which she means the removal of the reproach of her widowhood and the solution of her destitution by securing the economic necessities of life (food, shelter, clothing) and the calming of her anxieties concerning the future.

This is exactly what Jesus has done for humanity. He came to remove our reproach as sinners and those without a home. He came to provide for our spiritual, and in most cases physical, destitution by securing the necessities for life, both here and hereafter. He came to calm all our anxieties concerning our future. This is "rest for our souls" He promised.

As Naomi declares it, her sole motivation in proposing the following scheme is the welfare of her daughter-in-law. Not a word is said about her personal anxieties about the future.⁴

³Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006

³ Even if לֹא־אֵינִי (NIV "should I not") is interpreted as an emphatic particle, "Surely" (cf. M. L. Brown, "Is It Not? Or Indeed!: *HL* in Northwest Semitic," *Maarav* 4 [1987]: 201–19), the sense is the same, since the rhetorical question expects a strongly affirmative response, "Of course!"

⁴ The verb בִּקַּשׁ means "to seek, pursue, provide for." Cf. the expression לְבַקֵּשׁ טוֹבָה לְ, "to seek the good/welfare for," in Neh 2:10.

⁵ The NIV interprets the conjunction וְ as a subordinating conjunction, but it is preferable to interpret it telically, expressing purpose or result. Cf. GKC § 165b.

⁴Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 680

The first part of her explanation is **the purpose**: she has an obligation under the laws and customs of the Hebrews to provide a home and a husband for her daughter-in-law. The second part of her explanation is that **the person** necessary to accomplish this is available: his name is Boaz. She asks a second rhetorical question: “**is not Boaz our kinsman?**” Of course he is! That was already established in 2:1 and the person in whose field Ruth just “happened” to find favor. My guess is that Naomi has had this plan in mind for some time and has been waiting for the right moment to put it into action. “**Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.**”(v. 2b) Tonight is the time to execute the plan. The purpose is right; the person is right; the time is right; the place is right. The place is the threshing floor. It is a very public place and it is a party atmosphere.

Let me explain the threshing floor: People, donkeys, oxen, camels, or ox-carts carry the heavy loads of golden grain from the field to the threshing floor, which is located at the edge of a village or community. All the crop producing families use the same threshing floor. The threshing floor is a raised piece of ground, usually on a hill that has a nice breeze blowing across it. The ground is curved up on the edges and is paved with stone or with tramped-down mud grown stone-hard through centuries of use. Each farmer brings his harvest and pitches forkfuls of the golden grain onto the floor to a depth of 1 ½ -2 feet. A threshing board is placed on top of the piled grain. [Now, think wake-boarding behind a powerboat.] The threshing board is a wood sled 4 ft long, turned up at the front [like a toboggan]. The underside has sharp teeth of stone, lava, or iron. It is tied to an ox or other animal that pulls it around and around the threshing floor. One or more people get on the threshing board and “encourage” the animal to go. Riding a threshing board is considered fun, at least for a few hours.⁵

James Patch describes the threshing floor: **The threshing floors are constructed in the fields, preferably in an exposed position in order to get the full benefit of the winds. If there is a danger of marauders they are clustered together close to the village. The floor is a level, circular area twenty-five to forty feet in diameter, prepared by first picking out the stones, and then wetting the round, tamping or rolling it, and finally sweeping it. A border of stones usually surrounds the floor to keep in the grain. The sheaves of grain which have been brought on the backs of men, donkeys, camels, or oxen, are heaped on this area, and the process of tramping out begins....Until the wheat is transferred to bags some one sleeps by the pile on the threshing floor.**⁶

Just as Boaz had joined his reapers in the field, so he now joins the threshing at the floor. A multitude has gathered because the families come to join in this carnival atmosphere portion of the work. It is a time of great joy, celebration, and giving thanks to God for his bountiful blessing of a good harvest. Threshing time is a happy, public occasion.

After the threshing came the winnowing. Winnowing is when they would pitch the threshed grain into the air so the wind would blow the chaff away. This was done until all you had left was a pile of grain. While you were winnowing, you did not want to work down wind from someone else. They were winnowing the grain at night to take advantage of the cooler night breeze. After the workman had labored into the night and the wind had abated, they ate a midnight meal and then retired for the night. You slept near your pile of grain to protect it.

⁵ Info from Madeleine S. and J. Lane Miller, *Encyclopedia of Bible Life*, p. 19

⁶ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth The Romance of Redemption*, Pasadena: Through The Bible, n.d., p. 80. I have drawn much from chapter 8 of this book for this sermon.

2. The Execution of the Plan. Naomi had explained the plan. Now it was time to execute the plan. There was a very definite sequence to follow. It had a number of elements:

A. Wash yourself. Take a bath. Always a good way to start.

B. Anoint yourself. Put on some perfume. Also a good thing to do.

C. Put on your “long robe”. The word used for “dress” (clothes) is *šimlâ*, which normally refers to the outer garment that covered virtually the entire body except the head. The word designated garments worn by both men and women, though Deut 22:5 suggests they were distinguished. In no case, including the present, does the word require the meaning “best clothes,” as rendered by ⁷ most translations because they are suggesting an “enticing encounter”. I don’t think that is what is happening. (T)here seems little point in dressing up to go out in the dark. Nor would Naomi have used the generic word for an outer garment, *šimlâ*. According to Exod 22:25–26, poor people used this garment for a blanket at night. Since Ruth was a poor person going out to spend the night in the field, she will have needed this blanket-coat to keep warm.¹⁷

I think 2 Sam 12:20 gives us a better clue as to what is going on here. According to the Samuel text, when David had been informed of the death of his son, he washed himself, applied perfumed oil, put on his *šimlâ*, and then went to the temple to worship, after which he came back home and ate and drank. To David’s puzzled contemporaries this signaled the end of his period of mourning for his son. It appears that Naomi is hereby advising Ruth to end her period of mourning over her widowhood and get on with normal life. It may well be that until this time Ruth had always worn the garments of widowhood, even when she was working out in the field. Perhaps this was the reason for Boaz’s inertia. As an upright man, he would not violate a woman’s right to grieve the loss of her husband nor impose himself upon her until she was ready. We know too little about how long widows would customarily wear their mourning clothes, but it may be that Naomi is now telling Ruth the time has come to doff her “garments of widowhood” (Gen 38:14, 19) and let Boaz know that she is ready to return to normal life, including marriage, if that should become possible.^{18, 8}

D. Go to the threshing floor. There was no guessing where he would be. He would be spending the night protecting his harvest. She would be able to meet him there.

E. Remain out of sight. She was to wait until he was done with the day’s duties so there would be no interruptions for the proposal she was going to make.

F. Notice where he lies down. She was to observe the place where he laid down and plot her best course for getting there in the dark. Apparently she was to wait a little while in order to let him fall asleep.

G. Go, uncover his feet, and lie down. In these three actions some see a sexually explicit scene. I don’t think so. Both of these people have been called *virtuous* and people of highest *integrity*. I just don’t see them acting like a sex-driven couple in a public place. Other men and

⁷Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 683

¹⁷The root is common Semitic for “mantle, cloak.” On *לְבָשׁוֹתָ* in the OT see further *HALOT*, 1337–34.

¹⁸For a similar interpretation see Bush, *Ruth*, 152, following B. Green, “The Plot of the Biblical Story of Ruth,” *JSOT* 23 (1982): 61.

⁸Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 683

women, and even families were lying all around the threshing floor. Something else was taking place.

H. Trust him for the next part. “**He will tell you what you shall do**”. With this comment Naomi expresses remarkable confidence in Boaz to take the matter from here. The delicacy of the scheme is obvious, and the potential for disaster is extreme. From a human perspective Naomi seems to be taking a huge gamble that Boaz may not interpret this series of nonverbal gestures in accordance with the meaning she intends. **Obviously** when Boaz awakes and discovers his feet uncovered and a woman lying nearby, he could interpret her actions to be those of a common prostitute. After all, the events described occur in the dark days of the judges. **Second**, Boaz could wake up and interpret Ruth’s actions as those of a prostitute but as a noble and genuinely virtuous Israelite shoo her off as an immoral woman with whom he will have nothing to do. **Third**, Boaz could wake up and recognize immediately the true meaning of Ruth’s actions and respond favorably to her. Naomi’s scheme is obviously a gamble.⁹

II. The proposal (3:6–11) is understood. In the middle of the night a startled Boaz awakes to find Ruth lying at his feet! After identifying herself, she explains why she is there. It is not for sex. By asking him to “**spread his covering (long robe, or wings) over your maid**” she is asking him to perform his duties as her redeemer. She was asking for rest in the shelter and protection of a marriage relationship. This was a symbolic and modest way of telling Boaz that she was willing to accept him as the *goel* (kinsman-redeemer) and her groom.

Quickly and without equivocation, Ruth requests that Boaz marry her. In the phrase she uses, “**spread your covering/wings**” there is only a vowel difference between the two words. One writer called the phrase “gloriously ambiguous, referring not only to the wings of a bird but also to a skirt, the corners of one’s flowing garments (hence NIV). Literally then this statement could be interpreted as a request by Ruth to Boaz to cover her and protect her from the chill of the night. He is not the only one shivering. But there is still more to the demand, for in common Hebrew usage “to spread one’s wings over someone” was a euphemistic idiom for marriage.³⁹ The gesture of a man covering a woman with his garment was a symbolic act, which according to Near Eastern custom signified “the establishment of a new relationship and the symbolic declaration of the husband to provide for the sustenance of the future wife.”⁴⁰ This is what Naomi had in mind when she proposed this scheme as a way of providing *mānôah*, “rest, security,” for Ruth in 3:2.¹⁰

She could have gone before the elders at the town gate and demanded this from him, but she chose this quiet and graphic way of doing it. *The scene took place in the dark so that Boaz had the opportunity to reject the proposal without the whole town knowing about it.*¹¹ This reminds me of Mary and Joseph and their situation and Joseph wanting to end their relationship as

⁹Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 687

³⁹ See esp. Deut 22:30[Hb. 23:1]; 27:20; Mal 2:16; Ezek 16:8. On the last named reference see Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 482.

⁴⁰ Thus P. A. Kruger, “The Hem of the Garment in Marriage: The Meaning of the Symbolic Gesture in Ruth 3:9 and Ezek 16:8,” *JNSL* 12 (1984): 86.

¹⁰Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 691

¹¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:425

discreetly as possible. Ruth was trying to establish a formal relationship as discreetly as possible.

Boaz understood. He blessed her for paying attention to him instead of the younger men. He, too, had been thinking along these lines but was waiting for her. Since she was ready, he was too. That night was a turning point in the life of Ruth and the decisive moment in the life of Boaz.

Notice v. 11. He calls her a **woman of excellence**. But what an amazing turn of events this declaration signifies! Ruth had arrived in Bethlehem a few short weeks ago as a destitute widow, a foreigner at the mercy of the locals. Chapter 2 demonstrated that this was how she perceived herself. She was the lowest of the low, with no recourse but to scavenge in the fields behind the servants of the landowners. But because of her devotion to her mother-in-law and her willingness to abandon all for her, the townspeople knew her true character. But she did not gain this reputation by trying to be somebody, by associating with the important people. On the contrary, it was her self-effacing embodiment of Israel's lofty covenant standards, her *hesed*, her kindness and loyalty to the family of her deceased husband, especially her mother-in-law, that has won her the praise of all. Boaz could have treated her as Moabite trash, scavenging in the garbage cans of Israel, and then corrupting the people with her whorish behavior; but with true *hesed* of his own, he sees her as a woman equal in status and character to himself.¹² See 2:1.

However, there is one slight problem.

III. **The problem** (3:12) is stated: **There is a relative closer than I**. Boaz explains to Ruth that there is another man more closely related to her than he is. If that relative won't marry Ruth, he will. He assures her he will do whatever is necessary to take care of this situation as soon as possible. **Instead of winnowing wheat, he would now try to winnow out the other kinsman and gather into his garner someone more precious than grain....Boaz had no intention of acting illegally in order to gain his heart's desire.** (McGee, p. 86) But he would do all he could to "discourage" the other kinsman from exercising his right of redemption.

IV. **The precaution** (3:14) is taken. It is late at night. Out of concern for her safety Boaz requests that Ruth stay until dawn and secretly leave, lest her mission be misinterpreted by witnesses. He chooses his words carefully. He tells her to "lodge" at the threshing floor. He is careful to avoid any sexual overtones. By his speech as a whole and his choice of words in particular, Boaz maintains the same kind of integrity that he had displayed in chap. 2. He will not take advantage of Ruth.¹³ Though they both laid down, I doubt either of them slept much because their minds were whirling with plans for the new day.

V. **The provision** (3:15–17) is given. Boaz, still being generous, sends Ruth home with six measures of barley. This is approximately 60 pounds of grain. This is enough grain to supply the needs of Ruth and Naomi for several days. He is continuing the care he had begun back in chapter one.

¹²Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (694). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹³Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (695). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

VI. **Some patience** (3:18) is practiced. When Ruth returns, Naomi asks the simple question “who are you?” Obviously she knows who Ruth is. Ruth understands the idiomatic expression and answers the real question, “how did it go?” It went very well! Now Naomi tells Ruth “to sit tight” and wait for Boaz to work out the details.

In the statement we recognize a note of confidence in the hidden hand of God, who will direct affairs to the proper conclusion. But Naomi also expresses great confidence in Boaz. Ruth may sit back and relax, but she knows Boaz will not. Indeed he will not rest (*šāqat*) unless the matter is brought to a conclusion, today! With this statement the curtain falls on Act 3. All the characters have played their roles perfectly. Naomi has taken the initiative and gotten the ball rolling, Ruth has carried out her delicate and daring scheme, and Boaz has responded right on cue. The reader as witness to the drama waits with Ruth to see “how the matter will fall.”¹⁴

Again, I see a reflection of Jesus. He will not rest until our salvation is complete. He is busy building a place for us and getting our house ready, defending our new righteousness before the Father, and supplying the things we have need of. Jesus will not rest until He provides full rest for His bride.

The redemption rest that is provided today for a lost sinner is to cease from his own works and trust his Redeemer-Kinsman to provide his rest. “So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.” (Hebrews 4:9-10, NASB95) This is the rest that comes when we no longer trust our works, but receive his work of redemption on the cross as the penalty for our sins. Furthermore, we are instructed to rest in him daily and to commour every problem and difficulty to him, as Peter wrote “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7, NASB95) Only in our great Redeemer is there rest for the restless heart of man from the threshing floor of this world, with its chaff, stubble, and crowd. (McGee, p. 90) Do you know Him as your Redeemer?

Rest in Christ. Amen.

¹⁴Block, D. I. (2001, c1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (701). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.