

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH 3

In this chapter we have a proposal of Naomi to Ruth, with advice and directions to get Boaz for her husband, (^{<R1>}Ruth 2:1-4). Ruth's obedience to the instructions she gave her, (^{<R2>}Ruth 2:5-7), the notice Boaz took of her, and the conversation that passed between them, (^{<R3>}Ruth 2:8-13) the dismissal of her in the morning to her mother-in-law with a gift, to whom she returned, and acquainted her with what had passed, (^{<R4>}Ruth 2:14-18).

Ver. 1. *Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her,* etc.] After the harvests were over, and so gleaning likewise; when Naomi and Ruth were together alone in their apartment, the mother addressed the daughter after this manner:

my daughter, shall I not seek for thee, that it may be well with thee? that is, in the house of an husband, as in (^{<R5>}Ruth 1:9) her meaning is, to seek out for an husband for her, that she might have an house of her own to rest in, and an husband to provide her; that so she might be free from such toil and labour she had been lately exercised in, and enjoy much ease and comfort, and all outward happiness and prosperity in a marriage state with a good husband. This interrogation carries in it the force of a strong affirmation, may suggest that she judged it to be her duty, and that she was determined to seek out such a rest for her; and the Targum makes her way of speaking stronger still, for that is,

“by an oath I will not rest, until the time that I have sought a rest for thee.”

Ver. 2. *And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast?* etc.] He was, and her question supposes and concludes it, and which she observes, that Ruth might take notice of it, and encouragement from it; and the rather, since she had been admitted into the company and conversation of his maidens; and which was more, though not mentioned, into the company and conversation of himself, and whom Ruth knew full well; and who being, Naomi thought, the next nearest kinsman, and obliged

by the law in (^{<f51b>}Deuteronomy 25:5) to marry Ruth, with which view his relation is mentioned:

behold, he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshingfloor; which afforded a fit opportunity of meeting with him, being at night, and out of the city, from his own house, and alone, and after a feast for his reapers and threshers of corn, seems, from (^{<f51c>}Ruth 2:7) as it was usual to have threshingfloors in an open place without the city, so to winnow at them, whereby the chaff was more easily separated from the corn, and that, in the evening, when in those countries there were the strongest breezes of wind to carry it off; hence the Targum here has it,

“behold, he is winnowing the barley floor with the wind, which is in the night.”

For before the invention and use of fans in winnowing, it was only done by the wind carrying off the chaff, as the oxen trod the corn, for it was done in the threshingfloor, as here: hence Hesiod^{f52} advises that the threshingfloors should be *χωρῷ ἐν εὐαεῖ*, in a place exposed to wind; and so Varro^{f53} observes, the floor should be in the higher part of the field, that the wind might blow through it; to this manner of winnowing Virgil^{f54} has respect. Nor was it unusual for great personages, owners of farms and fields, to attend and overlook such service. Pliny^{f55} reports, that Sextus Pomponius, father of the praetor and prince of the hither Spain, presided over the winnowing of his reapers; so Gideon, another judge Israel, was found threshing wheat, (^{<f51d>}Judges 6:11).

Ver. 3. *Wash thyself, therefore*, etc.] Thy flesh, as Ben Melech, that she might appear clean and neat, and free from all spots, and every thing that might occasion a disagreeable aspect, or an ill scent, and so be acceptable to the man proposed:

and anoint thee; not with aromatic ointments, as great personages, both men and women, used as Aben Ezra notes, but with common oil, Ruth being a poor widow that she might look sleek and smooth:

and put thy raiment upon thee; that is, her best raiment; for it cannot be supposed that she was now without clothes; or else her ornaments as the Targum; her mother-in-law advises her to put off her widow’s weed, the time of mourning for her husband being perhaps at an end, and put on her ornamental dress she used to wear in her own country, and in her husband’s lifetime. Jarchi interprets it of her sabbath day clothes:

and get thee down to the floor; to the threshingfloor where Boaz was winnowing, and which it seems lay lower than the city of Bethlehem:

but make not thyself known unto the man; some understand it, that she should not make herself known to any man, not to any of the servants of Boaz; who, though they knew her before, when in the habit of a gleaner, would not know her now in her best and finest clothes, unless she made herself known to them; but rather Boaz is meant, to whom it was not advisable to make herself known; and who also, for the same reason, though he might see her at supper time, might not know her because of her different dress: and the rather he is particularly intended, since it follows,

until he shall have done eating and drinking; when Naomi thought it would be the fittest time to make herself known unto him in order to gain the point in view, marriage with him.

Ver. 4. *And it shall be, when he lieth down*, etc.] On the threshingfloor, under the open air, in order to sleep, and take rest:

that thou shall mark the place where he shall lie; the spot he shall lie on, and the direction in which he shall lie, whether east, west, etc. that when the light shall be taken away, and the darkness of the night come on, she might pretty easily find the place where he lay:

and thou shall go in and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; go into the threshingfloor, or to the place where he lay down and gently lay aside the covering upon his feet, whether a blanket, or rug, or his own long clothes, with which his feet were wrapped, and then lay herself down at his feet; this seems to be advised to, in order to give him a hint that there was somebody at his feet. This may seem to us to be strange advice, and not consistent with the character of pious and virtuous women, which they both bore, and with that modesty they otherwise seem to be possessed of; to clear this, let it be observed, that this man was, as Naomi thought, the next kinsman, and so in right of the law in (^{GEN}Deuteronomy 25:5), was the husband of Ruth, and therefore might take such a freedom with him as she did; and it seems by the same law as if the woman was to make the demand of marriage, which may serve to reconcile the carriage of Ruth to her character: besides, what things in one age, and in one nation, are reckoned immodest, are not so accounted in another age, and in another nation; add to this the age and gravity of Boaz, and the well known virtue of Ruth to Naomi, she might think herself quite safe in the advice she gave: and yet

after all, it must be owned, it is somewhat difficult to account for her simplicity and wisdom in it; since she could not be sure that sin and folly would not be committed, considering the infirmity of human nature; or that such a behaviour in Ruth would not alienate the affection of Boaz from her, and cause him to consider her as a light and loose woman, and unfit to be his wife:

and he will tell thee what thou shall do; being a judge of Israel, and expert in the law, he would inform her whether he was the next kinsman, and had the right of redemption or not, and what methods must be taken, and what rites used, in order to her marriage with him, or another person.

Ver. 5. *And she said unto her*, etc.] Having the highest opinion of her piety and prudence, and being confident she would never advise her to what was contrary to true religion and virtue:

all that thou sayest unto me I will do; observe every instruction and direction she gave her, and attend strictly to every circumstance pointed out to her, as she did; the word for “unto me” is one of those instances, the Masora observes, is not written but read; the letters of the word are not in the text, only the vowel points, the reason of which cannot well be said; what the Midrash^{f56} gives can never satisfy.

Ver. 6. *And she went down unto the floor*, etc.] From the city of Bethlehem, from her mother-in-law’s house there, to the threshingfloor of Boaz, which was at some distance from it, and lower:

and did according to all that her mother in law bade her; both before she went, and after: she washed and anointed herself, and put on her best clothes before she went down, and when she was there took care not to make herself known to any, especially to Boaz, and marked the place where he lay down after he had supped.

Ver. 7. *And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry*, etc.] Having ate and drank freely, though not to excess; and innocent mirth was always allowed in the time of harvest, and of the vintage, and of gathering the fruits of the earth, (see ^{<0927>}Judges 9:27 ^{<0903>}Isaiah 9:3) or “his heart was good”; he was in a good frame and disposition of mind, praising God for his goodness to him, and to his people; so the Targum,

“and his heart was good, and he blessed the name of the Lord who had received his prayer, and removed the famine from the land of Israel:”

he went to lie down at the heap of corn; in the threshingfloor, which had either been threshed out, or lay in sheaves to be threshed out: however, it seems probable that he had laid himself down on some of the straw of the corn threshed out, with his clothes on, covering his feet with the lower part of his garment; it being usual in those countries to wear long garments, which served to sleep in by nights, as well as to cover them by day; nor was it thought mean and unworthy of persons of note to sleep in such a place, and in such a manner as this^{f57}. And it might be chosen for coolness in those hot countries. Jarchi thinks it was to preserve his corn from thieves; though it might be because it was late ere the festival was over, and too late to go home, and besides he was ready for his business the next morning:

and she came softly; with stillness and quietness, as Jarchi, making as little noise as possible; or secretly, as the Targum, that no one might see her, and have knowledge of what she did:

and uncovered his feet; turned up the skirt of the garment that was upon his feet, or removed whatever covering was laid on them:

and laid her down; not on the side of him, which would have seemed immodest, but at his feet, perhaps across them.

Ver. 8. *And it came to pass at midnight*, etc.] So long Boaz slept without knowledge of any person being at his feet, and so long Ruth had lain there; but awaking, and perceiving something at his feet, which pressed them, it made him look about and feel, and so affected him,

that the man was afraid; though a man, and a man of spirit, he was afraid, a panic seized him, not knowing but it might be a spectre, a spirit, or a demon, as Jarchi; and such an instance we have in history^{f58} of an apparition, which seemed to put off clothes, and place itself in a bed where a man lay, etc.

and turned himself; to see who it was:

and, behold, a woman lay at his feet; which he knew by putting his hand upon her head, as Jarchi thinks, and so knew her by her headdress, or veil;

or rather by her voice, as Aben Ezra, and who supposes the moon might shine, and he might be able to discern she had no beard, as well as also discover her by her clothes.

Ver. 9. *And he said, who art thou?* etc.] He spoke quick and short, as one displeased, or however surprised and frightened, just coming out of sleep, and in the night:

and she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid; that had gleaned in his fields with his maidens, and with whom he had conversed there, and knew her by name:

spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid; which seems to account for the reason of her uncovering his feet, or turning up the skirt of his garment that was upon them; not through wantonness and immodesty, but to direct him, when opportunity offered, to spread it over her as a token of his taking her in marriage, and of her being under his care and protection, and of her subjection to him; so the Targum,

“let thy name be called upon me to take me for a wife,”

Whether the custom now used with the Jews at marriage, for a man to cast the skirt of his “talith”, or outward garment, over the head of his spouse, and cover it, was in use so early, is questionable; and yet something like it seems to have been done, as this phrase intimates, and to which there is an allusion in (²³⁶⁸Ezekiel 16:8). So Jarchi,

“spread the skirt of thy garments to cover me with thy talith, and this is expressive of marriage;”

and Aben Ezra says, it intimates taking her to him for wife; though as the word signifies a wing, the allusion may be to the wings of birds spread over their young, to cherish and protect them, which are acts to be done by a man to his wife:

for thou art a near kinsman; as she had been informed by Naomi, to whom the right of redemption of her husband’s estate belonged, and in whom it lay to marry her, and raise up seed to his kinsman, her former husband.

Ver. 10. *And he said, blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter,* etc.] Instead of calling her an immodest woman for laying herself down at his feet, and a bold impudent woman, she being poor, to ask marriage of him; and instead of being angry with her, and chiding and reproving her for

disturbing and frightening him in the night, he blesses her, and pray's to God to bless her, and prosper her in what she had engaged, and in a kind and loving manner calls her his daughter:

for thou hast showed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning; that is, to her husband's family; she had shown much love to her husband living and dying, and to her mother-in-law, in leaving her country and kindred to come with her into a strange country, and in labour to support her, as she had done, all which was great kindness; to which the Targum adds, her being proselyted; but the kindness she now showed exceeded all the former, in that she was desirous, according to the law of God, to build up her husband's family, to marry the next near kinsman, even though an old man, to raise up seed to the name and memory of her husband:

inasmuch as thou followedst not the young men, whether poor or rich; the phrase of following young men is not to be understood of committing fornication with them, as the Targum explains it, but of marriage to them: she shunned their company and conversation, and did not put herself in the way of being caressed and addressed by them, and refused everything of that sort; and did not choose to follow any young man, rich or poor, as a bride follows her husband when married to him. Now Boaz mentions this as an instance of her virtue, and of her great respect to her husband's family, that a woman of such amiable qualities, virtuous, young, and beautiful, who doubtless might have been married to a young man in her own country, or in Israel, but chose to marry the nearest of kin in her husband's family, to perpetuate his name and memory; the Jews say^{f59} Boaz was now eighty years of age, and Ruth forty.

Ver. 11. *And now, my daughter, fear not*, etc.] Either of being forced and defiled, to which he had exposed herself by lying down at a man's feet, or of being reproached as an immodest woman for so doing, or of being despised as a poor woman, and of not succeeding in her suit and enterprise:

and I will do to thee all that thou requirest; which could be done according to the law of God, and without injury to another person after mentioned:

for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman; or righteous, as the Targum; a good woman, possessed of grace and virtue, having every agreeable qualification to recommend to the marriage state;

and therefore, should they come to the knowledge of the step taken to obtain it, will never reproach thee for it, nor blame me for marrying a person, though poor, of such an excellent character, which, by her conduct and behaviour, was universally established. It is in the original text, “all the gate of my people”^{f60}; meaning either all the people that pass through the gate of the city, that is, all the inhabitants of it, or the whole court of judicature, the elders of the city, that sit in judgment there, as was usual in gates of cities, (see ^{<R00E>}Ruth 4:1,9). So the Targum,

“it is manifest before all that sit in the gate of the great sanhedrim of my people that thou art a righteous woman”

Ver. 12. *And now it is true, that I am thy near kinsman*, etc.] Her husband and he being brothers’ sons, so own cousins:

howbeit, there is a kinsman nearer than I, who was, the Jews say^{f61}, the brother of her husband’s father, and so his uncle, which was a nearer relation than an own cousin.

Ver. 13. *Tarry this day*, etc.] Or lodge here tonight, where she was; this he said not from any design upon her, but for her own safety and honour, that she might not be exposed to danger or disgrace, by returning home at such an unseasonable time of night. The first letter in the word for “tarry” is larger than usual in the Hebrew text; which may be done to raise the attention of the reader, to observe it as a thing very singular, that a widow should lodge with a man without any diminution of her chastity; so Buxtorf^{f62} says, that hereby attention is noted, even the honesty of Boaz ordering Ruth to lodge without a man, and wait until a nearer kinsman, according to the law, should come, and promising that on failure thereof he would be the lawful redeemer; but Dr. Lightfoot^{f63} observes, that as there is a special mark over a word in the story of Lot’s eldest daughter lying with her father, (^{<O1E8>}Genesis 19:34) and a special mark on this word here, in the story of Ruth going to Boaz his bed, seems to relate one to the other, and both together to point at the great providence of God in bringing light out of darkness, Ruth, a mother of Christ, out of the incest of Lot:

and it shall be, in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well, let him do the kinsman’s part; by marrying Ruth, and redeeming her husband’s estate, which if he did, it would be all very well, and right according to law; and it would be very well for Ruth, as Aben Ezra and Abendana interpret it; seeing, as they observe, that kinsman was a

very respectable man, a man of great esteem and worth, a man of wealth and authority, and she would be well matched to him. Some think, as the same writers observe, that the word “Tob”, translated “well”, is the name of the kinsman, the same with Tobias; so R. Joshua says ^{f64}, that Salmon (who was the father of Boaz), and Elimelech (the father of Ruth’s husband), and Tob (this near kinsman), were brethren:

but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: that is, he swore he would marry her, and redeem the inheritance, if the other would not; for the phrase, “as the Lord liveth”, is the form of an oath, it is swearing by the living God; so the Targum,

“I say with an oath before the Lord, that as I have spoken unto thee, so will I do:”

lie down until the morning; and take some sleep and rest, and be at ease in mind, depending upon the performance of what I have promised.

Ver. 14. *And she lay at his feet until the morning,* etc.] In the same place where she first lay herself down:

and she rose up before one could know another, because of the darkness, as the Targum, it not being yet break of day:

and he said, let it not be known that a woman came into the floor, to whom he spoke these words is not said, perhaps to Ruth, whom he might call to arise so early as she did, before one could know another, and distinguish a man from a woman; and so sent her away, and bid her be cautious, as much as in her lay, that it might not be known she had been there; for though they were both conscious of their purity and chastity, yet it became them to be careful of their good name, and to prevent scandal upon them, or hinder the nearer kinsman from doing his part, who might refuse upon hearing that Boaz and Ruth had been together; or this was said to his young men, as the Targum adds, charging them to let no one know of it; which is not so likely: it is the sense of some Jewish writers ^{f65}, that Boaz said this in his heart, in an ejaculatory prayer to God, entreating that affair might be a secret, that it might not be known that a woman had been in the floor that night, lest the name of God should be blasphemed, and he and Ruth be wrongfully reproached.

Ver. 15. *Also he said*, etc.] Which seems to confirm the first sense, that what he had said before was to Ruth, beside which he also said to her what follows:

bring the vail which thou hast upon thee, and hold it; by which it appears that he rose also thus early, since he ordered her to bring her vail to him, and hold it with both her hands, while he filled it from the heap of corn: this vail was either what she wore on her head, as women used to do, or a coverlet she brought with her to cover herself with, when she lay down; the Septuagint renders it a “girdle”, that is, an apron she tied or girt about her; which is as likely as anything: and when she held it, he measured six measures of barley; what these measures were is not expressed; the Targum is six seahs or bushels, as the Vulgate Latin version, but that is too much, and more than a woman could carry; unless we suppose, with the Targum, that she had strength from the Lord to carry it, and was extraordinarily assisted by him in it, which is not very probable; rather six omers, an omer being the tenth part of an ephah, and so was a quantity she might be able to carry:

and laid it upon her; upon her shoulder, or put it on her head, it being, no doubt, as much as she could well bear, and which required some assistance to help her up with it:

and she went into the city; of Bethlehem, with her burden; or rather he went^{f66}; for the word is masculine, and to be understood of Boaz, who accompanied her to the city, lest she should meet with any that should abuse her; and so the Targum expresses it,

“Boaz went into the city.”

Ver. 16. *And when she came to her mother in law*, etc.] To Naomi, in Bethlehem:

she said, who art thou, my daughter? it being near dusk, she could not discern her, or perhaps she put the question before she opened the door and saw her; though one would think, if Ruth had called to her, she would have known her voice: rather therefore the particle may be rendered, “what” or “how”^{f67}, instead of “who”; and the sense be, what had befallen her? what success had she had? how had things gone with her? was she married or not? or rather, had she got a promise of it? or was it likely that she should be married? with which the answer agrees:

and she told her all that the man had done to her; what kindness he had shown her, what promises he had made to her, that either he, or a nearer kinsman, would marry her, and redeem her husband's estate.

Ver. 17. *And she said, these six measures of barley gave he me*, etc.] Which she laid down before her, which was a proof of his kindness to her, that she was acceptable to him, and had well sped; of these six measures, (see ^{408B5}Ruth 3:15) which by some are allegorically interpreted of six blessings that should be bestowed upon her, as the spirit of wisdom, understanding, etc. as (^{2310E}Isaiah 11:2) so Jarchi; or of six persons that should spring from her, as David, Daniel, and his companions, and the King Messiah, as the Targum:

for he said unto me, go not empty unto thy mother in law; which, as it expressed a regard to Naomi, and a compassionate concern for her support, so would give her assurance of the success Ruth met with, she would relate to her.

Ver. 18. *Then, said she, sit still, my daughter*, etc.] Keep at home, say nothing of this affair to any person, be easy about it, take no other steps in it, wait the issue of it:

until thou know how the matter will fall; not that she thought it was a chance matter, a fortuitous and contingent event with respect to God; for all decrees come from heaven, as Aben Ezra on the text says, and particularly marriages are decreed in heaven, and come about according to such decrees; so the Targum,

“sit, my daughter, with me, in the house, until the time thou shall know how it is decreed from heaven:”

for the man will not be at rest until he have finished the thing this day; which she concluded, partly from his known integrity and faithfulness, diligence and industry, and partly from his affection to Ruth, and her interest in it; for she perceived, she had got his heart, both by what he had said to her, and by the present he had sent by her, and she was satisfied he would not be easy until he knew whether he should have her or not.