

A Recipe for Disaster (Ruth 3:1-5)

1. Naomi's Progress (v.1-2)

- Naomi, up to this point, has experienced tremendous tragedy and loss. Within ten years in Moab (1:1-5), her husband, Elimelech, along with her only two children (sons) Mahlon and Chilion have died. She lives in a male-dominated society that was dependent on the present provisions of the husband, including future blessings that children and grandchildren would bring to the family: security, food, and protection.
- After their death, the famine had ended in Bethlehem. Naomi begins her journey back to Israel with Orpah and Ruth, two virtuous women who married Mahlon and Chilion while in Moab.
- Naomi's desire is for both women to find "rest." This "rest" includes finding a husband, having children, and security of a home.
- Orpah returned to Moab, while Ruth has clung to Naomi (1:14). Naomi had wept with Orpah, yet exhibited no appreciation or emotion after Ruth displayed tremendous commitment to Naomi, even at the expense of marriage, children, and a rest that she may have experienced if she returned with Orpah back to Moab (1:16-18).
- A short time after arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth had told Naomi that she is gleaning (2:2). Naomi responds in two words (Hebrew): "Go (my)daughter."
- Naomi is convinced that God is against her (1:8, 20-21) and is the prime example of the person who intellectually acknowledges God's sovereignty but has a problem when He exercises it. Naomi has become self-absorbed (1:20-21), and in her self-pity, has offered no help to Ruth.
- Naomi's demeanor changes upon Ruth's return with close to 50 lbs. of grain (2:19) and finding out that Ruth "happened" to arrive at Boaz' field (2:2). Naomi knows who Boaz is and informs Ruth (and the reader) that he is "one of our redeemers" (2:20).

2. Naomi's Plan (v.2-5)

- The beginning of chapter 3 is the reversal of chapter 2: in the opening verses of chapter 3, Ruth does most of the speaking. In the beginning of chapter 3, Naomi does. In chapter 2, Ruth is the initiator. In chapter 3, Naomi is.
 - Ruth has gleaned for at least seven weeks through two separate harvests. There has been no progress beyond a platonic relationship between Ruth and Boaz (2:23). Naomi is planning to force an encounter between the two.
 - Naomi refers to Boaz as "our relative" (3:2) not "our kinsman redeemer" (2:20).
 - Calling Ruth "my daughter" and her desire to seek "rest" communicates a sincere longing for Ruth to find tranquility, peace, satisfaction, and security through a husband. Naomi intends for this to be Boaz. Wellness in ancient Israel is tied to long life in the land, a happy marriage, prosperity, and many children (Deut. 4:40; Ps. 127, 128), which includes the covenant blessings (Lev. 26:4-12; Deut. 29:2-13).
- A. Boaz is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor:
- In ancient times, this was a five-step process: First, it began with plowing (late summer, early autumn) in anticipation of winter. Second, was the scattering of seed on the ground, followed with the pounding of that seed into the ground by the feet of animals, or carts. Third, when springtime arrived, harvest would begin. Fourth, after the grain was harvested (collected into bundles/sheaves), it was beaten at the threshing floor to remove the heads of grain from the stalk. Fifth, the grain was winnowed: grain was trampled to crack the outer shell (chaff). Workers would then toss the grain in the air. If the wind was just right, it would blow the lighter chaff away, and the grain would fall to the ground. The grain was then brought to the market to be stored or sold. Chaff was collected and used for fuel,

while the stalks (hay) were used as animal feed. To protect his investment, Boaz would sleep next to the grain until the winnowing process was complete.

- B. Ruth is commanded to wash herself, anoint with perfume, and put on a cloak (v.3):
- Wash: bathing during this culture was infrequent, as it was a luxury to take daily, or even weekly baths, as water was scarce. Perfume was used to counteract the stench of weeks or months without bathing.
 - Anoint: this English word "anoint" has come to mean a technical and religious term. In this setting, it was to perfume with oil.
 - Put on your cloak: this was an outer garment (Ex. 22:25-26; Isa. 9:5). There were distinct cloaks that were worn by both men and women (Deut. 22:5). This shares many similarities with the bride and groom metaphor (Ezek. 16:8-12) and with the difference of dress, sandals, fine linen, and jewelry. When David learned of the death of his first child with Bathsheba, he washed himself, put on perfumed oil, and changed his clothes (2 Sam. 12:20). This is not a "best dress" but instead a cloak that covered the entire body except for the head.

*If Ruth was wearing a robe that symbolized her mourning over the loss of her husband, Mahlon, this may justify Boaz' hesitancy to advance the relationship (if he was interested). If this was the case, Ruth would have worn this "mourning garment" for at least seven weeks, not including the time she wore it in Moab after she buried Mahlon.

Scripture does not provide any additional information on this "mourning garment." How long did she wear it? Was this a Moabite or Israelite tradition? Second, and most important, Boaz praises Ruth for not going after other men (3:10). Why would Boaz praise Ruth for not going after men if she is in her mourning clothes?

- C. Ruth is commanded to uncover Boaz' feet/legs (v.4):
- Celebrations were typical during successful harvests. At this celebration, there would be eating and drinking. Ruth was told to linger in the dark and watch Boaz. After the celebration, she was to take notice of where he was sleeping. Once he was sleeping, she was to "uncover Boaz' legs/feet."
 - uncover his feet (legs): This word refers to both the lower portion of the legs, and the legs themselves. To uncover (Lev. 18:6-19; Deut. 27:20) the feet (28:57; 1 Sam. 17:6) can be a euphemism for sexual organs (Ex. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; 1 Sam. 24:3; Ezek. 16:25). Naomi does not tell Ruth to "lay at his legs/feet" but to uncover them. Her goal is to startle Boaz with the chills of the night air. Ruth will uncover his feet and lay there (submission) or uncover his torso (lie next to him).

- D. Boaz will tell you what to do: what does she mean?

Ruth's ethnic history is one of incestuous relationship (Gen. 19:31-38). Additionally, Moabite women led Israel into sexual immorality and adultery (Numb. 25). Threshing floors were places of prostitution (Hos. 9:1). Naomi's plan has placed Ruth and Boaz in a potential precarious situation: Ruth has already been abused in some manner (2:7-9, 15). Boaz, like other men, could use the night for pleasure, and then rebuke her for prostitution. Boaz could misread her intentions as well, and no one would question the matter.

Nearly every word in the Hebrew of verse 5 is provocative and has a strong tone of sexuality. The narrator brilliantly and deliberately includes Naomi's promiscuous commands to heighten the tension of the story. Boaz and Ruth are worthy (2:1; 11; 3:11). What will happen?