

Naomi Suggests a Plan for Boaz to Marry Ruth

Ruth 3:1-9

Ruth 3:1-9, *“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?”² Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.³ Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.⁴ Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.”⁵ And she said to her, “All that you say to me I will do.”*

⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her.⁷ And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

⁸ Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet.⁹ And he said, “Who are you?”

So she answered, “I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative.”

Background Notes

Under the Old Testament Law of Moses, if a man died with no children, his closest eligible relative was to marry the widow and “raise up an heir” for the man who had died. This close relative was known as the “kinsman redeemer.” The kinsman redeemer had another responsibility as well: he was to buy back or redeem and property that belonged to extended family members who were impoverished or poor.

In the story of Ruth, Boaz was the kinsman redeemer. So the property that belonged to Elimelech and Naomi, the property that the family had left when they went to Moab, was in jeopardy. Boaz had a responsibility to redeem this property and keep it in the family.

Furthermore, there was no heir in Elimelech’s family. Naomi and Ruth were both widows and Naomi was past childbearing age. But maybe Boaz could marry Ruth! This was the basis of Naomi’s plan.

Ruth had been gleaning for several weeks now in the field of Boaz. It seemed to Naomi that Boaz was attracted to Ruth, and it seemed that Ruth returned his regard. This was wonderful, as far as Naomi was concerned! She saw the marriage of Boaz and Ruth as the perfect solution to their situation. As kinsman redeemer Boaz would redeem the property, and if he married Ruth, they could raise up an heir in the family. And marriage with Boaz would give Ruth security and status in the community. That’s what Naomi meant in verse 1: *“Shall I not seek security or rest for you that it may be well with you?”* In other words, a marriage.

So Naomi came up with a plan to get Ruth and Boaz together in a situation where a proposal for marriage could be made. Her plan called for Ruth to make herself as attractive as possible: *wash yourself, anoint yourself, put on your best garment*" (v3). Then Ruth was to go down to the threshing floor at night and present herself to Boaz. Now at first this sounds like a plan for seduction, doesn't it? But not so! When we understand the cultural background, it may be a little romantic, but it was not an invitation to do what was wrong.

Why would Boaz be sleeping at the threshing floor? The harvesters had to guard the grain until it was all threshed and winnowed. They would actually camp out at the threshing floor so that no one could steal their grain. Because it was harvest time, it was a happy time. The men would use this occasion for feasting and having a good time together, something like a western "cattle roundup." Naomi viewed this as a good opportunity for Ruth to let Boaz know that she was willing to be his wife, if he was willing to marry her and perform his duties as kinsman redeemer.

The reason that Ruth uncovered the feet of Boaz was probably to wake him up and cause him to look down at his feet where she was lying. It's important to notice that Ruth was lying at his feet -- she didn't cuddle up by his side underneath his blanket, or anything suggestive like that! Verse 14 says that she lay at his feet until morning -- so we mustn't get any wrong ideas of what was going on!

Another reason that Ruth uncovered Boaz's feet was to give him an opportunity of saying "Yes!" with regard to his responsibilities as kinsman redeemer. Notice what Ruth said in verse 9, "*Take your maidservant under your wing for you are a near kinsman*" or, "*Spread the corner of your garment over me since you are a kinsman redeemer.*"

Boaz would signify that he was willing to marry Ruth by taking the corner of the cover that Ruth had lifted and place it over Ruth. This was the cultural way of saying, "Yes, I am willing to fulfill my duties as kinsman redeemer and marry you."

Doctrinal Point

Generation gaps are not biblical.

What do we mean -- "generation gaps"? A "generation gap" occurs when the older generation does not communicate or get along with the younger generation, and the younger generation does not respect or listen to the wisdom of the older generation. This may occur because of lifestyle, because of appearance, because of values, because of different tastes in music and clothes -- and many other things. But generation gaps are not biblical. God wants the different generations of a family to respect and love one another.

Where do we see that taught in the book of Ruth? In the story of Ruth, we have an outstanding example of the older generation, represented in Naomi, getting along with the younger generation, represented by Ruth. There was interdependence and respect between the generations. There was love and understanding. There was no generation gap! God put a stamp of approval on this relationship.

In chapter 1 we saw Ruth (the younger generation), primarily dependent on Naomi (the older generation). Naomi took Ruth with her to the land of Israel, and led her to the God of Israel. In chapter 2 we saw Naomi (the older generation), primarily dependent on Ruth (the younger generation). Ruth went out to the fields and did the hard work of gleaning to support herself and Naomi. Here in chapter 3 we see Ruth (the younger generation), primarily dependent on Naomi (the older generation), to work out a plan for her possible marriage to Boaz.

Notice that Naomi told Ruth exactly what to do and notice what Ruth's response was: *"All that you say to me I will do."* Notice the mutual trust here between Naomi and Ruth. Ruth trusted Naomi not to put her in a delicate or improper situation. Naomi trusted Ruth not to act indiscreetly. There was no generation gap. Ruth and Naomi were mutually dependent on one another.

In chapter 4 we will once again see Naomi, the older generation, primarily dependent on Ruth, the younger generation, as Ruth and Boaz cared for and supported Naomi in her old age. It's a wonderful demonstration of the way life in the family can be when there are no generation gaps.

Generation gaps are not biblical, then or now. God has designed families (and churches!) so that there will always be the older generation and the younger generation. He did not design generation gaps -- generation gaps are man-made!

God expects the younger generation to respect and honor the older generation. God expects the younger generation to listen to and learn from the older generation. Remember, young people, the older generation has a lot more experience, and wisdom, and maturity than you have. Take the matter of marriage, for example. It would be a good idea for the younger generation to listen to the counsel and advice of the older generation regarding who might be the best husband or wife in a given situation.

Last week a friend and I were discussing the pros and cons of a possible marriage of a couple we both know. I think we could give this couple some good insights about each other, and whether we feel the marriage would be happy. The question is -- will they listen? After all, we are the older generation.

As you know, Margie and I just returned from three weeks in the Far East. It was a very interesting trip. Of course we already knew that the American culture is very different than many Asian cultures in this matter of marriages. In many other cultures, and certainly in the Far East (such as Japan, Korea, China), the older generation has much more input into "who should marry whom" in the younger generation. In fact, that seems to be one reason why there's less divorce in those cultures than there is here in America. So it's wise for the younger generation to respect, honor, listen to, and learn from the older generation.

In the same way, the older generation needs to try a little harder to respect, understand and be willing to listen to the younger generation! The older generation needs to flex a bit for the younger generation. Many times the younger generation has some good ideas for change that the older generation needs to hear. For example, in the church – sometimes the older generation does not clearly distinguish between tradition and truth. Older people can become so used to their cherished traditions that these traditions become almost to the status of biblical teaching! Traditions can be good, and if it's biblical they should not be changed. However, some church traditions are not necessarily biblical, and tradition can be stifling in the church setting. The older generation holding doggedly to tradition can actually hinder the work of the Lord.

We all need to work at eliminating generation gaps. God has not only designed life so that there will always be an older generation and a younger generation, but He accomplishes His purposes through the interdependence of both generations. We see that written all over the book of Ruth. When we allow generation gaps to occur, we distort and destroy life as God intended it to be, and we hinder His work as well. Generation gaps are not biblical.

Practical Application

Have you found rest at the feet of Jesus?

Let's not forget the spiritual picture that is emerging from the relationship between Ruth and Boaz. It's possible to become so interested in Naomi's plan that we forget about the spiritual picture that God has given us here! Boaz, as the kinsman redeemer, is a wonderful and beautiful picture of Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. And Ruth, the Gentile bride, is a picture of us, the Church.

Now notice the picture here in chapter 3. Ruth is at the feet of Boaz. As Christians, that should be our place -- resting at the feet of Christ. Have you found rest at the feet of Christ?

And notice that Boaz was making sure that the grain was threshed, winnowed and guarded. Do you remember the lesson that the grain from Boaz's field could represent the Word of God, the food for our souls? I don't think we are "over-spiritualizing" this passage when we see a picture of the believer sitting at the feet of our Lord, who guards his Word and gives us his pure Word, without any chaff. Notice that Boaz gave Ruth six measures of pure grain (v15).

This picture of Ruth and Boaz reminds us of Mary of Bethany, who sat at the feet of the Lord and heard his Word (Luke 10). Have you found rest at the feet of Jesus?