

Exegetical Notes for Ruth 3:1-5

KEY

Barber = *Ruth: An Expository Commentary* (Cyril J. Barber). Chicago: Moody Press, 1983.

BBC = *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Edited by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Block = Block, Daniel I., *Judges, Ruth in the New American Commentary, Vol 6*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.

Bush = Bush, Frederick. *Ruth/Esther in the Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 9*. Edited by David H. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Dallas: Word Books, 1996.

Campbell = Campbell, Edward F., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary in The Anchor Bible, Vol 7*. Edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975.

Harrison = *Introduction to the Old Testament* (R.K. Harrison). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969.

K&D = Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F. in the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 2*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989.

Leggett = *The Levirate And Goel Institutions In The Old Testament With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Donald A. Leggett) Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing Company, 1974. PDF digitized with permission by Ted Hildebrandt, Gordon College, 2006.

MBC = MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

PC = *The Pulpit Commentary: Ruth*. (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909.

Piper = *A Sweet and Bitter Providence* (John Piper). Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.

TWOT = *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris; Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; Bruce Waltke). Chicago: Moody Press, 1980. Two Volumes.

UBS = *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (2nd ed.) (Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A.). New York: United Bible Societies, 1991.

Wood = *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Leon Wood). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

Wiersbe = *Be Committed. "Be" Commentary Series* (Wiersbe, W. W. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993.

Three Steps of Exegesis

1. **Translation.** Work through a transliteration of the text and translate the passage directly, if possible.
2. **Exegesis.** Detailed exegesis of the passage by way of a "shot-gun" approach, using various exegetical tools.
 - Work from critical commentaries to practical.
 - Word studies and cross-references (analogy of the faith).
 - Applicational analysis - applicational issues arising from the text.
 - Theological analysis - theological issues arising from the text.
3. **Structural Analysis.** Diagram the passage developing a detailed outline and central proposition.
 - Smooth away all of the wrinkles.
 - The process is to yield an accurate "statue" as I chisel away the debris.

Basic English Diagram

1 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 is not Boaz our kinsman,
with whose maids you were?

Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

3

* “Wash yourself therefore,

* and anoint yourself

* and put on your best clothes,

(and go down to the threshing floor;)

- but do not make yourself known to the man
until he has finished eating and drinking.

4

“It shall be when he lies down,

that you shall notice the place where he lies,

and you shall go

* and uncover his feet

* and lie down;

==> then he will tell you what you shall do.”

5

She said to her, ==>

“All that you say I will do.”

TRANSLATION, OUTLINE AND CENTRAL PROPOSITION

HEBREW TEXT (BHS):

- וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חַמּוֹתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֶבְקֶשׁ-לָךְ מְנוּחַ אֲשֶׁר יִיטַב-לָךְ: ¹
- וַעֲתָהּ הֲלֹא בַעַז מִדַּעַתְנוּ אֲשֶׁר הִייתָ אֶת-נַעֲרוֹתַי הַנֵּה-הוּא זָרָה אֶת-גֶּרְןָ ²
הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלַּיְלָה:
- וְרַחֲצֵתָ וְסִכַּתָּ וְשִׁמַּתָּ שְׁמַלְתֶּיךָ עָלֶיךָ וְיָרַדְתָּ הַגֶּרְןָ אֶל-תְּוֹדְעֵי לְאִישׁ עַד ³
כִּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת:
- וַיְהִי בְשָׁכְבוֹ וַיִּדְעַתָּ אֶת-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב-שָׁם וּבָאת וְגִלִית מַרְגְּלֹתַי ⁴
וְשָׁכַבְתָּ וְהוּא יַגִּיד לָךְ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין:
- וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמְרֵי ֹּ ֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה: ⁵

ENGLISH TRANSLATION (NASB):

1 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 is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 "It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." 5 She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

PASSAGE / BOOK OUTLINE:

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

- A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)
- B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)
- C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

- A. Scene One: Ruth Reaping (vv. 1-7)
- B. Scene Two: Ruth Rewarded - Part 1 (vv. 8-13)

- C. Scene Three: Ruth Rewarded - Part 2 (vv. 14-17)
- D. Scene Four: Ruth Reports (vv. 18-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

- A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)
- B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)
- C. Scene Three: Resting in Providence (vv. 16-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

- A. Scene One: Resolving Legal Matters (vv. 1-12)
- B. Scene Two: Romance and Redemption (vv. 13-17)

Epilogue - Royal Rights and The Resultant Redeemer (4:18-22)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)

1. Naomi Proposes A Solution to Ruth's Status as a Widow: A Husband for Ruth (v. 1-4)
 - a. Naomi is concerned for Ruth's welfare not her own (v. 1)
 - b. Naomi makes a connection between God's provision of grain through Boaz to God's provision of a husband for Ruth (v. 2)
 - c. Naomi concocts a plan for Ruth (3-4):
 - (1) Preparation:
 - (a) Wash herself (3a)
 - (b) Anoint herself (3b)
 - (c) Clothe herself (3c)
 - (2) Action:
 - (a) Go to the threshing floor this night (3d)
 - (b) Wait (3f):
 - i. until he is finished eating and drinking
 - ii. until he is turned in for the night
 - (c) Act (4a)
 - i. Uncover his feet
 - ii. Lie down nearby
 - (d) Listen (4b)
 - i. He will tell you what do to next

SERMON OUTLINE:

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5) or *Naomi Proposes: A Husband for Ruth*

1. The Beauty of God's Invisible Hand (1-5)
 - a. Beauty in the selfless actions of others (1)
Am I selfless or selfish?
 - b. Beauty in Orchestrated circumstances (2)
Do I see God at work?
 - c. Beauty in Providence greater than our plans (3-4)
Do I trust God to work?
 - (1) Ruth's Preparation (3)
 - (a) Washing up (3a)
 - (b) Smelling good (3b)
 - (c) Looking good (3c)
 - (2) Naomi's Plan (3-4)
 - (a) Go (3d)
 - (b) Wait (3f)
 - i. until he is finished eating and drinking
 - ii. until he is turned in for the night
 - (c) Act (4a)
 - i. Uncover his feet
 - ii. Lie down nearby
 - (d) Listen (4b)
 - i. He will tell you what do to next
 - d. Beauty in simple decisions (5)
Do I trust God with the future?

PASSAGE SUBJECT/THEME (what's t/passage talking about): Naomi looks out for Ruth's welfare

PASSAGE COMPLEMENT/THRUST (what's t/passage saying about what it's talking about): by devising a shrewd plan to join her to Boaz

PASSAGE MAIN IDEA (central proposition of the text): Naomi proposes a plan to get Boaz to propose marriage (to Ruth).

CENTRAL PROPOSITION OF THE SERMON: Naomi proposes a plan to get Boaz to propose marriage.

SERMONIC IDEA/TITLE: Pain, Plans and God's Purpose

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL/GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

- A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)
- B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)
- C. Scene Three: Resting in Providence (vv. 16-18)

This is one of the key scenes in t/story as far as suspense / what will the character(s) do / decisions go.

At this point one may wonder, why Boaz didn't think of his being a husband for Ruth. Two factors: First of all, he was considerably older (3:10). Was likely that he was also a sufficiently distant relative that it would not naturally occur to him to act on Ruth's behalf.

As to the structure, there's more technical data here than I want to go into. See, for example, Bush 145ff.

Boaz, while going out of his way to provide for Ruth, doesn't seem to 'get it' as far as Naomi is concerned. So Naomi concocts a match-making scheme. Cf. vv. 9-10.

What now happens at the threshing floor is as essential to the story-teller's purpose as what happened on the Moabite highway between Ruth and Naomi, or what happened in the harvest scene when Boaz praises an impoverished widow who was gleaning, or what will happen in the solemn civil hearing at the city gate. At each of these points in the story, a moment of choice is presented to both actors and audience, and at each of these points the choice is made in favor of what righteous living calls for. [Campbell, 132]

. . . the artistic function of the conflicting connotations of words versus sentences must be to furnish, on a level beyond the literal, the sense of the sexual and emotional tension felt by the characters in the vignette. The narrative tells us straightforwardly that no sexual intercourse has taken place on the threshing floor, that final resolutions await the scene at the city gate. All the while, however, the vocabulary of the scene indicates that it might have, that the atmosphere was sexually charged. Thus the ambivalence. The words point, beneath the surface, to the might-have-been which the characters felt might be, while the combinations of the words emphasize the opposing reality. The author of Ruth is relying upon ambiguity of language to depict the tension of emotion, enabling him to convey the atmospherics of the scene without digressing from his narrative to describe them [Benstein, JSOT 50, cited by Bush, 156]

Comparing Six English Translations

Note that all the translations have "uncover his feet" or a variation thereof.

Version	Ruth 3:1-5
NASB95	1 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 is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes , and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 "It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." 5 She said to her, "All that you say I will do."
ESV	3 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? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 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. 4 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." 5 And she replied, "All that you say I will do."
NIV	3 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for . 2 Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 3 Wash, put on perfume , and get dressed in your best clothes . Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." 5 "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered.
KJV	3 Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? 2 And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor. 3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. 4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. 5 And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.
HCSB	3 Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, shouldn't I find security for you, so that you will be taken care of ? 2 Now isn't Boaz our relative? Haven't you been working with his female servants? This evening he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. 3 Wash, put on perfumed oil , and wear your best clothes . Go down to the threshing floor, but don't let the man know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, notice the place where he's lying, go in and uncover his feet, and lie down. Then he will explain to you what you should do." 5 So Ruth said to her, "I will do everything you say."
NCV	3 Then Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, said to her, "My daughter, I must find a suitable home for you, one that will be good for you . 2 Now Boaz, whose young women you worked with, is our close relative. Tonight he will be working at the threshing floor. 3 Wash yourself, put on perfume , change your clothes , and go down to the threshing floor. But don't let him know you're there until he has finished his dinner . 4 Watch him so you will know where he lies down to sleep. When he lies down, go and lift the cover off his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you should do."

Footnote by Block:

This episode offers a classic illustration of the pitfalls of an audience-response hermeneutic. This proposal also provides the student of communication theory with a classic illustration of the power of ambiguity in rhetoric. Communication always involves three elements: a speaker, a message, and an audience. Understood traditionally, communication is the process whereby

the message is transferred from speaker to audience. It used to be assumed that true communication has not occurred unless the audience has arrived at the speaker's understanding of an issue. The source of a communication was the final authority over its meaning, and it was the duty of the audience to determine that intended sense. In our postmodern culture this entire scheme has been turned on its head. According to audience-response theory communication has potential meaning, but the hearer is the active agent in determining the meaning. Authorial intent has become irrelevant.¹

100 years ago Hermann Gunkel, considered by some the father of modern-day Ruth studies, claimed that it was not possible to find a central teaching in the book:

To anyone who still wants to take away a "teaching" ... we might command this one: that men would do well to be on guard before beautiful and clever women who want to get their way. [H. Gunkel, 'Ruth', in *Reden und Aufsätze* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1913) 89.]

¹ Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

3:1 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֶבְקֶשׁ-לָךְ מְנוּחַ אֲשֶׁר יִטֵּב-לָךְ:
it may be well with you that security I must seek for you not? my daughter her mother-in-law Naomi to her and she said

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

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?”

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

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?”

וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי חֲמוּתָהּ בְּתִי הֲלֹא אֶבְקֶשׁ-לָךְ מְנוּחַ אֲשֶׁר יִטֵּב-לָךְ:

"Then" (cf. previous context). No more than a few weeks has gone by.

Note how now N. is moved to action where before she appears to be apathetic (depression?) - 2:2.

N. asks 2 rhetorical ?s (here and in v. 2). They are negatively expressed, but similar to Boaz' statements in 2:8-9, perhaps leading to a conclusion that they spoke the same way because they were of the same age (cf. 3:10).

The word מְנוּחָה refers to a condition of security and rest. Part. true for a woman in antiquity (cf. 1:9). The implied idea is that N. is concerned for Rs welfare and doesn't want her to be an old maid. There's no indication at this point that N. is thinking of a levirate responsibility (to carry on t/family line of E.). She's thinking of Rs welfare. Cf. 4:5.

The word *mānōah*, “place of rest,” derives from the same root as *mēnūhā* in 1:9 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. The verbal link invites the reader to consider whether subsequent events are to be viewed not only as the consequences of Naomi's scheming, but also the results of her prayer in 1:8–9. Furthermore, to pick up the imagery of 2:12, a responsible husband functions as the wings of God offering protection and security for all who dwell in his house. Second, she defines the purpose of her quest for *mānōah* for Ruth: that it may go well for her (contra NIV, “where you will be well provided for”). 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. As she declares it, Naomi's 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. Nor is there any hint of a concern to provide an heir for her own husband Elimelech or her son Mahlon by a levirate marriage. She expresses no interest whatsoever in what will be high in Boaz's mind as he marries Ruth: to secure the place of Mahlon's family in Israel by raising up his name on his patrimonial estate and in the court of Bethlehem (4:10). It seems that in this patricentric environment, concerns involving inheritance and the place and reputation of the family within the family history were primarily male concerns. Women in general and widows in particular were more anxious about life for the living in the present.²

² Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (681). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

3:2 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בַעַז מִדַּעַתְנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתְוּ אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתָיו הֲיֵה־הוּא זֶרָה אֶת־גֶּרְןָ
at the threshing floor is winnowing look he with his maids you were who our kinsman Boaz not? and so then
 הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלַּיְלָה:
the night the barley

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

“Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

“Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were?”

וְעַתָּה הֲלֹא בַעַז מִדַּעַתְנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָיִיתְוּ אֶת־נַעֲרוֹתָיו

Cf. 2:20b. Not "goel" but "moda'tanu" (מִדַּעַתְנוּ), a unique fem. noun from "yada" - "to know".

Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

הֲיֵה־הוּא זֶרָה אֶת־גֶּרְןָ הַשְּׁעָרִים הַלַּיְלָה:

Word "tonight" brings anticipation to what happens later in the story. There's also a cultural consideration. Winnowing in Palest. was done using a large wooden fork or rake. The gleanings were piled on a hard-packed piece of ground, the 'threshing floor', and the fork was used to toss mixture into the wind. The chaff was blown away the furthest (being the lightest) and the straw, next. The heavier kernels of grain fell onto the threshing floor in front of the thresher.

In Israel, the summer west winds blow strongly in the afternoon dropping off into the evening. The evening hours were gen. best for the right amt. of wind to effectively sep. the grain from the chaff.

Naomi was familiar with this practice, as well as Boaz' seasonal habits.

Campbell adds the following details: Threshing floors were near the harvest field. A raised, level area was used; floor was hard-packed, surface durable. The grain would be thrown into the air with a fork against a strong wind; heavier grain fell to the ground, lighter stalk and chaff blown to the end of /threshing floor where a slow fire would be burning (cf. Matt. 3:12). [99]

The land owner or foreman would often sleep on the threshing floor with his men to protect the harvest from robbers.

Cf. w/2:23 we see a problem: if R. gleaned t/o both barley and wheat harvest, why is B. just now getting to winnowing the earlier crop (barley)? Cf. proposals offered by Campbell; Bush; and Block.

Threshing and winnowing were a time of great festivity and rejoicing. Naomi knew that Boaz was threshing his grain on the day that she had chosen for her plan. [The Bible Knowledge Commentary]

Probably Boaz himself did not do the winnowing, but simply supervised his servants as they did the work. Perhaps Boaz stayed at the threshing floor during the night in order to guard it against thieves.

[and animals]

One of the reasons why TEV does not specify “winnowing” is that such a process is rarely known or understood at the present time by English-speaking people. Furthermore, winnowing would be regarded as only part of the process of threshing, and therefore TEV uses the more general term at this point. However, where winnowing is known, a specific term for this process should be employed, and it may be useful in some instances to add a marginal note to explain this process. Where a technical term for winnowing is lacking, it is sometimes possible to use a descriptive phrase such as “he will be shaking out the dirt from the barley,” “he will be separating the grain from the chaff,” or “he will be separating the grain from the leaves.” [Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A. (1991). A translator's handbook on the book of Ruth (2nd ed.). UBS Handbook Series (47–48). New York: United Bible Societies.]

3:3 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וְרַחֲצָהּ וְסָבָהּ וְשָׁמָהּ שְׂמֹלֶתֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ וְיָרַדְתָּ הַגֶּרֶן אֶל־תְּוֹדְעִי לְאִישׁ עַד
until to the man you shall not make yourself known to the threshing floor and go down on you your clothing and you shall put and you shall anoint and you shall wash
כִּלְתּוֹ לֶאֱכַל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת:
and to drink to eat finishing him

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

“Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

“Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor;

וְרַחֲצָהּ וְסָבָהּ וְשָׁמָהּ שְׂמֹלֶתֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ וְיָרַדְתָּ הַגֶּרֶן

Note three steps related to personal hygiene: Wash; anoint; clothes.

Have to unwrap ourselves from our own cultural and linguistic presuppositions here.

Washing . . . people then, true today in most places outside of the US, did not bathe or shower on a regular basis (i.e. every day). Body odor was / is acceptable / normal (illust.). This "washing" wasn't a shower or a bubble bath. This was also a first step in betrothal to marriage (cf. Ezek. 16:9).

Anointing . . . this has strong religious connotations for us. We think of anointing oil; things that go hand in hand with bells and incense. This would have been perfumed olive oil, used as a feminine perfume or a general deodorant.

In a hot climate and in a culture where bathing was only an occasional luxury since water was scarce and personal hygiene was at most in a primitive stage of development, perfumed oil was used as a cosmetic to counteract body odors. [Bush, 150]

Cf. Song. 1:3,13; 3:6; 4:14; 5:1,5,13. Psa. 45:9; Esth. 2:12; Pro. 7:17.

Clothes . . . Ruth wasn't putting on her 'little black dress' (unheard of). The word "simlah" was used in the OT to refer to a large outer garment. This would have covered the entire body. Prob. not "best clothes" (so Bush).

The rendering get dressed in your best clothes is a very satisfactory idiomatic equivalent of the Hebrew expression. However, it is true that most Hebrew manuscripts have at this point a singular noun, and one may therefore appropriately translate “put on your best cloak.” This may very well refer to a large piece of cloth worn as an outer garment, but this is not the mantle or cloak mentioned in verse 15 which Ruth used to carry home the relatively large quantity of barley. [Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A., 48]

Third, Ruth is to put on her dress. The word used for “dress” 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 the NIV. This interpretation seems to be based on the parallel between this text and Ezek 16:8–12. Both texts contain the sequence of bathing, applying perfume, and putting on garments in preparation for an encounter with a male. It is therefore commonly assumed that Naomi would have Ruth follow a bride’s normal preparation for marriage. But such a brazen act would have repulsed rather than attracted Boaz.¹⁵ On the other hand, some see Naomi simply advising Ruth to dress up to attract a man. But this text bears no resemblance at all to accounts of seductive dress, as in Isa 3:19–23 and *Jdt* 10:4. On the contrary, there 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 to keep warm.³

What is she doing? Parallel to 2 Sam. 12:20 -

So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

Time for mourning is over. Put the past behind you. Time to move forward, for Ruth, that would include remarriage (cf. Paul in 1 Tim. 5:14). This would be a signal to Boaz as to her intentions.

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 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. Naomi may have had all this in mind already in 2:20, but if she did, she kept these notions to herself until such a time as she deemed Ruth ready for the move.⁴

3 Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (683). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

4 Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (684). Nashville:

Campbell writes:

Immoral practices associated with fertility rites were practiced on pagan threshing floors. [98]

but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

אַל־תִּגְדְּעִי לְאִישׁ עַד פְּלִתוֹ לְאָכַל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת:

In this context drinking refers to the drinking of wine or some other alcoholic beverage. In some languages the process of eating and drinking is represented by a single verb. [Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A., 48]

Cf. v. 7. Naomi wanted Boaz to be in the best possible mood. (cf. Timing is everything).

The reference to eating and drinking prior to an encounter reminds the reader of Gen 19:30–38, according to which Lot’s daughters deliberately got their father drunk so they could have intercourse with him. Although Boaz’s “drinking” probably included an alcoholic beverage, our passage makes no mention whatsoever of him getting drunk or of engaging in actions that he would not have done sober. Ruth the Moabitess is indeed descended from Lot by his eldest daughter, but the narrator is careful to present her as the antithesis of the stereotypical Moabite. In fact she is deliberately portrayed throughout as embodying the Israelite standards of *hesed*.⁵

Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵ Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (684–685). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

3:4 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וְיִהְיֶה בְּשֹׁכְבוֹ וַיִּדְעַתְּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם וּבָאת וְגִלִּית מִרְגְּלֹתָיו
feet - him - and and you shall open and you shall go he lies there where the place you shall take notice at lying him and it happened
וְשֹׁכַבְתִּי וְהוּא יַגִּיד לְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂינּוּ:
you shall do what [obj] to you shall tell and he and lie

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

“It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do.”

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

“It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies,

וְיִהְיֶה בְּשֹׁכְבוֹ וַיִּדְעַתְּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב־שָׁם

When he retires for the evening to sleep.

and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down;

וּבָאת וְגִלִּית מִרְגְּלֹתָיו וְשֹׁכַבְתִּי

Huh!! It's dark; he's a single man and I'm a single woman. He's ready for bed and in bed and you want me to do what?!

"feet" could be understood as "legs:"

Naomi may have deliberately used the word *margēlôt* to exclude the genital interpretation that is occasionally intended with *regel/raglayim*. On the analogy of *mēra'āšôt*, “place of the head, head support,” in Gen 28:11, 18, some interpret *margēlôt* as “place of the feet, footing.” However, a better clue to its meaning is found in Dan 10:6, the only place outside this context (here it occurs four times: vv. 4, 7, 8, 14) where the word appears. There, juxtaposed with *zērō'ôt*, “arms,” the word means “lower limbs,” inclusive of feet, legs, and thighs. Accordingly, it seems Naomi is advising Ruth to uncover Boaz’s lower limbs, probably exclusive of his genitals, and then go and lie down herself. Naomi says nothing about lying next to him or even lying at his feet. She is simply to lie down and watch what happens. Although the action is suggestive, by either of these last two interpretations the choice of *margēlôt* actually draws the

reader's attention away from the genitals and diffuses it over the limbs as a whole.⁶

Wild interpretations:

- 1) "feet" euphemism for sexual organs. However, this is not the normal word for "foot". Also not a reasonable interpretation.
- 2) translate "uncover" as "undress" - Ruth was to undress at Boaz' feet! Not credible. Besides, was she to stand there nude at Boaz' feet until he notices, perhaps hours later? [cf. Bush, 153 ff.)

Lift the covers renders what is in Hebrew literally “uncover the place of his feet.” The meaning of what Ruth did was essentially to ask for Boaz’s protection. Of course, the idea of a marriage proposal may very well have been implicit in the act,* but there is no clear evidence that this expression is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, as has been suggested by some scholars. On the other hand, the Hebrew terms translated “uncover,” “feet,” and “lie down” are often associated with sexual acts, and therefore the expression lends itself to this type of interpretation.* Even some ancient translators tried in several ways to weaken or alter the meaning. [Waard, J. d., & Nida, E. A., 49]

The ambiguities in the words and the circumstances chosen by Naomi are indeed provocative. What is one to think of a woman who bathes, puts on perfume, and then in the dark of night goes out to the field where the man is sleeping and uncovers his legs? Under ordinary circumstances these look like the actions of a prostitute. On the other hand, this overtly sexual interpretation of Naomi’s directions seems to read far more into the text than is intended. [Block, 685–686]

Daring and purposefully vague. Remember that both are desc. as having great integrity (2:1; 3:11).

Just where did Ruth lie down? "When he lies [i]" (3:4). The Hebrew is just as ambiguous as the English. Perpendicular? Parallel? Overlapping?

No indication that she is to lie down right next to him or extremely close to him.

Whatever Naomi's motive was, the situation is one that could lead us into passionate and illicit scene of sexual intercourse, or into a stunning scene of purity, integrity, and self- control.

Boaz, a virtuous person, blesses Ruth for her action (v. 10) and characterizes her as supremely noble woman (v. 11). She was not seeking sexual favors from him. Cf. all we learned of Boaz in chapter 2.

then he will tell you what you shall do.”

וְהוּא יגיד לְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין׃

Not he will do something to you!

The picture.

So Naomi's aim is clear: to win for Ruth a godly husband and a secure future . . . So she tells

⁶ Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (686). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Ruth to make herself as clean and attractive as possible, go to the threshing floor of Boaz, and after he has lain down for the evening, sneak in, lift up his cloak, and lie down at his feet. Everybody, including Ruth, must respond by thinking, "And just where do you suppose that will lead?" To which Naomi gives the extraordinary answer, "He will tell you what to do" (.3:4).

One thing is clear here, and one thing is not. It's clear that this is Naomi's way of trying to get Boaz to marry Ruth. It is not clear why she should go about it like this. Why not a conversation with Boaz instead of his highly suggestive and risky midnight maneuver? Was Naomi indifferent to the possibility that Boaz might drive Ruth away in moral indignation, or that he might give in to the temptation to have sexual relations with her? Did Naomi want that to happen? Or was Naomi so sure of Boaz and Ruth that she knew they would treat each other with perfect purity—that Boaz would be deeply moved by this outright offer of Ruth in marriage and would avoid sexual relations until all was duly solemnized by the city elders? [Piper, 83-84]

3:5 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמַרְי אֲעֲשֶׂה:
I will do that you say all to her and she said

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-תֹּאמַרְי אֲעֲשֶׂה:

Sign of respect toward her care-giver and elder; Ruth treats Naomi as a mother.

What now happens at the threshing floor is as essential to the story-teller's purpose as what happened on the Moabite highway between Ruth and Naomi, or what happened in the harvest scene when Boaz praises an impoverished widow who was gleaning, or what will happen in the solemn civil hearing at the city gate. At each of these points in the story, a moment of choice is presented to both actors and audience, and at each of these points the choice is made in favor of what righteous living calls for. [Campbell, 132]

What will happen next? All up to chance?

Yahweh does what only he can do: as sovereign initiator, he sets events in motion by arranging the meeting of key characters in the right situation; as immanent presence, he then facilitates the success of his chosen human instruments. On the other hand, they respond to God-given opportunity by actively applying human ability to take full advantage of it. Yahweh acts in their actions; their acts are Yahweh's acts. By implication, one glimpses the author's view of faith: in cases like this, faith is the seizure of opportunities as God-given, the application of human ingenuity to reach divinely-honoured goals. [Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Theological Reflections On Naomi's Shrewdness*. Tyndale Bulletin, Vol. 40:2 (NA 1989)]

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, the nonverbal communication is sufficiently ambiguous to be interpreted in any one of several ways. First, in that cultural and

spiritual context, Boaz could wake up in the middle of the night and willingly accept Ruth's overtures, in his grogginess interpreting 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. The effectiveness of her plan is measured by the extent to which Boaz's interpretation when he awakes conforms to the meaning she has intended in Ruth's actions. Either of the first two responses would have defeated Naomi's purpose; and far from securing Ruth's welfare, this poor Moabite woman would have returned home broken in body and bruised in spirit. From a natural perspective the desired response was actually the least likely to occur. What are the chances that Boaz will wake up and in his groggy state notice that Ruth has covered herself with a *šimlâ* rather than the seductive garb of a prostitute, that he will understand when she introduces herself, that he will respond favorably toward her, overlooking the irregularities of the situation (a woman proposing to a man, a younger person proposing to an older, a field worker proposing to the field owner, an alien proposing to a native), and that, in fulfillment of Naomi's words, he will give Ruth rational instructions concerning how to proceed? But by this time Naomi's faith is strong. She has confidence in Boaz's integrity and apparently in the hidden hand of God to govern his reactions when he awakes.

Remarkably Ruth's faith appears to be equal to that of her mother-in-law, for she gives herself wholly to carrying out Naomi's scheme in full. Meanwhile the narrator challenges the reader to trust God the way these women do. The first scene closes, leaving us to wonder if this delicate and dangerous plan will work.⁷

⁷ Block, D. I. (1999). *Vol. 6: Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (687–688). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.