
RUTH 3:14-18

SIX MEASURES OF BARLEY



Timeline of Ruth So far

A family moves from Bethlehem to Moab (Famine to Respite.) This is seen by the narrator with a critical eye. The family moves back from Moab to Bethlehem (From death to hope)... "The arrived at the beginning o the barley harvest."

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3:1-13

Chapter 3:14-18

The women take matters into their own hands. The plan to uncover is presented to Ruth who accepts Naomi's request. The drama intensifies. Boaz reveals to Ruth that the right to redeem belongs to someone else. She spends the night at the threshing floor.

Barley, working in the fields, the introduction, and the blessing of Chesed from an unexpected source. Introduction of Go'el. Boaz notices Ruth, but the chapter ends without a sense of resolution. Ruth goes back to live with her mother-in-law.

Conclusion of Chapter 3. Boaz provides for Naomi, and we see a transition to Chapter 4, and the conclusion of the story. There is a similar ending to chapters 1 and 2. This is purposeful and heightens the drama.

Opening Prayer





14 So she lay at his feet until morning...

- This is the third time in this scene where we read “at his feet.” The language is unclear as to whether she fell asleep at his feet or laid awake at his feet waiting for daybreak.
- “There, waiting the daylight, her mind probably went around and around about what would occur the next day. The day of the dead husband would be raised up, but through who? She probably thought through every possibility and every contingency that would arise, even with her limited knowledge of the actual circumstances ahead.” (Superiorword.org.)

but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.'

- "Given the common association between threshing floors and prostitution, we might interpret Boaz's wish for Ruth to leave the threshing floor 'before anyone could be recognized' as an attempt to protect either her reputation as a 'worthy woman' or his own reputation in order not to jeopardize the plan he will carry out in the next chapter." (The New Interpreters Bible, 930.)
- "The Woman." (a) Speaking to a trusted servant? (b) Speaking to himself? (c) Speaking to God in prayer? (d) Speaking to Ruth?





How might Ruth being seen at the threshing floor jeopardize Boaz's plans?

- Events could be seen as "tainted with preplanning in order to deceive or manipulate what would transpire.
- It would appear as collusion concerning the matter before it was settled." (SW)
- The Spiritual Angle: Boaz has acknowledged that there is a kinsman closer than he, and that kinsman must be given the first opportunity to accept or decline the right of redemption... If he did and he later found out that Ruth has been with Boaz, he could assume, though incorrectly, that they had been intimate... There is an order and propriety which Boaz had ensured would be followed so that all was done according to the law." (SW)
- The Cultural or Economic Angle: If the kinsman knew of the midnight visit, he might choose to redeem the land and widow, and then seek a high price from Boaz for the woman, because he would know Boaz liked Ruth. The best way to secure both land and widow is to hide the visit and hope the man would decline taking in a new wife, and thus decline the land (if it appeared to be an all or nothing proposition.)

15 Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city.

- Six Ephahs of barley
- Six measures of barley
- Six barleys
- We do not know how much for sure, since the text does not give us a unit of measure. These were six "measures" of one size or another of barley.
- "This amount of grain might represent a bride-price or a marriage settlement" (Sasson, et al.) "It might be the price for the option to buy the parcel of land that we learn about in the next chapter." (NIB.) "It could be interpreted as a token apology to Naomi, because her scheme did not work out precisely as she had hoped." (Caprona.) "It might be understood as Ruth's payment for services rendered during the night." (G. May.) It could be seen as "six seeds, symbolizing the restoration of 'seed' to Elimelech's line." (Bos.) Early Jewish thinkers believed it meant six seeds, representing six male descendants, each of whom would be blessed with six blessings. (Ruth Rabbah.) Anthony Phillips believes "Boaz seeks to save his own reputation and keep Naomi quiet at the same time by signaling by the gift of grain that he will now do what he ought all along to have put in motion." (The Book of Ruth -Deception and Shame, 14.)





Or this could just be another gesture of Chesed similar to 2:16-17

- Boaz has provided cooked grain and about an Ephah of barley before. He cares for the widows and wants to help
- The threshing floor event happened sometime after the end of both harvests; Boaz would have known that his original gift could be running low and repeats the gift in a, perhaps, larger scale.
- These six “measures” could mean several things, but it could just be a generous gift from a generous man, or a combination of some and/or all the arguments presented.

16 She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?'

- "Who are you, my daughter?" This literal translation could mean two things: a. Ruth arrived at a time that was still dark, and Naomi could not see her clearly ("Is this you, my daughter?") b. "The words could also be understood as Naomi's way of asking whether Ruth's status has changed overnight." (NIB) In other words, the question could mean, "Was our plan successful?"
- This could point to identity and status: "Are you the widowed Ruth or are you the betrothed of Boaz? Who are you, my daughter?" (SW.)



“Then she
told her all
that the man
had done for
her”

- She told Naomi all that the man had done for her. Of course, we, the readers, are still unsure about what happened and the full extent of the conversation.
- Ruth clearly connects the six “measures” of barley with “all that the man had done for her.” The barley is part of all he did. Now, we know that there was an acceptance of a marriage proposal, but we still don’t know how this marriage (assuming this can be accomplished) will benefit Naomi.
- “All the man had done” could be a promise of marriage, “Boaz has made a promise. He will secure a kinsman redeemer for me, be it our closer relative or be it he, I shall be redeemed.” (SW)
- “The joy of such a thought to both of them must have been immense. Just a short time earlier, they stood on the dusty roads of Moab weeping at the grim prospects of the future. Now, they were within hours of finding security and rest in one who would perform the redemption. The only question left isn’t ‘if,’ but ‘who.’” (Superiorword.org)

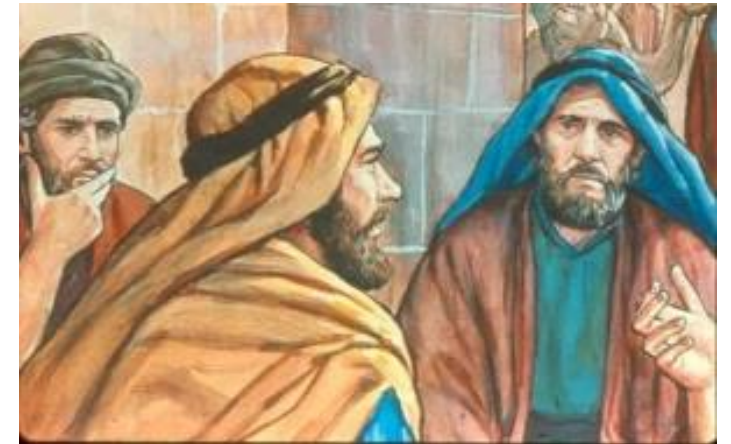
17 saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."

- The narrator does not give us any words in verse 15 when the grain was given, so we must accept Ruth's testimony as truthful.
- Whether Boaz actually said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty handed," Naomi saw the barley as a sign.
- The visit to the threshing floor was quite successful: There was a promise of a marriage (if possible,) there was a signal to Naomi that Boaz intends to support Ruth (and perhaps both, but this remains to be seen.)
- "Here, as in 2:21 the words that Ruth reports to Naomi are not part of Boaz's original words to Ruth. Ruth may be fabricating or embroidering in order to emphasize that Boaz's care for Ruth extended to his concern for Naomi." (Jewish Study Bible, 1584.)
- One last thing about "Measure": Compare KJV to NIV or NRSV. Translation makes a difference.



18 She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'

- Obviously, Naomi saw the barley as a sign, "The man will settle the matter today!"
- "Sit still, until..." This expression points to anxiety and excitement. Ruth will be married soon, she doesn't know to whom, but it will happen. Waiting to hear the outcome of the men's meeting would be an incredibly nervous moment for Ruth.
- "Boaz gave his assurances to Ruth, he gave a token through Ruth to Naomi, and he had departed at the first dawning of the morning to work out the consummation of his plans. Naomi therefore knew, with all certainty, that he was intent on seeing the matter through." (SW)
- The suspense of who will be the redeemer, leaves this chapter at a similar place than chapter 1 and 2.





Endings

- Chapter 1:22: "So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest." Now what? What will happen to the women?
- Chapter 2:23: "So Ruth stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law." Now what? Will Boaz act? What will the women do now?
- Chapter 3:18: "Naomi replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'" Now what? Will Boaz outmaneuver his relative? Who will marry Ruth? Will this marriage benefit Naomi?

Women taking matters into their hands

- 1:6 "Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard ... that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food."
- 1:16 "But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!...Where you die, I will die.'"
- 2:13 "Then she said, 'May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.'"
- 3:3 "Now wash 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. 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."
- 3:9b "'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.'"

