

AN IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY

BOAZ AND RUTH IN DETAIL

A Threshing Floor Scene Examined Carefully, and Two Characters Worth Knowing Closely

Ruth 1-4

A journey through history, biblical languages, and a courtship the text handles with unusual restraint

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Introduction: Two Characters Worth Knowing Closely

This series has already devoted a study to the book of Ruth's legal and theological framework — the kinsman-redeemer (go'el), the gleaning laws that first bring Ruth and Boaz into contact, and the formal legal proceedings at the city gate that resolve the book's central question. This companion study takes a different approach, focusing specifically and closely on Ruth and Boaz as characters: the full weight of Ruth's opening vow, Boaz's specific and deliberate acts of kindness, and above all, the threshing floor scene of Ruth 3 — a passage this study treats with the careful, honest attention its genuine interpretive complexity deserves, rather than either sensationalizing or sanitizing it.

This study examines: Ruth's vow to Naomi and its full cultural and personal cost; Boaz's introduction and social standing; the specific, deliberate kindness he extends to Ruth in the gleaning field; Naomi's plan for the threshing floor and its genuine ancient cultural background; the threshing floor scene itself, including a real, documented scholarly question regarding the passage's language that this study addresses directly and carefully; Boaz's response and the integrity it displays; and the nearer kinsman's decision, examined for what it reveals by contrast.

As with the other studies in this series, this study distinguishes what the text states explicitly from reasonable historical and cultural background, and addresses directly a genuine area of scholarly discussion regarding the threshing floor scene's language, presenting the evidence honestly rather than avoiding a legitimate question or treating it sensationally.

Did You Know?

The book of Ruth is one of only two books in the entire Hebrew Bible named after a woman (the other being Esther), and one of the shortest books in the Old Testament, yet it plays an outsized role in biblical genealogy — its closing verses trace a direct line from Boaz and Ruth to King David, making this brief, intimate narrative directly foundational to the entire subsequent history of Israel's monarchy and, ultimately, to the genealogy of Christ recorded in Matthew 1.

How to Use This Study

Each chapter includes: (1) the central biblical text; (2) historical and linguistic context; (3) explanations of Hebrew terms; (4) cross references; (5) 'Did You Know?' boxes with historical background; (6) suggestions for illustrations for those teaching this material in a classroom or small group; and (7) questions for personal or group reflection. At the end, you will find a consolidated summary of the main points, a list of further reading organized by theme, and a recommended bibliography for deeper study.



Suggested Illustration

Opening page with a simple illustration of a Bethlehem threshing floor at night, showing Boaz sleeping near a heap of grain with Ruth approaching quietly — visually establishing, with appropriate restraint, the central scene this study's later chapters will examine in careful historical and textual depth.

Chapter 1 — Ruth's Vow: The Full Weight of "Whither Thou Goest"

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death separate thee and me." — Ruth 1:16-17

A Vow Made After Genuine Alternatives Were Offered

This declaration occurs only after Naomi has already, twice, explicitly urged both her daughters-in-law to return to their own families and remarry among their own people (1:8-13), and after Orpah — presented without criticism or condemnation — has, in fact, taken exactly this reasonable, expected course (1:14-15). Ruth's vow, then, is made with full awareness of a genuine, socially sanctioned alternative, not as the only available option.

A Comprehensive, Escalating Commitment

Ruth's statement moves through an escalating series of specific commitments — shared geography ('whither thou goest'), shared daily life ('where thou lodgest'), shared people and identity ('thy people shall be my people'), shared religious devotion ('thy God my God'), and finally shared mortality itself ('where thou diest, will I die') — building toward a vow whose scope leaves nothing of Ruth's prior identity, nationality, or religious background unaddressed.

A Formal Oath, Invoking the Covenant Name

Ruth's concluding words — 'the LORD do so to me, and more also' — use a recognized formal Hebrew oath formula (compare its use elsewhere, such as 1 Samuel 3:17; 2 Samuel 3:9), and specifically invoke YHWH, Israel's own covenant name for God (examined at length in this series' dedicated study on the tetragrammaton), by a Moabite woman who had, until this point, presumably worshiped Moab's own national deity, Chemosh. This detail underscores that Ruth's vow includes genuine religious conversion, not merely practical loyalty to her mother-in-law.

Did You Know?

Moab's national god, Chemosh, is named directly elsewhere in the Old Testament (compare Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7, 33), and the relationship between Israel and Moab throughout much of the Old Testament was frequently marked by hostility and conflict (compare the broader narrative background in Numbers 22-25 and Judges 3:12-30) — making Ruth's specific vow to adopt Israel's God and people all the more striking, given the fraught, often adversarial historical relationship between these two nations.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 1:1-18; 1 Samuel 3:17; Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does knowing Ruth made this vow after a genuine, reasonable alternative had already been offered and taken by Orpah deepen your appreciation for its weight?
2. What does Ruth's specific invocation of YHWH by name suggest about the depth of the religious conversion her vow represents?

Chapter 2 — Boaz Introduced: "A Mighty Man of Wealth"

"And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz." — **Ruth 2:1**

A Specific, Deliberate Character Introduction

The narrator introduces Boaz directly to the reader before Ruth herself encounters him — a literary technique building anticipation and providing readers with background information the characters within the story do not yet possess, since Ruth herself, when she later meets Boaz, does so 'her hap was to light on a portion of the field belonging unto Boaz' (2:3), a detail the text explicitly frames as apparent happenstance from Ruth's own perspective, even while the narrator has already informed readers of Boaz's specific relationship to Naomi's family.

"A Mighty Man of Wealth": A Phrase With Range

The Hebrew phrase behind 'a mighty man of wealth,' גִּבּוֹר חַיִּיל (gibbor chayil), carries a broader semantic range than wealth alone might suggest — the same phrase and its related forms are used elsewhere in the Old Testament for military valor and general capability or worthiness (compare its application to warriors in Judges 6:12; 11:1), suggesting Boaz's description here likely encompasses not merely financial resources but general social standing, capability, and respected character within his community.

A Named Relationship to Elimelech's Family

Boaz's specific identification as 'a kinsman of her husband's, of the family of Elimelech' establishes, from the very outset of this chapter, the specific family and legal relationship that will become central to the book's later development regarding kinsman-redemption (examined at length in this series' earlier dedicated Ruth study) — the narrator ensures readers understand this crucial family connection well before the story's characters themselves begin to recognize or act upon it.

Did You Know?

The same Hebrew phrase applied to Boaz here, gibbor chayil, is applied in its feminine form (אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל, eshet chayil, 'woman of worth' or 'virtuous woman') to Ruth herself later in the book (3:11, examined in Chapter 7) and to the idealized wife described in Proverbs 31:10 — a linguistic connection some readers find suggestive, since it means Boaz and Ruth are each independently described, at different points in the narrative, using closely related forms of the same underlying Hebrew term for worthy, capable character.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 2:1-3; Judges 6:12; Judges 11:1; Proverbs 31:10.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does the narrator's technique of introducing Boaz before Ruth's own encounter with him shape the way you read the following chapter's events?

2. What does the broader semantic range of 'mighty man of wealth' — encompassing capability and respected standing, not merely financial resources — add to your picture of Boaz's character?

Chapter 3 — The Gleaning Field: Boaz's Specific, Deliberate Kindness

"Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: Let thine eyes be on the field that they do gleaning, and go after thine reapers: have I not charged the young men that they touch not thee?" — Ruth 2:8-9

Exceeding the Legal Minimum

Israel's gleaning law (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22, examined at length in this series' earlier Ruth study) required landowners to leave field edges and dropped grain for the poor and the stranger to gather. Boaz's specific instructions to Ruth go considerably beyond this legal minimum: inviting her to stay specifically within his own field rather than moving between different landowners' fields (as gleaners typically would need to do), instructing his young men not to trouble or harass her, and, as the chapter continues, providing direct access to drinking water his own workers had drawn (2:9) and an invitation to eat with his workers at mealtime, receiving more than she could finish (2:14).

Specific Protective Instructions

Boaz's explicit instruction that his young men should not 'touch' Ruth (2:9), and his later instruction that they should not 'reproach' her (2:15), reflects specific, deliberate attention to Ruth's vulnerability as a foreign, unmarried woman working alone among unfamiliar male laborers — a genuine social risk this study should name directly rather than passing over, which Boaz's specific instructions directly and deliberately address.

Boaz's Own Explanation of His Motivation

Boaz explicitly explains his kindness when Ruth asks why she has found such favor (2:10-12): he has heard 'all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband,' explicitly connecting his kindness to Ruth's own already-demonstrated character and loyalty (examined in Chapter 1), and expresses the hope that 'the LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust' — framing his own kindness as, in some sense, a human instrument of God's own recompense for Ruth's faithfulness.

Did You Know?

Boaz's specific phrase 'under whose wings thou art come to trust' (2:12) uses imagery elsewhere applied directly to God's own protective care (compare Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 91:4) — a striking anticipation of the almost identical phrase Ruth herself will later use when making her own specific request of Boaz at the threshing floor (3:9, examined in Chapter 7), where she asks him to 'spread therefore thy skirt' (the same

Hebrew word for 'wing,' *kanaph*) over her — a deliberate, meaningful verbal echo linking Boaz's earlier blessing to Ruth's later request that he himself become the specific means of that same protective blessing.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 2:8-17; Leviticus 19:9-10; Psalm 91:1-4.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does recognizing the genuine vulnerability Ruth faced as a foreign, unmarried gleaner deepen your appreciation for Boaz's specific protective instructions?
2. What does Boaz's own stated reasoning for his kindness — explicitly connected to Ruth's demonstrated character — suggest about how he understood his role in relation to God's own care for her?

Chapter 4 — Naomi's Plan and Its Ancient Cultural Context

"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?... 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. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go, uncover his feet, and lay down; and he will tell you thou shalt do." — Ruth 3:1-4

A Plan With a Stated, Legitimate Purpose

Naomi's stated goal is explicit and stated plainly: 'seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee' — securing Ruth's genuine, long-term security and provision through marriage, consistent with the broader ancient Near Eastern and Israelite understanding of marriage as the primary institution providing a woman's material security and social standing, particularly significant given both women's vulnerable status as widows without adult sons.

Threshing Floors as a Recognized Setting

Threshing floors in ancient Israel functioned as significant agricultural and, at specific points in the calendar (following the harvest and threshing season), social gathering locations, where landowners and workers might remain overnight to guard the newly threshed grain from theft — a well-attested ancient Near Eastern agricultural practice providing plausible historical background for why Boaz would be found sleeping at this specific location (3:7) rather than at his own home.

A Plan Requiring Real Trust and Vulnerability From Ruth

It is worth noting the genuine risk and vulnerability this plan required of Ruth specifically: approaching a man alone, at night, in a private setting, making a direct, personal request of him — a course of action carrying real potential for misunderstanding, refusal, or reputational damage, undertaken specifically at Naomi's counsel and Ruth's own willing agreement ('all that thou sayest unto me I will do,' 3:5).

Did You Know?

Naomi's specific instructions regarding washing, anointing, and dressing (3:3) likely reflect not merely personal grooming for its own sake, but the deliberate ending of a period of mourning observance — meaning Ruth's preparation for this encounter may have symbolically signaled her own readiness to move beyond widowhood's mourning period toward the possibility of remarriage, a meaningful, culturally understood signal beyond simple personal presentation.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:1-7; Ruth 1:8-9 (Naomi's earlier stated concern for both daughters-in-law's security).*

Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding threshing floors as a recognized, practical overnight setting for guarding grain add historical plausibility to this scene's setting?
2. What does the genuine vulnerability and risk this plan required of Ruth suggest about the trust between her and Naomi, and her own courage in following through?

Chapter 5 — The Threshing Floor: A Scene Requiring Careful, Honest Reading

"And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art near kinsman." — Ruth 3:7-9

A Question Worth Addressing Directly

This study addresses directly a genuine question raised within biblical scholarship regarding this passage's language, rather than avoiding it or treating it with either false prudishness or unwarranted sensationalism. Some scholars have proposed that 'feet' (Hebrew רַגְלַיִם, *raglayim*) and the act of 'uncovering' carry euphemistic sexual connotation in this specific context, noting that 'feet' functions as an attested euphemism for genitals elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (compare the likely euphemistic use in Isaiah 7:20 and possibly Exodus 4:25), and that the overall scene's private, nighttime setting, involving a woman lying down beside a man whose 'heart was merry' (possibly indicating some degree of wine's effect, 3:7), creates genuine ambiguity worth acknowledging.

Why the Majority Reading Holds This as a Legal-Symbolic Act, Not a Sexual One

This study holds that the majority, better-contextually-supported reading understands this scene as a legal-symbolic act of formal request rather than a sexual encounter, for several converging reasons. First, the narrative's own subsequent content provides no indication of sexual activity having occurred; Boaz's own later statement (3:11, examined in Chapter 7) explicitly affirms Ruth's virtuous reputation without any indication of compromised chastity, and the narrative moves directly and without any indication of shame or concealment into public legal proceedings the very next morning (3:14-4:12). Second, 'uncovering the feet' most plausibly functioned as a practical, physical means of waking a sleeping person in the dark without direct physical contact to more sensitive areas of the body — consistent with the immediate narrative's description of Boaz waking specifically because he noticed the cold or unexpected sensation at his feet (3:8). Third, Ruth's specific request — 'spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid' — uses recognized, formal marriage-proposal language and imagery (examined fully in Chapter 6), framing her entire approach as a direct, formal request for marriage and kinsman-redemption, not a seduction.

Holding the Question Honestly, Without Overstating Either Direction

This study presents the euphemistic reading as a genuine position within scholarly literature worth being aware of, while holding the majority, legal-symbolic reading as better supported by the passage's own immediate context and the book's overall narrative arc and characterization of both Ruth and Boaz as

consistently virtuous throughout. Readers should understand this as this study's own carefully considered position on a genuinely discussed textual question, rather than either avoiding the question's existence or asserting an unwarranted, sensationalized reading the text's own broader context does not support.

Did You Know?

Boaz's own later, spontaneous exclamation upon recognizing Ruth — 'blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter' (3:10) — uses the same term of respectful, somewhat paternal address ('my daughter') he had already used toward her in the gleaning field (2:8), a consistency of address some readers find further supporting the reading of this entire encounter as maintaining a tone of respectful formality rather than romantic or sexual charge, even within this genuinely intimate, private nighttime setting.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:7-13; Isaiah 7:20; Exodus 4:24-26 (a related possible euphemistic usage).*

Reflection Questions

1. How does this study's direct, honest engagement with the genuine scholarly question regarding this passage's language affect your confidence in the majority, legal-symbolic reading?
2. Why is it valuable to address a genuinely discussed textual question directly, rather than either avoiding it or overstating its implications in either direction?

Chapter 6 — "Spread Therefore Thy Skirt": A Proposal, Not a Seduction

"And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art near kinsman." — Ruth 3:9

Recognized Marriage-Proposal Imagery

Ruth's specific request — 'spread therefore thy skirt [רָצַף, kanaph, 'wing' or 'corner of a garment'] over thine handmaid' — employs recognized ancient Near Eastern and biblical imagery for marriage and covering under a husband's protection, most directly illustrated by Ezekiel 16:8's nearly identical image describing God's own covenant with Israel: 'I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee...and thou becamest mine.' Ruth's request, then, uses established, formal marriage-proposal vocabulary, not language of seduction.

A Deliberate Echo of Boaz's Own Earlier Words

As Chapter 3 noted, Ruth's specific use of kanaph ('wing/skirt') directly echoes Boaz's own earlier blessing that Ruth had come to trust under the 'wings' (same Hebrew word) of the God of Israel (2:12) — meaning Ruth's request functions, in effect, as a direct, pointed invitation for Boaz himself to become the specific human means of fulfilling the very blessing he had earlier invoked on her behalf, a rhetorically skillful and theologically aware request rather than an impulsive or merely emotional appeal.

An Explicit Legal Claim: "Thou Art Near Kinsman"

Ruth's concluding phrase — 'for thou art near kinsman' — makes her request's legal basis explicit and direct, invoking Boaz's specific status as a qualified kinsman-redeemer (go'el, examined at length in this series' earlier Ruth study) rather than presenting her request as a matter of personal romantic attraction alone. This framing situates the entire request within Israel's established legal and social framework for kinsman-redemption, not outside or independent of it.

Did You Know?

This same marriage-covering image, using the Hebrew word kanaph, appears to reflect a genuine, broader ancient Near Eastern symbolic practice in which a garment's corner or 'wing' functioned as a recognized symbol of protective authority and covering, plausibly connected to actual marriage customs in which a husband's garment might be symbolically extended over a bride as part of a wedding ceremony — providing helpful cultural background for why this specific image would have communicated Ruth's precise, formal intent clearly to Boaz within their shared cultural context.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:9; Ruth 2:12; Ezekiel 16:8.*

Reflection Questions

1. How does recognizing 'spread thy skirt' as established marriage-proposal vocabulary, directly paralleled in Ezekiel 16:8, strengthen the case for reading this as a formal proposal rather than seduction?
2. What does Ruth's deliberate echo of Boaz's own earlier words suggest about her own theological awareness and rhetorical skill in making this request?

Chapter 7 — Boaz's Response: Integrity Under Pressure

"And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning...And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I." — Ruth 3:10-13

An Explicit Affirmation of Ruth's Character

Boaz's direct statement — 'all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman' — provides explicit, public-reputation confirmation of Ruth's character, using the same Hebrew phrase (*chayil*) examined in Chapter 2 regarding Boaz's own description, and directly relevant to Chapter 5's discussion of this scene's proper interpretation: Boaz's own immediate, spontaneous response contains no hint of scandal, compromised reputation, or moral concern regarding what has just occurred, only continued, confirmed respect.

Complete Honesty Regarding a Legal Obstacle

Rather than simply accepting Ruth's proposal immediately, despite what would have been a genuine personal and practical advantage to do so, Boaz discloses directly and honestly the existence of a nearer kinsman with prior legal claim — a detail he could have concealed or minimized, given the private, nighttime setting and Ruth's own apparent lack of awareness of this specific legal complication, but chooses instead to address with complete transparency.

Protecting Ruth's Reputation

Boaz's specific instruction that Ruth leave before daylight, 'before one could know another' (3:14), and his direct concern that 'it be not known that a woman came into the floor,' reflects deliberate, practical protection of Ruth's reputation, ensuring that even this legitimate, legally-framed encounter would not become the occasion for public misunderstanding or gossip, regardless of its genuinely proper character.

Did You Know?

Boaz's additional gift of six measures of barley for Ruth to carry back to Naomi (3:15-17) served a specific, practical communicative purpose beyond simple generosity: a tangible, visible sign Ruth could show Naomi confirming that Boaz had genuinely heard and was acting upon her request, allowing Naomi to trust the outcome even before Ruth had opportunity to fully recount the entire conversation in detail.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:10-18; Proverbs 31:10 (the same 'virtuous woman' vocabulary).*

Reflection Questions

1. How does Boaz's explicit, public affirmation of Ruth's virtuous character strengthen this study's overall reading of the threshing floor scene as fundamentally proper and legally framed?

2. What does Boaz's complete honesty regarding the nearer kinsman, despite his own evident personal interest, reveal about his character?

Chapter 8 — The Nearer Kinsman: Why He Said No

"Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou myself; for I cannot redeem it, for myself, thou my right." — Ruth 4:5-6

An Initial Willingness, Then a Reversal

The unnamed nearer kinsman (deliberately left unnamed throughout the account, referred to only as 'such a one,' *peloni almoni*, in 4:1) initially agrees readily to redeem Naomi's land (4:4) — until Boaz clarifies the fuller legal obligation involved: redeeming the land specifically required also marrying Ruth and raising up an heir who would ultimately inherit that same redeemed land in the dead husband's name, rather than the redeemer's own family line permanently benefiting from the acquired property.

A Stated, Practical Reason for Refusal

The kinsman's stated reason — 'lest I mar mine own inheritance' — reflects a practical calculation: redeeming the land under these fuller terms would require expending his own resources to acquire property that would not ultimately remain within his own family's permanent inheritance, but would instead pass to a son born to Ruth, legally counted as continuing the deceased husband Mahlon's line rather than the kinsman's own. This represented a genuine, calculated financial cost without corresponding permanent benefit to his own family estate.

A Meaningful Contrast With Boaz's Own Choice

This detail illuminates Boaz's own decision by direct, deliberate contrast: Boaz, informed of this same complete legal and financial reality, chooses to redeem both the land and marry Ruth despite facing the identical practical calculation the nearer kinsman found unacceptable — highlighting Boaz's willingness to accept genuine personal cost for the sake of fulfilling this kinsman-redemption role fully and honorably.

Did You Know?

The specific legal ceremony marking the nearer kinsman's formal transfer of his redemption rights to Boaz — removing a sandal and giving it to the other party (4:7-8) — is explicitly noted by the narrator as reflecting an already older, explanatory custom by the time of the book's own composition ('this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming'), suggesting the book of Ruth itself was written at some later point when this specific legal custom required explanation for its own contemporary readers, a detail relevant to scholarly discussions of the book's likely date of composition, examined further in this series' earlier dedicated Ruth study.

 **Further Reading:** Ruth 4:1-12; Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (related levirate marriage legislation, examined at length in this series' earlier Ruth study).

Reflection Questions

1. How does understanding the nearer kinsman's specific, practical financial reasoning illuminate the genuine personal cost Boaz willingly accepted?
2. What does this contrast between the two kinsmen's choices suggest about the relationship between legal obligation and genuine, willing sacrifice?

Chapter 9 — Common Questions and Interpretive Caution

Given the sensitivity and genuine complexity of some of this study's material, this chapter draws together several further common questions.

"Is it appropriate to discuss the euphemism question regarding Ruth 3 openly, including in mixed or family settings?"

This is a matter of pastoral judgment depending on audience and context; this study holds that the question itself, and this study's own careful, textually grounded resolution of it (Chapter 5), can be discussed with appropriate maturity and care in most adult teaching settings, while teachers addressing younger or more sensitive audiences may reasonably choose to present the scene's outcome and character (a proper, legally framed proposal) without necessarily detailing the specific scholarly debate regarding the underlying Hebrew vocabulary.

"Does presenting the euphemism question at all risk casting doubt on Ruth's or Boaz's virtue?"

No; as Chapter 5 discussed directly, this study's own conclusion, reached after genuinely engaging the relevant textual evidence, affirms both characters' virtue and the scene's fundamentally proper, legally framed character — the point of addressing the question openly is not to cast doubt, but to arrive at a well-grounded, textually supported confidence rather than an untested, assumed one.

"How does this study's treatment of the threshing floor scene relate to its earlier treatment of the kinsman-redeemer laws?"

This study has intentionally focused on character, relationship, and this specific scene's careful interpretation, while directing readers to this series' earlier, dedicated Ruth study for the fuller legal and theological treatment of the kinsman-redeemer concept itself, avoiding significant repetition between the two studies while ensuring readers have access to both dimensions of this rich, multifaceted book.

Did You Know?

This pattern of directly addressing a genuinely sensitive textual question with careful, historically grounded honesty — rather than either avoidance or sensationalism — reflects this entire study series' consistent commitment to treating Scripture's full historical and textual complexity with the same seriousness and care applied throughout its complete range of subjects, from ancient Near Eastern comparative religion to genuinely debated theological questions to, here, a scene requiring particular pastoral sensitivity.

 **Further Reading:** *Ruth 3:1-18; this series' earlier dedicated Ruth study (for the fuller kinsman-redeemer legal background).*

Reflection Questions

1. Which parts of this study's argument do you hold with the most confidence, and which do you consider more genuinely open to different interpretive approaches?
2. How does this kind of careful, honest treatment of a genuinely sensitive question shape your trust in the study's overall presentation?

Chapter 10 — Practical Applications for the Christian Life

Ruth and Boaz's relationship, examined in its full character and historical depth, carries direct implications for how believers understand loyalty, integrity, and costly commitment.

1. Genuine Loyalty Sometimes Requires Choosing the Harder Path

Ruth's vow (Chapter 1), made after a genuine, easier alternative had already been offered and taken by Orpah, models a form of loyalty and commitment that deliberately chooses difficulty and uncertainty over an available, easier path, when genuine relationship and conviction call for it.

2. Kindness Can and Should Exceed Minimum Legal Obligation

Boaz's specific, deliberate kindness toward Ruth (Chapter 3), consistently exceeding what the gleaning laws strictly required, offers believers a model for generosity and care that goes beyond minimum legal or social obligation toward genuine, attentive compassion for those in vulnerable circumstances.

3. Difficult Questions Deserve Honest, Careful Engagement

This study's direct treatment of the genuine scholarly question surrounding Ruth 3's language (Chapter 5) models a valuable pattern for believers' own engagement with Scripture: neither avoiding legitimate questions out of discomfort nor treating them sensationally, but careful, textually grounded examination leading to well-supported conclusions.

4. Integrity Includes Honesty Even When Costly

Boaz's complete transparency regarding the nearer kinsman's prior legal claim (Chapter 7), despite the personal cost this honesty risked, models integrity that remains consistent even when concealment or minimization would have been personally advantageous and difficult to detect.

5. God's Providence Often Works Through Ordinary, Costly Faithfulness

The book's overall arc — Ruth's costly loyalty, Boaz's costly kindness and honest integrity, and the resulting genealogy leading to David and ultimately to Christ (examined at length in this series' earlier Ruth study) — reminds believers that God's larger redemptive purposes frequently unfold through the accumulated, ordinary faithfulness of individuals making costly, character-driven choices in their own specific, limited circumstances.

Did You Know?

The book of Ruth's placement within the Hebrew Bible's traditional ordering (within the Ketuvim, or 'Writings,' rather than alongside the historical narrative books as in most Christian Old Testament orderings)

reflects its traditional association with the Feast of Weeks/Shavuot (examined in this series' Feasts of Israel study) in later Jewish liturgical practice, connecting this harvest-season narrative to the same festival period during which it is traditionally read aloud in synagogue services to this day.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of these five applications feels most relevant to your own current experience of loyalty, generosity, or costly integrity?
2. How might Boaz's example of kindness exceeding minimum obligation shape the way you consider your own responsibilities toward vulnerable people in your own community?

A Closing Reflection: A Story the Text Refused to Rush

Notice how little this book actually shows us. Ruth's vow is spoken once, in full, and never repeated. Boaz's kindness is itemized with almost accountant-like precision — this much grain, this much water, this specific instruction to the young men — rather than described in sweeping romantic language. The threshing floor scene, which a lesser storyteller might have lingered over, is handled with a restraint so careful that readers two thousand years later are still working out exactly what a handful of words meant, precisely because the narrator refused to spell it out.

That restraint is not an accident. A book this short, this economical with its words, chose to spend real space on gleaning instructions and legal procedure at a city gate rather than on romance for its own sake, because the story it wanted to tell was never really about attraction. It was about two people choosing, repeatedly, the costlier and more honest option when an easier one was sitting right there — and about a God who apparently pays close attention to exactly that kind of choice, closely enough to write a king, and eventually a Messiah, into the account of it.

Summary of Key Points

- Ruth's vow to Naomi (1:16-17) was made after a genuine, reasonable alternative had already been offered and taken by Orpah, and includes explicit religious conversion through its direct invocation of YHWH by name.
- Boaz is introduced to readers before Ruth's own encounter with him, described with a Hebrew phrase (*gibbor chayil*) encompassing capability and respected standing beyond wealth alone.
- Boaz's kindness toward Ruth in the gleaning field consistently exceeded the legal minimum required by Israel's gleaning laws, including specific, deliberate protective instructions addressing her genuine social vulnerability.
- Naomi's plan for the threshing floor reflects a legitimate, stated purpose (securing Ruth's genuine security) within a well-attested ancient agricultural and social setting, requiring real courage and vulnerability from Ruth.
- This study addresses directly a genuine scholarly question regarding possible euphemistic language in Ruth 3:7-9, presenting the majority, better-supported reading (a legal-symbolic act of formal marriage proposal) while acknowledging the alternative reading exists within scholarly literature.
- Ruth's specific request, 'spread thy skirt over thine handmaid,' uses recognized ancient marriage-proposal imagery directly paralleled in Ezekiel 16:8, deliberately echoing Boaz's own earlier blessing invoking God's protective 'wings.'
- Boaz's response includes explicit, public affirmation of Ruth's virtuous character, complete honesty regarding a legal obstacle (the nearer kinsman) despite his own evident interest, and deliberate protection of Ruth's reputation.
- The nearer kinsman's refusal to redeem, based on genuine financial calculation regarding his own family inheritance, illuminates by direct contrast the real personal cost Boaz willingly accepted in choosing to redeem both the land and marry Ruth.
- Practically, this study grounds the value of costly loyalty over easier alternatives, generosity exceeding minimum obligation, honest engagement with difficult textual questions, integrity maintained even at personal cost, and confidence that God's providence often works through ordinary, costly faithfulness.

Further Reading by Theme

On the Full Book of Ruth

Ruth 1:1-4:22 (best read in its entirety in a single sitting).

On the Kinsman-Redeemer Law (see this series' dedicated Ruth study)

Ruth 4:1-12; Leviticus 25:23-34; Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

On Marriage and Covering Imagery

Ezekiel 16:1-14; Deuteronomy 22:30 (related 'skirt/covering' legal language).

On Gleaning Laws and Care for the Vulnerable

Leviticus 19:9-10; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

On Ruth in the Genealogy of Christ

Ruth 4:13-22; Matthew 1:5 (examined at length in this series' Rahab study).

Bibliography and Recommended References

The works below are recommended for readers who wish to go further than this introductory study, whether through academic commentaries or accessible reference resources.

Commentaries on Ruth

- BLOCK, Daniel I. Judges, Ruth. New American Commentary. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group.
- HUBBARD, Robert L. The Book of Ruth. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- BUSH, Frederic W. Ruth, Esther. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

On the Threshing Floor Scene and Its Interpretive Questions

- CAMPBELL, Edward F. Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday.
- NIELSEN, Kirsten. Ruth: A Commentary. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

On Ancient Israelite Marriage and Family Law

- WRIGHT, Christopher J. H. God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- MATTHEWS, Victor H. Manners and Customs in the Bible. Third edition. Peabody: Hendrickson.

On the Book of Ruth's Literary Artistry

- BAUCKHAM, Richard. 'The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic,' Biblical Interpretation.
- SAKENFELD, Katharine Doob. Ruth. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: John Knox Press.

Dictionaries and Original-Language Tools

- BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (BDB).
- HARRIS, R. Laird; ARCHER, Gleason L.; WALTKE, Bruce K. (eds.). Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT).
- VINE, W. E. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words.

— End of Study —