

### Structure for comparing two Biblical Stories of יבום Yibum: Genesis 38 vs. Ruth 3

This scene follows Tamar's marriage, in succession, to Judah's two oldest sons who both die childless. Tamar has been living in Judah's house, waiting to be married to Judah's youngest son, שלמה Shelah, and has come to understand that Judah will never marry her to his youngest.

#### Genesis 38:12-26 An Undercover Negotiation

- 38:12-13 Judah is going to Timnah, Tamar is told
- 38:14 Tamar removes her mourning clothes and disguises herself
- 38:15 Judah thinks she is a harlot
- 38:16-18a Negotiations of the harlot's fee
- 38:18b Tamar conceives by Judah
- 38:19 Tamar redresses in her mourning clothes
- 38:20-23 Judah tries to pay the harlot, cannot because she is not found
- 38:24 Tamar is pregnant, accused of harlotry; Judah proposes punishment
- 38:25 Tamar presents proof of paternity
- 38:26 Judah acknowledges he is the father and Tamar is more righteous

This scene follows Naomi's instructions to Ruth for approaching Boaz.

#### I. On the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:6-14)

- A. Ruth puts Naomi's plan into action (3:6-7)
  1. Ruth goes to the threshing floor (3:6)
  2. Boaz's evening (3:7a)
  3. Ruth follows instructions (3:7b)
- B. Ruth puts Naomi's plan into words (3:8-9)
  1. Boaz wakes up (3:8)
  2. Ruth is there (3:9a)
  3. Ruth asks to be redeemed (3:9b)
- C. Boaz responds in words (3:10-13)
  1. Boaz praises Ruth (3:10)
  2. Boaz gives comfort (3:11)
  3. Boaz is not the only redeemer (3:12)
  4. Ruth will be redeemed (3:13)
    - i. Stay tonight, in the morning (3:13a)
      - a. he will redeem (3:13b)
      - b. let him redeem (3:13c)
      - c. if not redeem (3:13d)
      - d. I will redeem (3:13e)
    - ii. Lie down until morning
- D. Boaz's plan goes into action (3:14)
  1. Ruth follows instructions (3:14a)
  2. Ruth rises to leave before anyone can see (3:14b)
  3. Boaz hopes that no one saw her on the threshing floor (3:14c)

The chapter concludes with Boaz going into the city and Ruth returning to Naomi, to report on the events of the evening (3:15-18). In the last verse of the chapter, verse 18, Naomi instructs Ruth to "sit tight" and wait to hear איך יפל דבר "how the thing will fall."

**A Deeper Dive into the Ruth Scene: first, an outline of the first five verses, for context**

- I. Naomi's place, Naomi's Plan (3:1-5)
  - A. Naomi offers to help Ruth (3:1)
  - B. Naomi suggests Boaz as a solution (3:2a)
  - C. Boaz's location tonight (3:2b)
  - D. Detailed instructions to Ruth (3:3-4)
  - E. Ruth consents (3:5)

**Ruth 3:1-5 from Sefaria.com for context:**

ותאמר לה נעמי חמותה בתי הלא אבקש-לך מנוח אשר ייטב-לך:

1. Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy.

ועתה הלא בעז מדעתנו אשר הנית את-נערותיו הנה-הוא זרה את-זרן השערים הלילה:

2. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight.

ורחצת | וסכת ושמת | שמלתך | [שמלתך | עלך] | וירדת | [הגרן אל-תודעי לאיש עד כלהו לאכל ולשתות]:

3. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

ויהי בשכבו וידעת את-המקום אשר ישכב-שם וקאת וגלית מרגלותיו | ושכבת | [והוא יגיד לך את אשר תעשין]:

4. When he lies down, note the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do.”

ותאמר אליה כל אשר-תאמרי אלי [אעשה]:

5. She replied, “I will do everything you tell me.”

**My careful translation of Ruth 3:6-14:**

(ו) ותרד<sup>1</sup> הגרן ותעש ככל<sup>2</sup> אשר צוהתה חמותה:

And she went down to the threshing floor and she did as all that her mother-in-law commanded her.

(ז) ויאכל בעז וישת<sup>3</sup> וייטב לבו<sup>4</sup> ויבא לשכב בקצה הערמה<sup>5</sup> ותבא בלט ותגל מרגלותיו<sup>6</sup> ותשכב:

And Boaz ate and drank and his heart was glad and he went in to lie down at the edge of the heap of threshed grain and she went in secretly<sup>7</sup> and uncovered his legs and lay down.

<sup>1</sup> ותרד – Again, the conversive vavs in this sentence each initiates a new action Ruth takes, following Naomi's instructions.

<sup>2</sup> ככל – According to BHS, a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts, the Syriac version of the Old Testament and the Vulgate all read כל.

<sup>3</sup> וישת – BHS states that this word is absent in the Septuagint and that the form of the word is a probable conjecture.

<sup>4</sup> וייטב לבו – Translated as Es. 1:10 ביון לב-המלך, where the king's heart is glad with wine. As Bush notes, this idiom is “often a synonym of שמח, ‘to be glad/happy’ (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:66, Eccl 11:9)” (161).

<sup>5</sup> הערמה – In Bush, “a heap of threshed grain; cf. also Neh. 13:15” (159).

<sup>6</sup> מרגלותיו – This unusual word only appears in this chapter of Ruth 3:7,8,14 and in Dan. 10:6. In Dan. 10:6, וימרגלותיו appears in the description of the body of an איש and וימרגלותיו is listed immediately after וזרעותיו “arms,” leading to an understanding that וימרגלותיו are legs.

<sup>7</sup> Secretly – According to BDB (532).

(ח) וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּתְרַדֵּם<sup>8</sup> הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת וְהָיָה אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מְרַגְלָתִיו:

And it was in the middle of the night that<sup>9</sup> the man trembled<sup>10</sup> and twisted himself,<sup>11</sup> and behold a woman was lying down at his legs.

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר<sup>12</sup> מִי אַתָּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי רוּת אַמְתָּךְ<sup>13</sup> וּפְרַשְׁתָּ כְנָפֶיךָ<sup>14</sup> עַל אַמְתְּךָ כִּי גֹאֵל<sup>15</sup> אַתָּה:

And he said, “Who are you?” And she said, “I am Ruth, your handmaid. Spread<sup>16</sup> your wings<sup>17</sup> over your handmaid, because you are a redeemer.”<sup>18</sup>

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה לִיקוּק בְּתִי הֵיטִבְתָּ חֲסִדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן מִן הָרִאשׁוֹן לְבִלְתִּי לָכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבְּחוּרִים  
אִם דָּל וְאִם עָשִׁיר:

And he said, “You are blessed by Adonai, my daughter. You have made the last loving-kindness of yours better than the first, not to go after the young men, whether poor or rich.

(יא) וְעַתָּה בְּתִי אַל תִּירְאִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרִי<sup>19</sup> אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּךְ כִּי יוֹדַע כָּל שַׁעַר עַמִּי כִּי אִשְׁתְּ חַיִּל<sup>20</sup> אַתָּה:

And now, my daughter, do not fear. All that you say, I will do for you, because everyone in town<sup>21</sup> knows that you are a woman of valor.

<sup>8</sup> וַיִּתְרַדֵּם – This exact form of this verb appears in five other places in תנ"ך, all of them meaning “trembled”: Gen. 27:33, where Isaac trembles and tells Esau that he gave his blessing to Jacob; Ex. 19:16,18 at revelation where the people and the mountain tremble respectively; I Sam 21:1/2, when David is fleeing from Saul he goes to see Ahimelech the priest, when Ahimelech meets him, he trembles; and I Sam 28:5, Saul trembles when he see the Philistine army.

<sup>9</sup> That – The conversive vav is translated as “that” to clarify the translation.

<sup>10</sup> trembled – This translation is based on the usage of the verb in other places in תנ"ך. BDB gives a more nuanced translation, “started up [out of sleep]” (352).

<sup>11</sup> twisted himself – According to BDB (542).

<sup>12</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר – The Syriac and Vulgate add a word meaning לָהּ (BHS 1323).

<sup>13</sup> אַמְתְּךָ – Sasson notes the absence of Moab in her identification (80) and that אַמְתְּךָ is the rank of “females who might be taken by a freeman either as a concubine or as a wife” (81). Ruth does not identify herself as the “wife of Mahlon,” Naomi’s deceased son either, as Boaz will in 4:5 (Bush 164). Bush’s point is important to temper Sasson’s reading of the word. There are places in תנ"ך where even a married woman calls herself אַמְתְּךָ, as Abigail does in I Sam. 25:24.

<sup>14</sup> כְּנָפֶיךָ – The Ketib Occidental reading and multiple medieval Hebrew manuscripts read כְּנָפֶיךָ; the Ketib Oriental reading, the Qere, Septuagint, and Syriac read כְּנָפֶיךָ.

<sup>15</sup> גֹּאֵל – In chapter 4, it is the “responsibility of the גֹּאֵל to recover or retain family property” (Bush 166).

<sup>16</sup> The conversive vav is translated as the beginning of a new sentence.

<sup>17</sup> your wings - While BDB translates “corner [of] your [garment]” (489), commonly, the root of כָּנַף appears in the plural תנ"ך meaning “wings” and relating to birds. However, in Deut. 23:1, 27:20 and 1 Sam. 24:5, 6, 12, כָּנַף appears, in the singular form, as a garment. In the plural form, כְּנָפִים commonly means “wings,” and most passages, such as Ex. 25:20 are about angels or are in another way poetic (Is. 18:1, Pro. 23:5) or supernatural (Zech. 5:9). In Ruth 2:12, Boaz says that Ruth has come to take refuge תַּחַת-כְּנָפָיו “under His wings” of Adonai.

<sup>18</sup> Ez. 16:8 spreading the corner of your garment over this woman could be an act of espousal:

וַאֲעִיבֵר עָלֶיךָ וְנָאֲרָאָה וְהָיָה עִמּוֹל עֵת דְּלִים וְנִאֲפָרֵשׁ כְּנָפִי עָלֶיךָ וְנִאֲכַסְתָּ עֲרוֹתַי וְנִאֲשַׁבַּע לָךְ וְנִאֲבֹא בְּכַרִּית אִתְּךָ נָאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה וְנִתְהַיֵּי-לִי:  
when I passed by you [again] and saw that your time for love had arrived. <sup>c</sup>An act symbolizing espousal; cf. note at [Deut. 23.1, Ruth 3.9](#). So I spread My robe over you<sup>c</sup> and covered your nakedness, and I entered into a covenant with you by oath— declares Ad-nai El-him; thus you became Mine.

Deut. 23:1 {ס} לֹא-יִקַּח אִישׁ אֶת-אִשְׁת־אָבִיו וְלֹא יִגְדֹלָה כְּנָף אָבִיו:

No householder shall take his father’s former wife [as his own wife], so as to remove his father’s wing/corner of his garment.

<sup>19</sup> תֹּאמְרִי – According to BHS, a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint Origenis recension, Syriac, Targums and the Vulgate add “אֵלַי.”

<sup>20</sup> חַיִּל – the moral worth of a woman (BDB 298), leading to the translation “valor.” The phrase אִשְׁתְּ חַיִּל appears in only two other places in תנ"ך, Prov. 12:4 and 31:10. In 12:4, עֲטָרַת בַּעֲלָהּ, אִשְׁת־חַיִּל, עֲטָרַת בַּעֲלָהּ – such a woman is the “crown of her husband” and in 31:10, נִחְזָק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה, “her value is far above rubies.” This phrase is great praise of a woman, especially a woman worth marrying.

<sup>21</sup> everyone in town – After Bush, literally “all the gate of my people” (173).

(יב) ועתה כי אִמְנֶם כִּי <אם><sup>22</sup> גֹּאֵל אֲנֹכִי וְגַם<sup>23</sup> יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קָרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי:

And now, it is true that I am a redeemer, but there is also a redeemer closer than I.

(יג) לַיְלֵי הַלַּיְלָה וְהָיָה בַּבֹּקֶר אִם יִגְאֹלְךָ טוֹב יִגְאֹל וְאִם<sup>24</sup> לֹא יִחְפֹּץ לִגְאֹלְךָ וְגִאֲלֶיךָ<sup>25</sup> אֲנֹכִי חַי וְקַיִן שְׁכָבִי עַד הַבֹּקֶר:

Stay the night tonight and it will be in the morning, if he will redeem you, good may he redeem. But if he does not desire/want to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as Adonai lives.<sup>26</sup> Lay down until the morning.”

(יד) וַתִּשְׁכַּב <מרגלתו><sup>27</sup> מִרְגְּלוֹתָיו עַד הַבֹּקֶר וַתִּקָּם <בטרומ><sup>28</sup> בְּטָרֶם יִכִּיר אִישׁ אֶת רֵעֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר<sup>29</sup> אֵל יְנַדַּע כִּי בָאָה<sup>30</sup> הָאִשָּׁה<sup>31</sup> הַגֵּרָוּן:

And she lay down at his legs until the morning, and she rose before a person could distinguish his fellow, and he said “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>22</sup> אם - multiple medieval Hebrew manuscripts are as the Qere, which does not read this word. I have translated to English in this tradition, excluding this word as well.

<sup>23</sup> וְגַם - The conversive vav is translated as “but” showing the problem raised in the second half of the verse.

<sup>24</sup> וְאִם - The conversive vav is translated as “but” showing the contrast between the first and second half of the verse.

<sup>25</sup> וְגִאֲלֶיךָ - The conversive vav is translated as “then” showing the result at the end of the verse.

<sup>26</sup> as Adonai lives - After Bush on page 158; literally it reads, “life of Adonai.”

<sup>27</sup> מִרְגְּלוֹתָיו - According to BHS, multiple medieval manuscripts as the Qere, reading מִרְגְּלוֹתָיו.

<sup>28</sup> בְּטָרֶם - According to BHS, the Ketib reads בְּטָרוֹם, while multiple medieval manuscripts follow the Qere, reading בְּטָרֶם.

<sup>29</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר - According to BHS, the Septuagint and Vulgate add “Boaz,” clarifying that Boaz is the speaker. The Syriac reads וַתֹּאמֶר.

<sup>30</sup> בָּאָה - According to BHS, the Syriac reads בָּאתִי.

<sup>31</sup> הָאִשָּׁה - According to BHS, this word is absent in the Syriac, while the Septuagint reads only “אִשָּׁה.”

<sup>32</sup> Verse 14 - The Syriac reads the verse: “And she lay down at his legs until the morning and she rose before a person could distinguish his fellow and she said ‘Let it not be known that I, a woman, came to the threshing floor.’” This reading eases the difficulty of a female actor and a male speaker.

**The ritual of *halitzah* is discussed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 as follows (from Sefaria.com):**

כִּי־יָשְׁבוּ אֲחִים יחדוֹ וּמֵת אֶחָד מֵהֶם וְגַם אֵין־לּוֹ לֹא־תִהְיֶה אִשְׁת־הַמֵּת הַחֹצֵה לְאִישׁ גַּר יִבְמֶהּ יָבֵא עָלֶיהָ וּלְקַחְתָּהּ לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְמֶהּ:

5. When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and leaves no offspring, shall not become that of another party, outside the family. Her husband's brother shall unite with her: he shall take her as his wife and perform the levir's duty.

וְהָיָה הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵד יָקוּם עַל־שֵׁם אָחִיו הַמֵּת וְלֹא־יִמָּחַה שְׁמוֹ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל:

6. The first child that she bears shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel.

וְאִם־לֹא יִחַפֵּץ הָאִישׁ לְקַחַת אֶת־יְבִמְתּוֹ וְעָלְתָהּ יְבִמְתּוֹ הַשְּׂעֵרָה אֶל־הַזְּקֵנִים וְאָמְרָה מֵאֵן יִבְמִי לְהַקִּים לְאָחִיו שֵׁם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אָבָה יִבְמִי:

7. But if that party does not want to take his brother's widow [to wife], his brother's widow shall appear before the elders in the gate and declare, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name in Israel for his brother; he will not perform the duty of a levir."

וְקָרְאוּ־לּוֹ וְזָקֵנֵי־עִירוֹ וְדָבְרוּ אֵלָיו וְעָמַד וְאָמַר לֹא תִפְצָתִי לְקַחְתָּהּ:

8. The elders of his town shall then summon him and talk to him. If he insists, saying, "I do not want to take her,"

וְנִגְזְשָׁה יְבִמְתּוֹ אֵלָיו לְעִינֵי הַזְּקֵנִים וְחָלְצָה נַעֲלָהּ מֵעַל רַגְלּוֹ וַיִּרְקַהּ בְּפָנָיו וְעָנְתָהּ וְאָמְרָה בְּכַה יַעֲשֶׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִבְנֶה אֶת־בַּיִת אָחִיו:

9. his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull the sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house!

וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל בַּיִת חָלוּץ הַנָּעֹל: } ס

10. And he shall go in Israel by the name of "the family of the unsandaled one."

**Resources**

BibleWorks for Windows, Version 6. Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks, LLC, 2003.

Brown, Francis, S. Driver, and C. Briggs. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.

Bush, Frederic W. *Ruth and Esther: Volume 9. Word Biblical Commentary*. Dallas: Word Books, 1996.

Campbell, Edward F. Jr. *Ruth. The Anchor Bible*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975.

Elliger, K. & Rudolph, W., ed. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977.

Even-Shoshan, Abraham. *A New Concordance of the Bible*. מלון חדש. Yerushalayim: Kiryat Sefer, 1984.

Fewell, Danna and Gunn, David M. "A Son is Born to Naomi!": Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 40 (1989) 99-108.

Fewell, Danna and Gunn, David M. "Boaz, Pillar of Society," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 45 (1989) 45-59.

Hubbard, Jr., Robert L.. *The Book of Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.

The Jewish Publication Society, *JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH*. Special Edition. Jerusalem: Sefer Ve Sefel Publishing, 5765 - 2005.

Korpel, Marjo. *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*. Assen, The Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2001.

Reinhartz, Adele. "Ruth," *The Jewish Study Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Responsa Project, Version 14. <http://responsa.biu.ac.il/>: Bar-Ilan University, 1972-2006.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew text with new JPS translation / commentary by Nahum M. Sarna*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Sasson, Jack M. *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Univeristy Press, 1979.

Trible, Phyllis. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.