

## Week 48, Lecture on “Tools of the Trade”

Originally I was going to make this part of the first lecture for Week 48, but it made the lecture too long. I have decided to issue it separately as a short lecture on “methodology.”

### Tools of the trade: Commentaries

**Study Bible:** *CSB, JSB*      **One-Volume commentary** on entire Bible, e.g., *NJBC*

**Multi-Volume commentary** on Bible: e.g., *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*.

**Full-Length Series commentary.** E.g., Anchor Bible (over 80 volumes). Formerly published by Doubleday.

Bought by Yale University Press. Now the Anchor Yale Bible.

Older volumes are word-for-word the same, except for the addition of “Yale” on the title page.

### Two Concrete Examples

Robertson Farmer, Kathleen A. “The Book of Ruth: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections.” *New Interpreter’s Bible*. Volume 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 889-946.

Campbell, Edward F. *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. Volume 7. New York: Doubleday, 1975. [188 pages].

## Week 48, Lecture 152.<sup>1</sup> Ruth 3:1-7, Naomi’s Plan.

Last week I gave you Alice Laffey’s outline from her *NJBC* article. Here is Kathleen Robertson Farmer’s from *NIB*.

**Robertson Farmer’s Outline of Ruth<sup>2</sup>** [Note to self. No need to go through this in detail in the lecture.]

- I. Ruth 1:1-22, Turn, Turn, Turn
  - A. 1:1-5 Turning Away
  - B. 1:6-22 Turning Back
    - 1:6-14 “Return to Your Mother’s House”
    - 1:15-18 “Don’t Tell Me to Turn My Back on You!”
    - 1:19-22 Turning Bitter
- II. Ruth 2:1-33, Known and Unknown
  - A. 2:1-16 Portrait of a “Worthy” Man
    - 2:1-7 “Happening” to Find the Right Field
    - 2:8-16 Boaz “Notices” Ruth
  - B. 2:17-2 “Kindness” Has Not Forsaken the Living or the Dead
- III. Ruth 3:1-18, Uncovering and Recovering
  - A. 3:1-7 The Plan: Uncovering
  - B. 3:8-13 Recovering: Midnight on the Threshing Floor
  - C. 3:14-18 The Beginning of an End to Emptiness
- IV. Ruth 4:1-22, The Roots of Israel’s Redemption
  - A. 4:1-11a, Boaz Settles the Matter
    - 4:1-4 The Trap is Baited & Set
    - 4:5-6 The Trap is Sprung
    - 4:7-11a Legal Formalities

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<sup>1</sup> Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week’s 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, “The Book of Ruth: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 897.

- B. 4:11b-17 Naming the Mothers of the Messiah
  - 4:11b-12 Blessing the Union
  - 4:13-17 Redemption Incarnate
- C. 4:18-22 David's Family Tree

### Ruth 3:1-7, My Translation.

<sup>1</sup> And Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her: "Should I not seek for you a **place-of-rest** so that it will be well for you?"

<sup>2</sup> And now, isn't Boaz, whose young-women you have been with, **our relative**? He is winnowing the barley **threshing floor** tonight. <sup>3</sup> And (= So) you must wash, and anoint yourself, and put your best-dress on, and go down to the threshing floor. Do not **make-yourself-known** to the man until he has finished **eating and drinking**. <sup>4</sup> And let it be when **he-lies-down** that you note the place where **he-lies**. Then (literally "and") you must go and you must uncover the place-of-**his-"feet"**, and **you-must-lie-down**. Then (literally "and") he will tell you what you should do.

<sup>5</sup> And she said to her, "I will do everything which you are telling me."

<sup>6</sup> So ("and") she went down to the threshing floor, and she did everything, just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. <sup>7</sup> And Boaz ate and drank and his heart was good (he was in a good mood). And he went **to lie-down** at the edge of the grain pile. Then ("And") she came stealthily, and she uncovered the place-of-**his-"feet"**, and **she-lay-down**.

### Verse 1, Some Time Has Passed.

#### Remarks on Word Biblical Commentary Series

#### Place of rest. Remark by F. W. Bush (WBC)

"**a home and a husband.**" Here the word מנוח, [*mānōah* *manoach*] "place of tranquility and repose," refers to the condition of security and rest afforded a woman in Israelite society by marriage; . . . It seems preferable in translation to make the basis of this security explicit since the literal meaning in English, "place of rest," would not be taken to refer to marriage.<sup>3</sup>

**Verse 2, Our Relative, moda'at.** This comes from the root יָדַע "to know." (*yod, daleth, ayin*)

This is one of two words with "double entendre."

It can be as innocent as "to know" in English, "to get / have information."

It can also mean "to have sex with" a person, as "Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived . . ." (Gen 4:1).

I will print the various words coming from the root [y d ' ] of this double-entendre word in **bold blue**.

#### Winnow (Describe the Process)

**Threshing floor.** These places were notorious places of sex for hire.

**Do not rejoice, Israel, do not exult like the nations! For you have prostituted yourself, abandoning your God, loving a prostitute's fee upon every threshing floor.** (Hos. 9:1 NABRE)

**Verse 3, "Your Best Dress."** Literally "your dresses" (plural)

Probably the plural means "nice clothes." NET renders this "get all dressed up." Ruth is "dressed to kill."

**"Make-yourself-known until . . ."**

This can be perfectly innocent. It can also mean, "Do not have sex with the man until . . ."

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<sup>3</sup> Fredric W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, vol. 9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 147.

**Eating and Drinking.** For a Jewish audience, this would call to mind the story of **Lot's Daughters in Genesis 19**. One of them is the ancestress of Ruth!

**Verse 4, “When he lies down . . .” & “where he lies.”**

This comes from the root *sh k b* (verb: *shakav*) שָׁכַב

Like English “sleep,” this word can be perfectly innocent. But it is our second double-entendre word.

It is also used in the expression “to lie with someone,” i.e., to have sex with someone.

Many of these double-entendres are totally missed in English translations.

So that you will not miss them, I am printing this double-entendre word in **bold red**.

**His “Feet.”** This is a euphemism.

Above him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he **covered his feet**, and with two he flew. (Isa 6:2 RSV)

There are many other places where the idiom occurs in the Hebrew Bible.

Usually English Bibles use an English euphemism.

**Robertson-Farmer's Outline.** This section is called “Uncovering.” Now she has him uncovered!

## Week 48, Lecture 153. Ruth 3:8-14a, The Night on the Threshing Floor

**Ruth 3:8-14a, My Translation.**

<sup>8</sup> And it happened that at midnight **the man trembled** and he **felt himself**, and behold! A woman **lying at the place-of-his-“feet”**.<sup>9</sup> And he said, “Who [are] you?”

And she said, “I [am] Ruth, your **maid-servant**. And you should spread the wing of your cloak over your maid-servant, for you are a *go'el* (redeemer, next-of-kin).

<sup>10</sup> And he said, “Blessed [are] you by YHWH, my daughter. (In) your second **act-of-loyalty** you-have-outdone the first! -- by not going after the young men, whether poor or rich! <sup>11</sup> And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. All that you are saying to me, I will do for you, for all the (people at the) city-gate know that you are a **worthy woman**. <sup>12</sup> And now, indeed, truly I am a *go'el* (redeemer, close-kinsman), but [there is] also a *go'el* closer than I. <sup>13</sup> Spend the night tonight. Then (“And”) in the morning if he will act-as-redeemer for you, let him do so. But if he is not pleased to act-as-redeemer for you, I will act-as-redeemer for you -- I myself -- [I swear] as YHWH lives! **Lie-down** until the morning. <sup>14a</sup> So (“And”) **she lay at the place-of-his-“feet”** until the morning.

**Verse 8, “The man trembled”**

The man was afraid (KJV); was startled (RSV, NRSV, NET); gave a start (NAB, NABRE)

The NET piously suggests, “Perhaps he shivered because he was cold.” OR perhaps he has ejaculated.

**He “felt himself.”**

. . . was troubled (KJV), and turned over (RSV, NRSV, NET); turned around (NAB); groped around (NABRE)

The grammatical form of the verb is called *niphal* in Hebrew. It is often passive or reflexive.

I have translated it as a reflexive.

**Verse 9, “Your maid-servant,” ’āmâ**

Earlier Ruth had use the word *šiphâ*, *shifcha* for maidservant. Commentators are divided.

Are these words simply synonyms? Or is an *'amâ* of higher status? Has Ruth just given herself a promotion?

**Verse 10, Act of Loyalty, *hesed*.** One of the main themes of the book of Ruth.

Robertson Farmer sees Naomi as the main character of this book.

Ruth's loyalty (*hesed*) is the LORD's **instrument** through which he manifests his loyalty.

There are different interpretations of what **Ruth's Two Acts of Loyalty** were.

To me, the most likely seem: 1) accompanying Naomi back from Moab; 2) choosing Boaz rather than a young man. From the perspective of Boaz, Ruth could have married any of the young men.

But by staying “in the family” she is making this a “package deal” which will include Naomi.

**Worthy woman**, *'ešet-hayil* (*eshet-chayil*). Boaz, *gibbôr chayil*, literally, a **mighty-man of strength** (Ruth 2:1) A woman of strength. Proverbs 31, “A Worthy Wife” [Remember, the Hebrew word for “woman” = “wife” ]  
-- can refer to her ability to bear many children

A good idiomatic English translation might be “a **strong woman**.” Proverbs 31 is a poem praising the *eshet-chayil*.

**Literary Frame.** The scene opens and closes with Ruth **lying** at the “feet” of Boaz.

This is why I divided the paragraph in the middle of verse 14 instead of at the end of 13.

**What has happened?** Boaz praises Ruth's action as an “Act of loyalty.” It was also scandalous!

Even if nothing more happened between Ruth and Boaz than the conversation reported in 3:8–13, Ruth's actions (coming to the threshing floor, lying next to a sleeping man who was not her husband) would undoubtedly have been judged scandalous according to the standards of the society in which she lived. The question is whether the end result in this case justifies the means.

The reluctance of modern readers to see any scandalous overtones in this scene may stem from a need to reinforce deep-seated beliefs that the virtuous are rewarded. Since Ruth's actions seem to have had positive results, what she did must have been something good. This wishful thinking is aided and abetted by translators who fail (or refuse) to communicate the undertones as well as the overtones of the original language to the non-Hebrew-speaking audience. If we acknowledge that what Ruth did is **both** scandalous (in the eyes of the world) **and** an act of loving-kindness, then we can prompt modern audiences to consider which canons of socially acceptable behavior they might be willing to defy in order to “do” *hesed*—loving-kindness above and beyond the call of duty.<sup>4</sup>

### **Merit Theology / Theology of Grace**

Ruth can be read as “merit theology,” showing the good results of courage, initiative, loyalty, and altruism.

Or it can be read as a theology of Grace.

Reading Ruth with a theology of grace (unmerited love) allows us to consider that none of the human characters acted in totally admirable or altruistic ways. The deliberate ambiguity of the narrator allows us to choose. Is redemption (which plays such a large part in the story) given as a *reward* for the behavior portrayed in this chapter or in spite of it?<sup>5</sup>

## **Week 48, Lecture 154. Ruth 3:14b-18, The Beginning of an End to Emptiness**

### **Ruth 3:14b-18, My Translation**

<sup>14b</sup> And she got up before a man can recognize his neighbor, and he said, “It must not be known that **a** woman came to the threshing floor.” <sup>15</sup> And he said, “Bring the shawl you are wearing, and hold it out.” So (“And”) she held it out. And he measured out **six barleys**, and he placed [it] upon her. And **she** went to town. <sup>16</sup> And she came to her mother-in-law.

And she said to her, “Who [are] you, my daughter?”

Then (“And”) she told her all that the man had done for her (or “to her”). <sup>17</sup> And she said, “He gave me these six barleys., for he said to me, ‘You must not go **empty**[-handed] to your mother-in-law.’”

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<sup>4</sup> Robertson Farmer, “Ruth,932.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid..

<sup>18</sup> And she said, “Sit down, my daughter, until you know how things will fall-out. For the man will not rest until he takes-care-of the matter today.”

**Verse 14b. Before a man can recognize his neighbor.** It is still dark

**And he said.** Is this past-perfect? “He **had** said . . .?” (NABRE). That’s why she got up early? Or is he thinking this to himself, rather than saying it to Ruth? (NET, “Boaz **thought**). Or, is he just now giving the command (most translations).

“**A**” Woman or “**The**” Woman? *Ha-* means “**the**.” Probably it originally said,

*Ba’ah ’ishshah*      **A woman came.** But probably a scribe has copied the “**h**” twice.  
I.e., *Ba’ah ha-’ishshah*      **The woman came.** Remember: now written vowels were in original Hebrew

באה האשה vs. באה אשה

**Verse 15, How much Barley?** 6 Ephahs would be 180 pounds. 6 Seahs would be about 60 pounds (NET note). Or was it simply six **grains** of barley, a symbolic gesture for Naomi that he was going to give “seed” (= offspring)

**She Went to Town.** Hebrew Masoretic Text says, “**He**” went to town. Some other Hebrew manuscripts say “**she**.” The Latin Vulgate and the Syriac Bible both say “she” went to town. The Greek of the LXX is gender ambiguous. “**She**” makes better sense. Of course, that is an argument for “**he**.” Usually scribes **improve** manuscripts. So the reading that makes **less sense** is often the more original. In spite of this, I went with “she!” I give my choice a “C” rating.<sup>6</sup>

**Verse 16. Who [are] you?** This is exactly the same question Boaz asked when he woke up next to her.

Most translations take it as some kind of idiom

“How did you fare (RSV); How did things go with you (NRSV)

“How have you fared (NAB); How did things go (NABRE)

“How did things turn out for you” (NET)

### Comment by Robertson Farmer

The phrase may simply be an idiom suggesting that Ruth has arrived home before it is light enough for Naomi to see for sure who it is (in which case, it should be translated, “It is you, my daughter?”). But the words might also be understood as Naomi’s way of asking whether Ruth’s status has changed overnight.<sup>7</sup>

**Verse 17, “You must not go empty.”** Recall Ruth 1:21

I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi [= “Pleasant” or “Comfortable”], when the LORD has afflicted me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” (RSV)

Whatever the “6 barleys” were --

an immense amount of food? one night’s wage? a symbolic gesture of future offspring?

Naomi sees a positive significance. There is hope her “emptiness” might change.

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<sup>6</sup> The United Bible Societies, in their edition of the Greek NT, give the choices they make between what ancient manuscripts say one of 4 ratings: **A** = we will die for this; we are as certain as humans can be! **B** = there is some doubt whether this is what the original author wrote, or whether it comes from a later scribe; **C** = there is a considerable degree of doubt whether the biblical author wrote this, or whether it comes from a later scribe; **D** = your guess is as good as ours, but we had to print something!

<sup>7</sup> Robertson Farmer, “Ruth,” 931.