

HOW TO TEACH RUTH CHAPTER THREE TO TEEN-AGERS*

WHAT THE TEXT DOES <i>NOT</i> TEACH:	WHAT THE TEXT <i>DOES</i> TEACH:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sex is first and foremost for sensual pleasure. 2. Sex may be enjoyed in an affair apart from marriage.¹ 3. Sex may be practiced apart from biblical law. 4. A woman may “trap” a man to marry him. 5. Marriage occurs without taking risks. 6. A good marriage depends on good bed partners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sex is to be experienced within a commitment to one’s family.² 2. One does not put “love or money” before duty.³ 3. Sex is to be practiced within biblical law. 4. A woman may use her sexual appeal to encourage the right man to do the right thing.⁴ 5. Marriage involves taking a risk.⁵ 6. A good marriage depends on sexual appeal,⁶ together with a virtuous character.⁷

*Text by Dr. Bruce K. Waltke, from his course *Judges to Poets* (RTS, Spring 1999); footnotes by Alejandro Moreno-Morrison, approved by Dr. Waltke.

¹ The view that there was sexual intercourse between Ruth and Boaz on the threshing-floor is to be explicitly rejected (cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *Judges to Poets* (course syllabus), RTS, Spring 1999; pp. 11-12). “Ruth acts innocently, delicately and she thinks with propriety”; “Boaz is merry with control and marries within the law” (Waltke, p.26). See also: Robert L. Hubbard (*The Book of Ruth*, Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988): “...the chapter teems with ‘carefully contrived ambiguity’ (Campbell) and sexual innuendo... a threshing-floor setting suggested sexual compromise (see v. 2), and the author packs his prose with erotic double entendres (cf. v. 4). He creates a strong impression that Ruth and Boaz might have had sexual relations that night, yet he never actually says so. Such ambiguity and suggestive language serve two purposes. First, they easily retain audience attention—and in gripping suspense, too! Second, they thrust Ruth and Boaz into a crucible of moral choice: will they again, as before, live according to the ideal of *hesed*?” (p. 196); “...the verb [used in v. 13 for “stay here the rest of tonight”] removed all ambiguity concerning sexual relations between the pair. It signaled that, thrown together in the crucible of temptation, the two proved themselves righteous by placing integrity above passion” (p. 218); “...they emerged from the heat morally unscathed...” (p. 74); David M. Howard (*An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1993) speaks of this as “a scene that hints of the sexual union that is to come later (vv. 6-13)” (p. 137); *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (NIDOTTE, Vol. 4, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997): “...though assertive, they followed another demand of *hesed*—to do things in the proper way... though undoubtedly tempted by Ruth’s sexuality, Boaz took no sexual advantage of her on the threshing floor. Though he risked losing her to the other man, he pursued proper legal procedure to arrange marriage because of *hesed*” (p.1156); and Walter C. Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 1996; pp. 199-120.

² Ruth shows *hesed* to the deceased and the needy. *Hesed*, which can be rendered as lovingkindness, love, faithfulness, loyalty, mercy, goodness (NIDOTTE, #2874) or “Covenant faithfulness” or “compassionate loyalty” is the main theme of the Book of Ruth (cf. Waltke, p. 17, 19, 21-23; Hubbard, pp. 1, 72-74).

³ Ruth refused to go after a young or rich man; “...she could have married for love (“poor”) or money (“rich”), but she chose family loyalty instead... Ruth acted neither from passion nor greed. Rather, sacrificially setting aside personal preferences, she chose a marriage of benefit to her family” (Hubbard, pp. 214-215); “She did not marry for sexual love or money. This book is not a romantic love story but a story of covenantal loyalty to an otherwise hopeless family” (Waltke, p. 12). “Further, when Boaz divulged the prior rights of the other relative to her..., Ruth eschewed any maneuvers to circumvent them. Having chosen to marry for Naomi’s sake, in effect she sacrificed her marital preference for Boaz on the altar of propriety guided by *hesed*.” (Hubbard, p. 74).

⁴ This is not a negative comment on Boaz (as passive or indecisive). In light of 3:12, Hubbard writes: “As an upright Israelite, Boaz bowed before that custom rather than scheme to circumvent it. Personal preference gave way to the prior rights of other relatives. Such scrupulousness served the narrator’s purpose... Further, it presented Boaz as a model of integrity... Indeed, that very integrity may explain why Boaz did not exercise the duty of [kinsman-redeemer] earlier; he knew that the right belonged to someone else and was not to be infringed upon. His caution would also enhance Ruth’s legal claims in Israel...” (p. 217).

⁵ “Naomi’s instructions were counter-cultural. Women were not present at the evening revelries of the threshers (v. 14)”; “Ruth, who is innocent, risks her reputation to remain loyal to her deceased husband [see 4:10], trusting herself to Naomi, Boaz and ultimately God. Tamar, the mother of Perez (see 4:12), also risked herself” (Waltke, pp. 11-12). Ruth increases her risks adding to Naomi’s plot. “In demonstrating remarkable initiative and defiance of custom, she... embodied the Israelite ideal of *hesed*” (Hubbard, p. 213). The closer kinsman revealed that redeeming Elimelech’s name could jeopardize his own inheritance, yet Boaz took the risk. “Such devotion [*hesed*] requires extraordinary risks” (Hubbard, p. 73); “...taken as a whole, the chapter taught that God carries out his work through believers who seize unexpected opportunities as gifts from God” (ibid., p. 230).

⁶ Cf. Ruth 3:3 with Ezekiel 16:9-12 (Waltke, p. 11), and Song of Songs 1:3 (Hubbard, p. 201), and notice the balance between Proverbs 31: 30 and 5:19 (Bruce K. Waltke, “The Role of the ‘Valiant Wife’ in the Marketplace” in *Crux* 3, Sept. 1999; p. 29).

⁷ Boaz’s reaction expressed in his words to Ruth (v.10) eclipsed the explicit sensuality of the situation by focusing his attention, excitement and praise in Ruth’s character. In his mind, the strong sensuality of the situation is overshadowed by Ruth’s even stronger trait of character. This reaction and rest of the scene also confirm the inspired author’s evaluative viewpoint of Boaz as a man of excellence (2:1). “*Hesed* required self-denial and proper procedure for marriage” (Hubbard, p. 74).