

RUTH 3: A NEW CREATION?

BJÖRN REINHOLD, M.MIN.

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, PHILIPPINES

Ruth 3 is an exciting section within the composition of the overall book. Here, the course for a blessed future for Naomi and Ruth, the main characters of the narrative, is set, although tragedy has ruled their past. In this sense, Ruth 3 can be seen as a new beginning, a new start, a new creation in the life of the two women. This “new creation aspect” is fostered by the text itself which refers to, alludes to, and echoes the creation account. This study aims to describe the links between Ruth 3 and the creation account, linguistically, thematically, as well as in terms of space or time.

Key Words: Ruth, creation, intertextuality, new creation, Gen 1–2

1. Introduction

Ruth 3 plays a pivotal role in the composition of the book of Ruth. Ruth 1 sets the stage, gives background information and introduces the element of tragedy. The surviving characters, Ruth and Naomi, face an uncertain future. Ruth 2 serves as the turning point in the narrative. With the introduction of a new character, Boaz, there is a shift from tragedy to blessing. Boaz provides for the basic physical needs of the two women. Ruth and Naomi live and survive. Ruth 3 reveals that Boaz not only accepts to provide materially, but also in terms of relationship and redemption. Finally, Ruth 4 describes the outcome of this redemptive relationship. Truly, what starts out as a tragedy ends becoming in abundant blessings!

The aim of this short note is to show that Ruth 3 really pictures a kind of “new creation.” This observation is based on the possible intertextual relationships between Ruth 3 and the creation account¹ of Gen 1 and 2.² In what follows I will seek to demonstrate these possible relationships.³

¹ Within this short note I will use the term “creation account” for the written account of both Gen 1 and 2, i.e., the final form of the biblical text, even though many scholars consider these to originate from different sources.

² The attempt of linking Ruth 3 and the creation account has not been made so far, according to my knowledge. No reference is made to creation terminology in the following major commentaries and articles: Moshe J. Bernstein, “Two Multivalent Readings in the Ruth Narrative,” *JSOT* 50 (1991): 15–26; Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 679–701; Leila L. Bronner, “A Thematic Ap-

2. Creation Elements in Ruth 3

Ruth 3 contains elements that link the chapter to creation thematically, linguistically, as well as in the settings of space and time. These similarities are first displayed in the following table and will be discussed in more details below.

proach to Ruth in Rabbinic Literature," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 146–69; Frederick W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther* (WBC 9; Dallas: Word, 1996), 144–87; Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 7; Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), 114–38; Danna N. Fewell and David M. Gunn, "'A Son is Born to Naomi!': Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 99–108; idem, "Boaz, Pillar of Society: Measures of Worth in the Book of Ruth," *JSOT* 45 (1989): 45–59; idem, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster, 1990), 46–56; Ronald M. Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth* (Facet Books: Biblical Series 23; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969); E. John Hamlin, *Surely There Is a Future: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth* (ITC 8; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 39–54; Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 195–230; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & II Samuel* (COT 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1978), 481–86; Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth," in *The Woman's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1999), 84–90; Carol Meyers, "Returning Home: Ruth 1:8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth* (ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 85–114; Mary E. Mills, *Biblical Morality: Moral Perspectives in Old Testament Narratives* (Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion & Theology; Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), 97–116; Leon Morris, *Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 7; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 284–96; Alicia Ostriker, "The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land," *BibInt* 10 (2002): 343–59; Ina Johanne Petermann, "Das Buch Rut: Grenzgänge zweier Frauen im Patriarchat," in *Kompendium feministische Bibelauslegung* (ed. Luise Schottroff; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1999), 104–5, 109–13; D. F. Rauber, "Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth," *JBL* 89 (1970): 27–37; Kristin Moen Saxegaard, "'More Than Seven Sons': Ruth as Example of the Good Son," *SJOT* 15 (2001): 257–75; K. Lawson Younger, *Judges and Ruth* (NIVAC 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 456–70. Besides the intertextual relationships, the "new creation" aspect is also highlighted; for example, by Ruth's washing and putting on of a garment, as it is mentioned in Ruth 3:3–5. See Christian Frevel, *Das Buch Rut* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1992), 90: "Das Waschen, Parfümieren und Ankleiden findet sich im AT und in der altorientalischen Literatur mit zweifacher Konnotation: zum einen wird durch diese Handlungen ein Neuanfang markiert. Ein bestimmter Zeitabschnitt (z. B. Trauer, Jugend) wird abgeschlossen und ein neuer durch die Reinigung und das Wechseln der Kleider begonnen (vgl. 2 Sam 12, 20; Ez 16, 8-10; Dan 10, 3) [...]."

³ It should be noted that the list of similarities between Ruth 3 and Gen 1 and 2 does not claim completeness.

<i>Linking elements</i>	<i>Ruth 3</i>	<i>Creation account (Gen 1 and 2)</i>
<i>Time setting</i>	During the night	Night is repeatedly referred to
<i>Location</i>	Outside, surrounded by nature, on a threshing floor	Outside, surrounded by nature, in Garden of Eden
<i>Available kind of food and quantity</i>	Heap of grain	Seed-bearing plants (= grain) and fruit with seed; "You may eat freely"
<i>Paradox situation</i>	Boaz seems to be perfectly satisfied (יטב), but he lacks a partner	Everything seems to be good (טוב), but it is not good for man (Adam) to be alone
<i>Use of generic designation instead of personal names</i>	Ruth 3:8: האיש "the man" and אשה "a woman," instead of Boaz and Ruth	Gen 2:23–24: איש "a man" and אשתו "his woman," instead of "Adam" and "Eve"
<i>Creation language</i>	Metaphor of spreading wings (קנף)	Creation of winged birds (קנף)
<i>Accumulation of certain verbs</i>	עשה היה אמר	עשה היה אמר
<i>Occurrence of commands</i>	Ruth acts according to what her mother-in-law commanded (צוה) her	God commands (צוה) to eat from all trees with the exception of the one tree
<i>Sequence of characters' appearance</i>	Boaz appears first in the scene; followed by Ruth coming (בוא); finally Boaz sleeps when Ruth comes	Adam appears first in the scene; then Eve is brought (בוא) to Adam; Adam sleeps when Eve is created
<i>Blessing, finishing and resting</i>	Boaz blesses (ברך) Ruth; Boaz does not rest (שקט) until he has finished (בלה) the thing on that day	God blesses (ברך) animals, men and the seventh day; God finishes (בלה) his works on the seventh day and rests (שבת)
<i>Covenant concept</i>	Language and place	Language and place
<i>Number of human characters</i>	Two (Boaz and Ruth)	Two (Adam and Eve)

Table 1: Links between Ruth 3 and Genesis 1–2

2.1. Time Setting

To begin with, the main events of Ruth 3 occur during the night, between evening and morning (see Ruth 3:7–14, 15). In the creation report this sequence of "evening and morning" is very prominent, describing one complete day (see, e.g., Gen 1:5). Indeed, the climax of the scene takes place in the middle of the night (לַיְלֵהָ הַלַּיְלֵהָ [Ruth 3:8]). The word לַיְלֵהָ "night" is mentioned four times within the creation report (Gen 1:5, 14, 16, 18). The

setting in time determines to a great extent the scene in Ruth 3 structures the creation report.

2.2. Location

The location of the main scene of Ruth 3 is linked to the creation account. The scene does not take place in a house or in a city (as in Ruth 4). Ruth 3 depicts a scene on the threshing floor which was surrounded by fields and nature. The first couple on earth, Adam and Eve, after they had been created, were also surrounded by nature, i.e., the Garden of Eden.

2.3. Available Kind of Food and Quantity

In Ruth 3 the narrator presents Boaz as sleeping "at the end of the heap of grain" (לְשֵׁכֶב בְּקֵצֵה הַעֲרֻמָּה) (Ruth 3:7)), thereby suggesting that he owned a bigger amount of grain. In the creation account God provides the human family with a diet which consisted at least in part of grain as well: נְתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע וְרֵעַ "I have given you every herb bearing seed" (Gen 1:29). This similarity in the kind of food is connected with the implied abundance. So Boaz is able to eat (וַיֹּאכַל) "and he ate," (Ruth 3:7) the food God has provided (cf. Ruth 1:6) and enjoys the same (וַיֵּיטֵב לְבוֹ) "and he felt good" [Ruth 3:7]). Parallel, God had created abundant food at the time of creation, saying to Adam: אָכַל תֹּאכַל "you may freely eat" (Gen 2:16).

2.4. Paradox Situation

At this point in the narrative, Boaz is described as feeling good (וַיֵּיטֵב לְבוֹ) (Ruth 3:7). However, this "good feeling" is not yet perfect, because he does not have a wife. During the creation, all created things are repeatedly described as being טוב "good" (see Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:12). However, Gen 2:18 points out that in the beginning there was one thing that was not good: לֹא־טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם הֶאֱדָם לְבַדּוֹ "it is not good that man should be alone." Thus, Adam and Boaz share the original characteristic of having everything in abundance, but each of them, at a certain point, lack a partner.

2.5. Use of Generic Designation Instead of Personal Names

Another similarity between the two narratives is that the narrator refers to both Boaz and Adam as well as Ruth and Eve as "man" and "woman," respectively, rather than using their personal names. In Ruth 3:8 Boaz is called הָאִישׁ "the man." The text here avoids calling him by his name. In the creation account, the word אָדָם is predominantly used (eighteen times!) to refer

to “man.” This expression combines the meaning of the word “man” used in a general sense with the meaning of the word “Adam” used as a personal name. Furthermore, in Gen 2:23, 24, when referring to the relationship between man and woman, the general expression אִישׁ “man” is used as in Ruth 3. Likewise, Ruth is just called אִשָּׁה “a woman” in Ruth 3:8. Her personal name is not used as in the other instances. This happens in correspondence with the depiction of Eve who is called אִשָּׁה “a woman” throughout the creation account as recorded in Gen 2:22, 23, 24, 25 and even afterwards. Eve stays nameless until she is given a name by her husband in Gen 3:20.

2.6. Creation Language

When Ruth approaches Boaz she uses metaphorical language: וּפְרִשְׁתְּךָ כְּנֶפֶד “spread your wing” (Ruth 3:9), using words which remind the reader of nature and creation. Actually, the same term (כְּנָף “wing”) is used in the creation account, pointing to the creation of birds in Gen 1:21.

2.7. Accumulation of Certain Verbs

Certain key verbs such as אמר “to speak” and היה “to become, happen” occur in both Ruth 3 and the creation account. Furthermore, the verb עשה “to do, make,” which describes the act of creation in the context of the creation account (see Gen 1:7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3, 4, 18), is used relatively often—five times in one short chapter (Ruth 3:4, 5, 6, 11, 16).

2.8. Occurrence of Commands

Ruth is pictured as obedient to the command of her mother-in-law in Ruth 3:6, using the Hebrew צוה “to command.” In Gen 2:16 the LORD God is the one who gives a command (וַיֹּצֵא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים), to eat from every tree with the exception of the one tree, but in contrast to Ruth Adam and Eve disobey.

2.9. Sequence of Characters’ Appearance

Another connection is given by the usage of בוא “to come, go.” In Ruth 3:7 Boaz is the first to go to his sleeping place and Ruth follows him—both times the word בוא is used to describe their movements. In the creation account God first brings the animals to Adam in order for him to name them (Gen 2:19). Then God brings the newly created Eve to Adam (Gen 2:22). Here, the action of bringing is again described by the use of the word בוא. Both Ruth and Eve appear when the men are sleeping (see Ruth 3:7 and

Gen 2:21–22). Neither Boaz nor Adam has had an active part into bringing to existence his future wife!

2.10. Blessing, Finishing, and Resting

Boaz begins his speech in Ruth 3:10 with the words בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ “blessed be you.” This is an echo of God’s first blessings in Gen 1 and 2. God blesses the animals (Gen 1:22), the man and the woman (Gen 1:28), and the seventh day (Gen 2:3), always described by means of the verbal forms of the stem בָּרַךְ. The manifestation of the seventh day is also echoed in the last verse of Ruth 3. It is assumed at this point in the narrative that Boaz will not rest (כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ) “for the man will not rest” (הַיּוֹם הַדִּבֶּר הַזֶּה כִּי־אִם־כָּלָה הַדְּבָר הַיּוֹם “unless he has finished the thing on the day.” On the other hand, using similar terminology, God finished his works on the seventh day (וַיְכַלֵּה הָאֱלֹהִים וְהָאָרֶץ וְהָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה וְכָל־צִבְיָאִים) (Gen 2:1) and rested from his works on that day (וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלָאכְתּוֹ) (Gen 2:2).

2.11. Covenant Concept

Both accounts relate in setting and language to the covenant concept. Genesis 2:23, 24 gives instructions for getting married and contains covenant language.⁴ The thought of “leaving” (Gen 2:24) often occurs in the context of the covenant. Israel shall not leave the covenant (Deut 29:24) as God did not leave Israel in His covenant (Deut 31:8; Josh 1:5). The “cleaving” (Gen 2:24) expresses the kind of faithfulness which is manifested in covenantal faithfulness. In Ruth 3, Ruth and Boaz also act according to given marriage covenant directions.⁵ Ruth’s metaphorical language (Ruth 3:9) has to be understood in relation to the marital covenant: “The spreading of the skirt over a widow as a way of claiming her as a wife is attested among Arabs of early days, and Joüon says it still exists among some modern Arabs.”⁶ In

⁴ Hugenberger holds that marriage parallels a covenant, creating a unity between unrelated persons. See Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (VTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1994, repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 166–67. Walter Brueggemann, “Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gen 2:23a),” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 539, comments on Gen 2:23: “Thus I shall insist, the main point is that the two, man and woman, are covenant partners and this partnership is decisive for understanding the life of either or both.” For further argumentation, see *ibid.*, 532–42.

⁵ The whole book of Ruth shows a marked connection with the “covenant” motif (see, e.g., Ruth 1:16, 17). Thus the book is today often read within the Jewish tradition in connection with celebrations of the establishment of the covenant. Cf. Ostriker, “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” 343–59.

⁶ Morris, *Ruth*, 289.

addition, the location of the scene in Ruth 3 also favors a covenant setting. The threshing floor was a place where judicial matters could be settled.⁷

2.12. Number of Human Characters

Finally, Ruth 3 echoes creation because Boaz and Ruth are completely alone in the night scene—one man and one woman, which alludes furthermore to the starting point of human history with only Adam and Eve being present during the time of creation.

3. Conclusion

Having looked at the variety and quantity of matching elements, echoes, allusions, and intertextual links, one can conclude that Ruth 3 echoes and alludes to the creation account which is found in Genesis 1 and 2. The new start within the family of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 3) may therefore have been consciously depicted in terms of a “new creation” and, in this case, should be understood in the same way. However, further study is needed to fully develop this surprising link between Ruth 3 and the biblical creation account.

⁷ According to Campbell, *Ruth*, 118: “Certain public occasions, especially judicial hearings, could properly be held at the threshing floor near the gate; this is the case in I Kings 22 and in a passage from the tale of *Aqht* found at Ugarit, text A v 4–8.”