

Ruth 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Ruth chapter 2 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour.

And she said to her, Go, my daughter. So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this?

And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

[1 : 07] Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner? But Boaz answered her, All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. Then she said, I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me, and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.

And at mealtime Boaz said to her, Come here and eat some bread, and dip your morsel in the wine. So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain, and she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.

When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her, and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.

[2 : 26] So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an effer of barley. And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned.

She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.

So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I work today is Boaz. And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, May he be blessed of the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.

Naomi also said to her, The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers. And Ruth the Moabite said, Besides, he said to me, You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.

And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted. So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests, and she lived with her mother-in-law.

[3 : 34] Ruth chapter 2 is set at the beginning of the barley harvest, and the text begins by introducing us to a relative of Elimelech, a member of the same clan or family. A man of some substance or mighty worth.

He's possibly a man of wealth, or maybe a man of standing within the community. Later on we see that he is someone of great virtue. A related expression is used of Ruth in chapter 3 verse 11, which might suggest that character is particularly in view here.

This man is called Boaz, and because of their similar character and virtue, Boaz and Ruth are clearly well suited for each other. As we see, they are both people who are characterized by great kindness.

Ruth and Naomi do not seem to have a family to support them. They have come back to Bethlehem, they don't seem to have property there anymore, and there is no immediate family to take care of them. So Ruth asks for permission to glean.

We're reminded that she is Ruth the Moabite at this point. She is both a widow and a foreigner. In Leviticus chapter 23 verse 22, we read the instructions for gleaning.

[4 : 39] And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am the Lord your God.

Ruth hopes to find favour in someone's sight. Presumably she can go to different fields and ask for permission to glean there, with different field owners providing for different gleaners. We read that she happened to come across the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of a Limelech's clan.

There's no explicit instructional planning, it seems to be by chance. Like in Esther chapter 6, when the king reads the records of the kingdom when he can't sleep, and comes across the account of Mordecai's revelation of the conspiracy, it seems to be merely a chance occurrence.

Providence is hidden and inscrutable, and God's hand is behind all of these events, as we will see. But as they occur, they seem to happen by chance. Boaz blesses his reapers, and the reapers respond in kind.

They seem to be people who fear the Lord. At this time in Israel's history, this could not be counted or presumed upon. Back in the story of Genesis, when Abraham and Isaac were sojourners in foreign lands, they had to take care whether the people were God-fearing or not.

[5 : 51] If they were not God-fearing, they would act in exploitative ways and abuse the people under their care. Boaz seems to be faithful in this regard, though. Boaz asks concerning Ruth, and the foreman tells him who she is and about her request to glean.

She is the Moabite woman who has returned with Naomi. She doesn't belong to anyone, she's an outsider. And the foreman describes her as a diligent worker. Boaz then speaks to Ruth, asking her to glean in his field only.

He wants to provide for her in a more committed way, and he addresses her as daughter. She is no longer treated as an outsider, but as one who's been provided for and cared for, by someone who's treating her as if she belonged.

Boaz tells Ruth that he has instructed his workers not to touch her. Some see this as an instruction not to assault her. While Ruth's vulnerability to assault may be seen in verse 22, here I think the meaning is probably that she not be pushed away, or denied access to the field and its gleanings in any way.

Boaz also gives her special privileges. He allows her to drink from the water that he has drawn for his workers. Ruth expresses her gratitude and wonders why he has taken such notice of her, as she is just a stranger and a foreigner.

[7 : 04] He has shown this kindness to her on account of her kindness to Naomi. The word of her behaviour to Naomi had obviously gotten around. And Boaz describes what Ruth has done in a way that alludes to the call of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 verse 1.

Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. She has sought to come under the wings of the Lord. This is language of protection, but it's also language of marriage.

In the next chapter she will ask Boaz to spread his wings over her. And Boaz blesses her, going beyond the requirement of the law. He includes her in the meal for the reapers.

She eats until she is full. Naomi's emptiness in the preceding chapter contrasts with the fullness of Ruth here. Boaz also instructs the young men to allow her to glean among the sheaves and to make things as easy for her as possible, purposefully pulling out barley from the bundles and dropping it for her to pick up.

Ruth ends up reaping an ephra of barley, and she brings back an ephra of barley and the remainder of her meal to Naomi. Naomi is not entirely clear how much an ephra was, but they gathered an omer of manna in a day, which was a tenth of an ephra, so this might be enough for several days.

[8 : 17] Gathering like this over the period of the harvest would give Naomi and Ruth enough grain to live on for the rest of the year. She tells Naomi in response to Naomi's request that the man who took notice of her was Boaz.

And Naomi's response is interesting. May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. At the end of the preceding chapter she spoke of her bitterness.

She said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

Now, however, she is speaking about being blessed by the Lord, and the kindness of the Lord. What does Naomi mean that the kindness of the Lord has not forsaken the dead?

The Lord is caring for the house of Malon and Elimelech through caring for Ruth and Naomi. He is showing his compassion for the widow, a common theme within the Pentateuch. Boaz is a kinsman.

[9 : 19] He is one who could redeem and deliver them and provide for them. This is important knowledge for Naomi. She now realises that there is one who could provide for them in some way, and who is willing to do so to some degree.

The kindness of Ruth and the kindness of Boaz are also signs of the Lord's grace to the widowed and bereaved Naomi. Naomi instructs Ruth to stick close to Boaz and his female workers.

Boaz had told Ruth to go along with his male workers, but Naomi suggests that it would be preferable for her to go with the female workers, and not to go into any other field, lest she be assaulted. Boaz will provide for and protect Ruth in his field.

And she spends the entire period between the barley and the wheat harvest working in Boaz's field. This is more or less the period between the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Pentecost, those seven weeks.

Boaz could probably have done more. He seems very eager to assist Ruth and Naomi, but the problem is that if he redeems Elimelech's land, he has to take Naomi as his sole wife, and she is past childbearing age, and this would have the effect of destroying his own inheritance, as he has no children of his own.

[10 : 28] So Boaz seems to be doing what he can within the limits that he faces. Recognising this will help us to understand what comes next. As Christians reading the story, we should also keep in mind throughout that this is not the last Redeemer that will arise from Bethlehem.

A question to consider. What lessons might we draw from this chapter about God's providence in our lives? A question to consider.