



Ruth - Chapter Two

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter introduces Boaz, a relative of Naomi's late husband. He was a wealthy land owner and Ruth suggested that she should go to one of his fields to glean what was left by the harvesters. When Boaz arrived in the field he noticed Ruth and instructed his own workers to allow Ruth to work unmolested and to take her meal break with them, thus protecting her from any abuse or harm from the young men who worked for him. After a long day in the field Ruth returned to Naomi with the food she had gathered and informed her of the kindness that Boaz had shown towards Ruth.

III. Ruth 2:1-23 - Ruth Meets Boaz

This second scene describes an encounter between Ruth and Boaz in the harvest field that is one of their two crucial meetings. The other is at the threshing floor and is told in 3:6-15. References to Naomi in v.1 and mother-in-law in v.23 frame this scene.

¹ Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

Ruth 2:1

Kinsman whose name was Boaz. The readers are told what the characters will soon discover (v.20). Naomi was related to this man Boaz through her deceased husband, although the closeness of the relationship is not revealed.

The Talmud identifies Boaz as Ibzan (Judges 12:8-10), who succeeded Jephthah as Judge. Boaz was the son of one of Elimelech's brothers. Naomi did not ask him for support because she still felt shame at having deserted her people during the famine, while Boaz stayed on and supported them.

Prominent or worthy, Hebrew *hayil*, is literally ‘of worth or excellence’, and connotes character, wealth, position, or strength, refer also to the comment made on 4:11. The same is said of Ruth in 3:11 and of the father of the first king: <<*There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth*>> (1 Samuel 9:1).

² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.’ She said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’

Ruth 2:2

The key word glean appears in this scene 12 times. Provisions for the poor, sojourners, widows, and orphans allowed them to gather standing grain in corners or borders of fields, as well as dropped stalks and left-behind sheaves: <<*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 19:9-10), and: <<*When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings*>> (Deuteronomy 24:19). This was one of the social assistance programs in Israel. Farmers were not to completely harvest their fields, so the poor and needy could come and glean the remains for themselves. This is a wonderful way of helping the poor. It commanded the farmers to have a generous heart, and it commanded the poor to be active and work for their food, and offered a way for them to provide for their own needs with dignity.

In whose sight I may find favour. Ruth recognised her dependence on the owner’s permission: <<*Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, ‘Let me find favour with you, and whatever you say to me I will give’*>> (Genesis 34:11), <<*They continued, ‘If we have found favour in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us cross the Jordan’*>> (Numbers 32:5), and: <<*Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favour in your sight; for we have come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David*’>> (1 Samuel 25:8). Refer to the comments made on Ruth v.10 and v.13.

³ So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

Ruth 2:3

So she went. Ruth, on her own initiative, set out to glean in the fields to support her and her mother-in-law Naomi. This showed a wonderfully hard-working spirit in Ruth, and it was spiritual also; she would not have been more spiritual to sit back at home and pray for food.

As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz. The narrator presents this event from the standpoint of something unknown to Ruth; refer to the comment made on v.20; since this is a story of God's mysterious providence, the words here are ironic.

⁴ Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The Lord be with you.' They answered, 'The Lord bless you.'

Ruth 2:4

The Lord be with you acknowledges the Lord's presence with the workers in the field, as it does elsewhere: <<*The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior'*>> (Judges 6:12), <<*And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you'*>> (Luke 1:28), and: <<*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

The Lord bless you recognises that he makes their lives and work fruitful: <<*God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth'*>> (Genesis 1:22), and: <<*The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; he will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you*>> (Deuteronomy 28:8); refer also to the comment made on v.20. This reveals something of the heart and character of Boaz. Apparently, his workers loved him and had a good relationship with him.

⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' ⁶ The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.' ⁷ She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.'

Ruth 2:5-7

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, ‘To whom does this young woman belong?’ When Boaz noticed Ruth’s modesty, he inquired about her (Midrash).

Ruth’s request to glean and gather among the sheaves is known only through the reaper’s report, as confirmed by v.2.

She has been on her feet from early this morning until now, where the Hebrew word ‘*amad*, literally stood, may suggest that she was not yet gleaning but waiting there for the owner to grant her permission (v.8), something that the foreman could not do. More likely, she has continued to work from early morning with only a short break from her work: <<*She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter*’>> (Ruth 2:7 NIV).

Because of the harshness of the noonday sun it was common practice for people to take a break from their work just as it is in hot climates today. One example of this is Saul’s son and successor King Ishbaal taking a short sleep, which cost him his life: <<*Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ishbaal, while he was taking his noonday rest. They came inside the house as though to take wheat, and they struck him in the stomach; then Rechab and his brother Baanah escaped*>> (2 Samuel 4:5-6).

⁸ 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.

⁹ Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.’

Ruth 2:8-9

Do not go to glean in another field or leave this one. God was blessing Ruth already and all because he guided her to Boaz’ field. Boaz knew that if Ruth stayed in his fields, she would be blessed and would find companionship, protection and refreshment by doing so.

Keep close to my young women. These were Boaz’ female field workers, who tied together the cut stalks of grain. Boaz told Ruth to stay close to them, so she would be well taken care of.

Boaz has charged the young men working in his field, as confirmed by v.15, and vv.21-22, not to bother or touch Ruth, in order to ensure her safety; young men in other nearby fields might not be as trustworthy, especially towards a foreigner, a prospect that is indicated by: <<*But if the man meets the engaged woman in the open country, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. You shall do nothing to the young woman; the young woman has not committed an offence punishable by death, because this case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbour. Since he found her in the open country, the engaged woman may have cried for help, but there was no one to rescue her*>> (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

¹⁰ Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, ‘Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?’

Ruth 2:10

Why have I found favour in your sight. Ruth’s first words to Boaz convey her gratitude that he would grant her these privileges and take notice of her; her second reply comes in v.13. In other words, she wonders why Boaz would act according to her need and not her social status; refer also to the comment made on v.20.

Ruth refers to herself a foreigner, but by virtue of her loyalty to Naomi and to the Lord she has become a sojourner, who can enjoy many of the rights of an Israelite: <<*You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 24:22), <<*Any alien residing among you who wishes to keep the passover to the Lord shall do so according to the statute of the passover and according to its regulation; you shall have one statute for both the resident alien and the native*>> (Numbers 9:14), and: <<*You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the Lord God*>> (Ezekiel 47:22-23).

¹¹ But Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

Ruth 2:11

All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me. Boaz has learned about Ruth’s kindness to Naomi and

therefore knows her good intentions. Fittingly, Boaz encouraged Ruth as if she were a new convert to the God of Israel. In many ways, Ruth stands as an example of a new convert.

- She put her trust in the God of Israel.
- She has left her former associates who worshipped idols.
- She had come in among strangers by choice.
- She was very low in her own eyes.
- She found protection under the wings of God.

Significantly, though these words were said to Ruth, they were also a prayer to God for Ruth. It is an example of how mature Christians should pray for new converts as they come to faith and start out on their journey.

¹² May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!’

Ruth 2:12

Only the Lord could repay, i.e. make restitution for Ruth’s losses of husband, father, mother, and country.

A full reward, Hebrew *maskoret*, is compensation commensurate with her loss – perhaps offspring, like Abraham’s ‘reward’ in Genesis 15:1-5, which uses Hebrew *sakar* from the same root, and Leah’s ‘hire’ in Genesis 30:18, also Hebrew *sakar*. On both counts Boaz himself will become the Lord’s answer to Boaz’ own prayer.

Wings, refuge are words often associated with the protection offered by those who draw near to God: <<*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings*>> (Psalm 36:7), and: <<*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*>> (Matthew 23:37). Boaz becomes the Lord’s protective wings when he ‘spreads his wings’ over Ruth; refer to the comment made on Ruth 3:9.

¹³ Then she said, ‘May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.’

Ruth 2:13

May I continue to find favour in your sight. This is Ruth’s second reply; refer to the comment made on v.10.

You have comforted me and spoken kindly. Boaz dispels the fear and uncertainty over whether Ruth can obtain food: <<*So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.*' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them>> (Genesis 50:21), and: <<*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins*>> (Isaiah 40:2). The type of servant, Hebrew *shipkhah*, to which Ruth humbly compares herself had limited rights, as confirmed by: <<*But Abram said to Sarai, 'Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.'* Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she ran away from her>> (Genesis 16:6), and: <<*If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, designated for another man but not ransomed or given her freedom, an inquiry shall be held. They shall not be put to death, since she has not been freed*>> (Leviticus 19:20).

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵ When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, 'Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶ You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.'

Ruth 2:14-16

Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles. Boaz' favour goes well beyond the requirements of the law; refer back to the comments made on v.2 and v.7.

¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸ She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied.

Ruth 2:17-18

Gleaning went from early morning (v.7) until evening, i.e. finishing just before sundown. After sundown was the time to beat out or winnow what was gathered, for it was at that time that breeze picked up after the heat of the day. The verse stresses gleaned because, although Boaz had ordered his harvesters to drop large amounts for her, Ruth limited herself to the gleanings she was entitled to by law, i.e. a maximum of two stalks at a time, and did not avail herself of Boaz's charity.

An ephah of barley is about 22 litres, at least a two-week supply for the two women, much to Naomi's surprise (v.19).

Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. The theme of having sufficient food and some left over is one that is important in the Bible: <<*But his servant said, 'How can I set this before a hundred people?' So he repeated, 'Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says the Lord, "They shall eat and have some left'"*>> (2 Kings 4:43), and: <<*Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets*>> (John 6:11-13).

¹⁹ 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 name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.'²⁰ Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!' Naomi also said to her, 'The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.'

Ruth 2:19-20

Whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. The referent of whose is ambiguous: is she speaking of the kindness of Boaz, or of the Lord? This ambiguity is probably intentional; that is, the answer is both. In this story, Boaz embodies features of God's own character, particularly his kindness. This kindness is clearly visible in vv.8-9 and vv.14-16, where Boaz goes well beyond any legal requirements in his generosity to Ruth. Ruth, in receiving the kindness of Boaz extended to a foreigner, is experiencing what Israel as a whole, and each faithful Israelite, receives from the Lord, as found in: <<*It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations*>> (Deuteronomy 7:7-9). Naomi's blessing anticipates kindness shown to the living in marriage: <<*When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and*

performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel>> (Deuteronomy 25:5-6), and: <<I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses>> (Ruth 4:10), and to the dead (1:8), by perpetuating their name in their inheritance: <<The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next-of-kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold>> (Leviticus 25:23-25).

The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin. Boaz is neither the closest relative to Naomi nor the only kinsman redeemer; refer to the comment made on Ruth 3:12-13. This situation combines two institutions: the redemption of family land and levirate marriage. What apparently just 'happened' in v.3 is now seen to be providential.

²¹ Then Ruth the Moabite said, 'He even said to me, "Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest."' ²² Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, 'It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.' ²³ So she stayed 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.

Ruth 2:21-23

Ruth the Moabite. Her origins are mentioned several times. The author emphasises how God's kindness extends beyond, but through, the Israelites, and how it abounds to them through a foreigner.

Close by my servants. On Boaz' advice, Ruth had stayed close to the young women, providing both companionship and support for her work. She was made to feel like a member of the community.

The barley harvest was in April/May, and the wheat harvest was a few weeks later. This was an important time for the whole community as their food supplies, and those for their livestock, depended much on these harvests.

She lived with her mother-in-law. This is a reminder of Ruth's pledge to Naomi: <<But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God>> (Ruth 1:16).