

# Ruth 2

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Updated 1/12/2024 Printed 1/28/2024 CPS

## Introduction:

Naomi had returned to Bethlehem along with her daughter-in-law. Ruth had dedicated her life to the God of Israel and Naomi. Now we will see how God made the best things happen for both ladies.

## RUTH ASKS PERMISSION FROM NAOMI TO GLEAN

**(2:1) Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.**

- The widowed **Naomi** had a kinsman on her **husband's** side of the family. He had been successful at farming and was **wealthy**. Bethlehem was noted as a successful farming area. The town name meant *House of Bread*. **Boaz** had gained great **wealth** during the same years that Elimelech and Naomi had moved to Moab.

**(2) One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." Naomi replied, "All right, my daughter, go ahead."**

- Calling **Ruth** a **Moabite** is not meant to degrade her, but simply identify her for the reader.
- **Ruth** asks **Naomi's** permission to find a **field** where she can pick **stalks of grain**. This is part of the welfare system of Israel. It was a right that belonged to the poor.

**"When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the LORD your God will bless you in all you do."** Deuteronomy 24:19

The Lord said He would bless those who made this provision for the needy. Anyone prospers who has the blessing of the Lord. Food was immediately available to this alien widow **Ruth**.

The Lord's policy for helping the needy was to require some effort on their part. This preserves the dignity of the needy. In Exodus, the Lord provided manna to eat, but required a family member to go out of the camp and pick it up. **Ruth** didn't just sit at Naomi's table and pray for food, she went out and got it.

- **Naomi** gave permission to **Ruth**. The poor had to work behind the harvesters, picking up what the reapers left behind. Furthermore, they had to pick up enough to last quite a while—until the next kind of harvest.

**(3) So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.**

- God was in this choice. By Divine Providence **Ruth** came to work in the **field** of **Boaz**, the wealthy landowner who belonged to the same family clan as the deceased **Elimelech**, her father-in-law.

**(4) While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The LORD be with you!" he said. "The LORD bless you!" the harvesters replied.**

- Such a greeting between owner and **harvesters**. It acknowledges the role of the **Lord** in all of their lives. It especially shows the place of the **Lord** in the life of **Boaz**.

## BOAZ IDENTIFIES RUTH

**(5) Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?"**

- **Boaz** spotted the **young woman**. The Hebrew word points more to a *very young lady*, not a *married* lady. More like a girl as in the *Complete Jewish Bible*. She appeared very young to him. He wondered that her parents had let her come out to work!

**(6) And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi."**

- The harvest supervisor knew who Ruth was. Word travels fast in small villages like Bethlehem. She is the woman who came with **Naomi** from **Moab**.

## PERMANENT WORK FOR RUTH

**(7) She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest in the shelter.**

- The field supervisor told Boaz that, after **asking** permission, she has been **working** all **morning** except for a short break in the **shelter**. She could have demanded her rights based on Deuteronomy, but she **asked** permission instead.

**(8) Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field.**

- Calling her **my daughter** was a way an older person would speak to a younger. It did not indicate any kind of family relationship. Naomi had used the same word **daughter** in 2:2.
- **Boaz** offers **Ruth** the chance to glean his **field** full time. She would not have to work this **field** for a while and then go try another. This is an interesting bit of information because she may have worked there for a couple of months. Even more, we know that she arrived at a time when the barley was still being harvested. But the wheat harvest usually began while the barley harvest was nearing its end, so a new crop was available to gather.
- **Boaz** was offering this gentile single lady the friendship of the ladies who normally worked for him. She no longer had to feel like an out-of-place foreigner.
- The end of the barley harvest is about the same time as Passover, so this Book of Ruth is read in Jewish synagogues at that season.



## WORK BENEFITS

**(9) See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."**

- Boaz tells Ruth that he has instructed **the young men** who are doing the **harvesting** to allow her freedom to do her work and **not to treat** her **roughly**.
- Not only that, she has been invited to drink from the **water** jugs that Boaz's hired reapers can drink from. This was the summertime in Judah; it was quite hot and **water** was critical. If a person had to go get his or her own **water**, it would take away from gleaning (or reaping) time. So by offering Ruth the opportunity to **drink** from the hired workers' **water** jug, Ruth could be more productive. This is not something that the other gleaners would have available to them; Ruth was getting special treatment.

**(10) Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."**

- **Ruth falls** down prostrate at Boaz's **feet**, thanks him for his **kindness**, and inquires why he would be acting so favorably to her (especially since she is a **foreigner**). She *could* have complained about the burdens of widowhood and the loneliness.
- Ruth identifies grace without using the word.

## RUTH'S STELLAR CHARACTER IDENTIFIED

(11) "Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers.

- **Boaz** replies that the story of her character has been reported to him. She has left her parents and her **land** of birth to come to Israel to care for Naomi. The flow of the story shows that **Boaz** was fascinated by Ruth's devotion.

(12) **May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."**

- Boaz offers a blessing to Ruth. Her work was to be **rewarded**, her wages full from **the God of Israel** because she had sought **refuge** under his **wings** (*kanaph*). He was well aware of her change from paganism to worshipping the one true **God**.
- **Under whose wings.** An illustration:



**(13) "I hope I continue to please you, sir," she replied. "You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not one of your workers."**

- Ruth thanked Boaz for looking upon her favorably, for **comforting** her and **speaking kindly** to her as though she was one of his **workers**. But she quickly distinguished herself from his actual **workers**.

### **LUNCH AND MORE BENEFITS**

**(14) At mealtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here, and help yourself to some food. You can dip your bread in the sour wine." So she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her some roasted grain to eat. She ate all she wanted and still had some left over.**

- More than treating her like a normal gleaner, **Boaz** asked her to join the **harvesters** for lunch. She sat beside the workmen, dipped in the **bread** sauce with the others and ate **roasted grain** prepared by **Boaz**. She even took a little that was **left over**.
- There may be a first hint of romantic interest in that **Boaz gave her** some food.

**(15) When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her.**

- **Boaz** broadened her picking area. Besides picking up things left by the reapers, he told the crew to let her glean among the **grain** that was already picked. He likes her the first day he met her. This offer was more generous than Scripture required.

**(16) And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"**

- In addition, **pull** some out of **the bundles** and **leave it** so she can glean there, too. Don't scold her for doing this.
- Ruth was gleaning in Boaz's field when her fortunes began to turn; and even this was because the hand of the God of the Hebrews guided her. The Law of Moses allowed the poverty-stricken widow Ruth to choose any field that caught her eye to glean, but the Lord had His own plans.



**(17) So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it filled an entire basket.**

- **Ruth** was able to gather an abnormally large amount of **barley** that **day**; and when she separated the **grain** from the heads and stalks by beating them on the threshing floor, it came to an entire bushel. (Authorities differ on the amount. However **Tom Bradford** claims that it was 55-60 pounds.)
- **Ruth** was gathering food *and* credibility for the future.

## THE REPORT TO NAOMI

**(18) She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the roasted grain that was left over from her meal.**



- **Ruth** carried home a load on her first day out in the field. She had her own dinner and gave the rest to **Naomi**. Her **mother-in-law's** future was already getting brighter.

**(19) "Where did you gather all this grain today?" Naomi asked. "Where did you work? May the LORD bless the one who helped you!" So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz."**

- **Naomi** was amazed. She immediately offered a **blessing** to whatever farmer had allowed this big haul.
- **Ruth** didn't know one farmer from another, but she told Naomi that his **name** was **Boaz**.

**(20) "May the LORD bless him!" Naomi told her daughter-in-law. "He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers."**

- **Naomi** was beginning to see a picture emerge. She read this event as a **kindness** from God for her and her now-deceased men.
- This is the same **Naomi** that had returned to Bethlehem nicknaming herself Mara (bitter) and reporting that God had afflicted her.
- Additionally, she identified Boaz as a **close relative** (on her husband's side). There is more about this at the end of these notes.

**(21) Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed."**

- Now **Ruth** adds this detail: she is to remain only in his field until the **harvest** is over. If she brought home an

over-supply on the first day, just imagine how much she will bring home on future work days.

**(22) "Good!" Naomi exclaimed. "Do as he said, my daughter. Stay with his young women right through the whole harvest. You might be harassed in other fields, but you'll be safe with him."**

- **Naomi** urged Ruth to stay among the other young ladies who were working for Boaz. There was genuine **safety** here.
- **Burton Coffman** observes:

What a glorious day this had been for both Ruth and Naomi! The gleaning had not only been successful that first day, but the invitation had been extended for Ruth to continue the gleaning through both the barley and wheat harvests, which would have reached until about June 1st. Besides that, Boaz' interest in Ruth opened up some possibilities that Naomi was quick to recognize, and her fertile mind had already jumped to the eventual solution of all their problems in the marriage of Ruth to the "near kinsman," especially and hopefully to Boaz.

**(23) So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz's fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she continued working with them through the wheat harvest in early summer. And all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.**

- **Ruth** accepted the generosity and the safety that had been made available to her. She did not "look for the best deal." The Lord was blessing her and she was benefiting greatly.

- She **lived** with Naomi, caring for her needs as she had promised before coming to Bethlehem. The story is already looking better with the best yet to come. While Paul expresses a principle in Romans, the principle itself can be seen frequently in the Old Testament, too:

**And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.**

Romans 8:28

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## THE REDEEMER

It will be helpful to understand some about the “**closest relative**” mentioned by Naomi in verse 20. The Hebrew word is *gaal* (or *go’el*) and speaks of the kinsman redeemer who can

- 1) redeem the inheritance of a person;
- 2) marry a widow;
- 3) avenge the death of a relative.

This last job description has gradually morphed into our word “jail.” The word occurs 104 times in the *King James Version* of the Bible.

It was very important that the ownership of land did not pass to another clan, tribe or even foreigners. In a sense, the widow was connected with the land. This was her financial security.

**Tom Bradford** explains how the kinsman redeemer task plays out in this book:

... our story of Ruth shows that a go'el also had the obligation to marry a next of kin's widow if that was necessary to rescue the land from being lost to another clan, tribe or foreigner. And, to some degree or another, this operated as (or in lieu of) Levirate Marriage especially if there was no brother of a deceased man available to marry the widow IF she was childless.

Thus in the Book of Ruth, the marriage of Ruth to Boaz was not really Levirate Marriage (since Boaz certainly was not a brother of the deceased), rather it was the somewhat extended duty of the go'el of Elimelech's clan (in this case Boaz) to marry the childless widow Ruth not only to rescue land (technically on Na'omi's behalf) but also to provide Ruth with a male-child.