

Study Notes: Ruth 2
Second Sunday in Advent: December 6, 2020: “A Strong and Redeeming Love”
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Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

- Chapter 2 begins by introducing a new character, Boaz, into the story. Boaz’s name means “strength.” He is described as a “man of standing” which can also be translated as “a worthy man.” In this chapter, Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s husband, becomes an example of *hesed* in his actions towards Ruth.
- The Faithlife Study Bible also describes Boaz, “The Hebrew phrase used here, *gibbor chayil*, likely identifies Boaz as a wealthy landowner, a member of the upper class. The phrase commonly refers to warriors (Josh 8:3; Judg 11:1; 1 Chr 12:8), but it can also designate a person of wealth and ability (1 Sam 9:1; 1 Kgs 11:28; 2 Kgs 15:20).”

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.”

- The closing verse of chapter 1 sets the scene for Ruth’s request to go and glean from the leftovers of the field. The women had returned during the barley harvest, and so to provide food for her and Naomi, it was natural for Ruth to seek food from this harvest.
- The Law of Moses set forth a provision for poor people to glean from the edges of fields and the leftovers that remained after a field was harvested (see Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22).
- Ruth would look for a field owned by someone who she found favor with, meaning she was looking for a field of someone who was faithful to the Law and would look with kindness on her need. This seems to suggest that while the Law of Moses required landowners to make provisions for the poor, at the time of judges, not everyone was following the law.

Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

- When Ruth set out, she happened to work in a field belonging to Elimelek’s relative, Boaz. Of course, given the picture that the book of Ruth paints, while this appears to be by chance, it is actually directed by the Lord. Naomi recognized this fact later in this chapter (see verse 20 below).
- The New American Commentary notes about the phrase, “as it turned out”, “The statement is ironical; its purpose is to undermine purely rational explanations for human experiences and to refine the reader’s understanding of providence. In reality he is screaming, ‘See the hand of God at work here!’ The same hand that had sent the famine (1:1) and later provided food (1:6) is the hand that had brought Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem precisely at the beginning of the harvest (1:22) and has now guided Ruth to that portion of the field belonging specifically to Boaz.”

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The Lord be with you!” “The Lord bless you!” they answered. Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?” The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. 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.”

- When Boaz arrived in his fields, his greeting showed his care for his workers. In fact, throughout everything Boaz said, it is clear that he was a man of compassion and grace. The New American Commentary notes, “From the outset we sense that Boaz has provided a positive work environment for his people. In this regard he serves as a model of true covenant *hesed* for all who supervise others in their work; his speech from beginning to end is characterized by grace.”
- After greeting those working in his fields, Boaz inquired about the woman gleaning. He discovered that she was the Moabite woman, Ruth, who returned with Naomi. This may indicate that Boaz was merely curious, but it also sets the scene for future events in the story.
- Boaz was informed that Ruth showed courtesy by asking permission to glean (even though this was her legal right). He also learned that she had been working with only a short rest, implying that Ruth was working hard to provide for both her and her mother-in-law.

So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

- After hearing the details of Ruth’s story, Boaz showed her extraordinary compassion and love. He offered her a safe place to gather grain, and told her that she could share in the water that had been put out for those working in the field.

At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me — a foreigner?” Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband — how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

- Because Boaz had been extremely kind in showing *hesed* to Ruth, she inquired why she was the recipient of Boaz’s kindness. Boaz told her it was because of her own kindness towards Naomi. Boaz offered a blessing to Ruth, praying that the Lord who she trusted in, would reward her further for her actions towards Naomi. Ironically, Boaz was the source of this blessing, because he had and would continue to show Ruth the loyal love of the Lord through his actions.

- The New American Commentary states, “From the first time Boaz opens his mouth until the last words he utters (4:9–10), his tone exudes compassion, grace, and generosity. In the man who speaks to this Moabite field worker biblical *hesed* becomes flesh and dwells among humankind.”

“May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant — though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.” At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.” When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

- Ruth humbly thanked Boaz for his kindness and told him the difference that it had made for her. Ruth had been greatly comforted and encouraged by the words and actions of Boaz.
- Boaz continued to show kindness by offering Ruth to join him for a meal, and then asking the harvesters to show her special kindness by leaving additional grain stalks for her to gather. He told the men in charge to be careful not to rebuke or reprimand Ruth, but to show her kindness, instead.

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

- After a day of work, Ruth returned home, bringing provisions back to Naomi.
- The Faithlife Study Bible states, “An ephah of barley would have weighed approximately 30 pounds — enough for Ruth and Naomi to live on for several weeks. Ruth’s ability to glean this amount in one day demonstrates both her work ethic and Boaz’s generosity.”

Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!” Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said. “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.” Then Ruth the Moabite said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’” Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.” So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

- Surprised at the amount of grain that Ruth brought home, and realizing that the owner of the field must have shown Ruth kindness, Naomi inquired about where Ruth worked.
- When she heard that Ruth had been in Boaz's field, she prayed a blessing for him because he had shown *hesed* to her and her family. Naomi also realized at this point that the Lord had not ceased to care for her, and was demonstrating that through Boaz, who showed kindness to the widow of Elimelek.
- Naomi also told Ruth the Boaz was their relative and guardian-redeemer. The Christian Standard Bible Notes, "Family redeemers (Hb *go'el*; v. 20) were relatives obliged to buy back family members from debt-slavery or to redeem their fields if they had to sell them (Lv 25:25–30). The family redeemer would also receive restitution on behalf of a deceased family member or pursue his killer to ensure that justice was served (Nm 5:8; 35:12). He might also raise up a child for the deceased relative in order to maintain the connection between the clan and the relative's hereditary property (Dt 25:5–10), though Boaz had no legal obligation to act in this way."
- Naomi instructed Ruth to heed the words of Boaz and remain with Boaz until the end of the harvest, a time of about two months. Given the climate of the time, Naomi said this would be the best way to ensure Ruth's safety. The chapter closes by indicating that even after the harvests, Ruth continued to live with Naomi, as she had not yet come to the point where she was self-sufficient.