

The Book of Ruth – Chapter 2

Love's response...

Introduction

Chapter 2 of the Book of Ruth introduces us to the 'hero' of the story, Boaz, a "relative" of Naomi's late husband Elimelech, and "one of our redeemers" (Ruth 2 v 20). The Hebrew term used here is גֹּאֵל (*go-el*), which means 'kinsman-redeemer', whose role will become clear in later chapters of the book.

This chapter also introduces us to the Law of Gleaning (see Leviticus 19 v 9, 10), which represented the welfare system of the day. If you were a landowner, you were allowed to make only one pass through your field at harvest time – you could not go back a second time. The concept was that what the reapers missed, or what spilled, was left for the widows and the destitute to gather up...

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1 v 22)

"At the beginning of the barley harvest" (v 22) – barley ripened before wheat, and began to be reaped sometimes as early as March, but generally in April. Mention of the barley harvest is the first hint of hope in the story...

Ruth gleanes in Boaz's fields (Ruth 2 v 1 to 16)

"She happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz" (v 3) – the Hebrew word for 'happened' is מִקְרֵה (*miqreh*), which has the general meaning of an unforeseen meeting or event, a 'chance' happening or 'lucky' accident, almost a 'serendipity' (or as the Americans say, 'happenstance').

But Ruth came to that part of the field because God was guiding her. This shows us the wonderful way God works. If Ruth had stayed home and waited for a 'spiritual' feeling, she might have waited a long time, and still might have chosen the wrong field. Instead Ruth 'stepped out in faith' and experienced the moving of the supernatural hand of God...

- In verse 4 Boaz finally makes his appearance.
- How does he treat his employees?
- What sort of 'godly' example does he show in the workplace?
- What does his treatment of Ruth tell us about his heart and character? (Note that in this chapter there is no suggestion of any 'romance' between Boaz and Ruth.)

Boaz knew that if Ruth stayed in his fields, she would be blessed and find:

1. Companionship ("keep close to my young women" v 8)
2. Protection ("have I not charged the young men not to touch you?" v 9)
3. Refreshment ("when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink" v 9)

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- What do these verses tell us about Ruth’s character, demeanour and attitude?
- What qualities of Ruth should we try to emulate, as followers of Christ? See Matthew 5 v 5.

“And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather...’ (v 7) – as the servant-in-charge reported to Boaz, he told of Ruth’s submissive attitude. There is a sense in which the gleaning was hers by right – after all, she could have quoted Leviticus 19, but she courteously asked for the right to glean in Boaz’s field.

“She has continued from early morning until now” (v 7) – Ruth may not have known it, but she was under inspection. The servant-in-charge noticed that she did a good job – which was important, because that made a good impression on Boaz. Remember, we too are under inspection.

“The Lord repay you for what you have done” (v 12) – it is appropriate that 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 Christian believer:

1. She put her trust in the God of Israel
2. She left her former associates
3. She came to live among strangers
4. She was humble (v 10)
5. She found protection under the wings of God (v 12)

Notice that “the servant who was in charge of the reapers” (v 6) introduced Ruth to Boaz. If Boaz represents Christ (typologically), and Ruth (the gentile bride) represents the Church (with Naomi representing the nation Israel), who do you think the unnamed servant represents? See John 16 v 13. (There is a similarity with the story in Genesis 24, in which Abraham’s unnamed servant introduces Rebekah to Isaac.)

Ruth reports the day's events to Naomi (Ruth 2 v 17 to 23)

- “So she gleaned in the field until evening” (v 17) – God blessed Ruth, and people were generous to her, but at the same time, she worked hard. This was a sunrise to sunset job, and Ruth worked hard all day. What does this teach us?
- How does Naomi react to Ruth’s news?
- What are her motives and priorities?

“May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” (v 20) – is this the same person who returned to Bethlehem saying, “Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1 v 20)? Is this the same woman who said, “the Almighty has brought calamity upon me” (Ruth 1 v 21)? Of course it is! Now that she sees more of God’s plan unfolding, she can better understand how all things are working together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8 v 28)...