

RUTH – A Tapestry of Redemption

RUTH CHAPTER 2

We are continuing our study of the book of Ruth. To set the scene for you, Naomi and Ruth have just arrived back in Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. It was a bittersweet homecoming for Naomi who had been away for 10 years. She feels as though God has been unkind to her. She says, "The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:20-21). Poor Naomi! She is feeling sorry for herself. Have any of you all ever been there? She is not in a very good place emotionally. The fact is, Naomi did NOT come back empty, did she? She returned with a gift from God whose name is Ruth. Sometimes when we are feeling sorry for ourselves, we forget about our blessings, right? Of course, Ruth, being from Moab, she is in a totally brand-new environment. There is a whole lot of uncertainty for her as well.

So, here is the thing -- even though Naomi cannot see it, the loving hand of the Almighty (as she calls Him) is already at work in her life. And Ruth is going to play a key part in the events that are about to unfold. As Chapter 2 opens, we are introduced to a new character in the story.

READ Ruth 2:1

A floodlight shines on Boaz as he enters stage left. We learn something about him here. Q1 asks, what was Naomi's relationship to Boaz? He is a relative of Naomi's husband, her deceased husband Elimelech. That is all we know. We are not told exactly what that relationship was. He could possibly have been his brother, uncle, cousin or nephew or something along that line. We don't know for sure. It is not really important.

The KJV refers to Boaz as "a mighty man of wealth." As we read on, we discover that Boaz certainly is a man of wealth. And he is quite prominent in this community. I really like the ESV's description of Boaz here as "a worthy man." In other words, he is a man of integrity and moral standing. One commentary I read described Boaz as one who "lived an exemplary lifestyle." So, there is a whole lot more to Boaz than just being a

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wealthy man. OK, so at this point, God inserts this man Boaz into our story. The next few verses will explain his significance as we move forward.

Good, bad or indifferent, life goes on for Naomi and Ruth. At this point reality sets in. They must try and figure out where they're going to find food.

READ Ruth 2:2-3

[The writer here] is emphasizing that relationship [between Naomi and Boaz]. Ruth informs Naomi of her plans. With the barley harvest in full swing, Ruth tells Naomi what in Q2? That she will head out to the fields. She mentions "[gleaning] among the ears of grain." I find it very interesting this concept of gleaning is something that was strictly an Israelite custom. It is unique to Israel. And yet it is Ruth, the Moabite that suggests going and gleaning. She must have already [become aware of] this practice.

Gleaning was a practice that was commanded in the Mosaic Law. In the book of Deuteronomy it says, "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 for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 24:19). In other words, any stalks of grain that were left after the initial cutting were to remain on the ground for the poor to pick up. It was an act of social compassion. Here we see the heart of God for the poor and the vulnerable; widows, orphans and strangers.

So, Ruth has already become familiar with this Israelite custom. Q3 asks, True or false? Ruth intentionally went to a field owned by Boaz. False. V 3 says that "she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz." Was this a mere coincidence? Was it just a lucky break, good fortune? Happenstance? I don't believe so based on how I read the book of Ruth. I view this as the sovereign hand of God guiding Ruth, even though she was probably unaware of that, to where He wants her to go. From our human perspective, sometimes events seem to be

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random. It is like that analogy I gave you of the backside of the tapestry. It just seems like a whole bunch of random things happening. But behind the scenes God is orchestrating this whole chain of events, as we will see.

READ Ruth 2:4

Is that how your boss normally greets you when you go to work in the morning? Here we get an indication of Boaz's character, don't we? Q4 asks, what do we learn about Boaz based on the way he greeted the workers? That he was a god-fearing man. He pronounces a divine blessing on his workers and in doing so he uses God's covenant name, Yahweh (LORD).

At this point Boaz notices that there is someone new out gleaning in his field...

READ Ruth 2:5-7

[Q5, what is the first question that Boaz asks his foreman? "Who is that young woman over there?" By now word has spread all over town about Ruth].

Q6, the servant, the foreman, fills Boaz in. How does the foreman identify Ruth to Boaz? She is a "young Moabite woman, a Moabitess. He explains that she had asked for permission to glean in the field and had been out there the last few days. So, this is not the first day she has been out there. He mentions that she is a hard worker – "she came and she has continued from early morning until now."

So, now Boaz speaks directly to Ruth...

READ Ruth 2:8-9

He addresses her as "my daughter," the same term that Naomi had used back in v 2. One commentary I read said that this term "my daughter" is probably an indication of the age difference between Ruth and Boaz. Boaz is a little older than Ruth, probably closer to Naomi's age than he was to Ruth's. He tells Ruth to continue gathering [grain] in his field.

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He promises two things -- to protect her and to provide for her. He gives her permission to draw water with the other workers.

Q7 asks, True or false? Boaz promised to protect Ruth from local thieves. False. He is protecting her from "the young men." Now who are the young men that he is talking about? His workers. Now, this is what J. Vernon McGee says in his commentary about this verse: "In that day it was very dangerous for a woman in Ruth's position – a woman and a widow from Moab. She was likely to have insult upon insult heaped upon her. And not only that but she would not be safe. [Remember, this is the period of the judges, so it is not a very good period morally anyway.] Boaz, recognizing that, immediately puts his cloak of protection around her."

READ Ruth 2:10

Q8, what question does Ruth first ask Boaz? "Why have I found favor in your eyes? Why me?" Ruth is surprised at the way Boaz is treating her given the prejudice that exists in Israel against foreigners, especially Moabites. Notice Ruth's reaction to the kindness that Boaz is showing her. "She fell on her face, bowing to the ground." She is humbled by it. Though she appreciates it, she does not fully understand it. She has probably never had anyone treat her this well -- ever.

Well, Boaz tells her the reason that she has found favor in his eyes...

READ Ruth 2:11-12

Q9, what is Boaz's response to Ruth? He has heard about what? That she had treated Naomi very well, right? Boaz says that Ruth's kindness to Naomi after the death of her husband is well known. It is a small community. Word has got out.

Boaz then blesses Ruth. Q10 Boaz ask the LORD to do what for Ruth? What did he ask God to do for her? To repay her for her actions. OK, so he uses God's covenant name Yahweh: "The LORD (Yahweh) repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by [Yahweh], the God

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of Israel.” So, in other words, he is asking the LORD to repay her for her actions – to repay her kindness with kindness.

Now, I want you to notice the metaphor that is used at the end of v 12. It says, “under whose wings [the LORD] you [Ruth] have come to take refuge.” This reminded me of something that I witnessed. I was visiting my parents in Pennsylvania. This was years ago. One Fall day, I was looking out their back window which had this beautiful view of the mountains, really pretty scenery. Along the tree line on the edge of their property was this [wild] turkey, this mama turkey and she was walking along with her chicks following her. They were just walking along. It was kind of a cute scene watching them walking. And then, all of a sudden, I witnessed the mother turkey stop. She turned around and she spread out her wings and all the chicks gathered together under her and they remained really still. I thought to myself, “That’s strange. I wonder why she did that?” I looked around and up in the sky about 100 yards away was this hawk circling. Long before I recognized the potential danger, that mother turkey saw it and she quickly reacted to protect her chicks. And I thought at the time (and every time I read verses like this one it brings it back to me), the picture of how God protects us even if we are unaware of the danger around us. So, I think this is just a beautiful metaphor that is used here about being protected under the wings.

Boaz recognizes that God will provide for and protect Ruth and he gladly accepts the role as the human instrument that God will use.

READ Ruth 2:13

Ruth expresses her appreciation for the kindness that Boaz is showing her. She acknowledges that, while she is undeserving, she is grateful for it.

READ Ruth 2:14

It is lunch time. Boaz invites Ruth to sit down and have this meal with all the servants. It says that “she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.” What does Ruth do with the food that is left over? She does not just throw it away. She does not just waste it, give up and leave

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it. We find out later in the chapter that she takes this food home to Naomi and shares it with her. That is the kind of person that Ruth is.

READ Ruth 2:15-16

Boaz instructs his workers to leave stalks of grain for Ruth to gather. Q11, True or false? What Boaz commands his harvesters to do goes beyond the requirement of the Law. True. Boaz goes above and beyond what the Law required. He doesn't just leave the barley clippings on the ground. He has his workers actually pull out some of the stalks that they had harvested and spread it out on the ground. That is the kind of person that Boaz is.

Well, it has been a long and wonderful day and Ruth finally heads home.

READ Ruth 2:17-18

She has literally worked all day, from early in the morning until evening. Q12 asks, how much barley did Ruth end up gathering in one day from Boaz's field? It says that she gathered an "ephah of barley." One commentary I read said that this amounts to about 30 to 40 pounds of food. That is a lot of barley! Ruth also brings home the food from lunch earlier that day.

READ Ruth 2:19-21

When Ruth tells Naomi that the man's name was Boaz, the light goes on in Naomi's mind. Of course, Naomi is thrilled to hear this. She informs Ruth of the significance of this.

Q13 asks, what significant term does Naomi use to describe who Boaz is? Boaz is not just a relative, he is what? He is "one of our redeemers." The Hebrew word here actually translates as "kinsman redeemer." We will learn in our next lesson – I am not going to go through it today – but we are going to unpack fully what this means in that culture. It must be something exciting because look at the drastic change in Naomi's tone here in this verse as compared to her "woe is me" tone in the previous chapter.

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The news about Boaz has given Naomi renewed hope. There might still be a bright future for her family! When we get to Chapter 3, we are going to learn exactly why this is. But at this point, Ruth, being an outsider, does not understand fully the significance that Boaz plays as one of the family's redeemers.

All Ruth knows and is focused on is what she says in v 21. Q14, what about Boaz was Ruth focused on? His kindness [toward her]. That is what she saw. Naomi is seeing big picture. Ruth is seeing what he did. One of the traits that women hold really high about men is kindness.

[One class member pointed out that there appears to be a physical attraction between Ruth and Boaz as well. There very well could have been. We cannot discount that. It is just not mentioned here. As we go through the story, we can certainly infer that. But the kindness is the thing Ruth is telling Naomi about.]

READ Ruth 2:22-23

Naomi encourages Ruth to keep right on gleaning in Boaz's fields where she knows that she will be safe. She has a good thing going, so keep right on. Q15, True or false? We can conclude from these verses that Naomi trusted Boaz and Ruth trusted Naomi. True. It is not too far [a reach] to make those connections. Naomi knows that Boaz will protect Ruth (she knows who Boaz is). And then, Ruth trusts Naomi because she does what Naomi tells her to do.

So, as Chapter 2 closes the barley harvest is nearing the end and the wheat harvest will follow shortly thereafter. Naomi has a plan. We will learn about that plan next time. It is a really good plan and it involves Boaz. Surprise! Surprise! Naomi realizes that if her plan is going to work, she will need to act quickly. And we will learn exactly what her plan is next time.