

RUTH 2

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz. ²And 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." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³So 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. ⁴Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they answered.

⁵Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?" ⁶The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷She 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."

⁸So 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. ⁹Watch 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." ¹⁰At 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?"

¹¹Boaz 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. ¹²May 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." ¹³"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."

¹⁴At 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. ¹⁵As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. ¹⁶Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her."

¹⁷So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. ¹⁸She 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. ¹⁹Her 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. ²⁰"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." ²¹Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'" ²²Naomi 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." ²³So 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.

Chapter 2: “Love’s Response”

Naomi wasn’t exaggerating her circumstances when she urged her daughters-in-law to leave her. The poverty they face is such that the able-bodied Ruth must follow after the reapers in the fields of wealthy strangers and pick up what is dropped to take home for food - the gleanings.

The Mosaic Law made provisions for the poor in Israel. What is going on here with the ‘gleaning’ is related to that. Here are two examples of the command to Israel. ▼

LEVITICUS 19:9-10 (ALSO 23:24)

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

DEUTERONOMY 24:19

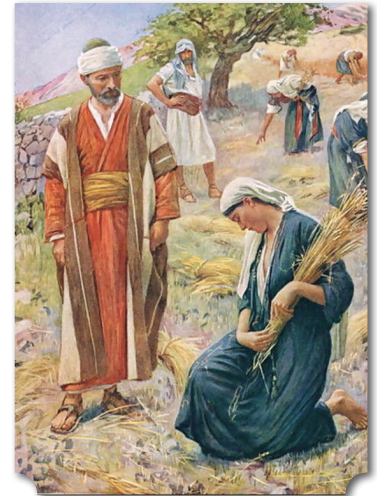
¹⁹When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

These laws secured for the poor the right to glean in the harvest fields, and prohibited the owners from gleaning themselves, but not all land-owners in Israel were pious and godly. Some made gleaning unpleasant or forbid the poor from doing it on their land.

When Boaz arrives on the scene, he greets his harvesters with a blessing that tells us immediately that he is a pious man- he says, “The Lord be with you.” The exchange Boaz then has with his overseer tells us a lot about him. As a wealthy man, he did not prohibit any poor people from gleaning. Then, when the overseer gives his report about Ruth, he relays that she is a foreigner, but a virtuous one. And Boaz is clearly more impressed with her virtue than anything else, that is, her faithfulness to Naomi, her diligence in working, perhaps even her propriety in obtaining permission before gleaning. Boaz’s response indicates that he is familiar with Ruth’s circumstances, even though he has never encountered her.

And then Boaz addresses himself to Ruth. The generosity and concern which he shows for her in this exchange has a great affect on her. She falls upon her face and bows and thanks him and seems mystified - “Why should you be so nice to me? I am a stranger.” And Boaz doesn’t say “Well, I’m just that kind of guy.” Instead, he gives her the credit. He tells her exactly what virtues he has seen in her that have caused him to regard her as worthy of his notice, and he speaks a blessing over her. This is a pious man. We see it in his greeting to his servants. We see it in the way he interacts with this strange young woman. Ruth is grateful. And we see throughout the day that a mutual affection is blossoming. In addition to the unfolding romance, this chapter shows us the exemplary character of both Ruth, who is humble and diligent, and Boaz, who is generous and kind. Having taken note of this virtuous woman, Boaz resolves to do what he can to protect her from harm and to provide for her needs.

When all of this is reported to Naomi, in spite of her grief and despair, she at once perceives that God is involved. Providence has led her daughter-in-law to the field of a good man, a relative, and someone in a position to redeem her. Such examples of providence call to mind the famous “all things” verse in St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans. ►



“RUTH,” HAROLD COPPING, 1927

ROMANS 8:28

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.