

Exegetical Notes – Ruth 2:1-23

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Ruth is a story that took place during the days when Israel was ruled by Judges. Those days were a time of moral and religious decline in Israel. The people of Israel were following the mindset of the people who lived around them and frequently ignored the Lord. They wandered into trouble and God sent people to save them from their wandering away from him. These people were called judges.

Ruth is the story of two women, Naomi, a Jewess, who is bitter because of the circumstances of her life and Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law who is not Jewish. It is the story of how God works in their lives to bring them blessing.

Ruth 2:1-23

Verse 1

1 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

- Elimelek was Naomi's husband. He had died. In Elimelek's family, there was a man whose name was Boaz. Boaz was a man of some standing in the community. He owned land, sat at the gate with the Elders (4:1), and his name appears on both genealogical records of Jesus (Matthew 1:5 & Luke 3:32. The Matthew genealogy confirms that the Boaz mentioned was the same man as is mentioned here.)

Verses 2-3

2 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."

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." 3 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.

- Ruth and Naomi had no means of support. There was no system of social welfare. Women had no professions open to them at that time except prostitution. Women, in their circumstances, gleaned grain at harvest time.

They followed the harvesters and picked up the grain which the harvesters missed (Leviticus 19:9, 23:22, and Deuteronomy 24:19 instruct the Israelites to leave some of the harvest for the poor). In our day, Ruth and Naomi would be on welfare.

- Ruth picks a field, apparently at random, and follows the harvesters picking up left-over droppings of grain. It turned out that the field she picked belonged to Boaz.

Verses 4-7

4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!"

"The Lord bless you!" they answered.

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?"

6 The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 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 at his field, he noticed Ruth and asked to whom she "belonged." He wants to know who Ruth is. His overseer explained that Ruth was a Moabite who lived with Naomi. He explained that she asked to glean and that he gave her permission to do so. He explained that she had worked in the field diligently all day.

Verses 8-9

8 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. 9 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."

- Boaz told Ruth to glean only in his fields. He instructed her to follow his men from field to field and take grain. She was to stay with his women workers and instructed the men who worked for him not to bother Ruth in any way. He even gave her permission to drink from the supply of water he provided for his workers.

- The motivation for Boaz’s kindness to Ruth is not explained. Perhaps his motives were altruistic, perhaps not. Regardless, he has extended exceptional kindness to Ruth and given her a safe place to gather grain.

Verses 10-16

10 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?”

11 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. 12 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.”

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.”

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

- When Ruth asked Boaz why he was treating her so kindly, he explained that it was because he had heard about how she had honored Naomi. He prayed a blessing on her for her kindness to her mother-in-law.
- She thanked him sincerely and he invited her to share the lunch he had provided for his harvesters.
- When Ruth had returned to work, Boaz instructed his workers to let Ruth gather without hindering her, even if they thought she was getting too close to them as they worked. He told them to drop some stalks of grain for Ruth to find. They were not to rebuke her.

Verses 17-19

17 So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. 18 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. 19 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.

- After gleaning all day, Ruth came home and prepared the harvest. She ate and then brought the rest of her produce to Naomi. Seeing the bounty, Naomi knew that Ruth had received special favor from the owner of the field where Ruth had been working. So, she asked Ruth in whose field she had worked. Ruth told her that she had gleaned a field which belonged to a man named Boaz.

Verses 20-23

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."

21 Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.'"

22 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."

23 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.

- Naomi was excited when she heard that Ruth had been working in Boaz's field because Boaz was a "guardian-redeemer" over she and Ruth (Deuteronomy 25:5-7 explains the law of Levirate Marriage. If a woman was widowed, her husband's nearest relative was expected to sleep with her and provide an heir for the widow's husband. In this way she would receive her husband's inheritance and be provided for). Apparently, Boaz was Elimelek's closest relative, except for one (see 3:13). Should he choose, Boaz could act as Elimelek's closest relative and so provide for Ruth and Naomi.

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