

**Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church**
10 Downing Street, Oakleigh, Vic. 3166

DHW

BIBLE STUDY CLASS

LESSON 2

RUTH 2

INTRODUCTION

At the end of chapter one, Naomi said, *I went out full, and the LORD (Yahweh) hath brought me home again empty.* By the end of this chapter, Naomi would reverse her testimony by praising the LORD. In the worst of times as in the time of the Judges, God works for the good of His people. Naomi echoed what the psalmist declares in the opening words of his song (46:1): *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.* The concept of refuge embodies protection, safety, provision, help, hope, renewal and revival.

God works in mysterious and marvellous way by providing and supporting His people. This is evident from this second chapter of Ruth and to the end of the book. There is also a “split screen” image in the narrative of Ruth—one that shows the work of human and the other the providence of God. The main characters themselves in Ruth might not realize the silent work of God as they lived from day to day making their decisions, but the divine writer would know and would skilfully and accurately write the book. On the other hand, we who are on this end of history know better because we

see through the lens of the New Testament. We may be tempted to think of the narrative in Ruth as a love affair at first sight between Boaz and Ruth, a significant underlying insight of the account foreshadowing the grace and sovereignty of God to save a hopeless and helpless world in Christ Jesus. This intent of the divine writer must be kept in mind as we read the book. Clearly absent in the account were the direct revelations, appearances of angels, miracles, judges, prophets or priests, who were involved in the events, like in the book of Judges. But to many of us who see through the eye of faith, we see the marvellous working of God’s providence in the lives of His people. And the important thing is that Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz were each able to make their own choices without having the slightest sense that they have been programmed. The sovereign work of God in fulfilling His plan and purpose does not deny the responsibility of man in making his own choices.

Ruth 2 contains five inter-related dialogues. The first is the dialogue between Ruth and Naomi (vv. 2-3); then Boaz and the reapers (vv. 4-7); and the third, Boaz and Ruth (vv. 8-15a), next Boaz and the reapers again (vv. 15b-16), and last, Ruth and Naomi (vv. 19-22). There is a pattern—A, B, C, B, A. In literary style it is called *chiasm*. It is a method of emphasizing the central unit which is “C”, the dialogue between Boaz and Ruth (vv. 8-15a); and at the height of that conversation, Boaz said (v.12): *The LORD recompense thy work, and a full*

reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

STUDY THE WORD

Ruth Gleans in Boaz's Field

The chapter opens with an editorial comment by the divine writer introducing Boaz. Boaz (means: *in him is strength*) was a kinsman or a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's deceased husband. He is described as "a mighty man of wealth." Although the phrase "mighty man" is often referred to as a great warrior or soldier, it is used here in the sense that Boaz was a noble man whose social standing was respected by others. It might include the idea that he was also an able warrior. Boaz was rich, influential, powerful and a man of great means.

We now look at the first conversation between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth asked Naomi for permission to glean the harvest fields so that they could both have food to eat. She hoped that the reapers or the landowners of the field would be gracious to her. She realized that her status was vulnerable because she was a poor young woman and a stranger, worst still a Moabite. The fact that she initiated to glean the fields could possibly indicate that Naomi could have already explained to her about the Law of Moses stipulating the rights of widows and orphans.¹ Naomi readily

gave her the go-ahead. Naomi should have gone with her. She could act as a deterrent against any attack on Ruth, but she did not go because she was too old or weak to do this back-breaking work.

Ruth went off to glean in a field. The text says that she *hap* (or happened) to glean in the field which belonged to Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech. The divine writer repeated the fact for emphasis. The phrase *her hap to light on* in the original Hebrew language does not convey the idea of "mere chance or luck." Literally translated it should read: *her chance chanced upon* or *this happenstance that happened to her was*.² The original text made it clear that Ruth happened to glean in Boaz's field was providentially directed by God. As far as Ruth was concerned, she went from the city to an outlying barley field in Bethlehem. It was not that she knew it belonged to Boaz, whom she had not met or known. Ruth's choice to glean in this field had been providentially determined by God! God was already working out His purposes. Now we see that Boaz was a figure of hope of better times for Naomi and Ruth.

sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. 20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

¹ Deuteronomy 24:19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a

² The NIV translation is too subdue: "as it turned out."

Boaz Notices the Presence of Ruth

And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem to his field (v.4) The timing was perfect, not a day earlier or a day later, but on the very day that Ruth came to glean in Boaz's field. It was the LORD'S doing yet they each made their own deliberate choice. Boaz greeted his reapers with the words, *The LORD be with you*. A simple *shalom* (peace) would do. This shows that Boaz was a godly man. For him even the workplace was not secular but sacred. There was no line drawn between what is "sacred" and what is "secular" work in his life. As far as he was concerned everything in his life was sacred. How many CEOs in today's multinational corporations greet their staff with these words when they come to work? The reapers answered Boaz with *The LORD bless thee*. This shows there was a good relationship between Boaz and his workers.

Ruth's gleaning at the last line among the reapers caught Boaz's attention even though the attire the women wore in those days did not show their physical attractiveness. Boaz could recognize all his workers, men and women. Ruth caught his eyes. She was young for Boaz referred to her as a *damsel*, and he noticed her because she was a foreigner. Boaz asked for her family ties, *Whose damsel is this* (v.5). The foreman answered that Ruth was a Moabite who came back with Naomi. In other words, the foreman knew Naomi who

formerly lived in Bethlehem, later went to Moab, and now she had returned from there. Ruth had asked him for permission to gather the fallen stalks of barley. The foreman also added that she had been working from the moment she came until now and only rested in the shed for a while. These remarks by the foreman showed that Ruth was a modest, diligent and hardworking woman (v.7).

BOAZ MEETS RUTH

Boaz approached Ruth and talked to her. Boaz addressed her warm-heartedly calling her, *my daughter*, and reassured her that she should not go to other landowner's field to glean. He instructed her to stay close to the women workers. He also charged the young men that they should not "touch" her. And if she was thirsty she could help herself to the water in the vessels, which was drawn by the young men (v.9). The word "touch" is generally translated in the sense of one coming into close physical contact with something or someone. In the case here, it is a stronger verb form and it denotes the act of "touching" that could refer to the intent of hurting or having intimate sexual contact.³ In those days, it was dangerous for a woman like Ruth who was young, and a widow, and a Moabite. She was therefore vulnerable to insults and abuses, and especially in those days when "every man did that which was right in his

³ Stephen D. Renn, editor, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, p. 978.

own eyes.” It was not safe for her. Boaz recognized that and accordingly instructed his male workers. His kindness went beyond the requirement of the law. They were tokens of his grace and favour. He became Ruth’s provider and protector.

Ruth immediate response was that she *fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground* (v.10). It was a gesture of submission and gratefulness. She exclaimed (paraphrased), *why have I found grace and favour in your eyes, that you should notice me, when I am a foreigner.* Ruth was overwhelmed by the exceptional kindness of Boaz for she was prepared to be rejected by the Bethlehemites. But Boaz answered that he had been made fully aware of all that she had done for her mother-in-law since the death of Naomi’s husband, and how she had left her own father and her mother, and the land of her birth, and had come to a people she had not known before (v. 11). Boaz must have heard a good deal of her since the return of Naomi. Boaz was impressed. The things which he heard about Ruth were unusually good. She was a foreigner and yet she was willing to follow her mother-in-law. She was still young and marriageable. Ruth had behaved herself beyond reproach.

Boaz continued with a benediction upon her—*the LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust* (v.12). He prayed that the LORD might reward her fully. He

meant that he had done as much as he could, and whatever more that he was unable to do, God would fully compensate her *under whose wings* she had come to trust. The image of *wings* pictures a bird tenderly protecting its young under its wings. Ruth was secure and safe under the LORD’S powerful wings. Ruth humbly replied that she hoped to find continued favour from Boaz. Addressing him as *my lord* (master), she expressed that she felt relieved and comforted for he had spoken to her heart as *his servant* even though she was aware that she was *not* one of his actual servants (v.13). In praying the benediction upon Ruth, Boaz did not know that he would be the one whom the LORD would use to fulfil the full extent of that blessing.

Boaz Favours Ruth

The dialogue between Boaz and Ruth continues. Boaz pleasantly surprised Ruth. He invited her over to dine with him at meal time. He must have observed that Ruth did not have her “lunch pack.” Apparently Boaz took his meals with his workers. So Ruth took her place beside the reapers. In those days they sat down on carpets to take their meals, unlike us today when we sit at tables. The barley bread was a thin piece and usually eaten parched (roasted). They would take the bread dipped into vinegar (wine vinegar) just as today we dip the toasted garlic bread into olive oil. Now Boaz made another surprised move. He reached out to Ruth and gave his roasted bread. He gave her a generous portion which was not only

enough for her consumption but she had leftovers which she could “doggy-bag” for Naomi. This was another gesture of kindness in which Boaz had gone beyond the expectation of a gleaner’s right. That is not the end yet. After mealtime it was back to work. When Ruth got up to resume gleaning, Boaz *commanded* his young men to let Ruth to gather the fallen barley around the already bundled sheaves. And they were forbidden to rebuke her. On top of that Boaz also told the young men to deliberately drop and leave some handfuls of barley so that Ruth could glean them. This was usually and unexpectedly way above the letter of the law. This is grace! Boaz was extremely generous and gracious, kind and compassionate, reflecting the grace and mercy of God. As someone has remarked: “We never owed grace but we are awed by grace”!

Ruth Returns Home After A Day’s Work

After a day’s gleaning, Ruth beat out the grains. It was about an ephah of barley which weighed about 14 kilograms (30 lbs). Naomi and Ruth did not have to worry about food any more, at least for the next two weeks. Ruth collected the barley grains and went back home in the city. When she reached home, Naomi surprised at the amount that Ruth had gleaned. Then Ruth took out the leftovers which she had wrapped earlier at lunch time for Naomi, who ate them. Ruth again displayed an affectionate care for Naomi. Naomi was so excited that she charged Ruth

with two questions in quick succession: “where have you gleaned today, where did you work”; and before Ruth could answer, Naomi quickly invoked a blessing upon Ruth’s benefactor (Ruth had no chance to reveal yet), who had taken notice of her. Ruth then shared with Naomi who the person was; his name was Boaz (v. 19).

On hearing the name “Boaz” Naomi praised the LORD for He had not ceased from showering His faithfulness and kindness (Hebrew, *hesed*) upon the living and the dead. Naomi told Ruth that Boaz was their relative, one of the next nearest of kin (v.20). There is a similar incident that happened to Abraham’s servant when he was instructed to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). Abraham emphatically told his servant that he must get a wife for Isaac from among his own relatives and country. Abraham’s servant set off and prayed that the LORD would lead and guide him.. At a well where he hoped to meet young maidens, he met Rebecca, who came to the well shortly after his prayer. And he discovered that she was the daughter of Abraham’s nephew. He bowed down and thanked the LORD, and testified, *I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren* (Genesis 24:27b). This seems to imply that when Naomi made the statement to Ruth, it suggests that the former might be thinking of Boaz as a potential kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew, *go’el*), and a husband for the

latter. Naomi's unspoken prayer for Ruth was about to be answered.

Naomi identifying Boaz as their kinsman, probably spurred Ruth to share more of what Boaz had said to her. Boaz had told her to stay close to his young men until they have harvested his crops. On hearing this, Naomi encouraged Ruth to go out with Boaz's *maidens* and not to go to any other field to glean. Naomi steered Ruth away from the male workers but to stick to Boaz's female workers. This counsel by Naomi intimates that she was preventing any blossoming of love and attachment that might arise if she stayed close to the male workers. She wanted the relationship which now began between Ruth and Boaz to run its course. As in chapter 1, the divine writer comments in the last verse that Ruth obeyed Naomi and did whatever she had instructed her. Ruth stayed close to the maidens and gleaned until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. Ruth continued to be with his mother-in-law.

PRACTICAL VALUE

We cannot but be speechlessly amazed at the generosity and kindness of Boaz towards Ruth. Boaz acted rightly when he approved his foreman in permitting Ruth to glean in his field as stipulated by the Law of Moses. He went a step further to tell her not to glean in another landowner's field, and that she could glean until the harvest season was over. In addition he guaranteed her personal safety and protection from any harassment and harm of any form from his own male workers. So, right from his first

encounter with Ruth, Boaz showed extraordinary kindness, and those privileges were further enhanced by inviting Ruth to lunch with him and his workers, and awarding her special freedom to gather among the bundled sheaves. That is not all, for we must mention that having bestowed all these "goodies" to Ruth, he invoked the name of the LORD to bless and fully reward her because she had come to trust the LORD. Boaz sets a clear example for all of us to treat those who are in need and rejected—especially to the household of God first, and then to others. Irrespective of our financial and material resources, and talent which may vary from one to another, we still can help in one way or another if we have the same feelings and willingness shown by Boaz. Boaz reflects the character of God, and we should do the same.

Another wonderful truth that we learn is the working out of the sovereign will of God in the daily lives of His children. Although Ruth made a deliberate and decisive choice to glean in a landowner's field which she did not know initially that it was Boaz's, and the fact that Boaz came to visit his field on that particular day and time, and caught the presence of Ruth and a relationship developed that showed Boaz's kindness which surprised not only the people in their lives, but also us. The truth is that God providentially orchestrated all that happened. The wonder of it all is that Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and the foreman, each thought, spoke and did according

to his /her individual choice and yet God was all the time in control! Scripture is replete with such examples. This precious truth once learned and internalized, shall be a great comfort and encouragement to us all in our daily life. What things we can do that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, virtuous and of good report and praise, let us do, and let the LORD God Almighty do the rest.

Another wonderful truth we learn is that the LORD our God is faithful and true to His covenant-promises (Psalm 100:3). Naomi, in spite of her deprivation and suffering did not deny the LORD God Almighty. In her affliction and bitterness she firmly acknowledged God's sovereignty and power to deal with man, even His children, as He pleases. We learn in His dealing with Naomi that when we are experiencing dire and difficult situations, and are tempted to rebel and deny God, we should instead remove ourselves from such temptation and faithfully and firmly acknowledge the LORD God Almighty before all men. He will in His time bless and reward us. AMEN