

RUTH 2:1-7

Introducing the Kinsman Redeemer

Ruth: A Drama in Four Parts

- Chapter one: The great drama begins, develops, and finds its apex. The chapter ends with a description of the women's condition as truly desperate. Naomi has returned empty-handed, she is bitter, she has no rights to her property, the women in town are gossiping about her, the men are keeping their distance, and the only who seems to care is a foreigner daughter-in-law. Do not call me "Sweet," but call me "Bitter" for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter. There is great tension at the end of this chapter and a glimmer of hope in the horizon: What will the women do? Will a kinsman redeemer rescue them? Will the younger foreigner find a place to glean? Will the women resort to begging? The one glimmer of hope is that they arrive at the beginning of the barley season, which will lead to the wheat season, which means six to seven uninterrupted weeks of plenty.
- Chapter two: The drama intensifies, and hope begins to unfold. Ruth meets a generous "man of substance" who allows her to glean undisturbed and shows her some kindness. He takes the time to get to know her and shows her some preferential treatment. The reader knows that this hope is temporary (during the time of the harvests,) and the questions remain, "Will Ruth and Naomi find someone to redeem their lands?"
- Chapter Three: The drama intensifies even further. An audacious plan is hatched to tip the balance of redemption on Ruth and Naomi's favor. This was quite a gamble that could lead to further dishonor, dispossession, and even danger. The drama reaches a boiling point when Ruth learns that she and Naomi may have miscalculated. Even though Boaz is a kinsman redeemer, he does not have first right of refusal. The reader is left with some important questions: Who will win the contest of redeemers? Who will choose to care for the land and the women? There are great glimmers of hope because at least we have a promise from the righteous "man of substance" that he will do all in his power to redeem.
- Chapter Four: The drama intensifies to its climax (4:4b) but then we see the resolution of the conflict at 4:9. Finally, we see the celebratory conclusion to the whole saga 4:13-17. The final genealogy lets the reader know the natural consequences of the Redeemer's kindness: He and Ruth became the ancestors of King David... and King Jesus!

Where are we now?

Chapter one: The great drama begins, develops, and finds its apex. The chapter ends with a description of the women's condition as truly desperate. Naomi has returned empty-handed, she is bitter, she has no rights to her property, the women in town are gossiping about her, the men are keeping their distance, and the only one who seems to care is a foreigner daughter-in-law. "Do not call me 'Sweet,' but call me 'Bitter' for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter." There is great tension at the end of this chapter and a glimmer of hope in the horizon: What will the women do? Will a kinsman redeemer rescue them? Will the younger foreigner find a place to glean? Will the women resort to begging? The one glimmer of hope is that they arrive at the beginning of the barley season, which will lead to the wheat season. This means six to seven uninterrupted weeks of plenty.

Opening Prayer



Chapter Two, At a Glance

Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, whose name was Boaz

He is a man of means

Ruth the Moabite decides to glean behind the reapers, with Naomi's permission

As luck would have it, (as it happened) it was the land of Boaz

"Whose girl is that?"

"She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab"

"She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning"

"Stay here close to my girls..."

"Why me... a foreigner?"

"I have been told of all that you did..."

Orders to the reapers

It is best that you go out with his girls

She stayed and gleaned until barley and wheat harvests were finished

Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law



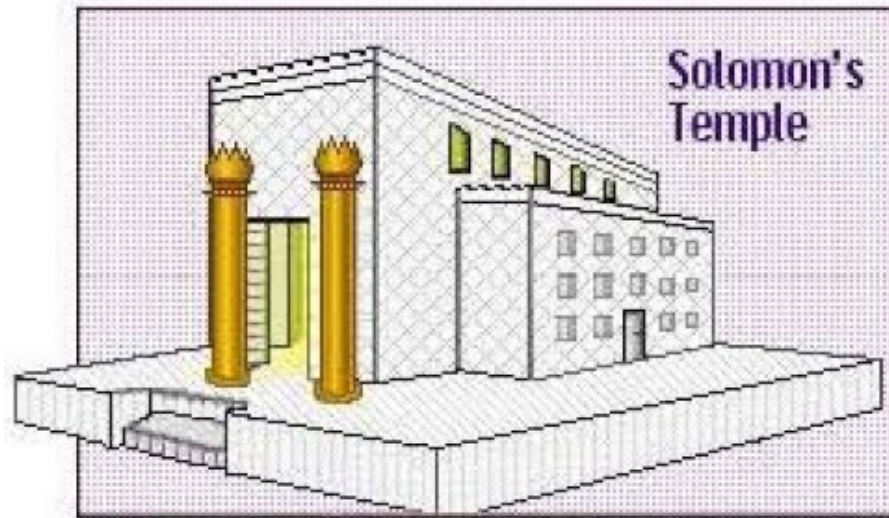
2:1 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. (NRSV)

Boaz is introduced with a reference to the clan/family of Elimelech. But the specific relation between the two is left vague.

Meyudda, which usually means "acquaintance," "close friend," or "Companion." Masoretic text uses "Moda" which seems to mean "kinsman," or "relative." Both words have the common root meaning "to know."

The two men are related in some way, and the vagueness very much represents the author's deliberate intentions.

"the narrator does not want to raise our hopes prematurely concerning the degree of closeness of Boaz and Elimelech... It is not at all clear if Boaz's relationship to Elimelech is going to be of help to Naomi." (NIB, 914.)



Solomon's Temple with two bronze pillars by its portico.

1 Kings 7:15-22

He will establish

In strength

“... a prominent rich man.”

- The word (either Meyudda or Moda) is neutral with regard to Boaz's family obligations. This introduction does not imply any moral or legal obligations to Naomi. This language will change in 2:20 when we hear Naomi say, “The man is one of ours, one of our nearest kin.”
- Gibbor chayil: Strength, power. The phrase has different connotations depending on the context. It could mean, “Warriors or Soldiers” (Josh 1:14; 6:2; 8:3; and Judges 11:1.) It could mean, “A man of wealth” or “A man of standing.” (1 Samuel 9:1.) “A brave man or a man of valor.” (1 Samuel 16:18.) “A valiant soldier” (1 Kings 11:28.) “A mighty warrior” (2 Kings 5:1.) “A man with great ability to produce offspring [virile] (Job 21:7 or Joel 2:22.)
- In Ruth the expression most likely means “A Man of Substance” or “A property holder.” (Tanakh.) A very creative phrase that captures the full meaning will be “A Pillar of Society.”
- A man of social and economic standing. A worthy man. The same word *hayil* will be used for Ruth later, implying that both are a “Worthy Couple.”


2:2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor.' She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.'

"The Moabite": Why this superfluous name? We already know who she is. Why the emphasis?

The author wants us to keep Ruth's ethnic identity in mind. Remember this foreigner has chosen to "come under the wings of the God of Israel for refuge." The fact that she is an enemy combatant makes this decision the most remarkable and radical.

Glean behind someone in whose sight I may find favor: A quick review of Leviticus 19:9-10 and 23:22. There are also specific instructions in Deuteronomy 24:19.

The Alien, the Orphan, and the widow.

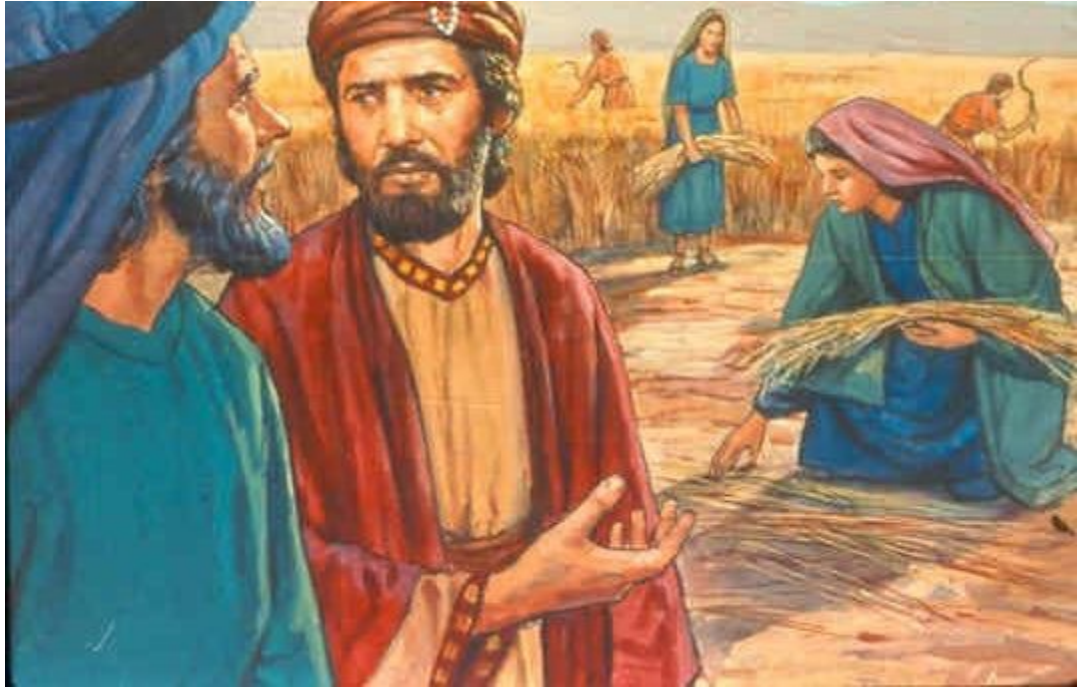


2:3 So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. (NRSV)

“As it happened” can also be translated in several ways: “as luck would have it,” or “by chance she happened onto,” or “it came to happen.”

The same expression in Genesis 24:12-15 and 27:20 ascribes the “sudden” or “by chance” or “happenstance” to God, but in this passage the narrator is careful to avoid any specific reference to God’s agency. (NIB Commentary.)

The reader, however, will ascribe God the directing, pointing to, guiding of a faithful servant to the place of blessing. In Jewish tradition, it is believed that good luck often befalls the righteous, independent of God’s actions on their behalf. This is a bit of “Karma” or Mitzvah repaid.



Greeting formulas are
Common in Jewish Scripture and liturgy.

Christianity is famous for our own formulas:

A: The Lord be with you
B: And also with you

A: The Peace of the Lord be with you
B: And with your spirit

"Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The Lord be with you.' They answered, 'The Lord bless you.'"

- "The first interchange between Boaz and his workers may reflect a standardized greeting formula. We have heard Boaz described in the third person as the "pillar" of the community. Now we are allowed to hear for ourselves the way a "Pillar" speaks." (NIB)
- In Hebrew Scripture, the lips reveal the content of the heart. Boaz is a righteous Jew who praises the Lord with his speech and his actions.

2:5-7 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.'

To whom does she belong? Although the same word can be used for "Servant" and "young woman" the context here most likely is "Young Woman." The full question could mean two things:

1. To whom does this servant woman belong?
2. To which clan or family does this young woman belong?

The servant in charge answers in two ways:

1. She is "the Moabite woman"
2. She is the one who "came back with Naomi from the country of Moab"

Ruth asked both "to glean" and "to gather" among the sheaves behind the reapers. This was a difficult task filled with danger. She could be "molested" by others who are gleaning.

"She has been on her feet..." We don't know what this expression means in Hebrew. There are two options:

1. She has been working in the field since morning
2. She has been standing there waiting for Boaz to arrive

The addition of "to gather" may imply that Ruth (perhaps out of ignorance) may have departed from tradition in terms of gleaning. NIV translates "remained in the field" while NRSV "on her feet".

In Memoriam

