

A close-up photograph of several golden wheat stalks with long, feathery awns. The stalks are arranged in a cluster, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. A semi-transparent, dark rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

**RUTH**  
**2:17-22**

'EPHAH

# THE STORY SO FAR

From Bethlehem to Moab (Famine to Respite)  
And from Moab to Bethlehem (From death to hope)... “The arrived at the beginning o the barley harvest.”

The introduction of Go’el: Boaz and God “take generous notice of Ruth and Naomi”

Chapter 1

Chapter 2 So far

Chapter 2, The rest

Barley, working in the fields, the introduction, and the blessing of Chesed from an unexpected source.

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## OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Today, as we remember all those who have died because of violence and hatred, we place our trust and our hope in your infinite love and mercy. Be with us today as we listen to your living word through the testimony of Ruth. Help us to acknowledge your Son as our Kinsman Redeemer, our Savior, and our friend. Fill our hearts with love of you and love of neighbor and make us instruments of your peace.

Dear Jesus, our world groans under the weight of pain and suffering. Bring those who are lost into the fold of those who have been found. Give your infinite grace to those who feel isolated from you and abandoned by the Church. Make the followers of your Son so filled by your Holy Spirit that none of us will ever rest until everyone comes “under the reach of your saving embrace.”

Bless those who mourn and soothe the afflicted. In Your Son’s Holy Name we pray, Amen!

## 17 SO SHE GLEANED IN THE FIELD UNTIL EVENING. THEN SHE BEAT OUT WHAT SHE HAD GLEANED, AND IT WAS ABOUT AN EPHAH OF BARLEY.

- She gleaned until evening (Sunup to Sundown)
- This was about an Ephah of barley: “Approximately 29 to 50 pounds” (The Access Bible)
- Why the variance? Well, it all has to do with the unit of measure you use. Here is an expert’s opinion: “Ephah is a Hebrew/biblical measure of volume. It is about 6.1 US gallons and is 10 times the size of an “omer.” Omer is a measure of mass related to the “ephah,” of about 3.5–3.9 pounds. So, you can take this one of 2 ways : Convert the volume measurement to pounds, using water as your reference mass -  $6.1 \times 8\text{lb/gallon}$  for water = 48.8 pounds. Or use the “omer” reference and multiply by 10. So, let’s split the difference and use an “omer” = 3.7lbs. So, an “ephah” would be 37 pounds. Since they differ by over 25%, let’s use the second one as our definition. So, an “ephah” of barley would be around 37–40 pounds of barley.” (Kevin Cummings, B.S. in Physics and Astronomy & Computer Science, University of Iowa.)
- A Second opinion, “There is a fundamental difference of opinion between the *Chazon Ish* and *Rabbi Avraham Chaim Naeh* as to all of the Biblical and Talmudic units of measure. All of the larger units (handbreadths, cubits, Ephah, etc.) are based on finger-widths. The *Chazon Ish* took a finger width to be 1 cm, while *Rabbi Avraham Chaim Naeh* took it to be 8 mm. This influences all of the larger measurements as well. (Yehuda Posnick, Jerusalem.)
- Suffice it to say, “It was a lot of barley!”

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**18 SHE PICKED IT UP AND CAME INTO THE TOWN, AND HER MOTHER-IN-LAW SAW HOW MUCH SHE HAD GLEANED. THEN SHE TOOK OUT AND GAVE HER WHAT WAS LEFT OVER AFTER SHE HERSELF HAD BEEN SATISFIED.**

- Ruth brings Naomi her leftovers. “In Jewish life and law, leftovers are positive instruments of morality, hospitality and societal good. The Torah’s viewpoint always reaches a higher plain of understanding and purpose than do mere human definitions and ideas. The *Halacha* provides that one can cook extra food on the day of the holiday itself... The rationale for allowing such cooking is that perhaps unexpected guests will arrive, and the original extra food will now be necessary in order to feed these guests. Implicit in this idea is the concept of hospitality and the intimacy that Jews feel about casually visiting one another, even unannounced, to share the joys of the holiday. Naturally, this means that there will always be leftovers from holiday meals... The Torah also provides for positive leftovers when the Jewish farmer harvests produce from the fields (gleaning)... There is an even greater lesson in the Jewish idea of ‘leftovers.’ We pray daily for the welfare of the scholars and leaders of the previous generation... This is another example of the positive and holy ‘leftovers,’ a concept which the Torah treasures and reinforces. There is an emphasis on knowing the history of one’s family, of the Jewish world generally and of all recorded human civilization as well.” (Rabbi Berel Wein.)
- Leftovers are a sign of abundance and overwhelming blessing. God’s Chesed always has leftovers (feeding of the 5,000, water into wine, etc.) The idea that Ruth had leftovers (after she had been satisfied) means that the original portion was very generous, pointing directly to God, whose hand is seen behind the interaction between Boaz and Ruth. This is God’s Chesed, always more than enough! This is a sign of extravagant abundance.

**19 HER MOTHER-IN-LAW SAID TO HER, 'WHERE DID YOU GLEAN TODAY? AND WHERE HAVE YOU WORKED? BLESSED BE THE MAN WHO TOOK NOTICE OF YOU.' SO SHE TOLD HER MOTHER-IN-LAW WITH WHOM SHE HAD WORKED, AND SAID, 'THE NAME OF THE MAN WITH WHOM I WORKED TODAY IS BOAZ.'**

- Naomi knows something Ruth does not know. Boaz is a Kinsman Redeemer, he is a go'el. I can almost see the wheels turning in Naomi's mind.
- The expression the "the man who did this is..." is seen in other parts of Scripture. It is as if the author wants us to say in our minds, "The man is (drumroll, please)... Boaz!" Compare this phrase to the following: "And Esther said, 'A foe and enemy! (drumroll, please) This wicked Haman!'" (Esther 7:6.) or "Then Nathan said to David, (drumroll, please) 'You are the man!'" (2 Samuel 12:7.) This formula builds a bit of suspense, and the reader can see God's hand actively working through the speaker and for or against the subject.
- The blessed blesses the blesser: "Blessed be the man who took notice of you." This blessing is an act of gratitude for an unknown subject. Once the subject is known, a more proper blessing will be issued. *To take notice* is another motif seen in various parts of Scripture: "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap" (1 Samuel 2:8.) "for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48.)

# PALATE CLEANSER



**20 THEN NAOMI SAID TO HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, 'BLESSED BE HE BY THE LORD, WHOSE KINDNESS HAS NOT FORSAKEN THE LIVING OR THE DEAD!' NAOMI ALSO SAID TO HER, 'THE MAN IS A RELATIVE OF OURS, ONE OF OUR NEAREST KIN.'**

- This second blessing “By the Lord” indicates that Naomi sees possibilities the reader does not. We also see how Naomi’s attitude towards Ruth seems to be changing. Naomi now includes Ruth in the kinship circle when she says that Boaz is “one of our nearest kin.” (NIB Commentary.)
- “Kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” What Naomi means is that Boaz has not forgotten the history that he shares with Abimelech's family, of which Naomi is a part. “The term “dead” refers to her husband and sons, and the word “living” refers to Naomi herself and Ruth... This is a clear indication of God’s providence in guiding Ruth to the field of Boaz. It was God’s hand that allowed her to go to the right field at the right time.” (Bible Exposition Commentary.)
- Whereas in 1:12-13 Naomi seems to have given up on the idea of a traditional levirate marriage, now, Naomi seems to think that “the living and the dead” will be able to benefit in some way from the relationship that is beginning to develop between Boaz and Ruth. This particular go’el (Kinsman Redeemer, close relative) might be the blessing she has been praying for, if he chooses to. Because he is not an immediate brother of Mahlon or Abimelech, the choice remains with him. This adds a bit of suspense because Naomi knows something Ruth and the readers don’t know at this point: there is someone else, a closer go’el who might step in.



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**21 THEN RUTH THE MOABITE SAID, ‘HE EVEN SAID TO ME, “STAY CLOSE BY MY SERVANTS, UNTIL THEY HAVE FINISHED ALL MY HARVEST.”**

- Now, here is an interesting twist. Ruth purportedly misquotes Boaz. He said, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.” (V. 8,) but Ruth tells Naomi, “Stay close by my servants” (servants in the masculine.) Read other version of verse 21. Why?
- Perhaps Ruth misunderstood Boaz, or perhaps Ruth is testing Naomi, perhaps this small lie is an attempt to explain the high yield of her gleaning. “He allowed me to do a man’s work.” In either case, her report is good news for Naomi because it means sustained provision for at least two months.
- “Until they have finished ALL my harvest. What this means is that after barley comes wheat, which means the woman will be gainfully employed (for herself as a gleaner) for anywhere between 6 to 8 weeks, or between Passover and Pentecost, the two festivals that mark the end of each of these two harvests.
- The narrator continues to highlight that Ruth is from Moab, at this point this reference to “Ruth the Moabite” is purposeful and meant to highlight the generosity of Boaz. Remember that both Ruth and Boaz stand as symbols for personal and divine Chesed (or hesed.)

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**22NAOMI SAID TO RUTH, HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, ‘IT IS BETTER, MY DAUGHTER, THAT YOU GO OUT WITH HIS YOUNG WOMEN, OTHERWISE YOU MIGHT BE BOTHERED IN ANOTHER FIELD.’**

- Naomi is worried by Ruth’s report. She could be assaulted, importuned, bothered, especially if the reapers accidentally cross into another person’s harvest. It is best to stay with the women (meaning, behind the men.)
- This sounds like good, motherly advice, but it is also possible that this request is prompted by self-interest. Contact with young men might result in friendships, relationships, love, etc. A union with another worker, perhaps a day laborer, would further worsen the women’s social condition, or would only improve it slightly. There is another danger that she may be assaulted sexually, and the law would demand the aggressor to marry her (and she would have little choice in the matter.) For Naomi to redeem her land, Ruth must remain single and under her care. Only then could a go’el be expected to redeem the land for Naomi and marry Ruth. If she is already attached, the Levitical mandates would not apply to her, and she would not be able to give birth to a child “for Naomi” or to “advance Abimelech and Naomi’s line.”
- The use of “My daughter” here is a term of affection but used for a purpose. If Ruth is willing to accept the place of a daughter (and she has several times before) obedience would be expected and Naomi’s interests have a better chance to be protected. This term of affection is sweet, but it betrays Naomi’s true intentions.

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**23SO SHE STAYED CLOSE TO THE YOUNG WOMEN OF BOAZ, GLEANING UNTIL THE END OF THE BARLEY AND WHEAT HARVESTS; AND SHE LIVED WITH HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.**

- As in the previous chapter, the final verse both summarizes the essential point made in the chapter and sets the stage for the action in the following chapter, verse 23 tells that about seven weeks have passed since Ruth and Naomi had arrived in Bethlehem (usual period between both harvests)
- Ruth and Naomi are still widows and still living on the leftovers (gleanings) of the harvests.
- Naomi's expectations that "the living and the dead" would benefit from Boaz's attraction to Ruth have not been met.
- We are left at the end of the chapter at the same basic place as in chapter one. "We are persuaded that their situation is dire enough to justify the drastic measures that will be taken in the following chapter." (NIB Commentary.)
- We are also left scratching our heads about Boaz. It is obvious that he likes the girl, but seven weeks have gone by, and the attraction has not developed into a relationship. He holds all the cards. He has all the power. Why hasn't he acted? Could it be that the relationship with a foreigner would threaten his position as a pillar of the community? Could it be that he needs a little push?

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## CLOSING PRAYER

