***Ruth***

Chapter 2

*Ruth Meets Boaz*

**Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabitess 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 and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. 4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The Lord be with you!” “The Lord bless you!” they called back. 5 Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, “Whose young woman is that?” 6 The foreman replied, “She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” 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 my servant girls. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.” 10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “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 given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.” 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, “Even if she gathers among the sheaves, don’t embarrass her. 16 Rather, pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.” 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. 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 kinsman-redeemers.” 21 Then Ruth the Moabitess 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 his girls, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.” 23 So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.**

**2:1-23** Chapter 2 contains the second act of the drama of Ruth. It can be divided into two scenes, 2:1–17 and 2:18–23. These scenes are knit together by the narrator through common motifs: Boaz the relative (2:1, 20), Ruth the foreign Moabitess (2:2, 6, 10, 21), gleaning (2:2, 3, 7, 8, 15–19, 23), food (2:2, 7, 14–18, 23), finding favor (2:2, 10, 13; see also 2:19), and the young reapers or workers (2:5–9, 14, 15, 21–23). (CC)

The first section (2:1–3) of the first scene (2:1–17) includes a chiastic framework with the introduction of Boaz: “… an honorable gentleman from the clan of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz” (2:1), “… Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech” (2:3). This chiastic emphasis on Boaz signals to the audience that he is the key to resolving the dilemma of Naomi and Ruth, and the one who will save Elimelech’s family from extinction, as chapters 3 and 4 will reveal. Indeed, the whole chapter may be outlined chiastically:

A Looking to find favor (2:1–3)

 B Invocation of the Lord’s blessing (2:4)

 C Ruth’s request for provision (2:5–7)

 D Why did Ruth find favor? (2:8–10)

 D′ Favor through faithfulness (2:11–13)

 C′ Boaz’s offering of provision (2:14–16)

 B′ Realization of blessing (2:17)

A′ Looking back on favor found (2:18–23) (CC)

Chapters 2 and 3 have five strikingly similar elements: (1) an exchange between Naomi and Ruth (2:2 and 3:1–5); (2) Ruth goes to a place where she would meet Boaz (2:3 and 3:6–7); (3) Boaz inquires about Ruth’s identity (2:5–7 and 3:8–9); (4) Boaz asks Ruth to stay, shows her favor, and grants her food and protection (2:8–17 and 3:10–15); and (5) Ruth reports the encounter to Naomi, who offers her counsel (2:18–23 and 3:16–18). (CC)

**2:1** *relative.* A sign of hope (see note on v. 20). (CSB)

**“An Honorable Gentleman” (2:1)**

The narrator marks the beginning of this scene by introducing the third of the three main characters of the story: Boaz, a close relative of Naomi’s deceased husband, Elimelech. This connection strongly implies that he and Naomi knew each other well, at least each other’s circumstances and character. The description that Boaz was “an honorable gentleman” (אִ֚ישׁ גִּבּ֣וֹר חַ֔יִל, *ish gibborḥayil*), is variously rendered. The shorter expression גִּבּוֹר חַיִל (*gibborḥayil*) can refer, first, to a property owner who could arm and provide for himself militarily (Josh 1:14; 6:2–3; 8:3; 10:7; Judg 11:1); second, to a warrior (2 Ki 5:1); third, to a man of material wealth (2 Ki 15:20); or, fourth, to a man of honor and social esteem (Judg 6:12; 1 Sam 9:1; possibly gained through diligence, 1 Ki 11:28). (CC)

The aspect of wealth might be implied in that Boaz was able to employ workers in his field (Ruth 2:8–9). However, these may have been few, and there is no indication in the story about the extent of his means, which could have been only modest. The military aspects do not seem to have any bearing in the book of Ruth. It is the fourth possibility that is particularly emphasized for Boaz: as a man of honor, he took pains to avoid disrespect for himself and others (2:4–5, 8–16, 21; 3:10–17), and he commanded the respect to convene and lead a legal convocation (4:1–10). The translation “an honorable gentleman” (2:1) thus conveys the emphasis in the story. By God’s gracious design, Boaz will carry out an important role in salvation history, as also will Ruth who, because of her faith in the Lord and decorum, will be called “an honorable woman” by Boaz (3:11). (CC)

All implied aspects of a *gibborḥayil* indicate that such a respected gentleman would set examples in the community in matters of religion, culture, economics, and politics. Whatever he did would not be primarily in his own self-interest, but in the interests of the community, clan, and nation. This means for a pious Israelite that the covenant of the Lord with Israel was of primary importance. Boaz and his workers readily express their mutual faith in the Lord through the antiphonal blessings in his name in 2:4, which presupposes that Israel’s covenant Lord is with his people and is the sole source of grace, peace, and every blessing. Boaz’s faith, revealed in this exchange, will be the impetus for his honorable conduct in his dealings with Ruth and Naomi, just as Ruth’s confession of faith in the Lord (1:16–17) explains her faithfulness toward Naomi and honorable conduct (praised in 3:11) toward Boaz. (CC)

Well-known in the town as a man of faith in the Lord as well as a property owner, Boaz was accorded respect, both among his workers in the field (2:4–16) and among the elders and public in a legal transaction (4:1–12). In the troubled times of “the judges” (1:1), he may have proven his valor in battle—for example, in protecting the town and its crops or in fighting against such oppressors as the Midianites. His honorable status also laid upon him, especially as a man of piety and integrity, the duty always to endeavor to set a worthy and imitable example for his townspeople. (CC)

That Boaz is referred to proleptically is a common feature of Hebrew narrative: his name is withheld until the end of the introductory statement (2:1). His description (“an honorable gentleman”) and kinship (“from the clan of Elimelech,” Naomi’s late husband [1:2–3]) inject notes of both hope and suspense into the story. Such a distinctive relative who emulates fullness in life and faith might play a decisive role in providing relief for the emptiness and grief of Elimelech’s family. Yet the rhetorical flourish presents symbolically the paradoxical relationship between Naomi and Boaz: while related and bound together, in the story they are always separated, never together. The responsibility of aid lay not primarily with a woman’s own clan but with that of her husband. The closest adult male relative, as גֹּאֵל (*goʾel*, “redeemer”), had the duty to rescue a person in poverty (Lev 25:23–55), whether that person became destitute through illness or the death of family members (cf. Ruth 1:3–5) or had to sell his inherited land (as Elimelech may have done in 1:1) or himself into servitude or slavery. This clan solidarity was Israel’s welfare system. However, while Boaz is an “acquaintance” (see the first textual note on 2:1), he is not introduced as Naomi’s closest relation, for another is closer (3:12–13). (CC)

 *worthy*. Lit, “a mighty man of valor.” Boaz’s social, legal, and economic status in the town was well respected. This expression commonly describes a seasoned warrior. Boaz was a “worthy man” before the Lord, as his forthcoming behavior makes apparent. These words imply that Naomi knew Boaz before departing for Moab. (TLSB)

 *Boaz.* Probably means “In him is strength.” Boaz is included in both genealogies of Jesus (Mt 1:5; Lk 3:32). (CSB)

**2:2** *Moabite.* Ruth was careful to seek the most favorable opportunity for gleaning (Lv 19:9; 23:22). But even this was a challenge because she was a Moabite. (TLSB)

 *Let me go.* Although Ruth is an alien and, as a young woman alone, obviously quite vulnerable in the harvest fields, she undertakes to provide for her mother-in-law. In 3:1 Naomi undertakes to provide for Ruth. (CSB)

**“Please Let Me Go Out to the Field” (2:2)**

The narrator gives no indication as to how much time elapsed between the women’s arrival in Bethlehem (1:22) and the commencement of the new action (2:2). Although movement can occur in the story despite an indeterminate time lapse, considering the probability that they had little or no provision on hand when they arrived, Ruth will have sized up the situation and made her intention known to Naomi within one or two days. Chapter 4 will reveal that Elimelech had owned a portion of a field (4:3), but he must have sold it before leaving for Moab (1:1). While a widow could temporarily control her family’s land inheritance (2 Ki 8:1–6; cf. Ruth 4:3), Naomi would have to wait until after the present owner of the field had harvested its crop before it could be acquired by a redeemer, who would also provide for her. (CC)

Ruth’s offer to glean is a result of her full commitment to Naomi and the Lord (1:16–17), now put into practice. In character with her commitment and in deference to Naomi her superior, Ruth states her intention as a polite request. In both the second scene of chapter 1 and the first scene of chapter 2, an introduction by the narrator is followed by speech. In this second act, it is Ruth who speaks first. (CC)

Israel’s Law permitted the poor to glean the grain fields, vineyards, and olive orchards (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22;Deut 24:19–22), for minimal survival depended on the three staple crops of grain, wine, and olive oil. The promised land really belonged to the Lord, who desires to care for his people through their mutual support of each other (Lev 25:23, 35–38, 55; see above on Ruth 1:1). But at the time of “the judges” (Ruth 1:1) “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6; 21:25), and idolatry, injustice, immorality, and even atrocity could easily take place (Judges 17–21). Thus we might expect to find both landowners and workers who ignored their covenant duties and expelled or abused a would-be gleaner. Later, in eighth-century Israel, the prophets had to remind the people of their social obligations toward their disadvantaged fellow Israelites. (CC)

It appears strange that the narrator identifies Ruth for the third time as a “Moabitess” (2:2; previously in 1:4, 22). This ethnic appellation made sense in the summary conclusion of the first act (1:22), where, upon her first introduction to the Israelite town of Bethlehem, Ruth would primarily be so identified until she could be recognized as a resident alien (as Elimelech’s family was in Moab; see 1:1). “The Moabitess” (2:2) can also be understood in the context of 2:6 (cf. 2:10). However, in 2:2 and 2:21 it appears unnecessarily redundant. The narrator obviously wanted to emphasize the fact that Ruth was a foreigner—and a detested Moabite at that. Whereas resident aliens, if poor or widowed, were allowed to glean and were protected from various abuses, these privileges were not guaranteed to nonresident foreigners. Thus, Ruth was vulnerable. She had to seek a sponsor or patron for herself and Naomi, a gracious farmer who would permit her to glean. But as a foreigner, she could expect the dangers of being rejected or abused (see 2:2, 9, 10, 15, 16, 22). (CC)

In both 2:2 and 2:21, Ruth “the Moabitess” announced something of significance to Naomi, first the proposal to solve their immediate food problem through gleaning, and then that she may continue to glean with Boaz throughout the harvest season. These two verses with “Moabitess” indicate that fullness was being provided for Naomi, the empty and bitter Israelite widow (1:20–21), through a foreign woman by the grace of the Lord. In 2:12 Boaz prays that the Lord would “fulfill” Ruth’s deed and that she would receive a “full” reward by his grace. What Ruth receives through Boaz’s gracious provision she will share with Naomi (2:18). (CC)

Naomi, who was probably too old to go gleaning, might have gone begging to her relatives for material aid, but Ruth evidently wanted to spare her this indignity. It was probably expected that the women would seek to sustain themselves if at all possible, the obvious recourse being that the younger Ruth would glean the harvest field. Notably, Ruth did not dictate to God that she would only stoop to such demeaning work if he would grant her certain amenities; rather, she performed sacrificial labor without condition. Through Naomi and Mahlon, Ruth had experienced God’s grace, which changes attitudes.118 Now, instead of trying to claim that she should qualify for the rights and privileges of a resident alien, she was guided by need and duty. When one so serves God by serving another, one receives the courage to set aside one’s own dignity. (CC)

It is not that Ruth was unaware of her disadvantages and dangers, for she and Naomi would have discussed their situation and possibilities during their lengthy journey from Moab to Bethlehem. Ruth well knew what she was up against when she went to search for a favorable farmer, and she was careful to glean only where she had obtained permission. It is remarkable that despite everything, Ruth was willing to take the risk of rejection and harm in order to provide for Naomi and herself. She thus exemplified initiative, loyalty, courage, and humility. Although equally aware of the dangers involved, Naomi gratefully let Ruth go out to glean. (CC)

 *pick up the leftover grain.* The law of Moses instructed landowners to leave what the harvesters missed so that the poor, the alien, the widow and the fatherless could glean for their needs (Lev 19:9; 23:22; Dt 24:19). (CSB)

**2:3** *As it turned out.* Divine providence is at work (vv. 19–20). (CSB)

“The heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Pr 16:9). (TLSB)

 *field belonging to Boaz*. Beginning with fields owned by others, Ruth comes to Boaz’s field. (TLSB)

**Ruth Gleaned in the Field Belonging to Boaz (2:3)**

With three quick Hebrew action verbs (“she went out, and she came and gleaned,” 2:3a), the reader is transported with Ruth from the town into the harvest work in the country. It is clear that Ruth was not purposely seeking out the cultivated field belonging to Boaz, for she did not yet know him as a relative (2:20). She only happened to come to his field, or it was the first field where she, as a foreigner without rights, was not denied entrance. Although Ruth realized that Boaz might make her leave, she had decided not to give up and try elsewhere. She had not yet learned about his fine reputation (2:1) or his relation to Naomi. But she probably noticed a certain civility in the demeanor of the foreman, for she was at least permitted to glean until the owner arrived. (CC)

That she would hit upon precisely Boaz’s portion may appear to be fate or a stroke of great luck. However, one recalls that Scripture allows for no such thing except in the minds of unbelievers. Everything, whether valued as good or bad, is caused or permitted by God (see “Providence” in “The Theology” in the introduction). Thus, “it so happened” (2:3) signals the operation of divine guidance, as Abraham’s servant made clear in Gen 24:12, where, in his mission to procure a wife for Isaac, he used a different form of the same verb in Ruth 2:3 when he prayed that the Lord would “cause to happen” (usually translated “grant success”). That is just one of several parallels between Ruth and the story in Genesis 24. The casting of lots by the high priest was also guided by God (Ex 28:30; Prov 16:33; cf. Acts 1:24–26). The believing audience will recognize here the hand of God, who in other betrothal stories led Abraham’s servant to Rebekah (Gen 24:10–27; see especially 24:14), Jacob to Rachel (Gen 29:1–12), and Moses to Zipporah (Ex 2:15–21; cf. 1 Sam 6:8–12; 1 Ki 22:34). The presence and agency of the Lord are made explicit by the pious greetings that invoke the Lord to be “with” his people and “bless” them (Ruth 2:4). (CC)

The Lord arranged the meeting of Ruth and Boaz to bring about the birth of David (Ruth 4:17, 22) and David’s greater Son (Mt 1:5) in the way he had planned from eternity, to unite Israelite (Boaz) and foreigner (Ruth), Jews and Gentiles through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3–10; 3:4–12). God provided the opportunity for this meeting to take place without mechanically controlling their actions (see Eccl 3:1–8). Such a “chance” meeting might be interpreted by an unbeliever as “accidental” or due to “luck.” Even the believers who experienced it (Boaz and Ruth) would not have realized its momentous significance in salvation history, for the divinely intended outcome would not take place until long after their earthly lives were over. (CC)

The tenor of the whole story makes it clear that the narrator sees God’s hand throughout. … It is a kind of underplaying for effect. By calling this meeting an accident, the writer enables himself subtly to point out that even the “accidental” is directed by God. …

The reason for the book’s deliberate subtlety lies in its aim to stress one particular aspect of God’s providence, namely, its hiddenness. The author hides God’s action during the entire body of the story simply because he feels that it is by nature hidden. …

Only with the mention of David [Ruth 4:17, 22] is the interpretive framework suddenly and fully provided. At once it becomes clear that this has all been *Heilsgeschichte* [salvation history]! (CC)

The audience is delighted that Ruth has come to the place where she can meet Boaz. Strange, though, is the fact that the two Israelites who are relatives and well-known to each other, Naomi and Boaz (Ruth 2:1, 20), are never reported in the story to have met each other. Instead, Ruth the Moabitess is the intermediary between them, reporting about Boaz to Naomi (2:19, 21; 3:16–17), fulfilling Naomi’s directives concerning Boaz (2:22–23; 3:2–18), and even bearing Boaz’s child for Naomi’s sake (4:13, 16–17). (CC)

**2:4** *The Lord* *be with you!*… *The Lord* *bless you*. Typical expressions of greeting and blessing still used today. They underscore the reality of the Lord’s commitment to Israel when He says, “I am with you.” This speaks of the Lord’s fidelity toward those who fear Him (Ps 130:3–4). The angel Gabriel used the same words to proclaim the Lord’s fidelity to the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:28). (TLSB)

**“ ‘The Lord Be with You!’ … ‘The Lord Bless You!’ ” (2:4)**

The initial “coincidence” is followed by a second one to catch the reader’s attention: the arrival of Boaz himself sets the stage for an eventual encounter with Ruth. Having come to inspect the work in his field, Boaz exhibited his faith and honor (“an honorable gentleman,” 2:1) by demonstrating his interest in the welfare of his workers. He greeted them with a friendly and pious salutation, “The Lord be with you!” to which his workers responded, “The Lordbless you!” A longer form of harvest greeting was “The blessing of the Lord be upon you,” which was answered by “We bless you in the name of the Lord!” (Ps 129:8). But the more common greeting was shorter: “Peace to you” (לְךָשָׁלוֹם, *shalom leka*) or just “Peace!” (שָׁלוֹם, *shalom*). “Peace to you” was the repeated greeting benediction by the risen Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 21, 26; cf. Jn 14:27). The apostles used it both in epistolary concluding benedictions (e.g., 1 Pet 5:14; 3 Jn 15) and, combined with “grace,” in epistolary salutations (e.g., Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Col 1:2). Like the response of Boaz’s workers, these salutations with “peace” allude to the Aaronic Benediction (see Num 6:26). (CC)

The mutual greetings in Ruth 2:4 might have been formulas at harvest time, implying the petition for a bountiful crop (cf. similar salutations at harvest time in Judg 6:11–12; Ps 129:7–8), since the OT frequently speaks of God’s blessing being manifested through him providing sustenance for life, especially crops, livestock, and children. (CC)

The greetings in Ruth 2:4 affirm the presence and work of the Lord even in the daily work of the participants. This is significant, considering the turbulent time of “the judges” (1:1) and the temptations even among Boaz’s workers to maltreatment and abuse (2:9, 15–16). It testifies especially to the faith and piety of Boaz, for the employer always tends to set the tone for the employees. He both attributed all material gain to God and recognized his workers as fellow worshipers and believers, equal with him under their gracious, redeeming God (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). Both Boaz’s salutation and the workers’ benediction are invocations of the Lord by his personal, covenant name. Hence they, like the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:24–26), serve as benedictions and absolutions because the divine name, received in faith, brings blessing, forgiveness, and eternal life. By these expressions of faith Boaz and his workers also called upon God to save, correct, direct, and support them. (CC)

Behind the form used by Boaz stood that promise of the Lord basic to all his commitments: “I am/will be with you!” Although God may also be present to judge, through his appointed means of grace he confers his salvation, and for believers his continual presence is a constant comfort and source of strength and hope against all difficulties (see Psalm 46, especially ET 46:1, 4, 5, 7, 11). His OT promise is fulfilled in the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, *Immanu-El,* “God with us” (Is 7:14, עִמָּ֥נוּ אֵֽל, using the same preposition [עִמּ-, “with”] as in Ruth 2:4). Our Lord remains with us, forgiving our sins and granting us faith and salvation, through Holy Baptism in the triune name and the proclamation of his Word according to all that he has commanded (Mt 28:19); thus before his ascension he promised, “Behold, *I am with you* all the days until the consummation of the age” (Mt 28:20). (CC)

The exact Hebrew greeting of Boaz is unique in the OT. However, a contemporaneous greeting (in the era of the judges; see Ruth 1:1) spoken by the angel of the Lord to Gideon as he undertook to call Gideon to save Israel, “The Lord be with you!” (Judg 6:12), differs only in that “you” is singular. The Greek equivalent of the divine angel’s greeting in Judg 6:12 was spoken by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary at the annunciation that she would bear the Savior: “The Lord [is] with you” (ὁ κύριος μετὰ σοῦ, Lk 1:28). St. Paul concludes several of his epistles with similar benedictions to the Christians, for example, “The Lord be with you all” (ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, 2 Thess 3:16) and “The Lord be with your spirit” (ὁ κύριος μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου, 2 Tim 4:22). More common at the end of the epistles are fuller Trinitarian benedictions that spell out the divine gifts (“grace,” “peace,” “love,”) from the Lord that are implicit in the shorter greetings and benedictions, and that name Jesus Christ as the “Lord,” for example, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you [plural]” (ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μεθʼ ὑμῶν,1 Cor 16:23) or “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, 2 Cor 13:13). (CC)

In the early church era, “The Lord be with you!” was incorporated into the church’s liturgy and rites. The Western church used the Vulgate’s Latin translation of Ruth 2:4, *Dominus vobiscum.* The Salutation continues to the present day at several points in the Divine Service, including the Preface at the beginning of the Service of Holy Communion. It is a most fitting address in preparation for the Lord coming to “be with” his people through the giving of his very body and blood in the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal. (CC)

The response by the workers quotes verbatim the first two Hebrew words of the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:24–26) and may even be styled after it as a summary petition for the comprehensive bestowing of divine grace. For the Lord to “bless” someone means principally that he, out of his goodness and grace, looks favorably upon him and confers the blessings of forgiveness, salvation, and life in all its fullness. In the OT his blessing looked forward to the advent of Christ, through whom the fullness of life would come and through whom all peoples of the earth would be blessed.l Since the Aaronic Benediction with its threefold invocation of “the Lord” is implicitly Trinitarian, it is fitting that Luther used it to conclude the *Deutsche Messe*, since earlier orders had other Trinitarian blessings at the conclusion of Communion. Following Luther, the Aaronic Benediction continues to serve as the blessing that concludes the Divine Service. (CC)

The exchange of greetings between Boaz and his laborers characterizes Boaz as a godly man with a kind spirit. (CSB)

**2:5-6 “Who Is This Young Woman?” (2:5–6)**

Immediately, Boaz noticed a stranger in his field, for, in the small village of Bethlehem he will have known every resident by sight. He naturally questioned the foreman in charge of all operations in his field about her family identity. Because everyone in town had been aroused over the dramatic arrival of Naomi and Ruth (1:19) and should have heard all about their circumstances before the first evening was over or by the next morning at the latest, the foreman needed to give no more than her basic identity (2:6). Perhaps Boaz had already guessed who she was. (CC)

Normally, a man would not speak to an unfamiliar woman without an introduction.נַעַר, usually rendered “young man,” refers to the foreman’s subordinate position and not to his age, and so is translated “servant” in 2:5–6 (see the second textual note on 2:5). However, the corresponding feminine term נַעֲרָה, “young woman,” when referring to Ruth the gleaner (2:5–6) includes both nuances of lowly status and young age. These terms introduce an emphasis in the story on the contrast between younger and older characters (especially Naomi and Boaz), a contrast often evident even in their manner of speech, which gives them credibility in the historical narrative. (CC)

Rather than explaining in narration what had previously transpired before Boaz’s advent, the skillful author informs the audience through a flashback in the foreman’s fairly long speech (2:6–7). It was his duty to inquire of Ruth about her identity when she asked permission to glean, for he was accountable for everyone present in Boaz’s field. It is not that her request was too unusual for it to be granted, for gleaning was an ordinary and legal activity provided by Mosaic Law “for the poor and the resident alien” (Lev 19:10; 23:22). However, she was not a poor Israelite nor even a resident alien, but a foreigner, indeed, from the despised Moabites. A foreign woman was popularly associated with immorality and prostitutes (Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 23:27). Moabitesses were historically infamous for seducing Israelite men into immorality and apostasy (Gen 19:30–37; Num 25:1–3), and Moabite men were prohibited from the Israelite assembly for ten generations (Deut 23:4–5 [ET 23:3–4]). (CC)

Since the adults in the small town of Bethlehem were surely aware of who was related to whom, the foreman may well have realized that Boaz was related to Naomi. However, Ruth was another matter. Since, as the foreman reports (2:6), Ruth had come to Israel with Naomi, a woman, Ruth did not belong to any man. As a foreign widow with no male relative in Israel, Ruth could not claim any legal or customary privileges from any Israelite, not even from Boaz. (CC)

**2:5** *Whose young woman is this?* As a good businessman, Boaz inspected his fields. Boaz did not ask “who” Ruth was. Boaz asked under “whose” authority or family this woman found her identity. (TLSB)

**2:6** *Moabite woman*. Six times Ruth is called a Moabite (1:4; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). This underscores that she is a foreigner who, hearing God’s Word through Naomi and her family, willingly came in faith to the land of the God of Israel. (TLSB)

 *with Naomi*. Ruth is under the authority of Naomi, within the family of Elimelech, a kinsman of Boaz. (TLSB)

**2:7** Ruth worked hard at her task to the glory of God (cf 1Co 10:31). (TLSB)

**“Please Let Me Glean” (2:7)**

Ruth had requested permission to glean leftover ears of grain from the ground and gather them for herself into sheaves or bundles (see the second textual note on 2:7). In the harvesting process, a male worker, after he had cut off with a sickle (Jer 50:16) as much as he could hold in his left hand, laid the ears on the ground in piles (see Ruth 2:16) without binding them into a bundle. Later, the men could gather the ears into sheaves (Gen 37:7) and bring them in from the field (cf. Ps 126:6). But usually the men were followed by female workers who gathered the ears into bundles or sheaves, perhaps binding them, and who carried them (cf. Job 24:10; Ps 129:7) to the threshing floor, where the stalks and husks would be separated from the heads. The poor were allowed to pick up ears that the women missed when gathering them into bundles or that they had dropped on their way to the threshing floor. But the poor were allowed to do this only after the sheaves were removed (see Ruth 2:15–16; Is 17:5) so that they would not be tempted to pull out some ears from the sheaves (see Deut 24:19). (CC)

The last four Hebrew words in the foreman’s explanation are subject to various interpretations. Perhaps the unclear wording reveals inner conflict: the foreman may have felt torn between a sense of responsibility to be strict and so exclude a nonresident Moabitess who lacked all rights, and a desire to show polite deference to a poor widow who was the daughter-in-law of Elimelech, a relative of his employer, Boaz (2:1). In any event, the foreman praises Ruth’s industry in patiently and persistently toiling since early morning until Boaz’s arrival with no more than a short rest. It was easiest for the harvesters to cut the grain stalks when they were still wet with dew,146 which helps explain why Ruth started gleaning in the “early morning” (Ruth 2:7). (CC)

**2:8–9** As a young, attractive single woman, or as a foreigner whose presence might bring residual ethnic prejudice from the Israelites, Ruth was protected by Boaz’s word. Boaz would keep a protective eye on Ruth. (TLSB)

**“Do Not Go Off to Glean in Another Field!” (2:8–9)**

The narrator does not bother to say whether Boaz approached Ruth to speak to her; in Hebrew narrative such movements are generally implied rather than described. Boaz’s field was also likely not too large nor the workers and other gleaners too many for everyone to have been within earshot. With the owner addressing a stranger directly and not through his foreman, particularly with the vociferous exclamation, “Pay attention,” all the workers would have paused in their activity to listen, since it must be a matter of serious import. Thus, Boaz’s statements, even those in the form of rhetorical questions, serve directly as permission for Ruth and also as directives to his workers (see the textual notes on 2:8–9). (CC)

By addressing Ruth as “my daughter,” Boaz signaled that he was extending a generous welcome to this destitute foreigner. He insisted on Ruth gleaning only in his field, for which he took added precautions to allow for both her comfort and protection (2:8–9). It would have cost her precious time to go back to the town well for a drink (see 2 Sam 23:15–16). And abuse was real enough in a time of compromised morality (see Judg 19:22–25; Ruth 2:22), especially against a single foreign woman who had no special protection under Israel’s laws. Boaz permitted her to glean close to his female workers, and he also made sure that she would not be molested. He thereby instituted the first recorded “anti-sexual-harassment policy in the workplace.” This demonstrates that early pious Israelites already applied the Sixth Commandment fundamentally in the sense of Jesus’ radical interpretation (Mt 5:27–28). Because lustful intent already breaks the Law of God, Christians must be chaste and circumspect in their dress and behavior, especially in respect to the opposite sex. (CC)

“Cling closely to my young women” (Ruth 2:8) uses the same Hebrew verb (“cling”) as in 1:14. Although its use here might have been natural enough (see 2 Sam 20:2), it appears that the narrator wanted to remind the audience of its emphatic use when Ruth “clung” to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). But it particularly signals that Ruth is to glean immediately behind the women workers, much closer than normally allowed for gleaners. Boaz has thus accorded distinct privileges and protection for Ruth. (CC)

**2:8** *my daughter*. Naomi addressed Ruth in this language as well (2:2, 22; 3:1, 16), suggesting that she and Boaz were roughly the same age. (TLSB)

 *my young women*. After the menservants cut the grain stalks, the young women gathered it into sheaves (bundles) to be brought to the threshing floor. Ruth was to follow behind the young women—ahead of the other aliens, widows, and poor—to have first opportunity to collect the best and most abundant gleanings without fear of rough treatment from the hired help. (TLSB)

**2:9–10** *drink* … *foreigner*. Though a foreigner, Ruth would not have to draw water for Israelites (Dt 29:10–11; Jsh 9:21–27); though a woman, she would not have to draw water for men (Gn 24:11–18; Jn 4:7–9). Now she would drink water drawn by Israelite men. (TLSB)

**2:9** *follow along after the girls.* It was customary for the men to cut the grain and for the servant girls to go behind them to bind the grain into sheaves. Then Ruth could glean what they had left behind (see note on 1:22). (CSB)

**2:10** *she fell* … *to the ground*. Boaz was possibly the first person to show kindness to Ruth since she arrived in Bethlehem. (TLSB)

 *Why have I found favor in your eyes*. Ruth knew she had been found by Boaz, in whose sight she wanted to find favor (v 2). (TLSB)

**“Why Have I Found Favor in Your Eyes?” (2:10)**

Ruth was overwhelmed that Boaz should “acknowledge” her as a legitimate gleaner when she was a “foreigner” (2:10). The two terms combine normally separated thoughts into an oxymoron with Hebrew wordplay (see the fourth textual note on 2:10). Her humble gesture—kneeling and bowing to the ground—and verbal response displayed fully sincere respect and gratitude, besides surprise, to her benefactor. There was surely some underlying joy in Ruth’s question mixed with her surprise, for “favor” was precisely what she was looking for (2:2). Her patient quest was now crowned with success. (CC)

Having hoped for no more than a minimal permission to glean, Ruth inquired into Boaz’s unusual kindness. Foreigners were relegated to a lower status than resident aliens (as is generally common even today) and enjoyed no covenant privileges (cf. Gen 31:15). The expression rendered “to acknowledge me” could well be used as a legal term, for Boaz was regarding her, not as a foreigner without rights, but as a resident alien (גֵּר, “sojourner, resident alien”; see “Sojourn in the Region of Moab,” the commentary on 1:1bβ) who should be granted the same protection and legal rights as an Israelite. (CC)

Because Ruth could not yet presume to have obtained the status of a resident alien, and with it the right to glean, she was amazed and overjoyed to receive special privileges that would not even be granted to a bona fide Israelite gleaner. She was legally an unattached person in Israel, for she had no husband, her father resided in a foreign country, and she had not yet been accorded proper recognition as a true resident alien by the town’s legal body, their elders. Neither Law nor custom required anyone to allow her to glean. (CC)

Boaz, however, interpreted and applied the Law according to its spirit, its intention. By permitting Ruth to glean in his field, he in effect considered her already to be a resident alien and no longer a foreigner: she was not outside Israel, but within it and deserving its protection. For the purpose of the Law, in singling out privileges for resident aliens but not for foreigners, was to provide for needy legitimate residents while protecting citizens from hostile interlopers and idolaters who might lead God’s chosen people into apostasy. Thus, an Israelite should have applied the Law generously to a harmless immigrant or refugee who was in genuine need. This should have been the case particularly for an immigrant who had been converted to faith in the Lord, the God of Israel, as Boaz knew Ruth had been (2:12; see her conversion in 1:16–17). (CC)

The casuistic provisions of the Law were not meant to be restricted to their literal meaning, but were to be applied according to their broader meaning and purpose to the various situations that arose. Even more fundamentally, the Lord repeatedly reminded the Israelites that they should be generous to aliens, for they themselves—first in the person of the patriarchs in Canaan, then as a people in Egypt—had received his blessings as aliens in a foreign land. By his grace they were and were to be his channel of blessing to all foreign peoples. (CC)

Because Jesus and his church fulfill Christotelically God’s promises of blessing for all (Lk 24:44; 2 Cor 1:20), the Lord Jesus sent his apostles into all the world to all peoples (Mt 28:18–20; Lk 24:46–47; Acts 1:8)—that “the blessing of Abraham might come in Christ Jesus to the Gentiles” (Gal 3:14; see also Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29). Pastors today continue that apostolic ministry. Indeed, as “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9; see Ex 19:6), all Christians are mediators of God’s blessings to others (1 Pet 3:9). Further, believers themselves receive all divine blessings, both physical and spiritual, temporal and everlasting, because of Christ and through Christ (e.g., Mt 7:7–11; Jn 14:13–14; Eph 1:3). (CC)

By extending to Ruth further special privileges, Boaz also “acknowledge[d]” this “foreigner” (2:10) as the daughter-in-law of his relative Naomi (see Ruth 2:1, 11; in 2:14–16 Boaz will go further in granting Ruth privileges of an Israelite relative). Boaz seems to follow a “hospitality protocol” according to generally accepted ancient Near Eastern custom. A host was expected to offer resources and protection to a stranger who entered his sphere of responsibility. Hospitality had to be offered by the male head of the household. The guest usually requested nothing, but the host provided the best available, and the guest responded with appropriate gratitude. The host did not directly question the guest, hence Boaz inquired about Ruth from his foreman (2:5). By doing so Boaz signaled his intent to offer her hospitality, and she accepted (2:10). Boaz thus assumed responsibility for Ruth and obligated himself to protect her. (CC)

Boaz was not patronizing, but respected Ruth for whom she was in her station as an alien widow who came to glean. But his special recognition welcomed her into his company of harvest workers as his “most favored” gleaner. In fact, if she would have been regarded as a foreigner, she may not have been given any water privileges at all. She could have been forced to draw water from the town well for the Israelite workers (see Josh 9:21–27), but instead, Boaz ordered them to provide water for her (Ruth 2:9; cf. Gen 24:17–19; 1 Sam 30:11; Prov 25:21). Realizing that other farmers probably would not treat her as favorably, he insisted that she remain in his field and with his workers, thus under his care and his protection from abuse, both here and elsewhere. Boaz was not motivated by infatuation with a pretty girl, but by his faith in the Lord. As a pious Israelite, he desired to fulfill the duties of the Lord’s covenant and to apply his Law not strictly by the letter, but faithfully and magnanimously according to its purpose and spirit, namely, that the Lord’s own grace and fidelity (חֶסֶד, *ḥeṣed*) would cause his people to treat others graciously and faithfully. (CC)

Recognizable here are several OT themes. First, there is a “betrothal theme,” but it involves a reversal of the usual course in which a man under duress travels away from his home and meets a woman whom he would later marry (e.g., Jacob and Rachel in Gen 29:1–28; Moses and Jethro’s daughters in Ex 2:15–21; cf. Abraham’s servant, substituting for Isaac, and Rebekah in Genesis 24). For here it is Ruth who leaves home and encounters hardships; yet she, like Rachel and Jethro’s daughters, has water drawn for her (Gen 29:10; Ex 2:17, 19; Ruth 2:9). A second, related theme is forsaking one’s home and country for Canaan; Ruth had left “the country of your relatives” (אֶ֙רֶץ֙ מֽוֹלַדְתֵּ֔ךְ, Ruth 2:11), as did Abraham and Jacob (אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּ-, Gen 11:28; 24:7; 31:13). (CC)

Third, another related theme from the patriarchal narratives is the protection of “the elect matriarch” from harm, particularly of Sarah (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–16) and Rebekah (Gen 26:1–11). This indicates again how the narrator of Ruth recognized similarities between her story and those of the matriarchs. One major aspect of this motif is that the Lord elects a particular woman to become a matriarch for his people, and therefore he specially protects her and provides her with progeny, as he did for Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel (Gen 21:1–2; 25:21; 29:31–32; 30:22–24), and also will do for Ruth (Ruth 4:13). Thus, the narrator, by recording parallels with the matriarchs, conveys that Ruth is also a matriarch elected by God (see 4:11–14) to be the ancestress of King David (Ruth 4:17, 22) and of the Son of David (Mt 1:5). (CC)

The NT too highlights the theme of “the elect matriarch.” As the Lord protected and provided for Sarah, Rebekah, and Ruth, so also he did for “the woman” from whom was born the Messiah (Rev 12:4–5). In one sense, the woman in Revelation 12 represents the Virgin Mary, the mother of our Lord and hence the mother of God (FCEp VIII 12; SD VIII 24). But in a broader sense the woman in Revelation 12 represents God’s “one holy catholic and apostolic church” (Nicene Creed), which by his grace has existed since his first Gospel promise (Gen 3:15) created faith (Gen 4:1), and which has persisted throughout the period of the old covenant and now of the new. From the OT church came the Christ according to God’s promise (Is 7:14; 9:5 [ET 9:6]; Rom 9:5). Now in the NT era the church is protected by God from “the great red dragon,” that is, Satan, who persecutes her relentlessly throughout the present age, but without overcoming her (Rev 12:1–4, 6, 9, 13–17). This theme also relates to “the elect lady” (ἐκλεκτὴ κυρία, 2 Jn 1) as a designation for a Christian congregation, perhaps representing the entire church, as also “your elect sister” (ἡ ἀδελφή σου ἡ ἐκλεκτή, 2 Jn 13). (CC)

This is all a marvelous comfort, first, for all Christian women in danger from Satan’s physical and spiritual attacks, that they can count on God’s sure protection. Second, this also assures every congregation and all members of the church of ultimate safety and deliverance from all persecution, which originates from Satan, through the certain promise that all who die in Christ shall be raised to physical and everlasting salvation, which has been guaranteed by Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection (Rev 12:11). (CC)

Further, as often in the history of Israel, the elect matriarch became the bride of the elect patriarch, so the bride of the elect Messiah (Is 42:1–3; 61:1; Mt 12:15–21; Lk 9:28–35) is the church herself, both now (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21–33) and everlastingly (Rev 19:7–9; 21:2, 9–10; 22:17). This great mystery (Eph 5:32) of God wedding his people through Christ, the Bridegroom (Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29), was already revealed to the church of Israel. It also is manifest in the relationship between Christian spouses in their daily life: the wife is called to submit to her husband as to the Lord, and the husband is called to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, for husband and wife are one flesh, and Christians are members of Christ’s body (Eph 5:22–33). (CC)

Also evident is the theme of integrating a foreigner into the true Israel through faith in the Lord. Essential for the narrator and the story, this invites the audience to compare Ruth with Joseph’s Egyptian wife Asenath (Gen 41:45), Moses’ Midianite and Cushite wives (Ex 2:16–22; Num 12:1), and Rahab the Canaanite of Jericho (Josh 6:25;Mt 1:5; Heb 11:31), and to contrast Ruth, the converted believer, with Esau’s heathen Hittite wives (Gen 26:34–35; 27:46); Judah’s (unbelieving?) Canaanite wife Shua (Gen 38:2); Shechem, the Hivite rapist and rejected suitor of Dinah (Gen 34:1–26); and the enticing young women of Moab who seduced Israel into apostasy (Num 25:1–2; 1 Ki 11:1–8; Ezra 9:1–2). (CC)

**2:11-12 “May Your Reward Be Full from the Lord” (2:11–12)**

Ruth’s question (2:10) kept the conversation going, which gave Boaz the opportunity in the form of his answer to explain how he could already have known something so positive about Ruth so as to offer her privileges. All the town quickly learned Ruth’s story, how she abandoned everything in her loving devotion to Naomi and full dependence on the Lord (see 1:16–17, 19; Is 55:5). In effect, Boaz praised her for her exemplary faith and faithfulness, wrought by the Lord, to which he responded with his “favor” and acknowledgement of her (2:10). Moreover, the Lord by his grace would surely “fulfill” her deed and so she would receive a “full” reward from the faithful God of Israel’s covenant (see Gen 15:1). Her immigration to Israel and conversion to faith in the Lord meant that she now participated in his kingdom of grace and protection. Normally, a foreign woman who was married to an Israelite living in the promised land was accepted as having been incorporated into Israel (as Ruth will be in 4:11–12). Although Ruth had been married to an Israelite, the marriage transpired in Moab (1:4), outside the Lord’s covenant land and people. Yet, because of her faith in the God of Israel and her fidelity to Naomi, Boaz was effectively treating the widow as an Israelite, with appropriate privileges. (CC)

Boaz (and his reapers) recognized that every blessing comes from the Lord and his gracious presence with his people (2:4), and so in his prayer for Ruth the Lord and his work are central. Understood theologically, Boaz’s prayer means that God’s grace, which creates in a person the response of faith and faithfulness, will also yield further blessings—perhaps temporal, and certainly eternal—for the believer, and often for many others as well. “Human righteous acts do not incur God’s favor, they live out God’s favor.” Thus the “favor” (2:10) Boaz showed to Ruth was a response to the favor God had already shown to him and to Ruth. Boaz, an employer with hired laborers, uses commercial terminology in his prayer (“fulfill your deed,” “your reward,” 2:12). God’s justified believers may be portrayed as his hired laborers whose work of fidelity is rewarded by wages (cf. Mt 20:1–16; 1 Cor 9:7–15; Rev 11:18; 14:12–13). However, this should not be construed as if a believer earns a reward by the merit of his deeds. Rather, it is by grace alone that the Lord converts a person by creating faith, through which a sinner is credited with righteousness (Gen 15:6; Ruth 1:16–17; see AC IV; Ap IV). God’s work in the believer brings about the life of faith with good works (2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:8–10; Col 1:9–10; 2 Thess 2:16–17). Throughout this earthly life, the believer remains a sinner in need of God’s forgiving grace; Ruth will confess this when she declares her unworthiness: “I am not comparable to one of your maidservants” (Ruth 2:13; cf. Lk 1:38). Yet at the same time, the sinner who trusts the gracious Lord is also a saint who yields the fruit of faith in deeds of fidelity. (CC)

Boaz’s prayer for a “reward” for Ruth, who sought protection under the Lord’s wings (Ruth 2:12), has a further link to the patriarchs, for God promised Abram, “I am a shield for you, your very great reward” (Gen 15:1). The term there for “reward,” שָׂכָר, is cognate to מַשְׂכֹּרֶת, “reward,” in Ruth 2:12. This was followed by Abram’s complaint that he had no heir, to which the Lord responded that he would indeed have a son (Gen 15:2–4). The alert hearer of Ruth 2:12 may have noted that “reward” may concern an heir (see Gen 30:18; Ps 127:3), which God granted Abram as the beginning of the fulfillment of his promise that Abram would have innumerable offspring (Gen 15:5) and all nations would be blessed through him (Gen 12:1–3). The Lord’s promises and gift of an heir were not because of Abram’s deeds nor his faith as meritorious, but to fulfill the Lord’s gracious plan to provide a Savior for all people: Jesus Christ. “Fulfill” and “reward” in Boaz’s prayer for Ruth (2:12) anticipate a similar gift of an heir to Ruth for the sake of Jesus, who would save his people from their sins (Mt 1:5, 21). (CC)

The prayer of Boaz was twofold, acknowledging Ruth’s past fidelity (“your deed”) and asking that she would be fully cared for in the future. It was on the basis of his prior knowledge of Ruth’s faith in the Lord and loyalty to Naomi (1:16–17) that he was readily willing to welcome her into his harvest group and afford her care and protection (2:8–9). This was pious fidelity, for “the one who is gracious to the needy honors” his Maker (Prov 14:31). The more Boaz became acquainted with Ruth, the more confirmed he became in his evaluation of her. His prayer for her added that she had come to seek “refuge” under the Lord’s wings (Ruth 2:12). That term implies that she sought not only the Lord’s care and protection, but also his welcome into Israel’s covenant community. In Ruth’s pledge she had declared her desire to be a part of Naomi’s people under the Lord (1:16–17). (CC)

In saying to Ruth, “You have come to seek refuge under his wings,” Boaz portrays God as protecting his people like an eagle with its wings. The metaphor of the Lord’s “wings” affording protection may be taken from the practice of an eagle to “hover over its young” (Deut 32:11). Similarly, the Lord brought Israel to Sinai “on eagles’ wings” (Ex 19:4). Those two passages are by Moses, who would have seen Egypt’s portrayal of gods with protecting wings, which was also later evident among the Assyrians. The motif of the Lord’s sheltering wings appears in psalms by David (ET Pss 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7), who may have been influenced by this passage (Ruth 2:12) in the narrative of his family history. It also appears in Ps 91:4; Is 31:5; Mal 3:20 (ET 4:2). The same symbol was used by Jesus in emphasizing his desire to rescue Jerusalem (Mt 23:37 || Lk 13:34), and in hymnody, for example, by Paul Gerhardt:

Lord Jesus, who dost love me,

O spread Thy wings above me,

 And shield me from alarm;

Though Satan would devour me,

Let angel-guards sing o’er me:

 This child of God shall meet no harm. (CC)

Later, Ruth will request that Boaz spread his “wing” over her (3:9, with a form of כָּנָף, the same term used in 2:12). Some understand her petition there to be a general request for protection from Boaz, but more likely the metaphor is specifically of a robed bridegroom covering his bride (or of a *levir* covering his widowed sister-in-law) with his “hem” or “skirt” (as some translate כָּנָף in 3:9) in marriage (see כָּנָף also in Deut 23:1 [ET 22:30]; Ezek 16:8). Through marriage to Boaz, she would receive the kind of certain aid attributed to the God of Israel, who protects those who trust in him from being overcome by physical and spiritual dangers, especially from Satan’s attacks. Boaz would be God’s agent to grant her refuge within the covenant of marriage and continuance of life through the son she would bear (Obed, leading to David and Jesus Christ [4:17–22]). (CC)

As Ruth and Abraham entrusted themselves wholly to God, he blessed them bountifully by his grace. And so he blesses everyone today who by faith in Christ seeks refuge in him (Mt 5:1–12). And, like Abraham, such persons are themselves called by God to be his blessings to others: “Be a blessing!” (Gen 12:2). See Mt 5:13–16; Jn 15:4–5.

It is no wonder that some commentators regard Ruth 2:12 as the key verse of the book. For the whole purpose of the story seems to be aimed at Ruth receiving the divine “reward” of an heir who would “fulfill” God’s promise of blessing not just for Israel, but also for foreigners, Gentiles, and indeed the whole world. It is comparable to Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan which, by focusing on the sacrificial service of a despised stranger, teaches about Christ’s own love at the same time it models how to practice love toward one’s neighbor (Lk 10:27–37).182 So Ruth, a despised Moabitess who was converted, showed for Israelites how their own concept of covenant fidelity (*ḥeṣed*) is to be lived out in practice. Therefore, the real key to the story, in particular its turning point, was Ruth’s declaration of commitment to Naomi and confession of faith in the Lord, the God of Israel (1:16–17). (CC)

**2:11** Ruth’s commitment to care for her desolate mother-in-law remains the center of attention throughout the book. (CSB)

Till now, Boaz knew Ruth only by reputation. With his own eyes, Boaz now sees the righteousness of Ruth’s actions. (TLSB)

 *you left*. Ruth was the antitheses of Orpah. Ruth’s sacrifice of leaving family and country could have reminded Boaz of Abraham and Sarah’s earlier pilgrimage (Gn 12:1–5) to the Promised Land. (TLSB)

**2:12** The blessing pronounced by Boaz pointed ahead to the shed blood of Jesus Christ on Mount Calvary for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. This blessing reaches its most poetic expression when Jesus proclaims His redemptive love for Jerusalem (Mt 23:37–39). (TLSB)

 *The Lord* *repay you for what you have done*. “Faith must be the mother and source of works that are truly good and well pleasing to God, which God will reward in this world and in the world to come. This is why St. Paul calls them true fruit of faith, also fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5:22–23]” (FC SD IV 9). (TLSB)

 *under whose wings.* A figure of a bird protecting her young under her wings (see Mt 23:37; see also note on 3:9). (CSB)

On the cherubim as God’s “wings.” (TLSB)

**2:13** *I have found favor*. After suffering, Ruth is now the beneficiary of the Lord’s mercy through Boaz’s kindness. (TLSB)

**“I Find Such Favor in Your Eyes, My Lord!” (2:13)**

The opening sentence in Ruth’s response to her first cheerful experience since her husband’s demise is the third time this day that Ruth has voiced the expression “to find favor” in someone’s eyes. The first was as a goal (2:2), the second as a question (2:10), and now the third expresses her gratitude for the favor she has received from Boaz. It also expresses her desire that his prayer for her (2:12) be fulfilled and functions in such a context to conclude a conversation. By recording Ruth’s three utterances of the expression, the narrator is signaling that Ruth is increasingly finding favor and acceptance in Bethlehem.185 The logically hopeless Moabite widow is beginning to receive some benefits of her commitment to Naomi and the Lord, who has become her own God (1:16–17), and who has more blessings in store for her (see 2:12). This strongly hints that a resolution to the major problem of Naomi’s dying family is underway. The Lord is indeed faithful to his promise to save all who hope in him. (CC)

Ruth explains that her gratitude stems from Boaz’s invitation and encouragement in view of her need and vulnerability (“for you have comforted me and you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant,” 2:13). After having referred to herself before as a foreigner whom Boaz acknowledged or recognized on the higher level of a resident alien (2:10), Ruth was amazed over experiencing his further welcome into the people of God, as if she were his “maidservant,” a member of his household. Respectfully addressing him as “my lord,” she dared put into words what Boaz was in effect doing: elevating an unattached alien to a lowly maidservant who would have at least some standing in his community of workers. With proper humility in her final sentence she confesses, “I am not comparable to one of your maidservants,” but the narrator lets this point ring in the hearer’s ear that Boaz had in effect accorded her that status. (CC)

Despite the example of Orpah and against the urging of Naomi, Ruth had decided to remain with Naomi, her people, and her God, the Lord (1:14–17). Ruth took the initiative to provide food for both Naomi and herself (2:2) and toiled away determinedly at a most menial task (2:7). She again demonstrated her faith and willful character by daring to suggest that Boaz had implicitly given her recognition as belonging to his clan or at least to his “family” of workers. Such an advantage could only be of help to Naomi as well as to herself. Boaz did not object to Ruth’s inference that he had elevated her status to be one of his “maidservants” (2:13), letting that term stand as the last word in their conversation that morning. He and Ruth did not let themselves be adversely influenced by outward circumstances: “He was prosperous, but he had not allowed his good fortune to cause him to forget the poor. She had been reduced to poverty but had not permitted such a reversal of fortune to make her hard and cynical.” (CC)

The audience may wonder if Ruth will find still more favor with Boaz, and if he will be the means to answer his own prayer for her (2:12; in 2:14–16 he will even treat her as an Israelite relative). But all credit for blessings is given to God alone, who ultimately directs events according to his plan of salvation for all in Christ, for the benefit of all who believe. (CC)

Now, we might ask: Why, if Boaz considered Ruth so worthy of deference, had he not immediately offered her and Naomi aid as soon as they arrived in Bethlehem (1:19, 22)? His preoccupation with the harvest would be no excuse. However, Boaz was not the closest relative of Naomi who would be primarily obligated to provide for her. Therefore, Boaz first had to give the closer relative the opportunity to help. But when Ruth came to glean in Boaz’s field, he then had both the occasion and the duty to be of assistance. The most he could do in deference to the rights and duties of the closest relative was to be generous and protective toward Ruth, which he was to the fullest (2:8–9, 14–16). (CC)

 *your servant.* A polite reference to herself. (CSB)

Because she is not an Israelite, she has no legal standing in Israel. (TLSB)

**2:14-17 “Come Here and Eat Some of the Food” (2:14–17)**

If anyone had any doubts as to Ruth’s status in Boaz’s “household” of harvesters, they were now clearly removed. Boaz continued to respect Ruth as a gleaner, who as such humbly kept her distance. Yet he unmistakably promoted her to the level of his own female workers (“one of your [Boaz’s] maidservants,” 2:13) by granting her unheard-of privileges for a gleaner. First, he invited her to partake of their noon meal (2:14). Next, he allowed her to glean among the piles of ears even before his young women had bound and gathered them up (2:15). Finally, as the greatest exceptional gesture, he ordered his workers to pull out some of their cut ears and drop them on the ground intentionally for her to take (2:16). (CC)

Boaz here has gone far beyond the requirements of the Law of Moses for an Israelite to be merciful toward a resident alien or Israelite widow. Rather, he has displayed the “favor” and acknowledgement (2:10) that an Israelite would show to a favorite, a member of his own circle of relatives. He exhibited himself not only as a relative of Naomi, but also of Ruth. He accepted her not just as if she were a resident alien in Israel, but even as if she were a full member of his clan. Through Boaz, the Lord was showing his grace to this Moabitess, who had become acceptable through faith (cf. Acts 10:35; Rom 15:16)! (CC)

Boaz was only required by the OT laws and customs to allow a resident alien or Israelite widow to glean at her own risk and expense (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut 24:19), but he went far beyond the letter of the Law by ensuring her safety from physical and verbal abuse, welcoming her to glean in his field throughout the harvest season, providing extra ears intentionally discarded, and furnishing free drink and food (Ruth 2:8–9, 14–16), which enabled her in one day to gather enough food for her and Naomi for perhaps two weeks. Boaz’s generosity was driven not just by the desire to adhere to the minimal requirements of the Torah, but by its divine spirit or intention. For Israelites were not only to love their fellow countrymen as themselves, but also aliens as well, because as aliens in a foreign land they had experienced God’s great mercy in delivering them from bondage (Lev 19:18, 34, 36). (CC)

Such mercy finds its fullest expression in Christ himself, who cared for the needy (e.g., Mt 14:13–21) and initiated table fellowship with sinners, and who even today provides abundant grace to all who seek refuge in him—us who are spiritually poor and needy, regardless of our outward circumstances.pWe baptized believers in Christ should certainly do no less than the exemplary believers of the old covenant in demonstrating our generosity to those in need, especially to fellow Christians, “the householders of the faith” (Gal 6:10), but also to all others (Lk 14:13; Rom 12:13), for we, like Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth, have received everlasting salvation purely by God’s grace (1 Cor 15:57–58). We are enabled to overflow with a wealth of generosity, as did the Christians in Macedonia (2 Cor 8:2), since we have first received the overflowing generosity of Christ, who endured a life of hardship and poverty, then gave himself up to the most vile death on the cross, in order to provide us with the riches of forgiveness and eternal life (2 Cor 8:9). (CC)

Indeed, Ruth the Moabitess is like those of us who are Gentile Christians and were “strangers and aliens,” but through Christ Jesus have become “fellow citizens of the saints and residents of God’s house” (Eph 2:19). As the Lord through Boaz welcomed Ruth into his covenant people, so he unites believing Jews and Gentiles as one body in Christ (1 Cor 10:16–17; Eph 2:11–18). So we Christians today welcome new believers out of all races and people groups into our Lord’s one “holy temple” (Eph 2:20–22). (CC)

Ruth may have been able to bring along only a minimal lunch and was probably wondering if she could glean enough for Naomi and herself to eat for another day or two. She now experienced how richly God may bless mundane toil. Indeed, she was awed into amazement by such totally unexpected acts of magnanimity, for Boaz not only served her at noon much more than she could eat (2:14), but also granted her the unheard-of privilege of gleaning among the piles of ears and ordered the reapers to intentionally discard ears for her to glean (2:15–16). Yet her own actions still portrayed her respect, humility, and gratitude. She did not presume to sit in the midst of the workers, but only nearby, “beside the reapers” (2:14). Since Boaz gave the orders to the reapers when Ruth arose to resume her toil (2:15–16), she probably was the first to leave the repast to return to work. (CC)

Strengthened by the satisfying meal, her industry proved itself again (as in 2:7) as she now kept laboring in the afternoon. Ruth certainly worked very hard in the back-breaking task of stooping to search for and pick up the dropped ears of barley from the ground. She had toiled at this from very early morning (2:7), for the workers will have started by the light of dawn, until the onset of evening, when she had to stop gleaning in time to beat the husks off the ears of grain (2:17). Her ephah of kernels was an amazing amount for one day’s gleaning (see the last textual note on 2:17). Boaz’s generosity made this possible, but Ruth still had to work diligently in order to realize it. Yet for the women there remained the hard work of grinding the kernels into flour, kneading the dough, and baking the loaves. (CC)

In this humble, industrious work, Ruth is a fine example to us all, not only in our own daily work, but also in the exercise of our spirit, as Charles Haddon Spurgeon applied 2:17:

*The gleaner gathers her portion ear by ear*; her gains are little by little: so I must be content to search for single truths. … Every ear helps to make a bundle, and every gospel lesson assists in making us wise to salvation. *The gleaner keeps her eyes open*: if she stumbled among the stubble in a dream, she would have no load to carry home rejoicing at evening. I must be watchful in religious exercises lest they become unprofitable to me. … *The gleaner stoops for all she finds*, and so must I. High spirits criticize and object, but lowly minds glean and receive benefit. A humble heart is a great help towards profitably hearing the gospel. The engrafted soul-saving word is not received except with meekness. (CC)

Since the creation, even before the fall, God has intended for human beings to work diligently and conscientiously (Gen 2:15). The wholesome activity of hard work for one’s own sustenance and for sharing with others belongs particularly to the calling of Christians. (CC)

**2:14** Boaz invites a destitute foreigner who was doing the menial work of gleaning to eat with him and his reapers. Boaz serves Ruth a meal with his own hands. This is a tremendous rise in status for Ruth. (TLSB)

 *wine*. Or, sour vinegar made from wine. (TLSB)

 *she had some left over*. Boaz’s generosity overflows. (TLSB)

**2:15** *gave orders to his men.* Boaz goes beyond the requirement of the law in making sure that Ruth’s labors are abundantly productive (see 3:15). (CSB)

 *Let her glean even among the sheaves*. Gleaners typically followed the young women who bundled together stalks and ears of cut cereal grass into a sheaf. Now Ruth gleans before the young women bundled the sheaves. (TLSB)

**2:16** *bundles for her* … *to glean*. Boaz’s generosity far exceeds the requirements prescribed in the Law for the poor (Lv 19:9; Dt 24:19). Such acts show that Boaz has a particular interest in Ruth. (TLSB)

**2:17** *she gleaned in the field until evening*. Though her work was manifestly easier and more productive, she did not become presumptuous and slack in her labors. (TLSB)

 *threshed.* See note on 1:22. In Ruth’s case, as in that of Gideon (Jdg 6:11), the amount was small and could be threshed by hand simply by beating it with a club or stick. (CSB)

 *ephah.* See NIV text note; an unusually large amount for one day’s gleaning. (CSB)

C 29 lbs, an astonishing amount gleaned in one day’s labor. (TLSB)

**2:18-20 “May He Be Blessed by the Lord” (2:18–20)**

Once again (as in 2:3) the narrator rushes the audience from one locale to another through Ruth’s movements, this time from the field to the town—from Boaz back to Naomi (2:18). But this interlude (2:18–23) is narrated in slow progression to stress the importance of the developments that come later (chapters 3–4). Ruth would have carried the load of barley kernels in her shawl on her head (2:17; see 3:15). Naomi was surely filled with much trepidation all the day, worried greatly over Ruth’s safety as an unprotected foreign woman among potentially abusive harvest workers (2:9, 22). As darkness approached and fell, her fears would have increased. (CC)

Ruth demonstrated that she was providing for Naomi’s needs by bringing back a large amount of grain that “she had gleaned” (2:18) and by giving her “what she had left over” (2:18) from her meal generously provided by Boaz (2:14). By these provisions, Ruth showed that she was acting as much more than a daughter-in-law, since a daughter-in-law had no duty to support her mother-in-law. Indeed, Ruth was acting as a son, who had the responsibility to provide for his widowed mother. Naomi may have acknowledged Ruth’s extraordinary role by addressing her as “my daughter” (2:22), even though Ruth was merely “her daughter-in-law,” as the narrator continues to remind us (2:20, 22). (CC)

As soon as Ruth entered their dwelling, Naomi could see at a glance with the light of a small oil lamp the large amount of grain. Her two “Where?” questions reveal her surprise. But more important than the place is the person who must have been gracious to Ruth. (In 2:19 Ruth will answer as if Naomi had not asked “Where?” but “Who?”) Knowing that no one under normal circumstances could have gathered so much in just one day, Naomi concluded instantly that Ruth must have received special favor, so she spontaneously cried out a blessing for the yet-unnamed benefactor: “May he who acknowledged you be blessed!” (2:19). That is a prayer that God’s grace would rest abundantly upon this man who had expressed his faith in the Lord by dealing so generously and sacrificially with a destitute foreign woman who was nevertheless a fellow believer in the Lord (1:16–17; cf. Mt 25:45). God’s blessing could bring the recipient spiritual and physical prosperity (cf. Gen 24:35; Deut 28:3–6), including an abundant harvest (Gen 26:12; Ps 65:10–11 [ET 65:9–10]). The blessing also amounted to a question about the identity of Ruth’s benefactor. With some complicated Hebrew syntax and repetition that signal this as a turning point in the story, Ruth delays the revelation of the name of their philanthropist until the very last Hebrew word of 2:19: “Boaz!” (CC)

Naomi’s first cry of joy was ignited by all the potential flour that could feed them for a week or two, besides the leftovers from the lunch that she could now enjoy as her first real meal of the day. But her first surprise was surpassed by the second: of all the people in Bethlehem, “Boaz” was most promising, much more so than a couple of weeks’ supply of bread, for he was one of her deceased husband’s relatives (2:1). Indeed, besides being a respected gentleman (2:1), he was one of the closest male relatives of their clan, who were duty-bound to help her in time of need. (CC)

The second surprise prompted Naomi to utter a second blessing for Boaz: “May he be blessed by the Lord, whose faithfulness has not forsaken the living and the dead!” (2:20). This is perhaps ambiguously phrased, for grammatically the “faithfulness” (חַסְרּ֔וֹ, literally, “his faithfulness”) could be that of either the Lord or Boaz. However, both contextually and theologically, the “faithfulness” must be the Lord’s. Indeed, many Scripture passages extol the Lord for חַסְרּוֹ, “his faithfulness,” as in the refrain, “his faithfulness endures forever,” that is frequent in Psalms 118 and 136. Yet, the *ḥeṣed* of Boaz became obvious in his generosity to Ruth (2:8–9, 11–12, 14–16) and would continue to be the means that fulfills the goal of the story (chapters 3 and 4). He thereby embodied the divine faithfulness. Still, it is more accurate to say that God’s *ḥeṣed*was operative through Boaz. (CC)

Naomi’s second blessing is even more remarkable, first, because she thereby comes out of her despair. Earlier she had lamented that the Lord had made her “empty” and had “testified against” her, and that the Almighty (*Shaddai*) had embittered and afflicted her (1:20–21), but here she declares that the Lord has exercised his faithfulness. “Self-centered sorrow yields to divine blessing through human agents.” Further, she singles out both “the living” and “the dead” (2:20) as recipients of his *ḥeṣed*. “The living,” though primarily meant generally, at least includes Ruth and Naomi, who have been overwhelmed this day by Boaz’s generosity. “The dead,” of course, includes Naomi’s deceased husband and sons (see 1:8). (CC)

The question, however, is this: how should the Lord be exhibiting faithfulness to the dead through Boaz’s deed for the living? The men’s wives had been left as destitute widows (1:3, 5), which could be construed as evidence that God had forsaken and severely punished the men (see Ps 109:9; Lam 1:1). Indeed, death entered the world as the just punishment for sin (Gen 2:17; 3:19; Rom 6:23a). But when the Lord graciously provides for their widows through fellow believers, this can be evidence that he is still gracious toward the whole family; as he preserves the earthly lives of the wives, so too may he preserve the husbands in the afterlife (cf. Mt 22:31–32). Thus Boaz might be compared to his great-grandson David, whose love for Jonathan persisted after Jonathan’s death: David acted upon God’s continuing grace toward Jonathan by caring for Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth and grandson Mica (2 Samuel 9). (CC)

The deaths of the Israelite husbands of Naomi and Ruth were tragic in a worldly sense, but the book of Ruth does not interpret them as divine judgment. The believing dead are precious in God’s sight (Ps 116:15), and he continues to care for his loved ones, who live unto him (Mt 22:31–32; Lk 20:35–38). Thus, at the heart of Naomi’s prayer is the biblical belief in life after death, with God’s promise of the resurrection to everlasting life for all believers. It is no coincidence that this new joy and hope in Naomi are reported right before the exact center of the story as the turning point for her. (CC)

Significant in this chapter are the five blessings, which should be highlighted. Blessings are spoken by Boaz to the workers (2:4) and to Ruth (2:12); by the workers to Boaz (2:4); and by Naomi over Boaz (2:19–20). The first two (in 2:4) invoke “the Lord” by name and reveal a deep mutual faith in him that affected even the mundane relationships between employer and employees in daily life, particularly at the time when the Lord’s physical blessings for his people were being harvested (see the commentary on 2:4). The other three blessings are responses to extraordinary human deeds of faith, and two of them invoke “the Lord” as the source and agent of blessing (twice in 2:12; once in 2:20). (CC)

After a pregnant pause (“Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law … ,” 2:20), it occurred to Naomi that Boaz was a גֹּאֵל (*goʾel*, “redeemer”) of theirs (2:20b). This meant he was a close male relative who, if able, could assume the obligation to pay the redemption price of the inheritance of his deceased relative Elimelech (2:1). The redemptive value of the property depended on the number of harvests it would bring before the next Jubilee. If the inheritance could not be redeemed, it should be returned into the possession of the original owner or his heirs at the Jubilee, in which case God himself acted as the redeemer. The redeemer of a widow who had neither father nor son had the duty to assume responsibility both for her and the family’s inherited real estate (Lev 25:13–17, 23–31; Jer 32:1–15) in order to keep the clan’s divinely given inheritance intact. (CC)

The Lord himself had instituted this rite of redemption, and he called his people to remain faithful to him by carrying out this covenant obligation. Now, it did not belong to one of the potential duties of a redeemer to marry a childless widow in order to raise up an heir for her deceased husband.46 However, the narrator of Ruth has been preparing the audience for associating the concepts of levirate marriage and *goʾel* responsibility by employing literary conventions that are common to a betrothal. At any rate, the role of Boaz in the story is hereby elevated. (CC)

If restitution for a crime was owed to a person who died before receiving it, the restitution was given to the redeemer (Num 5:6–8). The “redeemer of blood” (גֹּאֵל הַרָּם, *goʾel haddam*) was to avenge the willful killing of a relative by executing the murderer (but only if it was not an accidental death; in that case the murderer was given asylum in a city of refuge). The redeemer should also redeem a relative who became so impoverished that he had to sell himself into slavery (Lev 25:47–55). On the basis of metaphorical usage, he probably was expected to assist a relative seeking justice in a lawsuit. (CC)

In the OT, the last two duties led to associating redemption with God’s activity of redeeming his people, not only from injustice, harm, slavery, and enemies, but also from their own sin and its consequences, death and eternal condemnation to hell.51 The association of redemption with God’s spiritual and eschatological saving activity continued to be frequently appropriated in the NT, especially in reference to Christ’s work of redeeming us from sin, condemnation, and death, and granting everlasting salvation with the promise of the resurrection. The church therefore addresses Jesus ultimately as “the Redeemer.” (CC)

An Israelite family’s conception of its own identity depended on its genealogy (see Ruth 4:17–22) and its land inheritance as a down payment of its place in the new heavens and earth (e.g., Isaiah 11; 65:17–25), and included faith in its believing members’ life beyond death and participation in the resurrection, all made possible by the Lord’s redemption. The theme of the “redeemer” (*goʾel*) remains dominant for the rest of the story of Ruth, and with it comes the first implication of land. Why, then, is Elimelech’s land not mentioned explicitly until 4:3, and why did Naomi not make use of that land? (CC)

Elimelech’s land inheritance would have been ownership of a certain portion of a large field, or a share of what belonged to the clan as a whole (hence “*the portion* of the field that belongs to our brother Elimelech,” 4:3). When the famine forced Elimelech to leave Bethlehem with his family (1:1), he must have sold his land, that is, its usufruct, the remaining harvests until the next Jubilee (Lev 25:13–17), to someone willing to buy it. (Hence in Ruth 4:1–9 Boaz and the closer redeemer negotiate who will redeem the land from whoever bought it from Elimelech.) The land dare never be lost from the clan, for it really belonged to the Lord who had lent it to Israel’s tribes, clans, and families (Lev 25:23). Thus, the land was God’s royal estate, and the Israelites were his royal servants (see “my kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” Ex 19:6). When Naomi returned, she could only hope that the closest relative of Elimelech (the *goʾel*) would redeem the inheritance, with which should come the responsibility to care for her. Because the whole town was preoccupied with the harvest, the settling of the matter would have been temporarily postponed. Ruth 4 gives no evidence that money changed hands in the case of Elimelech’s land, so the proceedings there only settled the question of who would carry out the redemption. There is no discussion in Ruth 4 of the value of the land’s usufruct, which would determine the price the redeemer would need to pay to the present owner, to whom Boaz had sold his land. (CC)

The story will bear out that Naomi had something else besides the land settlement in mind—perhaps already at this early moment. For it is well within the realm of possibility that, after the arrival of a bountiful supply of grain that solved their immediate physical need, the thought of Boaz triggered in her a sudden insight: “Boaz is the answer—not only to our problem of sustenance, but also to the greater difficulty of providing the heir who alone can save our little family from extinction!” For striking is the fact that Boaz welcomed Ruth into his circle of dependents, in effect demonstrating that not only Naomi but even Ruth the foreigner was also his relative, and thus eligible to address him as “redeemer” (3:9). Similarly, Naomi implicitly included Ruth fully in her family when she said to her daughter-in-law about Boaz, “He is even one of *our* redeemers!” (2:20; see also 2:22, where Naomi calls Ruth “my daughter”). Ruth could only participate in the redemption if she married the man who would redeem Elimelech’s estate (as will happen in 4:10). (CC)

So far, Naomi had only this idea: the overly benevolent Boaz could be the solution! But how? For a redeemer must, in a crisis, take care of the inheritance, but he was not bound to provide an heir. That Boaz is just one of their “redeemers” indicates that he is not the closest one, who had the greatest responsibility to them (see 3:12). Besides, he has not committed himself as redeemer to anything further than allowing Ruth to glean provisions during the harvest season (2:21). To work out a solution to this dilemma would occupy Naomi’s thoughts during the next weeks. (CC)

**2:18** *city*. Typical translation of the Hbr term, though it may describe a walled town of small size, such as Bethlehem. (TLSB)

**2:19** *with whom I worked*.… *Boaz*. Ruth makes it sound as though she was working for Boaz. She recognizes that he treated her as a member of his clan, but she is not affected by this. Throughout, Boaz hints at things that Ruth has yet to comprehend! (TLSB)

**2:20** *The Lord… has not stopped showing his kindness.* See 1:8. In 3:10 Boaz credits Ruth with demonstrating this same virtue. (CSB)

 *kinsman-redeemers.* Redemption is a key concept in Ruth (see Introduction: Theme and Theology). The kinsman-redeemer was responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family—e.g., to provide an heir for a brother who had died (Dt 25:5–10), to redeem land that a poor relative had sold outside the family (Lev 25:25–28), to redeem a relative who had been sold into slavery (Lev 25:47–49) and to avenge the killing of a relative (Nu 35:19–21; “avenger” and “kinsman-redeemer” are translations of the same Hebrew word). Naomi is encouraged when she hears that the Lord has led Ruth to the fields of a relative who might serve as their kinsman-redeemer. This moment of Naomi’s awakened hope is the crucial turning point of the story. (CSB)

Hbr *go’el*. A redeemer’s responsibilities included the following.: “First, buying back the estate of a deceased relative (Lev 25:24–30; Jer 32:6–15); second, buying back an impoverished relative who had to sell himself into slavery (Lev 25:47–53); third, receiving restitution for a crime whose victim was deceased (Num 5:8); and fourth, avenging the willful, non-accidental killing of his relative by executing the murderer, for whom there was no ransom (Num 35:11–12, 16–21, 31–32; Deut 19:11–12), although this fourth practice was probably replaced by due procedures in criminal courts during the monarchy. Fifth, as implied in non-legal literature, the redeemer evidently also had the customary duty to assist the relative in a lawsuit” (CC Ru, p 38). Cf Jb 19:25; Ps 119:154; Pr 23:11; Jer 50:34; Lm 3:58. (TLSB)

**2:21-23 “She Clung Closely to the Young Women of Boaz to Glean
until the Completion of the Harvest” (2:21–23)**

For the present, the widows’ attention was directed to the harvest and gleaning. Once again, the narrator refers to Ruth as “the Moabitess” (2:21). Particularly striking in the Hebrew is that 2:20 ends with Naomi referring to “our redeemers,” and then 2:21 begins with the narrator pointedly emphasizing that Ruth is “the Moabitess.” The proximity of the terms underlines the gulf separating Boaz, who might act as redeemer for his Israelite relative Naomi, from the foreigner Ruth. Yet might it also suggest to the audience the possibility, however remote at this point in the story, that Boaz’s redemption might even involve a “Moabitess”? Earlier, the narrator called attention to Ruth as “the Moabitess” to emphasize the dangers threatening her as an unprotected young foreign widow going out in the fields to glean (2:2; she is also called a “Moabitess” in 1:22; 4:5, 10; see also 1:4; 2:6). But here, the context stresses Boaz’s acceptance of Ruth the foreigner. (CC)

Ruth reports to Naomi the benevolent directive from Boaz: “Cling closely to the workers who are mine” (2:21, referring to 2:8). Surely Ruth also would have reported to her mother-in-law all the extraordinary privileges Boaz had granted her (recorded by the narrator in 2:8–9, 14–16), but the narrator omits a full report here to avoid undue repetition. Yet the narrator, quoting Ruth’s words, here reveals another privilege, which Boaz must have granted to Ruth sometime during the earlier dialogue between them (2:8–16), but which the narrator did not record previously. Ruth adds that Boaz had granted her permission to glean in his field throughout the entire harvest: “until they have finished all the harvest that is mine” (2:21). In 2:8 Boaz had said to Ruth, “Yes, never depart from this [field],” but the narrator did not include there any words of Boaz about the end of the harvest. (CC)

This is another example of progressive revelation in the narrative: the author does not relate the entire speech in his initial record of it, but later dialogue reveals what was also said earlier. The narrator includes the revelation only later, at the point where it proves to be most effective for the plot and development of the story. The fact that Ruth continued to glean in Boaz’s field until the completion of both the barley and wheat harvests (2:23) shows that Ruth did not invent this new privilege; in 2:21 she faithfully reported what Boaz must have told her earlier. (CC)

As toward the end of the first chapter or act (1:20–21), Naomi also is the last character to speak in the second (2:22). She gladly assented to Boaz’s arrangement (2:8, which Ruth relayed more fully in 2:21) since it protected Ruth from harassment and danger for the rest of the harvest season (“so men will not molest you in another field,” 2:22). Naomi must have been greatly relieved. Besides, after all of Boaz’s generosity, it would be most ungrateful for Ruth to glean anywhere else. Ruth had included the young men who were the reapers when she reported Boaz as having said, “Cling closely to *the workers*,” since she used a masculine plural Hebrew term. But since Boaz had expressly told her to cling to his “young women” (2:8) and had told his “young men” not to touch her (2:9), the words of Ruth recorded by the narrator may tantalize the audience by suggesting Ruth was casting eyes on the young men. Naomi at least, who had already begun to think of Boaz as somehow the answer to their deeper dilemma (“he is even one of our redeemers,” 2:20), seems to have heard Ruth’s term (“the workers,” 2:21) as a reference to the young men. So she advised Ruth to stay close to “his young *women*” (2:22), the female workers who gathered the stalks cut by the men who were the reapers. For the time being, Ruth should not jeopardize Naomi’s embryonic plan by associating with male workers who were not relatives of Elimelech. (CC)

As the narrator provided the very last verse in the first chapter (1:22), so too does he in the second (2:23), which leaves a question in the hearer’s mind that serves as a hinge to the next chapter or act. Ruth continued to live with Naomi (2:23), which fulfilled her vow (1:16), but this also signals that all the previous encouraging movement had come to a standstill. At the end of chapter 1, Naomi’s topic was death (1:21), but the narrator’s was life (1:22). Now, Naomi affirms the plan that would provide them with sustenance for life (2:23), but the storyteller cautions death: Ruth “lived with her mother-in-law” (2:23). The reason Ruth lives with Naomi is because Ruth remains unmarried, and as long as she remains unmarried there will be no heir to save the family from extinction. That the emphasis of the narrator is in tension with that of Naomi heightens the suspense for the audience. (CC)

The intervening quiet seven weeks from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the harvest of wheat (2:23) were, in the OT calendar, from Passover to Shavuoth. They parallel the seven weeks in the NT and church calendar from Easter to Pentecost. The Israelites rejoiced in reaping their harvest before they could turn their attention to other matters, including whatever might result from the harvest. Similarly, Christians rejoice for seven weeks in the risen Redeemer’s victory over Satan and death before turning their attention after Pentecost to the practical consequences of living out their redeemed life. Hence the season after Pentecost is called “The Time of the Church.” (CC)

Providing an heir for Elimelech’s family would involve marriage, and Naomi declares that her family, in which she graciously includes Ruth, has “redeemers” (2:20), but it was not a redeemer’s duty to marry a widow in order to produce an heir; that was the responsibility only of a *levir*. A *levir* had to be a brother of the widow’s husband, a son of the same father (Deut 25:5–6). However, Elimelech apparently had no living brother, and Naomi was too old to have a child anyway (Ruth 1:12), so that ruled out an heir through Naomi. The only brother (Chilion) of Ruth’s deceased husband, Mahlon (4:10), was also dead (1:5), so that ruled out an heir through Ruth—at least by levirate marriage. So the audience finds itself in a quandary how to conceive of a solution to the family’s dilemma by means of the OT institutions of a redeemer, marriage, and heir. (CC)

It is most interesting that the book furnishes a number of clues to induce the audience to associate this story with marriage. Robert Alter has concluded that biblical storytelling made use of conventional “type-scenes,” that is, presentations of certain episodes, such as announcing the birth of a hero, danger in the desert, and the testament of a hero, in a conventional pattern with certain elements. One major type-scene is the betrothal of the hero, which Alter discerns especially in the second chapter of Ruth, and Alter relates it to the betrothal scenes of Genesis 24; Genesis 29; and Ex 2:15–21. Each betrothal scene has unique variations, but a typical scene could be described as follows: the hero journeys to a foreign land, encounters a girl (in Exodus 2, seven girls) at a well, where he draws water for her (in Genesis 24 she draws for him), and bestows gifts on her, whereupon she rushes home, and then the hero negotiates the betrothal with her family, and the marriage is the happy conclusion. (CC)

The audience paid keen attention to variations in the pattern, because they signified or foreshadowed momentous characteristics. The passive Isaac had a surrogate (Abraham’s servant), but the initiative-taking Rebekah drew the water (Genesis 24). Jacob, who repeatedly had to overcome obstacles, rolled a stone away (Gen 29:10). Moses, who had to contend with enemies, drove off hostile shepherds (Ex 2:17–19). And the refugees Jacob and Moses had no gifts to present. (CC)

The literary convention of a betrothal scene serves a monotheistic purpose by reproducing “in narrative the recurrent rhythm of a divinely appointed destiny in Israelite history.” More specifically, since the triune God blessed procreation (Gen 1:26–27), and after the fall into sin his Gospel promise was that the Redeemer would come through procreation (Gen 3:15), subsequent betrothal scenes in the OT point toward God’s fulfillment of the Gospel promise through the birth of the Savior. (CC)

The whole book of Ruth may be termed a Christotelic betrothal scene, culminating in the birth of David (Ruth 4:17, 22), ancestor of Jesus Christ (Mt 1:5–6). But the circumstances in Ruth often differ from the earlier patterns and sometimes are even fully reversed. It is not the hero, Boaz, but the heroine, Ruth, who is the foreigner in a strange land, and she is even a widow. They encounter each other not at a well, but in a field, for instead of water, the harvest has central significance in this story. Neither one drew the water, but rather the young men did (2:9). Boaz was favorable toward Ruth not because of her ancestry (she was a “Moabitess,” e.g., 2:2), but because of her conversion to faith in the Lord (1:16–17) and her fidelity to Naomi (2:11–12; *ḥeṣed* in 3:10), the widow of his relative Elimelech (2:1). Ruth’s conversion and fidelity to Naomi gave her a new, honorable family identity (cf. Gen 24:15; 29:10) that made her eligible to be an Israelite wife, a matriarch by adoption. Boaz heaped privileges and edible gifts on Ruth, who went home with the news. The marriage negotiations were delayed and carried out publicly (Ruth 4:1–10), for Ruth lacked an intimate male relative to negotiate for her. (CC)

Despite the unique circumstances in Ruth, an attentive audience, alerted by Ruth’s need for a husband (1:8–13), would quickly have recognized the allusions to a betrothal scene, which announced that Boaz, not a younger man (3:10), was Ruth’s future bridegroom. However, that recognition would have produced tension and anxiety about how the hero and heroine, under such difficult conditions, could become betrothed. (CC)

It is interesting that these ancestors of the great King David, who at the time were so seemingly inconsequential for Israel’s salvation history, should have experienced such an intriguing and detailed “betrothal scene,” whereas David himself did not. In stark contrast, the circumstances of three of his betrothals are reported, but all bear little resemblance to the conventional scheme. They rather concern violence and death: David and his men killed two hundred Philistines as the bride-price for Michal (1 Sam 18:20–27); he married Abigail after her first husband died of shock (1 Sam 25:18–42); and he took Bathsheba after arranging for her husband’s death in battle (2 Samuel 11). Within the canon as a whole, it appears that the account of Boaz and Ruth is a substitute for what their greater descendant lacked. (CC)

A Jewish audience would definitely have raised their eyebrows when Jesus, a traveling stranger, asked a Samaritan woman to draw water for him so he could drink from Jacob’s well (Jn 4:6–7; cf. 4:11) and she even was an adulteress (Jn 4:16–18)! But Jesus turned the makings of a “betrothal scene” into an evangelistic opportunity (Jn 4:28–30, 39–42). Jesus affirmed that marriage is God’s sacred institution (Mt 19:4–6) and he blessed a wedding by his personal attendance and first public miracle (Jn 2:1–11). Yet all the Gospels are consistent in avoiding every hint of a literal betrothal or of an individual bride for Jesus. Instead, the NT revelation is that Jesus himself is the Bridegroomc and the church herself is his bride (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17). Through the apostolic ministry—the preaching of God’s Word and the administration of the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—the church is united with Christ as his body and betrothed, virgin bride (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25–32). The everlasting Bridegroom promises an intimately close relationship with his believers (Is 61:10; 62:5; Hos 2:19–20) that is anticipated and Christotelically prophesied in a Christian marriage in the union of husband and wife (Eph 5:22–33). (CC)

**2:21** Boaz’s men would also now keep a protective eye on Ruth. (TLSB)

**2:22** *young women*. Workers for Boaz. (TLSB)

 *assaulted*. As a young, single foreign woman, Ruth would be open to simmering verbal prejudice or worse. (TLSB)

**2:23** *until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.* This phrase rounds out the harvest episode and prepares for the next major scene on the threshing floor (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

 *she lived with her mother-in-law*. Though times were improving, Ruth was still faithful to her mother-in-law in accord to the vow she made in 1:16–17. (TLSB)

**Ch 2** The Lord brings Ruth and Boaz together in mutual honor. We see a wonderful reversal in the fortunes of Ruth and Naomi. In times of darkness and suffering today, we may doubt God’s Father-heart toward us. Yet God promises that He works all things for our good (Rm 8:28–39). • Dear Jesus, by Your Holy Spirit, open the eyes of our hearts so that we may see You caring for us through those around us. Amen. (TLSB)