

Ruth Bible Study

Chapter 2

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print at the end of the “questions” section.**

Read 2:1-23

1. How is Boaz described in verse 1?
2. What does Ruth ask to do in verse 2?
3. How does verse 3 illustrate that God is in charge at all times?
4. 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)

It or something like it is found in our worship liturgy. This liturgical exchange is short. What might we do before worship to get more meaning from it?

5. 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 (vv. 5-6). Why would the foreman have been expected to know who Ruth was?
6. In 2:7 Ruth had requested permission to glean leftover ears of grain from the ground and gather them for herself into sheaves or bundles. 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)

How did Ruth win over the foreman?

7. The narrator in verses 8-9 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. (CC)

In verses 8-9 what are ways the Boaz shows special care for Ruth's welfare?

8. Look again at verses 10-16. In response to Ruth humble approach and what Boaz had come to know what are some very special actions he takes concerning Ruth?
9. In verses 17-18 how does Ruth prove her industriousness and loyalty?
10. In verses 20-23 what will Naomi reveal about Boaz?
11. What is your favorite verse in this study and why?

Some Answers to the above Questions:

1. The ESV uses the word *worthy*. It literally means "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)

2. 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. (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. (CC)

Although Ruth is an alien and, as a young woman alone and obviously quite vulnerable in the harvest fields, she undertakes to provide for her mother-in-law. (CSB)

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). 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)

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. 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. (CC)

4. Like several other portions of our liturgy, we might give some added thought as we peruse the worship folder before the worship service.

5. 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)

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)

6. 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, which helps explain why Ruth started gleaning in the "early morning" (Ruth 2:7). (CC)

7. 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. (CC)

8. 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. The whole town quickly learned Ruth's story, how she abandoned everything in her loving devotion to Naomi and full dependence on the LORD. (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).

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)

9. Ruth would have carried the load of barley kernels in her shawl on her head. An *ephah* was C 29 lbs, an astonishing amount gleaned in one day's labor. (TLSB)

Ruth shared with Naomi what was left over from her meal generously provided by Boaz. 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. (CC)

10. In 20b the concept of kinsman-redeemer surfaces. This meant Boaz 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)