

RUTH

sheaf before the Lord on the day after the sabbath, and the people were to offer a he-lamb without blemish for a burnt offering unto the Lord (Leviticus 23:10-12). Since so many of the events recorded in Ruth occurred during the time of the barley harvest, it was customary to read the little book as the people celebrated the feast of Pentecost, the feast which came fifty days after the passover. This statement in the closing verse of chapter one opens the way for telling of events which happened in the barley fields where Ruth worked after she came to Bethlehem-judah.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 1

1. Where was Naomi's home in Israel?
2. What was the name of Naomi's husband?
3. What were the names of the two sons of Naomi?
4. What were the names of the two women of Moab whom Naomi's sons married?
5. How long was Naomi in Moab?
6. Did Orpah return to Bethlehem with Naomi?
7. What is the meaning of the word *Naomi*?
8. What name did Naomi ask the people of Bethlehem to call her?
9. What is the meaning of the word *Mara*?
10. What time of year was it when Naomi returned to Bethlehem?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 2

- Vv. 1- 7 *Ruth gleaning in the field of Boaz.* Provision was made in Israel for the poor and widowed to glean the fields for their sustenance. Land owners were instructed not to reap wholly the corners of their fields. They were not to

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gather the gleaning of the harvest. Fallen fruits of the orchards were to be left as were the grapes in the vineyard. These were for the poor and the sojourner among them (Leviticus 19:9, 10). Ruth took her place among these "non-advantaged" people.

Vv. 8-16 *Ruth treated kindly by Boaz.* Ruth was invited to eat with the reapers of Boaz. When they went out to the field again, Boaz gave instructions to his men telling them to leave additional grain in the field for Ruth. He was a near kinsman of Naomi's and had heard of Ruth's coming back to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Vv. 17-23 *Naomi informed of Ruth's good fortune.* The day's work in the fields of Boaz gave enough grain to Ruth to meet the immediate needs of the two women. Naomi thanked God that Ruth received such kind treatment, and she encouraged Ruth to work only in the fields of Boaz. For this reason, Ruth stayed with the workers in the fields of Boaz until the end of the barley harvest.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Labor and Management are compatible.* When Boaz came to meet his workers, he greeted them with a prayer that the Lord would be with them. They replied by praying that God would bless their master. Such a healthy relationship between the owner of land and those who worked for him is a good example to be imitated by all who are in similar situations today.

2. *A good reputation is the best kind of introduction.* When Boaz met Ruth, she was humble before him. She was surprised that he paid any attention to her since she was a foreigner. Boaz replied that he had heard already how she had treated her mother-in-law kindly after the death of her husband. He knew how Ruth had left her father and mother and the land of her nativity to come into the land of Judah. All of this spoke highly of Ruth's character.
3. *Generation gaps need not occur.* In the twentieth century much has been made of children entering into an era of life known as the "teen ages." Young people believe they enter into some kind of magic time of life when they are not quite children and not quite adult. Throughout many of these years they look askance at anyone more than ten years older than they are and quite often refuse to listen to the counsel of wiser and more mature judgment. Ruth did not take this attitude. She looked to Naomi for counsel, and Naomi counseled her wisely as she asked her to stay in the fields of Boaz. Each generation should look for this pleasant association with those younger or older than they.

CHAPTER TWO

Ruth Meets Boaz 2:1-23

Ruth Gleans in the Field of Boaz 2:1-7

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.

2 And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

4 And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.

5 Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?

6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:

7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

1. *What is the meaning of mighty man of wealth? 2:1*

Boaz is described as "a mighty man of wealth." Such terminology is usually used to describe one who was a brave "man of war." The term was used in this way in Judges 6:12 in describing Gideon. The angel of the Lord called Gideon "a mighty man of valor," but the original language is the same in both places. The phrase is translated in the same way in Judges 11:1 where Jephthah is called "a mighty man of valor." Since Boaz had nothing to do with warfare, it is presumed the phrase means he was an influential man with considerable wealth, and the translation is so given.

2. *What was the law regarding gleaning? 2:2, 3*

The Mosaic law (Leviticus 19:9, 23:22, cf. Deuteronomy 24:19) expressly secured to the poor the right to glean in the harvest fields. It prohibited the owners from gleaning themselves, but hard-hearted farmers and reapers threw obstacles in the way of the poor. Some even forbade

their gleaning altogether. Hence, Ruth proposed to glean after him who should generously allow it. She carried out this intention with the consent of Naomi. God led her to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech, without her knowing the owner of the field or being at all aware of his connection with Elimelech. Ruth was industrious and willing to work with her hands to provide their daily bread.

3. *What was the relationship between Boaz and his reapers?* 2:4

He treated them mercifully and they served him faithfully. He greeted them by saying, "The Lord be with you." They replied to him by saying, "The Lord bless thee." Such a greeting indicates the existence of a good rapport between the landowner and those who worked in his fields. Their expressions were more than the customary greetings which are often thoughtless and given hastily, such as our everyday, "Hi!" or "Hello!" Both the greeting of Boaz and the reply of his reapers were prayers.

4. *Why did he come from Bethlehem?* 2:4

Men lived in towns and went out to their fields. It was unsafe for individual farmers to live alone in the countryside. They would be vulnerable to highway robbers and in danger of harm from predatory animals. Most of the time, these settlements had walls around them with gates which could be locked at night, thus protecting the people who dwelled there from any harm. Boaz resided in Bethlehem and went out to his field during the daytime. Thus we read, "Boaz came from Bethlehem."

5. *Why did Ruth ask to work "among the sheaves"?* 2:7

She wanted permission to go into the fields—more than walking along the roadside. The Old Testament law was specific in giving instructions as to how much grain could be gathered by those who were dependent upon this activity for their livelihood. For example, it was specified

that they could go into the vineyard of their neighbor, but they were not to take any grapes out in a vessel. They could eat all that they needed while they were there. A similar rule was made with regard to walking through the standing grain of the fields. People were allowed to pluck the ears with their hands, but they were not allowed to use a sickle in the standing grain (Deuteronomy 23:24, 25). According to this custom and regulation Jesus' disciples plucked grain as they walked through the grain fields on the sabbath day (Matthew 12:1, 2). Ruth's request was for freedom to work in the fields following the reapers.

6. *What can we learn from the servant's conversation with Boaz? 2:4-7*

It is evident from this answer of the servant who was placed over the reapers that Boaz did not prohibit any poor person from gleaning in his field. It is also clear that Ruth asked permission of the overseer of the reapers. She availed herself of this permission with untiring zeal from the first thing in the morning. She wanted to get the necessary support for her mother-in-law and herself. Lastly, we learn her history was well known to the overseer and also to Boaz, although Boaz saw her now for the first time.

The Kindness of Boaz 2:8-16

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens:

9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.

10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

12 The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

13 Then she said, Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.

14 And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

15 And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:

16 And let fall also some of the handfulls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

7. Why did Boaz make special arrangements about the water? 2:9

Men who hired workers were especially careful to provide water for them. Even in modern times these provisions are cared for with great detail. Men soon be-

come disgruntled if good clean water is not made available to them. The hot climate of Palestine demands such arrangements. If Ruth were forced to provide her own jug for drinking water, she would be handicapped in this respect. It was a fine concession which Boaz made to her in this regard.

8. *What was the cause of the kind treatment? 2:11, 12*

Boaz heard a good report of Ruth. Word must have spread rapidly about the woman from a foreign country who had shown great kindness to her deceased husband's family. Boaz mentioned especially her leaving her own father and mother and her native land to come into Judah. He was impressed because she had entered a country about which she had no prior knowledge. He was also duly impressed with her renunciation of a former pagan faith in order to be counted among the redeemed of Israel. His picturesque expression of this action was similar to an expression used by Moses as he mentioned God's bearing the children of Israel on "eagle's wings" (Deuteronomy 32:11). Boaz prayed that Ruth would be rewarded by "the Lord God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to trust."

9. *Why did Ruth compare herself unfavorably with the other gleaners? 2:13*

She was a stranger in Israel. She said she was not like any of the handmaidens in the service of Boaz. She may have had different facial characteristics since she was not descended from one of the founders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Her people had been separated by location and social customs from the people of Israel. Her appearance was evidently different enough to set her apart. Some feel the main thrust of this book is to break down barriers of national and racial prejudice, and certainly Boaz did not withhold his kindness from Ruth because she was of foreign nationality.

10. *What was the parched corn? 2:14*

Parched corn was a delicacy prepared by roasting the heads of grain (not ears of maize). Israel's offering of the firstfruits to the Lord demanded their giving "green ears of corn dried by the fire, even corn beaten out of full ears" (Leviticus 2:14). These roasted grains of wheat are still eaten by reapers in the harvest field. On occasion strangers will be offered some of these delicacies. One traveler told of coming into a field where nearly two hundred reapers and gleaners were working. The gleaners were nearly as numerous as the reapers. Some of them were resting from their labors and taking some refreshment. These offered the traveler some of their "parched corn." Those who have partaken of this kind of grain describe the grains of wheat as being not yet fully dried and hard. They are roasted in a pan on an iron plate and constitute a very tasty bit of food. This is sometimes eaten along with bread or at other times in place of it. Boaz gave Ruth an abundant supply of the parched grain. She was not only satisfied, but saved some to take home to her mother-in-law.

11. *Why did Boaz give special instructions to his young men? 2:15, 16*

Ruth had evidently asked for permission to glean among the sheaves, an allowance which was not normally made. Boaz also felt it necessary to instruct his reapers not to torment her or cause her any injury. Furthermore, he instructed them to drop little bundles of grain for her. These were to be left lying so that she could pick them up and add to her supply of gleaned grain. Some of the workmen may have thought Ruth was out of place. Others may have resented the presence of a Moab woman among the other gleaners, but Boaz instructed them to "reproach her not." He continued by saying, "rebuke her not."

Ruth Returns to Naomi 2:17-23

17 So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley.

18 And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.

19 And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned today? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought today is Boaz.

20 And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

21 And Ruth the Moabite said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

22 And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

23 So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law.

12. How much is an ephah? 2:17

An ephah equals three pecks and three pints. It was almost a bushel. This standard of measure was popular throughout much of Israel's history. When the children of Israel received manna in the wilderness, the portion given to each person was counted as a tenth part of an ephah (Exodus 16:36). Since one-tenth of this amount was sufficient for an individual's need of manna, Ruth's por-

tion from her gleaning was considerably more than a day's supply of grain. She was quite evidently industrious and achieved a great deal from her day's work.

13. *Why was Ruth reserving some grain?* 2:18

The writer of Proverbs wisely counseled a young man to put a knife to his throat when he went to eat with a ruler. Otherwise, he might be tempted to plunge into the abundant provisions and make a spectacle of himself. He would thus show his greediness and offend his host (Proverbs 23:1, 3). Such conduct was not becoming to any person, and it was especially so with Ruth since she was a woman and a foreigner. Consequently, she did not eat all of the parched grain which was provided for her. Furthermore, she must have been thinking about Naomi. Her unselfish and loving character prompted her to save some of the delicacies for her mother-in-law.

14. *How was God showing kindness to the dead?* 2:20

What was done to Ruth and Naomi was also done to Mahlon and Chilion. Naomi admits it was kindness done to her and to Ruth, the living. God was showing kindness to Elimelech and his sons inasmuch as He was caring for their widows. The property was still in the name of Elimelech, and Ruth was still known as the wife of Mahlon. The kindness of Boaz to Ruth was a remembrance of both the living and the dead.

15. *What is the meaning of "next kinsmen?"* 2:20b

There were three ways in which redemption was specified in Leviticus 25:25 ff. *The first case was this:* if a man became poor and sold his property, his nearest redeemer was to come and release what his brother had sold. He was to buy it back from the purchaser and restore it to its former possessor. The nearest kinsman was the relative upon whom this obligation rested. *The second*

case was this: if one had no redeemer, either because there were no relatives upon whom the obligation rested or because they were all too poor and he had earned and acquired sufficient to redeem it, he was to calculate the years of purchase and return the surplus to the man who had bought it. He gave as much as was paid for the years which still remained up to the next year of jubilee. Thus, the original owner might come into possession of it again. *The third case was this:* if a man had not earned as much as was required to make compensation for the recovery of the land, what he had sold was to remain in the possession of the buyer till the year of jubilee and then it was to "go out." It was to become free again, so that the impoverished seller could enter into possession with compensation. Since the "near kinsman" was also to marry the widow of a brother, the two transactions—redemption of the land and marriage of the surviving wife—became inextricably associated.

16. *How long did the gleaning continue?* 2:23

Barley harvest was early spring (March, April). Wheat harvest was in the summer. Altogether harvest lasted from three to four months. These were important events in the lives of this agricultural people. The plagues which came on Egypt were identified in time by the condition of the crops. When the plague of hail came on Egypt, the flax and the barley was smitten "for the barley was in the ear and the flax was balled" (Exodus 9:31). At the same time a note was made of the season because the "wheat and the rye were not smitten: because they were not grown up" (verse 32). These people were accustomed to noting time by making reference to the progress of their crops. Such activities as the harvesting of the grain were very important to the lives of these people.

RUTH

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 2

1. What was the name of Elimelech's near kinsman?
2. What service did Ruth ask Naomi to allow her to perform?
3. In what village did the near-kinsman live?
4. What was the kinsman's greeting to the men in his field?
5. What was the reply of the men in the field?
6. Where did Ruth want to glean?
7. By what title did Ruth describe herself?
8. What delicacy was Ruth given to eat?
9. How much grain did Ruth get from her gleaning?
10. What kind of grain was it?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 3

- Vv. 1- 5 *Naomi's instructions to Ruth.* When the barley harvest was nearly completed, Naomi instructed Ruth to go to the threshing floor for the feast. Since Boaz was a near kinsman, Naomi thought he should enter into a Levirate marriage with Ruth. With typical mother-love, she helped Ruth to make herself as appealingly feminine as possible. She had also advised her to bide her time and to approach Boaz in modesty.
- Vv. 6-13 *Boaz honors Ruth's request.* Boaz received Ruth's proposal and complimented her on her honorable conduct. He did not go outside the Law, however, and reminded Ruth of the presence in the community of one who was closer of kin than he was himself. He asked Ruth to stay with him for the rest of the night in order to protect her from any harm and prom-