

Chapter 2

- II. **Relief**: The blessing of food on the land of Israel is realized by Naomi through Ruth and Boaz in Bethlehem (2:1-23).⁸²
- A. **Means**: Introduction of Boaz, covenant keeper and instrument of YHWH (2:1-3).⁸³
1. **Means**: Introduction of Boaz to the story as near kinsman (2:1).⁸⁴
 2. **Cause**: Ruth seeks to glean according to covenant (2:2).⁸⁵
 3. **Unknown cause**: Ruth *happens*⁸⁶ to find the field of Boaz (2:3).⁸⁷
- B. **Covenant Status**: Dialogue with worker reveals position of Boaz and Ruth with respect to covenant (2:4-7).⁸⁸

⁸² This chapter is marked out by the scene of the field, and Naomi's relief from famine through Boaz and Ruth.

⁸³ Boaz here is introduced before his appearance in the story. The author does this to show where God is going ahead to lead both Ruth and Naomi.

⁸⁴ Boaz is 1) related to Naomi; 2) very wealthy or perhaps honorable (The word is also used of Ruth in 3:11 ("excellence") and 4:11 (NASV: "wealth").).

⁸⁵ Since Naomi and Ruth were poor, gleaning was a covenant means of blessing (Lev. 19:9,10; 23:22, Deut. 24:19). It is interesting that it is Ruth, the gentile, who suggests gleaning and not Naomi. Note that this was YHWH's legal provision for the poor, alien and widow. However, to have Ruth suggest this and not Naomi is consistent in the story, for Naomi never suggests anything covenant correct.

⁸⁶ The influx of "chance" (Lit: "happened to happen upon") into the story is considerable. Later (4:1) by chance (marked by הנה, 'behold') the close relative "of whom Boaz spoke was passing by...". Earlier (2:4), Boaz comes back (marked again by 'behold') precisely at the right time to observe Ruth in the field.

⁸⁷ While gleaning in the field of Boaz is important, the fact that he is a near kinsman is not related to this. According to covenant she should have been able to find food in any man's field.

The near kinsman (and thus Boaz) was also a redeemer, that is, he was to buy back what was lost, particularly in the case of a field. Thus the *goel* is used primarily in restoring the field to the original owner. It is not used, but should be understood within the context of the Levirate marriage, for the seed had been lost at the death of the husband and the *goel* was in essence repurchasing the field for the deceased brother.

1. **Boaz**: Boaz and workers share a common respect based on YHWH (2:4).
 2. **Ruth**: Worker defines Ruth as a poor alien from Moab related to the widow Naomi (2:6-7).
- C. **Covenant Response**: Boaz' response to Ruth through the covenant is one of providing for a poor alien and widow (2:8-16).⁸⁹
1. **Security**: Boaz insures her provision, insisting that she stay in his field, where she will be respected (2:8-10).⁹⁰

2:8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean⁹¹ in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. 9 "Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

⁸⁸ This subsection is marked out by Boaz' dialogue with the servant. His conversation is present to reveal the covenant status of Boaz and Ruth to Boaz and to the reader. Note that Naomi is already known to Boaz (1:19, 2:1, 6).

⁸⁹ Boaz was required to treat the alien in a response to his own personal blessing (Deut. 10:19; 14:29; 26:11; Lev. 19:9-10; 33-34; 23:22). In addition, Naomi, being a poor Israelite deserved proper treatment also (Lev. 25:25). In addition, as widows, both Ruth and Naomi deserved proper treatment according to Lev. 21:14, 22:13, Deut. 10:18, 14:29, 16:11, 16:14, 24:17, 24:19, 24:20, 24:21, 26:12, 26:13, 27:19. Deut. 10:18-19 is particularly significant as it demonstrates that YHWH's own heart is with the alien and widow. These verses regarding orphans, widows, and the poor are used in James 1:27, 2:15 to emphasize the responsibility of a covenant-keeper. Further, Boaz reconfirms that Ruth is a convert to YHWH. Boaz admires Ruth for honoring her mother according to covenant (Lev. 19:3, Deut. 5:16).

⁹⁰ Security was a covenant provision (Lev. 25:19; 26:5; 26:26; Deut. 6:11; 8:10; 12; 11:15; 14:29; 23:25; 26:12; 31:20). In addition, Boaz wanted to bless Ruth as a covenant-blessor, and part of that was to show respect for her as a widow.

⁹¹ Here Boaz is recognizing his position as provider through the Law regarding gleaning. He is over-abundantly providing, in essence guaranteeing Ruth, acceptance in his field and thus the provision of grain.

2. **Means:** Boaz confirms that he is the provider of YHWH's blessing (safety and food) for a poor alien, widow and convert to YHWH (2:11-13).⁹²

2:11 And Boaz answered and said to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your ⁹³husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know."⁹⁴ 12 "May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

3. **Food:** Boaz insures her food (2:14-17).

2:14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. 16 "And also you shall purposely pull out for her *some grain* from the bundles and leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."⁹⁵ 17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

4. **Effect:** Naomi receives blessing of food through Ruth (2:18).

⁹² Recognize here that Boaz becomes the mediator of blessing to a gentile. This was what Israel was to do. It was what Naomi did not do. They both bless Ruth verbally, but Naomi sends her away from her mediation of YHWH, while Boaz provides it.

⁹³ Note that he refers to the bond that she has with Naomi through her husband. It is not the death of Elimilech that has caused Ruth to be so amazing (Naomi's need), but that the connection to Naomi was seemingly severed through the death of Mahlon. Thus it is amazing that Ruth stayed, having been freed by the physical connection, but not in the view of the text from the requirement of bonding to provide seed, both in Genesis 2:24 (one flesh) and in the Levirate marriage.

⁹⁴ This appears to be another allusion to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3.

⁹⁵ This is likely a reference to Exodus 22:21.

2:18 And she took *it* up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took *it* out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied.

- D. **Summary:** Naomi recognizes Boaz as provider of security and food as Ruth keeps her vow (2:19-23).⁹⁶

This paragraph is a pivot between the foregoing attempts to receive food and the following which are the attempts to receive seed.

1. **Food Assessment:** Naomi blesses Boaz as the gracious means by which she has received food (2:19-20).

This paragraph is a pivot between the foregoing attempts to receive food and the following, which are the attempts to receive seed. Having been blessed with food, Naomi gives a blessing of YHWH to Boaz. This is a parallel to her conclusion when leaving Moab, as she blessed Orpah and Ruth for taking care of her and their husbands. Now she recognizes that Boaz has taken care of her and Ruth as widows (Ruth as an alien) through gleaning.

But then she adds the Boaz is a 'goel'. Gleaning was not directly (textually) related to the function of a goel, but to any landowner in Israel. And, having issued her blessing for food, Naomi now turns to the following context, which is that of seed. She adds here that he is a goel. The goel was related to the repurchase of her land, and thus heir-ship enters the scene, and the possibility of marriage is now opened.⁹⁷ Ruth, will not forget

⁹⁶ Naomi's voice is heard here in summary and confirmation that Boaz and Ruth are appropriate covenant keepers. Naomi is the beneficiary of them both.

⁹⁷ Strictly speaking, the *goel* was related specifically in the covenant to the repurchase of one's field lost through financial instability. Thus, an alternative here is not that Naomi was relating the *goel* to marriage (since Deuteronomy 25 is speaking regarding the marriage and does not mention *goel* but one in the family). There are several possibilities here. Either Naomi related the *goel* to a potential Levir (e.g., Boaz), but did not think he would concur without some physical enticement (to occur in 3:1), or she related the *goel* only to her field, which the reader does not find out about until chapter 4. Sometimes people state that Naomi had money since she owned a field. But in actuality she did not own the field since she had lost it, which is why it was to be bought back in chapter 4 by the unnamed *goel* (see the discussion there regarding the translation of the verb). Naomi maintained the rights since the field was in Elimilech's name and family and would revert back at the year of Jubilee. However, it had apparently been lost through Naomi's poverty, and the repossession would bring it back to Naomi prior to the year of Jubilee and thus revert to her grandson through Ruth. Thus, it may be that Naomi is only thinking of the field that would come back to her should Boaz repurchase it, and then go on to

this as she will point it out to Boaz on the threshing floor, but then she will relate the goel to the Levirate marriage which she will engage on behalf of Naomi.

2:19 Her mother-in-law then said to her, "Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD⁹⁸ on who has not withdrawn his kindness⁹⁹ to the living and to the dead."¹⁰⁰ Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives¹⁰¹."

her heirs. However, without heirs it would not benefit her personally but only the re-purchaser. Thus, it would seem best in this alternative that Naomi understands that Boaz is a *goel* who can repurchase her field, but that it is of no good to her without an heir, and thus moves to enticing Boaz to provide seed in chapter 3, not because of the covenant, but because of practicality.

⁹⁸ This statement bears a similarity to the statement of Isaac's servant on finding Rebekah, Isaac's marriage partner in Genesis 24:27.

⁹⁹ *Hesed*. Whose *hesed* is it? Either way it works. It could be YHWH's *hesed* through Boaz, or Boaz' *hesed*. Boaz could not have the *hesed* without a link to YHWH, and that seems likely in light of 1:8, where YHWH's *hesed* is related to the daughter's *hesed*.

¹⁰⁰ The question here is who is Naomi referring to, YHWH or Boaz. This is much debated. This is a literary contrast to 1:8 when Naomi blesses her daughters who have shown her *hesed* as well as her dead sons. However, Naomi could be recognizing that Ruth had gleaned successfully due to the benefit of a landowner who would demonstrate his *hesed* in the provision of gleaning to a widow. Assuming that Naomi knew of gleaning as a covenant provision (although that is somewhat in question in light of the fact that it was Ruth who suggested it), then she would also recognize the *hesed* in the covenant required of one to do this. She then adds that he is a *goel*. Assuming again that Naomi knew of the concept (and she seems to in Chapter 1), then her mind is likely thinking that he is a potential land re-purchaser, but she needs an heir to possess this re-purchased land. She then will send Ruth on the journey to capture his heart(?). There does not seem to be anything in here that qualifies as a change of Naomi's heart, other than the fact she is now recognizing the generous food provided through Boaz. Note that Ruth regards YHWH as a source of her life and One with whom she will be involved. Boaz also sees YHWH as a source of His involvement with others. Naomi never sees YHWH as a Guide to her life, but only the source of her own good or bad.

¹⁰¹ These words are used in combination as *near redeemer* and show up in combination in Lev. 25:25 regarding the purchase of land for one who had lost it.

2. **Rest Assessment:** Naomi assesses Boaz' benevolence as protection.

While Boaz' motivation was to provide for a widow and alien through the covenant, Naomi takes it as simply a safety issue. While that was a provision of the covenant, Naomi only sees it as a better alternative than that of another field where she could be preyed upon.

21 Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'"¹⁰² 22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, lest *others* fall upon you in another field." 23 So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

¹⁰² Ruth appears to be referring to the incident in 2:8, although the part about staying until completion of the harvest has not been reported in the text, and is new information.