

Compassionate Regency

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 5th, 2010 • Pastor Chris Lankford

Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband 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. 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.”

~Ruth 2:11-12 (NASB)

1) From Bitterness To Hope

- A) The events in the story of Ruth occurred during the “days when the judges governed” (Ruth 1:1), probably contemporaneously with the time of two of Israel’s most famous judges, Gideon and Samson (around 1125 A.D.).
- B) Because of a famine in Israel (1:1), Elimelech and his wife Naomi, along with their two sons, migrate from Bethlehem to Moab (1:1-2). Elimelech unexpectedly dies in Moab (1:3), and soon thereafter his two sons marry Moabite women, named Orpah and Ruth (1:4).

- C) Sadly, Naomi’s sons also unexpectedly die, leaving the widow Naomi with her two widowed daughters-in-law in distant Moab (1:5).
- D) Naomi decides to migrate back to Bethlehem from Moab, but asks the widows Orpah and Ruth to return to their families (1:6-13). Orpah agrees to return to her family (1:14), but Ruth eloquently chooses to stay with Naomi (1:15-18).
- E) Understandably, but sadly, as Naomi arrives in Bethlehem (1:19), she is deeply bitter and empty (1:20-21), and publicly laments God’s treatment of her. BUT, the barley harvest (HOPE) is just beginning (1:22).

2) The Compassion Of Ruth & The Kinsman Of Naomi

- A) Immediately after the mention of the impending barley harvest, we are introduced (as a quick aside to our story) to a family member* of Naomi named Boaz, a man of great wealth and influence† (2:1).

* Besides being influential, the man was also from the same clan as Elimelech. A clan (משפחה) was the kinship category between the larger “tribe” (in the case of Elimelech & Boaz, the clan of Judah) and the smaller “extended family.” The clan consisted of families descended from a common ancestor and was the most important single group in Israelite society. Clans enjoyed inalienable ownership of specific lands (Joshua 13-17), ownership which the “gaa-ah!” (גאָה!), among other duties, was obligated to protect (Leviticus 25). The inclusion of an individual’s name served as a geographic address (cf. Judges 10:1). No one outside of the clan, not even other ethnic Israelites, could own land within that territory. In this case, the clan was probably that of the Ephrathites (note 1:1). Again, mention of his relationship to Elimelech was important: it implied that clan loyalty and its incumbent duties might cause the man to use his influence at some later time (collected from various sources, esp. *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT), by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., ©1988, pg. 133-134).

† אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל מִמִּשְׁפַּחַת אֱלִיעֶזֶר, “a man of substance and standing from the clan of Elimelech.” חַיִל לְיִחְיִישׁ גִּבּוֹר means literally a man mighty in חַיִל (khah-yeel). Since חַיִל can bear several meanings—“strength, power, ability, wealth”—the exact meaning of אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל depends upon the context in which it is used. In a military setting it refers to a warrior, particularly one who has distinguished himself in armed combat. In other contexts it can refer to wealth (2nd Kings 15:20) or ability (1st Kings 11:28), and it always designates one who possessed social standing and a good reputation. In this context it connotes not only wealth but also ability and honor (cf. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* 2:374; Campbell, 90) (*Ruth & Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC), by Frederic W. Bush, ©1996, pg. 100).

- B) Returning to the story once again, we find Ruth asking Naomi to go and “glean”^Δ from the barley harvest in order to provide food for her and Naomi (2:2).
- C) Unlike Naomi, who is paralyzed by her devastating losses, Naomi shows extraordinary compassion through her devotion to Naomi (in making provision for her), tremendous humility (by accepting a destitute role), and courageous risk (a woman (and foreigner) in the fields).
- D) Ruth went and gleaned grain in the fields, and eventually ends up in Boaz’ field (2:3). Simultaneously, Boaz comes to his field to supervise his reaping operation (2:4), and notices Ruth gleaning in his field (2:5).
- E) Boaz asks about Ruth, and is informed by the foreman about her identity (2:6-7). The text indicates that Ruth’s reputation as “Naomi’s Moabite” has preceded her. There is a sliver of tension in the text here... How will Boaz respond to a foreigner? What will he do with Ruth? Is Boaz going to tell her to move on, or allow her to stay?
- F) Boaz’ response is both noble and stunning. Boaz insists that Ruth remain in his fields to glean, among the maids (wives) of his workers, following along with his servants, enjoying the same rights which they receive (2:8-9).

Δ Gleaning was the process of collecting the leftover crop (in this case, barley) from the field after the workers/harvesters had come through and collected (reaped) the harvest. Leviticus 19:9 & 23:22 required Israelite landowners to leave an edge around their fields unharvested to provide food for the poor and resident aliens (sojourners). Leviticus 19:9 forbade owners from passing a second time through their vineyards to harvest grapes missed or dropped the first time. Deuteronomy 24:19-22 extended the provision of Leviticus to permit gleaning in fields, olive orchards, and vineyards and forbade workers from returning to the field to harvest overlooked sheaves. (collected from various sources, esp. *Judges/Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary (NIVAC), by K. Lawson Younger, Jr., ©2002, pages 440-441 & *The Book of Ruth*, (NICOT), by Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., ©1988, pg. 136).

- G) Ruth is overwhelmed and thankful (2:10, 13), and Boaz recounts to her that he knows her story (2:11) and he is simply extending the blessing of God to her for her compassionate devotion to Naomi (2:12).
- H) It is notable here that Boaz recognized that he was not the owner of his own field, but God was the owner. Boaz was God’s servant (regent), and his extension of compassion to Ruth was a direct response to God’s goodness to him.
- I) Both Ruth and Boaz are shining examples of God’s compassion, called “KHESED” (כֶּסֶד) in the Old Testament. Khesed is God’s mercy, His compassion, His lovingkindness. The theme of the book of Ruth is Khesed, God’s loving mercy expressed through His noble servants.

3) Boaz’ Special Kindness

- A) Extraordinarily, Boaz invites Ruth to mealtime (2:14) to eat with his own workers, where “he served her” and “she was satisfied.” The scene gets more personal here, more intimate. There is a spark in this moment between Ruth and Boaz, the mixing of two people of Khesed character.
- B) As she rises to go back to her gleaning (2:15), Boaz tells his servants to make special provision for her (2:15-16), and he commands that she be protected, even to the point of not allowing for her to be insulted.
- C) The “wings of God’s refuge” (2:12) which Ruth sought are none other than the noble arms of Boaz himself. He is both her provider and protector, and she is blessed.
- D) Ruth relates her experiences to Naomi (2:17-20), who notes that Boaz is a “close relative” or “kinsman redeemer,” a “good sign” to Naomi (2:21-23).