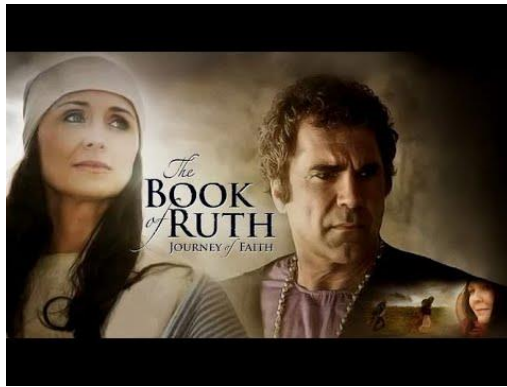


## Ruth chapter 2



### Introducing Boaz: The nearest kinsman

- Neither N or R knew that a rich farmer living in Bethlehem was a relative of Elimelech..... that Divine Providence awaited to take their tears away and give them the security of a happy home again.
- The day R met B changed everything for everyone – even the ancestry of Messiah!
- The author tells the reader about Boaz immediately so that we can be sure that God's Love deals with the ordinary things of everyday life.... That God wants to be Father and provider for the children He loves infinitely because they are His idea, and have been in His Heart ab aeterno!
- Boaz means 'strength'. He was Salmon's son from the Tribe of Judah: Mt 1:5

**My Kinsman:** This is the crucial piece of information for Naomi. It was the family link that N needed.

- Family at that time comprised a large group of people – not just the 'nuclear' family today. 3 or 4 generations would live on the same compound – hence **the sins of the fathers could be visited on the children to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> generation:** Deut 5:9
- Noah's family consisted of 8 persons including his wife, and their sons and their wives: Gen 7: 1, 7
- Abraham's family was huge even though he had no son until he was 90: Gen 17:9-12
- Jacob's family going to Egypt included 3 generations: Gen 46: 8-26
- On Passover night a lamb was provided for 'a household': Ex 12:3, 21. The entire family was made secure by the blood of the lamb put on the door.
- God continuously works with families. His Chosen People was a nation of families. His Church is His family today. When we live in the Divine Will we enter His heavenly Family in a unique way.
- For God's people the family was the basic unit of society, and the also of the inheritance of land. In the Book of Joshua certain lands were allocated to each tribe

and they were not allowed to sell it or let it go out of the tribal boundaries – hence the men had to own the land because the women changed their name in marriage and became part of their husband’s inheritance. They didn’t buy or sell land because the land belonged to the Lord, and He gave it to Israel as its inheritance

- Cf Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kgs 21: 1-29. The king tried to force Naboth to sell his inheritance, and killed him when he refused because of the Law....
- When Elimelech died with no children – since they died also – there was the problem of ‘redeeming’ his land inheritance that he abandoned when he went to Moab. Only a ‘near kinsman’ could redeem the land.
- But ***the Levirate Law*** laid down that the ***goel*** or redeemer should marry the widow and raise children for the dead man. In our case Naomi is too old, so Ruth steps in for her. This is the role that Boaz plays in this drama.
- We are told that Boaz was a ‘man of wealth’ – which some people presume refers to riches. In the biblical use it can also mean a man ‘of moral worth’, or a man of integrity and a man of influence in his home place; ***a righteous man***.... Therefore, wealthy in both social and spiritual dimensions – as we shall see as the story progresses.

### **Gleaning on Boaz’ property:** 2:2-3

- Ruth loses no time to try to help Naomi to survive and then get on her feet again. She humbly asked if she could glean in the fields after the reapers to bring home enough grain to eat, and if she did well she might even be able to sell a little in order to be able to buy the necessary things.
- Her humility and selfless love are rewarded almost immediately...she ‘accidentally’ found herself in that part of the land owned by Boaz.... But anyone living in relationship with God doesn’t have so-incidences. They are ***God incidences*** because Divine providence takes care of everything. His loving-kindness surrounds us: Ps 23
- **Gleaning** was one of the ways that Israel tried to help the poor and the widows. The Law required that the reapers deliberately leave enough grain on the ground for the poor to help themselves. The same applied to the vineyards and olive groves – they were to leave a portion of the crop to be collected by the needy. Cf Lev 19:9-10, 23:22; Deut 24:19.
- Israel was to do this to reflect that they imitated God Himself: **For the Lord your God is God of gods (El Elohim) and Lord of lords (Adon adonim), the Great God, triumphant and terrible, never partial, never to be bribed. It is he who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing.**

- In other words, because God is a God who rescues slaves (Israelites!) and cares for the poor, helpless, needy, so the laws of the land are to see that God's Will is carried out.
- For us who are so privileged as to have both redemption and sanctification, the obligation to take care of the poor is great. The Church has concerned herself with the poor and marginalised from the beginning of its history. On the macro level she must fight for the rights of the poorer nations also, and for the just distribution of wealth in the world.
- Even though the law laid down that grain be left for the poor...in practice that depended on the goodwill of the land owner. Ruth is aware of this so she said to Naomi: **let me go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour.**
- So, our introduction to the romance between Ruth and Boaz begins **with her** as a poor widow **and him** as a gracious landowner *who might look at her with favour.*
- Ruth's *lovely* relationship with Naomi is highlighted in her *asking permission to go*. Naomi is obviously her ideal of 'mother' and she genuinely loves her.
- God's providential care made sure that Ruth **just happened to come to that part of the field owned by Boaz.** It wasn't chance, but Divine Providence which led Ruth directly into Boaz' property – which Naomi will acknowledge later in 2:20.
- It is good to remember that all events in the world, and in world history are **His Story** – which may appear as chance, or even meaningless in the moment – yet they are in the hands of God whose purpose will be seen by all in the end: Eph 1: 8-10.
- Like Ruth, Naomi and Boaz **we are not idle onlookers in God's drama.** We are active participants – whose decisions determine what can happen at this time in history.
- Decisions made in love and in God's Divine Will **actually guide history forward** – as Ruth's humility does in this book. **It is God, for His own loving purpose, who puts both the will and the action into you: Phil 2:13**
- Look at the small decisions of people with free will which God used here to introduce a foreigner into the ancestry of Christ the Messiah: 1) Ruth's request to help 2) Naomi's encouragement 3) Ruth's unconscious choice of the right field and 4) Boaz' free decision to work in the field that day. This should encourage us to make **good and loving decisions in God's Divine Will to bring the New Era of divine holiness to the earth** which is languishing in moral filth right now.
- One can see here that Grace flows when our wills align with God's Will and our choices are those He would want us to make. Grace is not an automatic waterfall to override

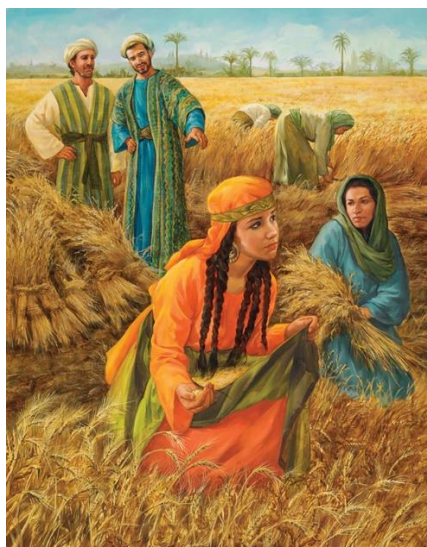
our human will and its decisions. It is the Love of God flowing towards the one who is in loving relationship with Him and it expresses His encouragement for us to continue on this path of choosing loving self-giving.

- Both Naomi and Ruth have suffered well, trusting that God could give them new life after all the death and disaster, and now they find that “God can write straight with crooked lines”. Nothing is impossible with God: Lk 1:37. Even though Naomi is old there will be a marriage and a child to go into the future. This is the resurrection side of the ‘death’ she has experienced. This is the calm after the storm.
- We need to remember that **My grace is sufficient for you: My power is at its best in weakness:** 2 Cor 12: 9, so we are covered by Divine Providence in all our trials, sickness and sufferings - no matter what the source.

**Enter Boaz:** As Boaz arrives he greets the reapers with **The Lord be with you!**

- This is the only reference to this greeting in OT, so it indicates a man with a real relationship with God. The greeting is full of joy in the Lord and shows that both he and the reapers were true to their Covenant with Yahweh.
- Cf Ps 129: 8 **The blessing of the Lord be upon you! We bless you in the name of the Lord!** There is warmth and gratitude in the greeting. Harvest-time was a time of joy, laughter and gratitude to God for all His provision. It was also the time to show this gratitude by caring for the poor of the land.

**Boaz sees Ruth:** 2:5-13



- Boaz noticed the stranger among the reapers and enquired about her
- He is told her story with regard to Naomi. His response is not only total acceptance of her presence, but true kindness. In fact, he warned the men not to touch her, that is

not to molest her! And he instructed Ruth to stay with the women reaping **in his field** and to use the facilities like everyone else for her safety.

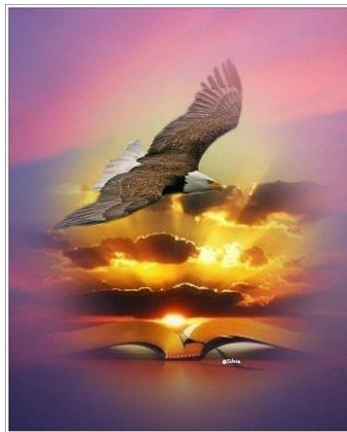
- The author is at pains to tell us that there was no racial discrimination among the Chosen people. RD has to do with colour & nationality, but since we are all the descendants of Adam, and of Noah after the Flood - with some more exposed to the sun than others – racial discrimination is ignorance of history: Acts 17:26.
- I have already shared texts where the law laid down that God's people were to take care **of the stranger** in their midst... and we have seen that many Egyptians – who were not Israelites – joined the Exodus with Moses.
- What **was** forbidden was **inter-religious** marriage for fear that God's people would veer off into idolatry and abandon Yahweh, which happened to king Solomon after he married many foreign women **accepting their gods** (2 Kings).
- Ruth is different! She has abandoned her false god Chemosh and chosen Yahweh as her God. She has chosen the Chosen People and the Covenant and is actively helping Naomi to put the levirate law into practice to help Naomi recover her lands.
- Ruth has become a member of God's household and Boaz knows this! Boaz welcomes Ruth as a member of the family of God **under whose wings she has taken refuge.**
- By the time we reach the NT **all the nations** had gathered in Jerusalem to seek the Lord: Acts 2: 5-12 just in time for the Holy spirit to descend upon them regardless of who they were or where they came from. This was the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy Is 2:1-4. They discovered that Jesus is the Universal Saviour: (Jn 4 etc).
- Boaz looks at lovely Ruth for the first time, realising her conversion to Yahweh and her love for her mother-in-law.... And the fact that she has been gleaning all day without either food or water! He sees that her external beauty reflects a beautiful interior of humble, selfless love and willingness to serve. These characteristics are not owned by any one nation or people! They are owned by a soul who truly loves God and neighbour. **May the Lord reward you for what you have done!** R 2:12
- I wonder if Boaz thought of Abraham at that moment. He, too, was a foreigner from UR of the Chaldees (Iraq today), who came to the land not knowing what the future held for him.... he chose God and chose a personal relationship with God for the whole of his long life: Gen 12:1ff. and God donated the land of Canaan to his descendants forever. Ruth is on a similar path.

- Ruth's response to Boaz is humility and gratitude. Nothing is taken for granted. She bowed to the ground before Boaz; **how have I so earned your favour that you would take notice of me?** Here Ruth is experiencing the graciousness of God through the graciousness of one who carries out His Divine Will.... the poor and needy need to see God ***in us***, and to experience His loving kindness ***through us*** who are His hands, feet, eyes and heart to those in need. The generosity of the one who loves God feeds the poor, enabling them to put their trust in God also.

**The Great Attraction:** Boaz had heard of Ruth's devotion to Naomi

- but now he sees her humility towards himself, and her acknowledgement that she was not 'one of his handmaidens', nor the equal of any one of them! R 2:13
- Both B and R speak as people who love the Lord, and who serve Him lovingly, Boaz in caring for the poor and Ruth in accepting the care with humility and gratitude. They are very suited to each other! Both giving and receiving is done in humility and love.
- Boaz pronounced a wonderful blessing on Ruth: **May the Lord reward you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!** Cf Phil 4:19. Boaz does not yet realise that the Lord God of Israel will ***use him*** to give that blessing and reward!!
- Notice that we sometimes articulate something that the Lord **wants us to hear!**
- Boaz is not saying that we do good to be rewarded by God... that would be an inferior motive, but that when we do God's Will ***that it includes reward*** for it opens Heaven in our favour. Jesus said that if we forgive others that God will forgive us!

**The Wings of Refuge:** This evokes the image of God as the Great Eagle



- God told the Israelites in Ex 19:4 that **I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself** at Sinai.

- Deut 32: 11-13 describes God as the Great Eagle who cares for His people like the eagle cares for its young.....
- Ps 17:8 **keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings...**

Ps 36:7-9: **How precious is your mercy, O God!**

**The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings.**

**They feast on the abundance of your house,**

**and you give them drink from the river of your delights.**

**For with you is the fountain of life in your light do we see light.**

Ps 57:1: **Be merciful to me O God, be merciful to me,**

**For in you my soul takes refuge;**

**In the shadow of your wings, I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by.**

- Notice the different uses of the word 'refuge': **God carries us in time of need**: Ex 19
- In Deut 32 **God trains His people**, feeds and protects them.
- Ps 17: **God protects us**
- Ps 36: we are in deep relationship with Him and being fed deeply in spirit
- Ps 57: We literally take refuge in Him from the storms of life.
- Boaz probably meant that Ruth had sought refuge in the Covenant with the only true God that exists.
- As an unprotected woman she is in constant danger of being molested (2:22). She is emotionally drained from her bereavement, from being on the move, from her exile from Moab; she is hungry with no home for safety or refuge or refreshment.... she longs for stillness, relaxation and a new hope.... **all of which she will find in finding Boaz!**

### **A place in the family: 2:14-16**

- Boaz welcomed Ruth to his home for the meagre meal that they all shared. The loving-kindness of God came to her through him. It is a generous love which does not seek 'payment' of any sort or in kind.
- Boaz offered Ruth freshly roasted ears of the newly picked grain to eat **until she was satisfied and she had some left over!** She had enough to take to hungry Naomi: 2:18
- This reminds us of the feeding of the 5,000 where Jesus provided for everyone regards of merit, and they all ate until they were satisfied and had some left over there also: Lk 9:12-17.
- Then Boaz told her to glean even among the sheaves instead of being at the edge of the field where she would get the poorest grain. He even tells the reapers to drop grain to her!

- It is obvious here that Boaz is very unlike the Pharisees of Jesus' **time** – who separated the Law from a personal relationship with Yahweh whom they were in Covenant with.
- **NB:** When this personal relationship is separated from religion then the law becomes a great burden, and Jesus was determined to remove this burden from His chosen people.
- In Mt 23: 4-28 **Jesus castigated the leaders for destroying religion for the people: they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger...**
- It is clear from Deuteronomy that the primary duty of the Covenant was to love God wholeheartedly: Deut 6:4-10, and to love the neighbour as oneself: Lev 19:18
- Boaz is showing the character of God – WHO IS LOVE: 1 Jn 4:7ff – a love shown perfectly through and in Christ. We have the same obligation but on a higher plane. This draws the new believer to trust God realising that they, too, are loved by Him.

#### **Ruth: Generous love: 2: 17-20**

- Ruth worked hard all day; she had to beat the grain she collected and she ended up with an ephah of barley (vs 17) ..... about 45 litres in today's volume; it was one bushel – a container large enough to hide a small person: Cf Zec 5:6ff.
- It was no wonder that Naomi reacted with both surprise and delight.... this was just one days' work! God had truly blessed them: Naomi exclaimed: **Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!**

#### **Hesed: Kindness: This is what the author wants to drive home to us.**

- Kindness is the most attractive expression of our love for God and neighbour. It truly touches hearts, it gives joy and hope to those who are suffering, enabling them to build a personal relationship with God also.
- **Hesed** is the word used most frequently for God's faithfulness to His side of the Covenant. It is a warm, loyal love that never fails. God taught His people what loyalty and love was in caring for them for 40 years in the wilderness in spite of their sinfulness and failure to keep their side of the Covenant. Even when he chastised them it was only to restore the relationship of Covenant with them.



- **Hesed** is the unchangeable disposition to love on God's part: Ps 145:17: **the Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings** (RSV). **Yahweh acts only out of love** (JB)
- People who want to show their willingness to keep the Covenant will imitate God in acts of kindness: Boaz, King David in 1 Sam 20:14: Jonathan said to David: **if I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house forever.** David fulfilled this request in 2 Sam 9:3: **Is there still someone of the house of Saul that I may show the kindness of God to him?**
- It was this loving-kindness of God that made the people call Him both **Father & Shepherd**. He was the 'Father of the fatherless': Is 63: 15-16; Ps 68:5.
- As 'the sheep of His pasture' His people felt secure for time and eternity: Ps 95:7
- **Yahweh's Hesed** was seen particularly in His willingness to continue relationship with us in spite of our sinfulness.....when His Love turned to Mercy to the undeserved. This is seen clearly in the prophet Hosea where the prophet was asked to love an unfaithful wife so that he could tell the people how God felt about their continued unfaithfulness to Him: Hosea 11: 1-4
- This is continued in Jeremiah 31:20 **Is Ephraim my dear child? .....** the language he uses is like the parable of the Prodigal son in Luke 15!
- **NB:** This is the mystery of God, our Creator and Father, wanting communion with us His tiny creatures!
- It is **this hesed** which conquers Naomi's sorrow, gives new life to Ruth, and which makes Boaz an ancestor of the Messiah Himself! What a reward!