

A Love Story

Ruth 2:17-23

Paul Cannings, Ph.D

A. It's Sacrificial (vs. 17-18):

1. Glean – Because Ruth was a widow, she was able to pick up the stalks of grain that were required by law to be left behind for widows. With no possible job and no husband, the timing of the harvest was perfect and totally needed to survive. Ruth, every day, and all day, did this with no plans to stop until the season had come to an end. She seems to have only eaten one meal per day.

a) The verb חבט means literally “to beat” and refers to the practice of threshing small quantities of grain by beating the stalks and ears with a stick (cf. Judg 6:11; for the use of a stick, cf. the “beating out” of seeds of certain spices in Isa 28:27). On the practice in antiquity, see Borowski, *Agriculture*, 63; Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte* 3:61, 92, especially plate 25.^[1]

b) According to v. 17, Ruth scavenged for grain in the field until evening. Then, presumably with a flail or a stick, she “beat out” the grain from the heads of barley. Where she did this is not indicated. In Judg 6:11, where the same verb, *ḥābaṭ*, was used, Gideon had used a winepress to hide from marauding Midianites. Given Boaz’s generosity in the previous scene, one may imagine that Boaz had invited her to use his threshing floor.^[2]

2. It was about ephah – Ruth, after a long day in the scorching sun working relentlessly hard, measured ‘an unusually large amount’ (NASU Bible) of barley.

a) This has been calculated to be between thirty and fifty pounds of grain, which would have represented about a month’s worth of the grain ration usually allotted to male workers.^[3]

3. It was about ephah – It is powerfully interesting to see how God was putting together His handy work because of the character of Ruth. Her love for her mother-in-law led her to the right field of a wealthy landowner with a large enough crop to cause Ruth to have enough food for herself and her mother-in-law.

4. It was about ephah – Ruth’s love for Naomi energizes her to work beyond everyone’s expectations continuously. .

B. It’s Loyal (vs. 18-19):

1. She took it up; Carry; Stirred – Once Ruth had completed beating out the barley, her mind was to focus on continuously doing whatever it took to get to Naomi so that she could take care of her.

2. She went into the city – Ruth, after a long day's work, made it her mission to get to Naomi to provide to Naomi what she had gathered for both of them.

3. The mother-in-law saw had gleaned – Ruth came directly to Naomi. This is how purposeful she was. Once she was with Naomi, Naomi clearly understood what Ruth

had accomplished. Being a Jewish woman, Naomi fully comprehended what it must have taken to acquire such a large amount of barley in one day.

4. She took it out – Because her entire focus, all day, was to take care of Naomi Ruth; after a long day of work and a walk back to the city, she did not ask for rest. Ruth's complete focus was exposed when she continuously focused on giving Naomi what she had gathered in Boaz's field upon arrival.

5. Given you what she had left – Ruth's love was so selfless that she did not ask Naomi to pay her; she only focused on providing her with all she had left. It was utterly all she had left after eating some of the grain.

6. Her mother-in-law said to her Naomi repeatedly asked Ruth the same question because she was amazed at the amount of barley Ruth had collected.

7. Where did you glean today? - Because Ruth had an exceptional amount of barley, when she was only allowed to pick up what was left over for widows, Naomi wanted to understand completely which field Ruth worked in.

8. Where did you work - Naomi was so amazed at the amount of barley collected that she viewed what Ruth did as going beyond what most widows typically collect and therefore characterized Ruth as laboring (toiling) out of an ethical obligation to please her.

9. May he take notice of you – Naomi heard all that Boaz did to help Ruth, so she immediately took things to the next level by sharing her desire that Boaz become more acquainted with Ruth to the point that he becomes completely aware of who she is.

a) Was Boaz physically attracted to Ruth? Yes (vs. 5-6), but Boaz admired her character (vs. 11). He loved her loyalty (vs.11) and dedication (vs. 12).

b) Boaz provided her direction (vs. 8-9a), protection (vs. 9b), and provision (vs. 9c, 15-16).

10. Blessed – Naomi wishes Ruth to experience God’s divine favor so Boaz engages with her so that she prospers and is happy.

11. So she told her mother-in-law - Ruth kept explicitly explaining to Naomi all that Boaz did. She left no part of the story untold.

12. So she told her mother-in-law - Ruth had shown no interest in Boaz; she just responded to him respectfully as being kind to her (2:10-13). She so wanted to please Naomi that when Naomi spoke this way, Ruth engaged with the desire of her mother-in-law.

a) When Ruth responded to her mother-in-law about where she had gleaned , it did not seem like she had any interest in Boaz. She did not pick this field because of her interest in Boaz; she simply fulfilled her promise. Boaz was the one who showed interest (vs. 21), not Ruth.

13. And said - Ruth spoke to Naomi with the same excitement Naomi spoke to her.

14. The name of the man with whom I worked today – Ruth explained that Boaz is the man who took notice of her and made sure she worked closer to his maidens than she related to the other widows. This means that Ruth became one of his workers, which caused her to gain more than was provided to widows.

a) Boaz was both a wealthy landowner and a close relative of Naomi. As such he could be expected to buy for the family its rightful land (Lev 25:25) and look after the helpless members of the family.^[4]

15. The name of the man with whom I worked today – True love is shared loyalty , and the blend nurtures a relationship to be life-changing , and powerful in the sight of God.

C. It's Refreshing (vs. 20-23):

1. Naomi said to her daughter in law – Naomi totally engaged in what Ruth reported and kept speaking to her daughter-in-law to learn of all that had taken place.

2. May he be blessed of the Lord - Naomi desires that the Lord who sustains His covenant with Israel would grant Boaz favor so that He would prosper Boaz because of the kindness he displayed to Ruth.

a) Naomi repeated her blessing, now knowing to whom it should be applied (cf. v. 19a). Her night of sorrow with its fog of depression, had broken into the dawning of a new day of joy. As God was the source of her sorrow (1:20–21), He was now the source of her joy. God's kindness (*hesed*; cf. 3:10 and comments on 1:8) again rested on the living, Ruth and herself.^[5]

3. He has not withdrawn his kindness – No matter how awful Naomi and Ruth's life circumstances may have seemed , the fact that Ruth went to Boaz's field and experienced his kindness in the manner in which she did is now evident to Naomi that the Lord is truly steadfast and generous in affectionately loving them during the worst time of their lives.

a) Boaz was a close relative, but more than that, he was a kinsman-redeemer. He could act as a redeemer of property and persons. He could act as a *levir*, a Latin term for brother-in-law. Boaz could be redeemed by fulfilling the levirate law, which required a brother of a deceased man to marry his widow and raise up a son to his name (Deut. 25:5–10). Though Boaz was not a brother to Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband (Ruth 4:10), he was a close relative to the family and could act as a *levir* if he so desired. Naomi sensed the willingness of Boaz. No explanation is given as to why Naomi did not mention the nearer kinsman-redeemer (cf. 3:12).^[6]

4. He has not withdrawn his kindness – The love that Ruth displays to Naomi is countered by God's love for both of them.

a) Redemption is a key concept in Ruth. The kinsman-redeemer was responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family – e.g., to provide an heir for a brother who had died (Dt. 24:5-10), to redeem land that a poor relative had sold outside the family (Lev. 25:25-28), to redeem a relative who had been sold into slavery (Lev. 25:47-49) and to avenge the killing of a relative (Nu. 35:19-21; "avenger" and kinsman-redeemer" are translations of the same Hebrew word). Naomi is encouraged when she hears that the Lord has led Ruth to the fields of a relative who might serve as their kinsman-redeemer. This moment of Naomi's awakened hope is the crucial turning point of the story. (NASU Bible).

5. Naomi said – Naomi apparently knew of Boaz, but it was God's loving act that caused Naomi to engage Ruth with Boaz. It was not Naomi's strategic plan; it was all based on God's providential love.

6. Then Ruth the Moabitess said – Ruth engages in the conversation as energized as Naomi was about all that is taking place.

a) Ruth the Moabitess – Several times, the author reminds the reader that Ruth is a foreigner from a despised people (2:2,6,21; 4:5,10; see 2:10).

7. You should stay close - Ruth agrees with Naomi by explaining to her that Boaz acted in a manner that demonstrated that he would be loyal to her by having her remain like glue to his servants rather than among the widows. This also meant he was willing to protect her, especially since she was a Moabitess.

a) Naturally, Naomi encouraged Ruth to accept Boaz's generosity. Perhaps to emphasize her need to stay there, Naomi reminded Ruth of the danger that might lurk in another field. This was a reminder of the especially low morals in the days of the Judges and Ruth.^[7]

8. Finished – Boaz's commitment to Ruth extended until the harvest was completely exhausted.

9. Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law - Naomi continuously kept verbally communicating with Ruth about this matter with some sense of urgency.

10. It is good – Naomi told Ruth that it is practically beneficial for her to remain with Boaz’s maids. It would also be more pleasant for her if she did because of the uncertainty of what could take place if she strayed into someone else’s field that may not be kind to a Moabitess.

a) The latter was at the end of May or the beginning of June. 22. It is good ... that thou go out with his maidens—a prudent recommendation to Ruth to accept the generous invitation of Boaz, lest, if she were seen straying into other fields, she might not only run the risk of rude treatment, but displease him by seeming indifferent to his kind liberality.^[8]

11. You go out with his maids – Naomi insisted that Ruth consistently move about with Boaz’s maids.

a) Throughout the harvest season Ruth continued to work with the maidens by day and to return to the home of her mother-in-law each evening.^[9]

12. Fall upon in another field – Naomi warns Ruth that going into another field can cause her to be horribly beaten or even killed.

13. So she stayed close - Ruth listened to Naomi and continuously cleaved, like glue, to the Boaz’s maids.

14. She lived with her mother-in-law - The entire time Ruth worked very close to Boaz and his maids, she remained permanently with Naomi, which means that even though

she knew Boaz had an interest in her, she kept herself from being involved with him.
Ruth kept the relationship a working relationship until the end of the harvest.

15. She lived with her mother-in-law – There is hope for everyone because of true love.
Hope for Boaz to find a wife, hope for Ruth to find a husband, hope for Naomi to have
all her lost family restored, and hope for mankind to see Jesus.

16. She lived with her mother-in-law – When love is genuine, it's empowered by God
(1 John 4:7-14) and blesses all those involved.

^[1] Bush, F. W. (1996). *Ruth, Esther* (Vol. 9, p. 132). Word, Incorporated.

^[2] Block, D. I. (1999). *Judges, Ruth* (Vol. 6, p. 670). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^[3] Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., Ru 2:17). InterVarsity Press.

^[4] Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Ru 2:19). Moody Press.

^[5] Reed, J. W. (1985). *Ruth*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 423). Victor Books.

^[6] Reed, J. W. (1985). *Ruth*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 423–424). Victor Books.

^[7] Reed, J. W. (1985). *Ruth*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 424). Victor Books.

^[8] Jamieson, R. (n.d.). *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments: Joshua–Esther: Vol. II* (p. 131). William Collins, Sons, & Company, Limited.

^[9] Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Ru 2:20). Moody Press.