

Re-Learn
Ruth 2:5-6, 8-13; 3:6-13
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I. Reconnaissance Ruth 2:5-6

- a. Who is the Young Woman
 - i. Whom
 - 1. Boaz's question is not "*Who* is this young woman?" but "*To whom* ...?"
 - 2. In the case of Ruth, however, Boaz does not know whether to ask "whose daughter" or "whose wife" she is, since she is a stranger. So he must naturally ask the general question
 - 3. In particular, a woman had no independent status and identity in Israel's patriarchal world. She belonged to and lived under the authority of her father when unmarried and her husband when married
 - 4. "To whom does this young woman belong?" In ancient Israelite society in general, the community to which one belonged—at all levels, family, clan, tribe, nation, village—was central to one's identity and status.
 - ii. Young Moabite
 - 1. Again Boaz's recognition of her as "the young woman" suggests she is considerably younger than he.
 - 2. Despite the fact that she is a Moabite, and he knows it, like a loving father he will offer this foreigner his protection and his resources
 - iii. Returned with Naomi
 - 1. Land of Moab

II. Reserve vs. 8-9

- a. My Daughter
- b. Protection
 - i. **Servants do not touch her v.9**
 - 1. Third, Ruth is not to worry about harassment from the male workers (*ně'ārîm*) because Boaz is commanding them not to bother her. Normally the verb *nāga'* means "to touch," but in this case it functions more generally for "to strike, harass, take

advantage of, mistreat.” Contemporary readers will be struck by how modern this comment sounds. Boaz is hereby instituting the first anti-sexual-harassment policy in the workplace recorded in the Bible.

c. Provision

i. Glean with my maids v.8

1. Normally a “gleaner” gathered the “gleanings” (*leqet*), that is, the remnants of harvest, either uncut corners of the field or stalks of grain inadvertently dropped by the harvesters (Lev 19:9; 23:22). Accordingly in this context the supervisor means to tell Boaz that he did not send Ruth away; nor did she “turn back” to find another field or to return to Naomi. “She came and she has remained here” is his way of indicating that he gave her permission to glean and she accepted his invitation. In fact she has been working from the moment he approved (*mē’āz*, “from then” or more loosely “since”), that is, early morning (*habbōqer*) until now, that is the arrival of Boaz.

ii. Eyes on the field

1. Go after them

2. Boaz explains specifically what he means. Ruth is to keep her eyes on which fields Boaz’s people are harvesting, and she is to follow them.

iii. Drink where servants draw

1. In a cultural context in which normally foreigners would draw for Israelites, and women would draw for men (Gen 24:10–20), Boaz’s authorization of Ruth to drink from water his men had drawn is indeed extraordinary.
2. Fourth, Ruth may drink freely of the water that is provided for Boaz’s regular field workers.

III. Recognized vs. 10-13

a. Recognized the Favor

i. Prostrated

1. Ruth’s physical gesture of submission and gratitude was accompanied by a verbal expression of amazement that Boaz should have been so gracious to her and even taken notice of her (*lěhakkîrēnî*, “to notice me”). After all, she is a foreigner!
2. But the gesture was also performed in less significant contexts as a secular greeting, mark of respect, or expression of gratitude. Unless the gesture was hypocritical, in every case the socially inferior would bow down before the superior (not vice versa), in recognition of the latter’s authority and honor and as an external sign of the inner spirit.

ii. Ruth Noticed

1. First, Boaz has been kind to Ruth because he is fundamentally a good man. The narrator had introduced him as a noble character in 2:1. As a genuine member of the community of faith, one who embodies the standards of covenant faithfulness, he spontaneously utters words of encouragement and naturally performs deeds of kindness (*hesed*) and would have treated any destitute gleaner this way. Second, in Boaz's response the reader must recognize the providence of God. In v. 2 Ruth had expressed the wish to Naomi that she might glean behind someone in whose eyes she might find favor. Although it was not expressed as a prayer, Yahweh had heard her wish. Boaz is kind to Ruth because Yahweh has prepared his heart for her!

iii. Foreigner

1. From this answer Boaz leads Ruth to believe that his generosity was simply his response to her acts of kindness toward her mother-in-law. He leaves her no hint that this was such an important issue to him because Naomi was his relative or that he is repaying her for her kindness to a member of his family

b. Boaz Heard

i. Heard what you did for your Mother in Law

1. After Death of Husband

- a. her extraordinary kindness to her mother-in-law and her extraordinary courage in accompanying her back. Her kindness is referred to simply as (lit.) "all that you have done for your mother-in-law" (*kol 'ăšer 'āšît 'et-hămôtěkā*). Later these actions will be characterized as *hesed* (3:1), but for the moment no designation is given.

ii. Reported to him v.11

1. Left Her Family

2. Left Her Land

- a. Boaz goes on to explain that what has particularly impressed him in the reports is her treatment of Naomi after the death of her husband. With her declarations in 1:8–9 and 12–13 Naomi had released both Ruth and Orpah of all legal and moral obligation toward her. Orpah's response was natural and rational. She accepted the release Naomi offered and returned to that which was familiar and secure: her own land, her own people, and her own gods. By contrast, Ruth's response was radical and irrational. Preferring the unknown world of her mother-in-law, like Abraham centuries before (Gen 12:1–4), she abandoned (*'āzab*, NIV, "left") her own father

and mother and her native land and cast her lot with a people (*'am*) whom she had not previously known

c. Deserve of Reward

i. Reward

1. The blessing breaks down into three parts, First, he prays that Yahweh would repay Ruth for her actions. The verb for “repay,” *šillēm*, is derived from the same root as *šālôm*, “peace, wholeness.

ii. Comfort

iii. Kindness

COMMENTARY

Ruth (Person). Moabitess and the widow of Mahlon, the son of Naomi and Elimelech, who were Ephrathites from Bethlehem living in Moab because of a severe famine in Judah. Upon the death of Elimelech and Naomi's two sons, Naomi returned to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth during the time of the barley harvest (Ru 1:4–22). While gleaning in the barley fields of Boaz, Ruth found favor in his eyes (2:2–22). She later married Boaz, when he, serving as nearest kin to the childless Naomi, purchased Naomi's estate to keep it within the family (4:5–13). Ruth is mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Christ as the mother of Obed and the great-grandmother of David (Mt 1:5)..¹

The second act of the book of Ruth consists of the whole of chap. 2. Between two short scenes involving Ruth and Naomi, one introductory (vv 1–3), the other an epilogue (vv 18–23), is sandwiched the principal scene (vv 4–17). This scene features the meeting between Ruth and Boaz as she gleans in his field. The unity of the section is signaled by its formal characteristics (see below) and by the cohesion of its chronology and the coherence of its content. Ruth's activities continue from her journey to the fields after securing Naomi's permission (vv 2–3), through the overseer's timing of her activities with "from the morning until now" (v 7), through Boaz's kind invitation at the noon meal (v 14), to her gleaning in the field until evening (v 17), and end with her return to the city and her report to Naomi on the day's events (vv 18–22). The concluding comment reports that she continued gleaning until the end of the harvest period (v 23). The coherence of its content is effected by repeated reference throughout to the same semantic domain, i.e., the activities and persons involved in the harvesting of grain: (1) the place: "field" (7, אשדה); (2) the personnel: "reapers" (6, אקצרים; "men and women workers" (7, אנערים נערות), "overseer" (נער נצב על), 2x; (3) the activities: "to harvest" (1, אקצר), "to gather" (1, אאסף), "to glean" (12, אלקט), "to thresh" (1, אחבט); (4) the product: "harvest" (3, אקציר), "stalks" (1, אשבליים), "bundles" (1, אחטים), "sheaves" (2, אעמרים), "barley" (2, אשערים), "wheat" (1, אחטים).²

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "[Ruth \(Person\)](#)," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1871.

² Fredric W. Bush, [Ruth, Esther](#), vol. 9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1996), 99.

לְמִי הַנְּעֶרָה הַזֹּאת 5. Boaz's question is not "Who is this young woman?" but "To whom ...?" As Myers observes (*Linguistic and Literary Form*, 23), the construction לְמִי with a personal subject occurs elsewhere only in Gen 32:18; 1 Sam 30:13. On the basis of these passages, Campbell (93–94) argues that the question is more general than simply one of identification and paraphrases it "Where does this young woman fit in?" But Campbell's analysis presents no concrete evidence that the expression means anything more than its literal meaning expresses, "To whom does this young woman belong?" In ancient Israelite society in general, the community to which one belonged—at all levels, family, clan, tribe, nation, village—was central to one's identity and status. To be resident outside that community was to be a גֵּר *gēr*, "resident alien" (see *Comment* on 1:1), without rights and status. In particular, a woman had no independent status and identity in Israel's patriarchal world. She belonged to and lived under the authority of her father when unmarried and her husband when married (cf. Tribble, *IDBSu*³*p*, 964). Given such an understanding of identity, the question "To whom do you belong?" is quite natural (cf. Gen 32:18; 1 Sam 30:13). Particularly instructive is Saul's question to Abner regarding David: בֶּן-מִי־זֶה הַנָּעַר, "Whose son is this young man?" (1 Sam 17:55; note 17:56, 58), as well as the question of Abraham's servant to Rebekah: בֵּת-מִי אַתְּ, "Whose daughter are you?" (Gen 24:23). In the case of Ruth, however, Boaz does not know whether to ask "whose daughter" or "whose wife" she is, since she is a stranger. So he must naturally ask the general question. In the light of these considerations, it is most improbable that the question implies that Boaz wished to betray no unseemly curiosity about Ruth's person (Rudolph, 46), since she is a female (Gray, NCB⁴C, 391). Finally, that the choice of the term נְעֶרָה, "young woman," is used designedly by the narrator in order to raise questions in our minds occasioned by the other possible meanings of the word, namely, "(female) servant" or "marriageable young woman" (so Hubbard, 146–47), is most unlikely. It is simply the natural term to use for an unknown young woman (cf. the use of the masculine equivalent for David in 1 Sam 17:55–58). The most that can be said is that it implies Ruth's youth vis-à-vis Boaz.

6 ... הַנְּעֶרָה מוֹאָבִיָּה הִיא הַשָּׂבָה, "She is a Moabite young woman—the one who came back ..." Classifying clauses, distinguished from those that *identify* the subject) normally have an indefinite predicate and the order predicate + subject, as here (cf. 1 Sam 15:29). The form הַשָּׂבָה is again pointed as a perfect (see the *Comment* on 1:22). It seems likely in cases like these that the article loses its determination in a relative force. To translate the phrase as definite ("She is the Moabite young woman who ...," so Sasson, 38) is to understand the predicate as an identifying, rather than classifying, clause, which requires not only a definite rather than indefinite predicate but also the order subject + predicate

³*IDBSup* Supplementary volume to *IDB*

⁴NCBC New Century Bible Commentary

2:4–7 The opening *hinnēh*, “Behold,” of v. 4 not only shifts the reader’s attention from Ruth to Boaz, who has arrived at the field where Ruth is, but also expresses wonder at his arrival and its timing.⁵¹⁹ In the providence of God Ruth got there on time for Boaz. The first words we hear at the field are pleasant and cheerful words of greeting. Appropriately, Boaz, the landowner, initiates the conversation, but he does so with two simple but profound words, *yhwh ‘immākem*, “May the LORD be with you!”²⁶⁰ From the outset we sense that Boaz has provided a positive work environment for his people. In this regard he serves as a model of true covenant *ḥesed* for all who supervise others in their work; his speech from beginning to end is characterized by grace. And with a boss like this it is no wonder that Boaz’s workers respond with a blessing of their own: *yēbārekēkā yhwh*, “May the LORD bless you!” Unlike Boaz’s greeting, this blessing follows the traditional pattern (cf. Num 6:24).

It seems not to have taken Boaz long to notice a stranger in his field, for he turns to (lit.) “his young man” to find out what he can about her. The narrator’s use of *na‘ar*, “young man,” rather than *‘ebed*, the normal designation for “servant,” may be intentional to reflect the difference in age between Boaz and the man (cf. 3:10). Qualified with *hanniṣṣāb ‘al haqqôṣērîm*, “who was stationed over the harvesters,” he was obviously “the foreman” or supervisor.²⁷¹

On first sight the question Boaz poses to his attendant seems odd. Instead of an expected “Who is this young woman?” he asks (lit.), “To whom does this woman belong?” (*lēmî hanna ‘ārâ hazzō t*). He assumes that Ruth, obviously a stranger, would not be independent; she must belong to someone or be engaged to some landowner like himself, though not necessarily as a slave. But the question could also mean “Whose daughter or wife is she?” or “To which clan or

⁵¹⁹ Cf. Bush’s rendering (*Ruth*, 113), “Wouldn’t you know it!” or “Of course!” It is unclear how much time separated Ruth’s and Boaz’s arrivals. Sasson (*Ruth*, 46) thinks they arrived “within seconds of each other.” J. de Waard and E. A. Nida (*A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Ruth*, 2d ed. [New York: UBS, 1992], 27) suggest Boaz came several hours later.

⁶²⁰ Unlike Judg 6:12, the context requires this nominal clause be interpreted optatively rather than indicatively. Here the idiom functions as both a greeting and a blessing.

⁷²¹ Although the word נַעַר “young man,” originally referred primarily to a person’s age, here and in the following narrative it bears the sense of “servant.” A similar use of the word is found in Gen 18:7; 22:3, 5, 9; and the feminine equivalent, in Exod 22:5 (the princess of Egypt’s attendants). In the Ugaritic texts from a century or two before the events of this book *nār* denotes (1) an overseer or supervisor; (2) a class of palace personnel; (3) military personnel. For a discussion of the word see J. McDonald, “The Status and Role of the *na‘ar* in Israelite Society,” *JNES* 35 (1976): 147–70; V. Hamilton, “נַעַר,” *NIDOTTE* 3.124–27.

tribe does she belong?”²⁸² In any case he knows she is out of place among his workers and in his field. For the reader, however, there is more. The question refocuses the attention on Ruth and indirectly draws attention to the line of Elimelech, which gives her identity in this context. For the first time Ruth is a spectacle among Israelites. Again Boaz’s recognition of her as “the young woman” suggests she is considerably younger than he. It also raises expectations in the mind of the reader.

The servant’s answer to Boaz’s question repeats information the narrator had offered at the beginning of this act (1:22): she is a Moabite woman, the one who “returned/came back” (*šûb*) from the land of Moab with Naomi. Although the supervisor obviously knows who Naomi is, he provides no hint that he knows Ruth’s name. But he has answered Boaz’s question: she belongs to Naomi. His addition of “young woman” again raises the reader’s hopes (lit., “a young woman, a Moabite, is she”).²⁹³

Then the supervisor reports an earlier conversation he had had with Ruth. She had asked him whether she could glean²¹⁰⁴ among the sheaves behind the harvesters. As the NIV and most other versions translate the text, the question is extraordinary if not a contradiction in terms. If *liqqēṭ* means “to glean,” why would Ruth request permission to glean behind the harvesters among the *‘ōmārîm*, which some interpret as “small heaps of grain.”²¹¹⁵ Normally a “gleaner” gathered the “gleanings” (*leqet*), that is, the remnants of harvest, either uncut corners of the field or stalks of grain inadvertently dropped by the harvesters (Lev 19:9; 23:22). By the NIV’s interpretation she is brashly asking either to pick up grain among the harvesters in the midst of the field, perhaps even taking ears of grain from the heaps of cut grain, or to take her place among them as a harvester. On the other hand, if the preposition before *‘ōmārîm* is interpreted as “in” or “into” instead of “among,” and noun is understood as “bundles,”²¹²⁶ the request makes perfect sense. Then the clause *wē’āsaptî bo’ōmārîm* serves to define *liqqēṭ*: “to glean” means “to gather in bundles” behind the harvesters the *leqet* they have missed.

But what then is to be made of the next line, literally “and she came and stood from then the morning and until now” (*wattābô’ watta’āmôd mē’āz habbōqer wē’ad-’attâ*)?²¹³⁷ The first verb is easy, but what is the meaning of *watta’āmôd*? Usually the verb means “to stand,” but this creates a contradiction: Why would she ask permission to come in[to the field] and then simply stand around. Many maintain that the supervisor hesitated to give her permission either

⁸²² Cf. Sasson, *Ruth*, 46, “Where does she fit in?”

⁹²³ The construction of this verbless clause of classification, נָעַרָה מִיִּצְרָאֵל הִיא, compares with נָעַר מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי, “I am a young Egyptian,” in 1 Sam 30:13.

¹⁰²⁴ Again the cohortative form should be interpreted as a polite request. Cf. v. 2.

¹¹²⁵ HALOT, 849. The word occurs elsewhere in v. 15; Lev 23:10–12, 15; Deut 24:19; Job 24:10. A *piel* denominative verb meaning “to cut ears of corn” is found in Ps 129:7. The container used to measure the volume of dry cereal, the omer (עֹמֶר), one-tenth of an ephah, derives from the same root. See Exod 16:16–36.

¹²²⁶ Roughly equivalent to צִבְתִּים, “handfuls” (NIV “bundles”) in v. 16.

¹³²⁷ D. Lys (“Résidence ou repos? Notule sur Ruth ii 7,” VT 21 [1971]: 497–99) summarizes nineteen different ways in which the sentence had been interpreted by 1971!

because he was offended by her request or he lacked the authority to do so.²¹⁴⁸ The NIV offers a “persistent” sense to the word: Ruth has been on her feet [working] without stopping to rest,²¹⁵⁹ but this interpretation of *‘āmad* is rightfully criticized by many as odd. A better solution is to recognize that this verb, which normally means “to stand,” is capable of meaning “to remain, stay.”³¹⁶⁰ In Exod 9:28 it means the opposite of *šālah*, “to send away”; in Deut 5:31 and 2 Kgs 15:20 it serves as the opposite of *šûb*, “to return.”³¹⁷¹ Accordingly in this context the supervisor means to tell Boaz that he did not send Ruth away; nor did she “turn back” to find another field or to return to Naomi. “She came and she has remained here” is his way of indicating that he gave her permission to glean and she accepted his invitation.³¹⁸² In fact she has been working from the moment he approved (*mē’āz*, “from then” or more loosely “since”), that is, early morning (*habbōqer*) until now, that is the arrival of Boaz.³¹⁹³

But the interpretive problems continue in the rest of the verse. There is no consensus on the meaning of the last clause (*zeh šibtāh habbayit mē’āṭ*), unquestionably the most difficult line in the book. The line translates literally as “This (masculine)³²⁰⁴ her sitting/dwelling the house a little,” but this makes no sense. Indeed the text is so difficult that Campbell does not even translate it.³²¹⁵ Given the NIV’s rendering of the previous line, “except for a short rest in the shelter” makes sense in English,³²²⁶ but it is far removed from the Hebrew. This reading of

¹⁴²⁸ Sasson (*Ruth*, 48) comments: “Ruth had come with a request that could not be fulfilled by a mere overseer. All that he could do was to ask her to step aside and wait until the ‘boss’ arrived. In this way Ruth was assured of meeting Boaz, since the latter could hardly fail to notice her as she stood by.” Cf. Campbell, *Ruth*, 95–96; Hubbard, *Ruth*, 149–50.

¹⁵²⁹ Similarly JPSV, “She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning.” Also REB, NRSV, Rudolph, *Ruth*, 45–46.

¹⁶³⁰ Thus JB; Bush, *Ruth*, 118; E. A. Martens, “עמד,” *NIDOTTE* 3.432.

¹⁷³¹ Cf. also Deut 10:10; 2 Kgs 6:31; Est 7:7; Dan 10:17. The word is also capable of meaning “to abide, to continue.” For references see BDB, 764, 3c; *HALOT*, 841, 3c.

¹⁸³² Similarly Bush, *Ruth*, 118.

¹⁹³³ But note the opposite interpretation by M. Carasik, “Ruth 2, 7: Why the Overseer Was Embarrassed,” *ZAW* 107 (1995): 493–94. Based on Boaz’s response to Ruth (rather than to the overseer) in the succeeding verses, Carasik argues that Ruth was actually leaving the field when Boaz arrived. Rather than politely granting her permission to glean, Ruth is the victim of sexual harassment, and the supervisor is embarrassed before Boaz about it. Accordingly, the present sequence of words represents “a deliberate device to depict confused and apologetic speech because of an incident of sexual harassment.” These words represent some lame explanation like “This fellow ... she’s just going home for a bit.”

²⁰³⁴ The antecedent must be “the field.”

²¹³⁵ Campbell opines “that a hundred conjectures about a badly disrupted text are all more likely to be wrong than any one of them absolutely right!” (*Ruth*, 96).

²²³⁶ Similarly NRSV, REB, JB. Cf. JPSV, “She has rested but little in the hut.”

šibtāh, “her sitting,” is based on the LX²³X, “she has not rested in the field,”³²⁴⁷ which assumes a root *šābat*, “to stop,” that is, “to rest.” Hubbard’s “this field has been her residence” for the first part is not much better, though “the house [in town] has meant little to her”³²⁵⁸ is a gallant attempt at the last phrase. Bush’s “she has stopped only a moment” follows the LX²⁶X in reading *šābēṭā* for *šibtāh* and dropping *habbayit*, “the house.” In our estimation the text defies explanation, and we are left with admitting that any explanation, including the NIV’s reading, is a guess.³²⁷⁹

(2) The Second Interchange (2:8–14)

⁸ So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have given me comfort and have spoken kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servant girls.”

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over.

The bulk of this scene is taken up with the dialogue between Boaz and Ruth. However, this is not one continuous conversation. The reference to “mealtime” in v. 14 suggests a temporal break between vv. 13 and 14. Presumably after the initial encounter (vv. 8–13) Ruth had gone back out to glean, and when it was time to eat he called her in from the field (v. 14). In the first part the speakers alternate: Boaz, Ruth, Boaz, Ruth, Boaz. In the second only Boaz speaks. The reader will also recognize a pattern in the lengths of the respective speeches. In keeping with their social positions, Boaz takes the initiative, and his first two speeches are rather lengthy discourses. On the other hand, as an alien, a young woman, and a field worker, Ruth’s responses

²³ LXX Septuagint

²⁴³⁷ οὐ κατέπαυσεν ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ

²⁵³⁸ Hubbard, *Ruth*, 151.

²⁶ LXX Septuagint

²⁷³⁹ J. A. Loader suggests the last four words contain two nominal sentences, both of which had *nr*, “This,” as the subject: “This is where she stays; this is her home in a sense” (“Ruth 2:7—An Old Crux,” *Journal for Semitics* 4 [1992]: 151–59).

are short and to the point. The function of these two conversations in the overall flow of the book is to give the reader a clear view of the character of Boaz, and to recount the first stage in his relationship with Ruth. From the first time Boaz opens his mouth until the last words he utters (4:9–10), his tone exudes compassion, grace, and generosity. In the man who speaks to this Moabite field worker biblical *hesed* becomes flesh and dwells among humankind.

BOAZ'S FIRST SPEECH (2:8–9)

2:8–9 Whatever the meaning of the field supervisor's comment in v. 7, when he had said his piece Boaz turned his attention to Ruth. He breaks the ice by addressing her directly (lit.), "Have you not heard, my daughter" (*hālô' šāma 'at bittî*), which in effect means "Listen carefully, my daughter."⁴²⁸⁰ His address of Ruth as "my daughter" is remarkable not only because it is reminiscent of how Naomi perceived Ruth (1:11, 12; 2:2), but also because of Boaz's intention to break down the barriers that naturally separate her from him. The expression is not patronizing but reflects the age difference between these two persons, and it arises out of the genuine sense of responsibility that Boaz feels for Ruth. Despite the fact that she is a Moabite, and he knows it, like a loving father he will offer this foreigner his protection and his resources.

The formal part of the speech consists of four basic statements. First, Ruth is not to go and glean in any other field; she has no need to leave at all (v. 8b).⁴²⁹¹ Second, Ruth is to attach herself to Boaz's regular female servants.⁴³⁰² Like the previous piece of advice, this point is made repetitiously. The NIV's rendering of the phrase *dābaq 'im*, "to stick with," in v. 8c (and vv. 21, 23) as "to stay with" is too weak. The verb is the same as had been used earlier in 1:14 of Ruth "clinging" to Naomi. In v. 10a Boaz explains specifically what he means. Ruth is to keep her eyes on⁴³¹³ which fields Boaz's people are harvesting,⁴³²⁴ and she is to follow them. Third, Ruth is not to worry about harassment from the male workers (*ne' ārîm*) because Boaz is commanding them not to bother her. Normally the verb *nāga* ' means "to touch," but in this case it functions more generally for "to strike, harass, take advantage of, mistreat."⁴³³⁵ Contemporary readers will

²⁸⁴⁰ Thus the NIV and virtually all English translations. On the use of the negative to express strong affirmation see GKC §150e and Hubbard, *Ruth*, 154.

²⁹⁴¹ The statement is emphatically redundant. The phrase *וְגַם לֹא תַעְבוּרִי מִזֶּה*, "and also do not pass over from here," means "do not cross the boundaries into another field."

³⁰⁴² The NIV rightly renders *נַעֲרוֹת*, lit. "young girls," as "servant girls." This is the feminine plural of the masculine singular form used for the field supervisor in v. 6 and the masculine plural (*נַעֲרִים*) in v. 9. In v. 4 *קוֹצְרִים* had been used of all the "harvesters" without respect to gender.

³¹⁴³ *עֵינֶיךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה*, "let your eyes be on the field," is a subject-predicate verbless clause constructed just like *יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם*, "May the LORD be with you," in v. 4.

³²⁴⁴ The masculine form of the verb *יִקְצְרוּן* assumes all the harvesters, without respect to gender.

³³⁴⁵ On the surface *הֲלֹא אֶצְוֶה אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים לִבְלֹתִי נָגֶעַךְ* looks like a negative question, "Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you?" But the first word should be interpreted as an emphatic particle, hence, "Surely I am commanding ..." On this use of *הֲלֹא* see M. L. Brown, "Is It Not? Or Indeed!: *HL* in Northwest Semitic," *Maarav* 4 (1987):

be struck by how modern this comment sounds. Boaz is hereby instituting the first anti-sexual-harassment policy in the workplace recorded in the Bible. Fourth, Ruth may drink freely of the water that is provided for Boaz's regular field workers. Presumably at the beginning of each day, as the servants (*hannē 'ārīm*) left town for the fields they would stop to "draw" (*šā 'ab*) water from a well or cistern, perhaps by the gate of Bethlehem (2 Sam 23:16), and carry it with them in containers (*kēlīm*) to the plot where they were harvesting. In a cultural context in which normally foreigners would draw for Israelites, and women would draw for men (Gen 24:10–20), Boaz's authorization of Ruth to drink from water his men had drawn is indeed extraordinary.

RUTH'S FIRST RESPONSE (2:10)

2:10 Overwhelmed by Boaz's generosity, Ruth (lit.) "fell on her face and worshiped him" (the NIV reverses the two clauses and translates the second as a prepositional phrase, "she bowed down with her face to the ground"). This verse illustrates the biblical understanding of worship. The Hebrew word for worship, *hištaḥăwâ*, occurs only here in the Book of Ruth.⁴³⁴⁶ As the first clause, "and she fell on her face" (*wattippōl 'al-pānêhā*) explains, fundamentally *hištaḥăwâ* denotes the physical gesture of prostration, that is, falling to one's knees and bowing with face/nose to the ground⁴³⁵⁷ before royalty or deity. But the gesture was also performed in less significant contexts as a secular greeting, mark of respect, or expression of gratitude. Unless the gesture was hypocritical, in every case the socially inferior would bow down before the superior (not vice versa), in recognition of the latter's authority and honor and as an external sign of the inner spirit.

Ruth's physical gesture of submission and gratitude was accompanied by a verbal expression of amazement that Boaz should have been so gracious to her and even taken notice of her (*lěhakkîrēnî*, "to notice me").⁴³⁶⁸ After all, she is a foreigner! The addition of the circumstantial verbless clause (lit.), "Now I am a foreigner" (*wē'ānōkî nokriyyâ*), creates an effective wordplay

201–19. The NIV and most English translations render the perfect verb צִיִּיתִי literally in the past tense, but this is an example of the perfect "used for an action which in fact belongs to the future, but which is represented as being performed at the very moment of utterance." Thus *BHS* §112*g*.

³⁴⁴⁶ The LXX uses προσκυνέω, "to fall down and worship, to do reverence to, etc." (Gen 18:2; 27:29, etc.). חוה occurs four times in Judges: 2:12, 17, 19; 7:15. For further discussion on the form and meaning of the word see the commentary on Judg 2:12. In addition to the bibliography cited there see M. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1980), 187–99, 303–10; T. E. Fretheim, "חוה, *NIDOTTE* 2.42–44; H. D. Preuss, "חוה *hwh*; השתחוה, *hishtachăvāh*," *TDOT* 4.248–56.

³⁵⁴⁷ See Gen 19:1; 1 Sam 25:23, 41; cf. 1 Kgs 18:42.

³⁶⁴⁸ The *lamedh* + infinitive construction לְהַכִּירָנִי, "to notice me," is to be interpreted consequentially or modally, i.e., Ruth is noticed as a result of finding favor with Boaz, or Ruth's being noticed is the expression of finding favor. The assumed subject for the infinitive is provided by the suffix of בְּעֵינֶיךָ, "in *your* eyes."

after *lēhakkîrēnî*. Both words, *lēhakkîrēnî* and *nokriyyâ*, derive from the root *nkr*, which must have meant “to be strange, unknown.”⁴³⁷⁹ By a strange quirk of linguistic development, another form of the verb (the *hiphil* stem) means the virtual opposite, “to investigate [what is unknown], to recognize, to take note of.”⁵³⁸⁰ Here the last-cited definition applies. Even though we do not know whether Boaz even knew Ruth’s name at this point,⁵³⁹¹ he acknowledged her. But there is more than one form of acknowledgment. The foreman had noticed her, and it was taken for granted that other men in the fields would take notice of her, as a potential victim of abuse—hence Boaz’s proscription on touching her. But Boaz had dignified this destitute widow from a foreign land and treated her as a significant person, on par socially with his hired and presumably Israelite field workers. Ruth, who is obviously extremely self-conscious about her alien status, cannot believe Boaz’s indifference to the fact that she is a Moabite.

BOAZ’S SECOND SPEECH (2:11–12)

2:11–12 Boaz continues to dignify Ruth in his answer to her question. He begins by explaining why he has shown her such favor: he has heard all about her.⁵⁴⁰² Although his foreman had not identified Ruth by name, as soon as he had identified her by status (a Moabitess) and affiliation (the daughter-in-law of Naomi) the lights went on. So this is the woman everyone in Bethlehem was talking about! The reports that he has heard have emphasized two details about her in particular: her extraordinary kindness to her mother-in-law and her extraordinary courage in accompanying her back. Her kindness is referred to simply as (lit.) “all that you have done for your mother-in-law” (*kol ’ăšer ’āšît ’et-hāmôtēkā*). Later these actions will be characterized as *hesed* (3:1), but for the moment no designation is given.

Boaz goes on to explain that what has particularly impressed him in the reports is her treatment of Naomi after the death of her husband. With her declarations in 1:8–9 and 12–13 Naomi had released both Ruth and Orpah of all legal and moral obligation toward her. Orpah’s response was natural and rational. She accepted the release Naomi offered and returned to that which was familiar and secure: her own land, her own people, and her own gods. By contrast, Ruth’s response was radical and irrational. Preferring the unknown world of her mother-in-law, like Abraham centuries before (Gen 12:1–4), she abandoned (‘*āzab*, NIV, “left”) her own father

³⁷⁴⁹ The root נכר, which is unattested in the *qal*, is widely attested in the Semitic languages, appearing as נַכְרִיָּא in Old Aramaic (*DNWSI*, 732) and *nakrum*, “enemy” (*AHW*, 723). Cf. the Akk verb *nakāru*, “to be indifferent, hostile” (*Ahw* 718). Cf. *HALOT*, 699. R. Martin-Achard (“נכר *nēkār* Fremde,” *THAT* 2.66–68) suggests the *niphal* “to disguise oneself” and *piel* “to deface, make strange” are denominative verbs derived from the noun נַכְרִיָּא.

³⁸⁵⁰ Cf. Martin-Achard, *ibid.*, 67. On the possibility of two separate roots see B. Lang, “נכר *nkr*,” *TWAT* 5.454–63.

³⁹⁵¹ Neither the field supervisor nor Boaz ever mention her name in this chapter.

⁴⁰⁵² Note the emphatic expression of scope by means of the *hophal* infinitive absolute and perfect of the same root in הִגֵּד הִגֵּד לִי. The clause translates literally as “being reported it was reported to me” but idiomatically as “it has been fully reported to me.” On this emphatic construction see *IBHS* §35.3.1–2.

and mother⁵⁴¹³ and her native land⁵⁴²⁴ and cast her lot with a people (*'am*) whom she had not previously known. As the daughter-in-law of Naomi, she had learned to know one specific Israelite and will certainly have heard about Naomi's people, but the expression here means "to have firsthand experience with." Like Abraham, she had left the security of the familiar (family and land) and committed herself to the unknown. Nothing is said here of leaving her gods and committing herself to Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf. 1:16).

From this answer Boaz leads Ruth to believe that his generosity was simply his response to her acts of kindness toward her mother-in-law. He leaves her no hint that this was such an important issue to him because Naomi was his relative or that he is repaying her for her kindness to a member of his family. Although Boaz's explanation makes perfect sense, the reader suspects that this is an incomplete answer to Ruth's question: "Why have I found favor in your eyes?" Indeed several additional answers could be given. First, Boaz has been kind to Ruth because he is fundamentally a good man. The narrator had introduced him as a noble character in 2:1. As a genuine member of the community of faith, one who embodies the standards of covenant faithfulness, he spontaneously utters words of encouragement and naturally performs deeds of kindness (*hesed*) and would have treated any destitute gleaner this way. Second, in Boaz's response the reader must recognize the providence of God. In v. 2 Ruth had expressed the wish to Naomi that she might glean behind someone in whose eyes she might find favor. Although it was not expressed as a prayer, Yahweh had heard her wish. Boaz is kind to Ruth because Yahweh has prepared his heart for her!

Evidence of both Boaz's nobility and the work of God in his heart is provided by v. 12. Not satisfied with answering Ruth's question or content with his own generosity, he invokes Yahweh to intervene on her behalf as well. The blessing breaks down into three parts, First, he prays that Yahweh would repay Ruth for her actions. The verb for "repay," *šillēm*, is derived from the same root as *šālôm*, "peace, wholeness." This use of the word is based on the assumption of a universe governed by order. For every action there must be an equal reciprocal action. In legal and economic contexts the verb form used here (the *piel*) means "to compensate, replace with an equivalent, repay." But the idiom is also used in theological situations, recognizing that in principle Yahweh maintains order by repaying people according to their deeds.⁵⁴³⁵ In general this involves punishment for sin,⁵⁴⁴⁶ but for Israel it involved specifically retribution for violating the covenant standards.⁵⁴⁵⁷ Yet biblical writers also know of Yahweh repaying people for good

⁴¹⁵³ The expression "to abandon father and mother" occurs elsewhere only in Gen 2:24. The verb אָבַד, "to abandon, forsake," is the opposite of דָּבַק, "to cling to."

⁴²⁵⁴ The choice of מוֹלָדָת, "place of birth/relatives," is significant on two counts. First, being derived from יָלַד, "to give birth," it raises issues of genealogy and progeny (to be answered later). Second, as an abbreviation of מוֹלָדָת אֶרֶץ, "land of one's birth/relatives," the word provides a specific link between Ruth's and Abraham's migrations (cf. Gen 11:28; 24:7; 31:13).

⁴³⁵⁵ In general, 2 Sam 3:39; Job 34:11; Pss 28:4; 31:24; 62:12; Jer 25:14; cf. Prov 24:12; Jer 17:10.

⁴⁴⁵⁶ Isa 59; 18; 66:6; Jer 16:18; 50:29; 51:24, 56; Ps 94:2.

⁴⁵⁵⁷ Deut 7:10; 23:21 [Hb. 22] (vow); 32:41; Isa 65:6

deeds.⁵⁴⁶⁸ The present case illustrates the principle enunciated in Prov 19:17: “He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.” By her acts of kindness to Naomi, Ruth has indebted not only her mother-in-law but also Yahweh. Thus Boaz prays that Yahweh will repay her for her work.⁵⁴⁷⁹

The second clause of this blessing concretizes the image by focusing on the wages (lit., “and may your wages be full ...”) and specifying that the deity who has been indebted by Ruth’s kindness is indeed the God of Israel. The word for wages, *mašköret*, occurs elsewhere only in Gen 29:15 and 31:7, 41, where it refers to the wages Laban owed Jacob. Here the word is modified by *šēlēmâ*, “complete, full.” The nearer identification of Yahweh as “the God of Israel” is extremely significant in this instance. Ruth is a Moabite. Because of her deeds of kindness to Naomi, an Israelite, she, an outsider, had obligated the God of Israel to repayment. As the last line of v. 12 indicates, however, by transferring her spiritual allegiance from the gods of Moab to Yahweh the God of Israel, Ruth was also claiming Yahweh as her divine patron and protector.

To express this notion Boaz introduces one of the most beautiful pictures of divine care in all of Scripture. He imagines Yahweh as a mother bird who offers her wings (*kānāp*) for the protection of her defenseless young.⁶⁴⁸⁰ In perceiving God as a bird Boaz draws on an image that was common throughout the ancient Near East.⁶⁴⁹¹ He speaks of Ruth’s experience as “coming to seek refuge/asylum under his wings.” Although Boaz is probably thinking primarily of the day when Ruth transferred her allegiance from Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, to Yahweh, the God of Israel, her actions this morning represent a specific application of her general looking to him for protection. Inasmuch as she had come to Boaz and he had offered her his protection, he was personally functioning as the wings of God. But in so doing he was not only offering her asylum but also honoring God, for in the words of the Israelite proverb: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (Prov 14:31; cf. 17:5). With this final statement Boaz raises the question of the link between reward and protection. Only time will tell how both will be experienced by Ruth.

RUTH’S SECOND RESPONSE (2:13)

2:13 After Boaz’s first speech Ruth had responded with a physical act of obeisance and an interrogative expression of incredulity. It is unclear how her second response is to be interpreted. The idiom itself is clear, having been encountered twice already in this chapter (vv. 2, 10). But a problem is created by her use of the imperfect, which under normal circumstances would be translated declaratively, “I shall find grace in your eyes, my lord.” However, this makes little sense in the context, especially if the following clause is interpreted causally, “because I have been comforted.” If anything, the cause-effect relationship should be reversed, “I have been comforted because I have found grace in your eyes.” The NAS⁵⁰B overrides the imperfect

⁴⁶⁵⁸ 1 Sam 24:20; Prov 13:21; 25:22.

⁴⁷⁵⁹ פָּעַל, “action, effort,” is a poetic synonym for מַעֲשֶׂה, “work.”

⁴⁸⁶⁰ Cf. Deut 32:11; Isa 31:5; Matt 23:37.

⁴⁹⁶¹ Cf. O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, trans. T. Hallett (New York: Seabury, 1978), 190–92, etc.

⁵⁰NASB New American Standard Bible

and finds here a reference to past action, “I have found favor in your sight,” but this rendering of the verb is cavalier. More likely is the common treatment of the imperfect as a virtual cohortative, in which case Ruth expresses her wish that his grace would continue.⁶⁵¹³ But such a response is odd after v. 10 and even less suited to the following causal clauses. Better still is the interpretation that turns the idiom around and treats its occurrence here as an expression of gratitude, which is exactly what one expects in this context. Modern English rarely uses the biblical idiom “I have found favor with you,” preferring “You have been gracious to me.” Accordingly, here the imperfect “I am finding favor with you” may be rendered “You are kind to me.”⁶⁵²⁴ Support for this interpretation is found in several other texts where the same idiom serves as an expression of thanks.⁶⁵³⁵

In the remainder of the verse Ruth gives two reasons for her gratitude. First, she expresses thanksgiving to Boaz for calming her emotionally: “You have given me comfort.” The root *nhm* in this verb form (*piel*) is capable of a wide range of meanings: to comfort, to console, to bring relief. The word appears to be related to Arabic *nhm*, “to breathe deeply,” a sense that is still recognizable in the Old Testament.⁶⁵⁴⁶ In contexts like this it conveys the sense of relieving tensions, easing the mind. Ruth hereby tells Boaz that his kindness has brought her great relief. Like a young chick frightened by the pouring rain, she has come out of her fears and found comfort and security under the wings of God. Those wings are embodied in the person of Boaz.

Second, she expresses gratitude for his kind words (“You ... have spoken kindly”). The idiom *dibbēr ‘al-lēb*, “to speak on the heart,” carries a considerable range of meanings, but in this context it means “to speak compassionately and sympathetically.”⁶⁵⁵⁷ In v. 10 Ruth’s expression of amazement at Boaz’s kindness was based on racial considerations; he had paid attention to her even though she was a foreigner. Now the issue is class: he has spoken kindly to her his *šiphâ* (NIV “servant”), even though she was not like his *šiphôt* (NIV “servant girls”). Hebrew employs several different words for female subordinates: *na ‘ārâ*, “young servant girl” (v. 5); *šiphâ*, “servant”; *‘āmâ*, “maidservant” (3:9). Even though the words are often used interchangeably, their differing etymological roots invite a consideration of possible variations in meaning. Fundamentally *na ‘ārâ* reflects the young age of the woman without specifying her placement in the rank of servants. *šiphâ* is cognate to *mišpāḥâ*, “clan, family” (cf. v. 2), but this is of little help. According to Sasson *‘āmâ* seems to have represented women who could advance to the status of wives or concubines. He plausibly considers a *šiphâ* a female servant of the lowest rank. She could be given as a gift to accompany a bride and, if her mistress proved barren, could

⁵¹⁶³ Thus NIV. Cf. NRSV, “May I continue to find favor in your sight”; also REB; JB; Hubbard, *Ruth*, 168. NAB suggests “May I prove worthy of your kindness.”

⁵²⁶⁴ Thus RSV; JPSV; HALOT, 332; Bush, *Ruth*, 123–24; L. Morris, *Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1968), 277.

⁵³⁶⁵ Cf. JPSV rendering of Gen 47:25, “We are grateful, my lord”; 1 Sam 1:18, “You are most kind to your handmaid”; 2 Sam 16:4, “Your Majesty is most gracious to me.”

⁵⁴⁶⁶ J. Scharbert (*Der Schmerz im Alten Testament*, BBB8 [Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1955], 62–63) cites Gen 5:29; Isa 12:1; Pss 23:4; 86:17; Job 7:13 (all *piel*); Ezek 14:22; 31:16; 32:31 (all *niphāl*); Gen 27:42; Ps 119:51; Isa 1:24; Ezek 5:13 (all *hithpael*).

⁵⁵⁶⁷ For a study of the word see G. Fischer, “Die Redewendung דבר על-לב im AT-Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis von Jes 40, 2,” *Bib* 65 (1984): 244–50.

bear a child on her behalf for the husband, although this would not change her status.⁵⁶⁶⁹ By claiming the status of *šiphâ*, Ruth views herself as occupying the lowest rung on the ladder. But by insisting that she will never be (i.e., futuristic rather than the NIV present) like Boaz's *šiphôt*,⁵⁷⁷⁰ she places herself even lower. Ruth is totally amazed that differences of race or class could not stifle Boaz's compassion toward her.⁵⁸

⁵⁶⁶⁹ Sasson, *Ruth*, 53. On the position of slaves in Israel see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 82–90; M. A. Dandamayev, “Slavery,” *ABD* 6.62–65.

⁵⁷⁷⁰ וְאֶנִּי לֹא אֶהְיֶה כְּאֻנֹּת שִׁפְחֹתֶיךָ should be translated “though I shall never be like [i.e., be equal to] your servants.”

⁵⁸ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 654–666.