

## **Commentary on Ruth 2:8-18**

**By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.**

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, August 21, 2011**, is from **Ruth 2:8-18**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

**(Ruth 2:8)** Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

God led Ruth to the field of Boaz, and God inspired Boaz to meet the needs of Naomi and Ruth. From the *Book of Ruth*, we learn how much Boaz sought to obey the Law of God, and God wanted to care for these women through a man who was godly. Boaz wanted to protect Ruth by having her stay close to the other young women, who helped him with his harvest. Ruth would be gleaning (reaping what was left after the harvesters passed through the field) and Boaz wanted her to follow them closely to glean as much as possible from what they left behind. God gave the Israelites the law of gleaning: “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left;

it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this” (Deuteronomy 24:19-22).

**(Ruth 2:9) Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”**

With his instructions, Boaz helped Ruth to organize her gleaning. Since she was from Moab, she might not know the best way to glean in the custom of the Israelites. He did not want the young men to bother her, which they might be tempted to do just because she was a Moabite woman and not an Israelite. If she obeyed Boaz, she would always be cared for and protected, and Boaz could arrange for her to glean more grain than she could otherwise.

**(Ruth 2:10) Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?”**

Because she was a Moabite, Ruth recognized her secondary place among the Israelites. She was so overwhelmed by Boaz’s unexpected kindness that she fell before him as a loyal, humble, and submissive subject before a king. Because of his goodness, she showed by her actions that she would obey him, not

out of fear or compulsion, but because she knew his commands came from his care and concern for her. Likewise, believers obey God because they know His commands come from His loving and caring heart.

**(Ruth 2:11) But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.**

Boaz did these good things for Ruth because of all the good things she had done for Naomi. Ruth reaped what she had sowed, and God made certain she did. Just as Ruth had loved and cared for Naomi, Boaz did loving and caring things for Ruth and Naomi both. He knew that Ruth was gleaning for Naomi, and not just for herself. The news of Ruth’s good character and commitment to God and His Law had been circulated among the residents of Bethlehem.

**(Ruth 2:12) May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!”**

With these words, Boaz offered a blessing upon Ruth and also prayed for her. His prayer indicated that he knew she deserved a reward from God, a full reward for her good deeds. Boaz also knew that God wanted him to take on the responsibility of answering his

prayer by giving her the refuge she sought from the LORD. He opened his life to following the LORD and being of use to God. Boaz added good deeds to his prayer so she would be rewarded for her efforts through gleaning. This was only the beginning of the rewards God sought to bestow upon both Boaz and Ruth, as well as Naomi; for Boaz would reap what he had sowed.

**(Ruth 2:13) Then she said, “May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.”**

At Boaz’s answer, Ruth remained humble and addressed him as “my lord,” even though she was not one of his hired workers. She pledged herself to obey him and honor him as though she worked directly for him as one of his hired harvesters. She hoped that she could continue in his favor by doing what he told her, knowing his commands were in her best interests. Her response to Boaz spoke highly of his kindness to all of his servants as well as to her; for she saw he was treating her with the same care he showed to all of his hired workers.

**(Ruth 2:14) At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her**

**some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.**

In response to Ruth's loyal reply, Boaz then treated her even more as one of his hired workers by feeding her as he fed them (though he expected nothing from her in return). He wanted to make certain that her physical needs, created by hard work under a hot sun, were met. Boaz heaped up the food for her, showing his generosity and knowing that she might not take enough food for herself because of her humble heart and possible feelings of unworthiness as a Moabite. Because she had more food than she needed, Ruth took the left over food to Naomi for her dinner that evening (see Ruth 2:18).

**(Ruth 2:15) When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her.**

Knowing that the inexperienced Ruth might not completely understand the rules for gleaning and might begin gleaning in the wrong places, Boaz instructed his young men to allow her to glean wherever she might wander in his field. Boaz did for Naomi and Ruth more than they could ask, imagine, or think.

**(Ruth 2:16) You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."**

Boaz wisely did not do anything that might destroy Ruth's strong work ethic. He did not give her any harvested grain that she had not worked for to take home. He did, however, arrange for extra grain to be left behind that she could glean through work. His orders did save her some of the hardship of gleaning, but did not take from her the dignity of working for Naomi and herself by gleaning. In sum, Boaz instructed his young men not to bother her, not to reproach her, not to rebuke her, but actually to help her glean more than she normally could glean.

**(Ruth 2:17) So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.**

Ruth worked hard the entire day, until evening, because of her strong commitment to care for Naomi and herself no matter what the personal cost to herself. After a hard day's work, she had gleaned a little more than a bushel (an "ephah") of barley after it was beaten out. She ended her work day with more hard work in the evening rather than wait until the next day to beat out her grain.

**(Ruth 2:18) She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied.**

Naomi was surprised to see how effective Ruth had been at gleaning. Ruth gave Naomi the remainder of the lunch that she had not eaten (see Ruth 2:14). This verse does *not* teach that Ruth prepared dinner for herself from the grain that she had gleaned, and then after she had eaten gave what was left to Naomi. Naomi began to see how much God truly cared for both of them after they returned to Bethlehem.

### **Five Questions for Discussion**

1. How does the *Book of Ruth* teach the law of the harvest — that we reap what we sow?
2. How might you expect to be treated if you were a very poor Moabite widow who had just moved to Bethlehem with your very poor Israelite mother-in-law?
3. In what ways did Boaz show his care and concern for Naomi and Ruth?
4. In what ways did Boaz do more than the Law of God required of him in allowing Ruth to glean in his field?
5. What does it tell us about someone when they try to find ways to avoid doing what the Law of God requires of them?

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