

Becky Bereans – Ruth 1:22-2

Review

Last time we began our study of the sweet little book of Ruth. We looked in detail at the various names we find in chapter 1 paying close attention to the names' meanings. We saw that Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi had become so embittered by the deaths of her husband and sons that she told the townspeople of Bethlehem to call her מָרָא *mārā'* – **bitterness** – upon her return from Moab. Our hearts break for Naomi in that moment because she was unaware of the blessings God would soon work in her life – bringing not only the birth of her grandson Obed, but also bringing salvation for the entire world through Jesus whose mother Mary was to come through the line of Obed. We considered the lesson we can take from Naomi's sorrow and bitterness since we too are largely unaware of the blessings God is working all the time in our lives even in the midst of trials and tragedies.

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We didn't discuss the final verse of Ruth 1 last time because it more properly belongs with chapter 2. Let's read together Ruth 1:22-2.

The Barley and Wheat Harvest

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. Ruth 1:22 [ESV]

In Israel, the Barley harvest began in the latter half of the first month of the year – Nisan. This month corresponds to March and April in the modern calendar. The beginning of the month of Nisan also corresponds roughly with the spring equinox. Although God had not yet established any of the ordinances pertaining to the calendar, it was during this first month of the year that the waters of the great flood dried up and Noah opened up the covering on the ark (Genesis 8:13). More significantly, Nisan is the month God ordained in the Law of Moses for the celebration of the Passover (Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Numbers 9) to commemorate God's sparing of the first-born of Israel out of death when He brought the final plague which finally convinced Pharaoh to let the Israelites leave their Egyptian bondage. Most importantly, during the month of Nisan Jesus – our Passover Lamb – was crucified and then rose from the dead. The Easter celebration by which Christians around the world commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ takes place during the same week as the Jewish Passover festival. Thus, the modern calendar date of Easter Sunday varies year by year.

NOTE – Although Nisan is the first month of the year ordained by God in the Law of Moses, the Jewish new year celebration – Rosh Hashanah – takes place at the beginning of the seventh month of the year which falls in late September or early October in the modern calendar.

The barley harvest continues through about the middle of the second month of the Hebrew calendar, and is followed by the wheat harvest which also continues for about a month. The Feast of Weeks was ordained in the Law (Exodus 34:22, Numbers 28:26-31, Deuteronomy 16:9-10) to be celebrated seven weeks from the beginning of the grain (barley) harvest after the Passover sabbath. This seventh sabbath after Passover is celebrated by Christians as the Day of Pentecost – the day on which God's Holy Spirit came upon the apostles of Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 2).

Ruth Gleans in the Field of Boaz



The Gleaners - Jean-François Millet

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. Ruth 2:1 [ESV]

The significance of Boaz' family relationship with the clan of Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech will become apparent when we take up our study of Ruth 3. Unlike the names we found in Ruth 1, the name Boaz has no specific meaning that is relevant to the story.

3And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 4So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. Ruth 2:3-4 [ESV]

The gleaning of the fields by the poor was part of God's "social security" plan set out in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:9-10 & 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22).

9"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:9-10 [ESV]

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19“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 for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 22You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this. Deuteronomy 24:19-22 [ESV]

Time and again throughout God’s Word, we find evidence of God’s care for the poor – particularly widows and orphans. God made specific provisions in the Law for widows, orphans, and homeless sojourners. As Christ followers, we too are called to honor and serve them.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. James 1:27 [ESV]

There is an important point that we should take care not to miss found in the story of Ruth regarding God’s ministry for widows and orphans. God’s provision for the widow and orphan in His Law isn’t a call to spoon feed them, making them dependent upon our provision. Instead, God calls us to provide opportunity for the destitute to partake for themselves in the blessing of God’s provision. God’s call to honor the less fortunate includes honoring their dignity, not just their physical needs. We shouldn’t foster a culture and attitude of victimhood among the poor around us. Rather, we who are more richly blessed by God should seek to provide the means for those in greater need to improve their lot through their own efforts. Marxist ideology isn’t just self-destructive. It is also contrary to God’s will. Paul gave very specific instructions to Timothy with regard to pastoral ministry for widows.

3Honor widows who are truly widows. 4But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. 5She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, 6but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 7Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. 8But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:3-8 [ESV]

Clearly, God’s preferred mechanism to provide for widows and orphans is the family unit, not the government nor even the Church. The systematic dismantling and crippling of the traditional family by modern society runs contrary to God’s intent for us, and we can see the tragic results of this misguided societal architecture all around us.

But just in case we might be tempted to blame the breakdown of the family on the government or some other organization we need to remember that we ourselves make choices that become the primary drivers of the societal breakdown of the family. Most working adults live many miles from the rest of their families. Thus, when our aging parents become unable to care for themselves, we find ourselves having to arrange for their care from a distance, and the care they receive is at best a poor substitute for the care we ourselves might have provided. In modern America, economic necessity

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requires both spouses of virtually every family work outside the home. The rearing of the children is therefore often hired out to child care services and later to the public schools causing the children to be indoctrinated into ungodly values and world views with which most parents disagree.

Furthermore, the monogamous, life-long marriage bond between one man and one woman that God has ordained as the foundation and sustaining strength of the family unit has been largely abandoned in favor of fluid and fleeting “family” arrangements that virtually evaporate when their constituent individual members are called to make difficult self-sacrifices in caring for one another.

But let’s get back to the scripture at hand, shall we? Ruth provides a perfect example of the way God intended family members to care for one another and by extension how local Christian fellowships are to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Ruth could have gone back to her own Moabite people upon her Hebrew husband’s death, receiving provision from her own people and possibly marrying a new husband from among them. Indeed, Naomi herself encouraged Ruth to do just that as her sister-in-law did. But Ruth chose instead to throw her lot in with Naomi knowing that her mother-in-law would also need support just to survive – support the Moabite Gentiles were unlikely to give a Hebrew foreigner. In so doing, Ruth honored not only her mother-in-law, but also God Himself. We have no way of knowing whether Ruth had been taught by her husband about God’s provision in His Law for widows and orphans, but regardless of whether she did so consciously, Ruth herself became the instrument by whom God provided for Naomi.

There is a lesson for us here. Sometimes in our lives, the prospects for the future seem quite bleak – just as they must have seemed to Ruth and Naomi as they returned utterly destitute from Moab. Yet we have a promise from the LORD that He knows our needs and will provide for them in response to our faith, just as He did for Ruth and Naomi.

31Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 [ESV]

5Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” 6And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, “She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.” Ruth 2:5-7 [ESV]

Although Boaz had never met Ruth in person, as we shall soon see he had heard about her choice to accompany Naomi on her return to Bethlehem and to care for her.

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8Then 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. 9Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.” Ruth 2:8-9 [ESV]

Ruth’s choice to go the fields alone to glean was risky. Although we might find it disgusting to even think about, a young woman alone with no visible wealth and no husband or father or brother to defend her was liable to be assaulted, and possibly even killed despite God’s clear admonishment in the Law not to dishonor widows. Thus it is noteworthy that Boaz not only offered Ruth protection, but also reassurance so that she could go about her gleaning without being fearful.

10Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” 11But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12The LORD repay 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!” 13Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

Ruth 2:10-13 [ESV]

It is striking to me that none of the characters in this sweet little play had the slightest idea of the magnificent salvation for all mankind that God was already working through them. Yet here in these few verses we find the beginning of God’s blessing upon Ruth and Naomi, and indeed His blessing of Boaz as well in response to Ruth’s stepping out in faith when she first chose to accompany Naomi on her return to Bethlehem instead of remaining in the relative security she might have found among her own people.

14And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.” Ruth 2:14-16 [ESV]

Boaz went above and beyond the strict requirements of the Law – not only allowing gleaners to glean along the edges and corners of the field and from sheaves accidentally left in the field by the loaders. He also directed his reapers to purposely leave sheaves for Ruth to glean. In sharing his own lunch with Ruth, Boaz began to show perhaps more interest in Ruth personally than just obeying God’s Law to honor widows.

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¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah [about 3/5 bushel or 22 liters] of barley. ¹⁸And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. ¹⁹And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” ²⁰And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.” Ruth 2:17-20

[ESV]

Of course Naomi was excited about the unusually large amount of gleanings Ruth brought home, but even more excited to learn that it was Boaz’ field in which Ruth had gleaned. We’ll set aside for now discussion of what Naomi meant when she told Ruth that Boaz was one of the family’s redeemers.

Spoiler Alert – In redeeming Ruth, Boaz is a foreshadowing type of Christ – our Kinsman Redeemer.

For now, suffice it to say that Naomi was finally beginning to catch a glimpse of God’s amazing plan of redemption in the aftermath of her own sorrow and bitterness.

²¹And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’” ²²And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.” ²³So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law. Ruth 2:21-23 [ESV]

Once again we’re brought face-to-face with the unpleasant reality that then as now a young woman venturing out alone with no protector was and is faced with the very real danger of being assaulted and killed. In his role as Ruth’s protector, Boaz provides an image of the coming Messiah.

*⁴Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts;
his name is the LORD;
exult before him!
⁵Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation. Psalm 68:4-5 [ESV]*