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Thursday Morning Bible Study

The Book of Ruth Chapter 2

We have now met mother Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth. WE learned their story, of how Naomi and her husband Elimelech had gone to the country of Moab with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion, fleeing Bethlehem of Judah during a severe drought, probably during the reign of Gideon the Judge. Moab is a country located east across the Jordan River and the Dead Sea from Judah, and quite high up in the local mountain range. Apparently, there was no famine there.

We then learned that Elimelech dies, the two boys marry a couple of local girls, Orpah and Ruth, and then the boys die. No explanation is given, but according to scripture, this takes place in the span of about ten years. What we have up to this point, is three women with little means of support, one a mother, living in a foreign land, who now has no husband nor her sons to take care of her, and two very young widows with no children, and no one to take care of them. Naomi makes the decision to return to Bethlehem, she does have some family members there, and bids the girls to return to their respective families, and maybe new husbands can be found for them.

Both girls are very resistant to the idea of leaving mother Naomi, and really do not wish to return to their families, however Orpah is persuaded to go back, but Ruth will not heed Naomi's reasoning, and Naomi finally accepts Ruth's company. The reasoning for their reluctance to go back to family, is one, they were under contract in their marriages, and two, they, in all probability, took on the religion or beliefs of their husbands and were no longer property of their birth families. Off Naomi and Ruth go, back to Judah and to Bethlehem, probably more than a week's journey, up and down steep mountainsides, and across the head of the Dead Sea at the River Jordan.

They are now in the Bethlehem area, and just in time for the first harvest of the year, and everybody is busy, and happily folks are glad to see Naomi, and warmly welcome her back as well as Ruth. But, and this is a point to remember, Naomi is bitter and hurt, because bearing children is the pride of women of that era, and all that Naomi had is now gone, and no resultant heirs to be had. Her life is a failure as far as she is concerned. Elimelech had gone to a foreign land, which some say

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was against God's wishes, and why so much misfortune had befallen the whole family. Another point, was the Moabites worshipped the god, Chemosh who was not a very nice god, and a god that required a human blood sacrifice. Here then with Naomi is a Moabite woman now in their midst, although she had truly converted. So Naomi had left with a husband and two sons and this is what she comes back with. Needless to say, Naomi is not a happy camper.

A] Ruth 2: 1 through 3; (read)

1] "There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family Elimelech, his name was Boaz."

Here we meet a relative of Elimelech, and this is important, because Elimelech, has no heirs, so a cousin is introduced. At least this promises to Naomi that maybe she can finagle a little security for her and Ruth.

2] "So Ruth the Moabite, said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I might find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

Here we have an issue of Naomi and Ruth being dependent on each other, and with no income they will be reduced to gleaning in the fields, and from what I can 'glean' from scripture, Naomi was not in the best of shape to go to the fields. Mosaic Law in Leviticus 19:9 and Deuteronomy 24:19 states that the laborers are not to pick the fields clean but leave gleanings of grain in the field, and scatterings of grapes on the vine for the poor and strangers. Also, by this time with the introduction of Boaz, Naomi is quietly pushing Ruth toward a meeting with Boaz.

Now harvest of grain will begin with scything of the grain stalks, and bundling them into sheaves, allowing the sheaves to dry in the field, and then the sheaves are taken to the threshing floor, where either they are beaten to knock the grain from the chaff, or oxen or horses do the work of trodding on the grain. Gleaning simply means, that some of the grain stalks may not be cut or during the cutting, ripe grain falls from the stalk, and either the birds come along and gobble it up or the field mice make a feast of it. However, the poor people, widows, orphans will also follow after the workers and gather the fallen or leftover grain, take it home where they grind it into flour or roast it for eating.

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3] "And she left 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 family of Elimelech."

What she will do, is carry a cloth bag, and bending down she will either take the grain that has fallen to the ground or pick the grain off of the grain stalk and save it in her bag. Also, take note, she is not alone. A lot of folks are scratching for a little bit of grain to feed themselves or their families. Before long she just happens to come into the field that belongs to Boaz. ----- Now things get interesting.

B] Ruth 2: 4 through 7; (read)

1] "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." And they answered him, "The Lord Bless you."

This ought to help, clearing up some misconceptions regarding the status of people and God's acceptance of the status quo. In this picture we have three basic classes of people, the elite status, the worker status and the poor status. God accepts all three as they are and does not really interfere with lifting of the poor status to worker status or the worker status to elite status. Individually, each person must pull him/herself by faith, hard work, and wisdom, into a better status position.

Now, by the tenor of the greetings, I can tell Boaz is a righteous man and highly respected, by his workers.

2] "Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

Boaz notices someone different out in the fields and asks probably who's wife or daughter is she, because he doesn't recognize her, and being an important person in Bethlehem, he would know most folk in the area.

3] "So the servant who was in charge of the reapers, said, "it is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, 'please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."

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It is explained to Boaz who she is, and I am sure He probably has heard about her, and would know that she is with an important in-law, and gets a report that she is a very hard worker. Resting in the house might refer to the little tabernacles that dot the edge of the field during the harvests.

C] Ruth 2: 8 through 12; (read)

1] "Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."

For one, this sounds like a boss to a worker, "young lady, you listen to me" Boaz has already had a talk with the workers in the field about their relationships with the lady workers, and he tells Ruth stay with the girls, no matter what. Keep your eyes open so you see where the edge of the field is, and always stay with the other girls. Wander over to another field, he cannot protect her. The water came in jugs brought from the well in Bethlehem, probably by the strong young men. (Those jugs would be heavy to be able to supply enough water for the workers) The water was for the paid workers in the field and not for the outlying gleaners, that followed the workers and gleaned the fields. They would be responsible for their own respites. But Boaz has allowed her to avail herself of the water when she needed it.

There was no distinct division between fields except for possibly a plowed rut and everybody who had possession of land planted it together and harvested it together, and because gathering the grain was so very important, every able-bodied person was called to the fields to get the harvest in. Each field was accountable for its own produce. There was usually three harvests per year, and preserving and storing these harvests was the most important job for the community survival.

2] "So she fell on her face, bowed down 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?"

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One of the things to remember, was Moab and Israel were not on friendly terms, as were all the other surrounding countries. Ruth knows this, but because she married an Israeli and forsook her own religion, taking on the beliefs of her husband, and because she companioned Naomi back to Bethlehem of Judah, she will now claim this land and people as hers but she also knows or presumes to know her place in this society. However, Boaz also knows what she has done for Naomi and what she means to Naomi, and Naomi is his relative by marriage. He respects this. Ruth is now figuring this out.

3] "And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported to me, that all you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given to you by the Lord God of Israel, under Whose wings you have come for refuge."

Boaz knows what Ruth has given up, her family and friends, a life she knew, and the security of her people, to stay with Naomi and see to her needs. Boaz also recognizes that she is a stranger in a strange land, and he will see to her protection because of her kindnesses to Naomi.

D] Ruth 2: 13 through 16; (read)

1] "Then she said, "let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me and have spoken kindly to your maid-servant, though I am not like one of your maid-servants."

Ruth asks for the continuation of his kindnesses. We must remember what society was in those days. Women, especially foreign women, were treated more like chattel, or second-class citizens. They had their place, but this was a male oriented society. Ruth does understand that being from enemy territory, she has no advantage and no standing except as might be given to her.

2] "Now Boaz said to her at meal time, "Come here and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers and he passed parched grain to her and she ate and was satisfied, and kept some back."

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Did she go back to the field and now to mealtime? The way scholars feel, she probably did, and now she is allowed to eat with the reapers and paid workers and Boaz even allows her some special privileges. Parched grain is dry roasted to remove the moisture and makes is better for traveling and lack of cooking facilities. The vinegar was old wine and was used like we might use jelly or any flavoring on our bread today. Ruth eats and satisfies her appetite and saves some to take back to Naomi.

3] "And when she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."

Boy! Talk about your special favors! Gleaners are supposed to trail the workers at a safe distance, and pick up the loose stalks or fallen grain, primarily for themselves and their families. They don't have much contact with the paid workers except for derision or scolding by the overseers. They are almost akin to street beggars.

E] Ruth 2: 17 through 20; (read)

1] "So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Then she took it took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back, after she had been satisfied"

Ruth beats out or takes the grain stalks and knocks the grain out of the husks. Her day's work netted her about an ephah, or 5.9 dry gallons of grain (a little less than a bushel) plus she brings to Naomi what extra food she saved for her at dinnertime with the workers.

2] "And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you."

Now let's get the picture; As we saw from the beginning of their returning to Bethlehem, Naomi is in a depressed state, and Ruth essentially is looking after her. Naomi is old by the standards of that day, and as we have already noted, feels her whole life has been a waste because there is nothing to show for it. Now

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all she has is a foreign-born daughter-in-law, and that is about it. Ruth is now her caretaker, and yet she still has that mothering instinct. "Where did you go? Out! What did you do? Nothing!" Kind of relationship.

3] "She told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz. Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, " Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives."

Well, that ought to brighten up Naomi! Boaz is at least a cousin or uncle of Elimelech, and gives Naomi a glimmer of hope. There is a symbiotic caring between Naomi and Ruth, and I am sure Naomi is greatly concerned about what will happen to Ruth when she is gone. And frankly, with no money to support themselves, and Naomi really too old to be much use in the fields, it is all up to Ruth, to find food for the two of them. Now knowing that the Boss-man is a close relative, Naomi recognizes that God did have a hand in all this after all.

F] Ruth 2: 21 through 23; (read)

1] "Ruth the Moabitiss said, "he also said to me, 'you shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field." So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of the barley harvest and wheat harvest, and she dwelt with her mother-in-law."

The main issue at this point is security for Ruth, because being young and a stranger in the land, Ruth might be fair game for all the leering young men in the neighborhood and they would try to take serious advantage of her. As long as she stays under the umbrella of Boaz and his crowd, Boaz will make certain that Ruth will be safe, and will have work for her to support herself and Naomi.

As the story goes, Ruth plies herself at the gleaning until the full harvest is over.