

The Book of Ruth

Lesson 4 - Chapter 2

We finished up chapter 1 of Ruth last week but before we get into Ruth chapter 2, I would like to briefly repeat and summarize a key point from the last lesson: and it is that when a gentile accepts the God of Israel he is also to accept God's people, the Israelites. And this is because God makes a spiritual connection between the convert and Hebrew. Let me also prepare you for today's lesson by saying that while a couple of lessons ago I was "preachy", and last week I was "teachy", today we're going to get a little more "techie". But I think you'll like it.

Last time I pointed out this mysterious reality of an inherent but difficult-to-define relationship that is created between natural born Hebrews and gentiles who come to faith in the God of the Hebrews (and we'll even see this from another perspective in today's lesson). We saw this when I broke down Ruth's promises to Na'omi into 1 statement of faith (Your God will be my God), accompanied by 5 promises of action on her part signaling what amounts to a visible and tangible commitment that ought to necessarily come when a gentile makes that statement of faith. Those 5 actions were: I will go wherever you go, I will stay wherever you stay, your people will be my people, I will die where you die, and I will be buried where you are buried. The "I" in that statement is a gentile and the "you" is a Hebrew. So from another aspect we have a promise from Ruth to the God of Israel (that YHWH will be Ruth's God) and a promise from Ruth to Na'omi (and in a broader sense to the people of Israel) to join them in all the ways that matter.

As we go through today's lesson I want you to take special notice how often Ruth will be referred to as Ruth the Moabite, or Ruth the foreigner. Yet the locals of Bethlehem are aware of the switch of allegiance that Ruth has made to Yehoveh and to Israel, and they are also cognizant of Ruth's loving care of Na'omi. So calling Ruth a Moabite is not meant as a slap or rejection of her conversion; rather it's just noting a fact of her background. That she has made the decision to leave Moab and its gods behind to cleave to Israel has been accepted; that she is NOT a biological Hebrew is equally accepted. And yet, while she is not a physical ethnic Jew she now has a Jewish heart or soul (so to speak) as a result of her acceptance of the God of Israel. So the question is: is Ruth now a Jew or is she still a Moabite gentile living among the Jews (or is she some kind of strange hybrid)? This is a quite relevant issue for the mostly-gentile church of today, especially with the return of Israel as a re-born nation that confronts many of our cherished doctrines. And at the heart of the matter is: exactly how does a gentile Christian identify him or herself once we accept the God of Israel. This was also an immediate concern among the Jewish Christian leadership and their gentile Christian converts following Christ's death.

So of course we see this same dilemma brought forward into the New Testament and Paul addresses it. In the Book of Romans Paul says this:

CJB Romans 2:25 For circumcision is indeed of value if you do what Torah says. But if

you are a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision! 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the Torah, won't his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 Indeed, the man who is physically uncircumcised but obeys the Torah will stand as a judgment on you who have had a b'rit-milah and have Torah written out but violate it! 28 For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. 29 On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God.

Now, how do I know that Paul is directly addressing the matter of how to regard a gentile who comes to belief in the God of Israel, versus a situation whereby perhaps a Jew is not operating within the Torah and is being chastised for not being spiritual enough? That is, do we have Paul saying that for a Jew to be a REAL Jew (or TRUE Jew) he must have a circumcised heart? No we don't. Because the next verse of Paul's dissertation is:

CJB Romans 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? 2 Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.

In other words, since the subject was how a gentile who receives a circumcised Jewish heart (in a manner of speaking) becomes a Jew inwardly does that mean that from a physical standpoint that there is no longer any distinction between a gentile and a Jew? Some say (using a rather new belief that I do not subscribe to) that what Paul was getting at is that in some miraculous way a gentile is PHYSICALLY transformed into a physical Hebrew upon his acceptance of the Hebrew God. Again, I think that is a very contrived and unwarranted reading of that passage.

Anyway: Paul says that a real Jew is one inwardly; it comes from a miraculous, divinely performed (spiritual) circumcision of the heart NOT a miraculous transformation of the human flesh. So this begs the question, how can someone be one of God's people inwardly (spiritually), but reject God's people outwardly (physically)? The theology of Ruth says you can't, and Paul's extended argument on this subject in Romans 11 also explains that gentiles are actually grafted in (again, spiritually) to Israel, their covenants, and their God by means of trust in Messiah Yeshua. Thus the misguided doctrine of Replacement Theology, a theology that has gripped too much of the church for too many centuries; a theology that hopes to prove that gentiles who love Jesus have replaced the Hebrews as God's people is not only erroneous it is utterly impossible because the circumcised heart that is received by a saved person makes that person an Israelite inwardly (from a spiritual point of view) and creates a bond with the physical Israelites.

Ruth didn't waltz into Beit-Lechem and tell the Jewish townspeople that they are old news because now that she, a gentile, has accepted the God of Israel as her god she is now God's favorite and they are discarded. Indeed, Ruth is a model for the church to follow just like nearly every Christian commentator says. Ruth knew that to accept the God of Israel is also to accept Israel.

A little later in this lesson we're going to see another interesting parallel between this Old

Testament story of Ruth and a New Testament story of how a gentile becomes part of Israel **spiritually** when they accept Israel's God.

Let's read Ruth chapter 2.

READ RUTH CHAPTER 2 all

Verse 1 essentially explains that Na'omi is NOT blood-related to Boaz. Rather Boaz is associated with Na'omi's deceased husband Elimelech. The information is supplied that Boaz is a wealthy man belonging to Elimelech's clan. This reminds us of a couple of lessons ago when I explained that in the first chapter of Ruth Elimelech's family were called **Ephrathim** of Bethlehem; and that the Hebrew root word **Ephrath** means abundance or fruitful. The point being the Elimelech's clan was a fruitful (well-to-do) clan of the tribe of Judah and here with the direct pronouncement that Boaz was wealthy and of the same clan as Elimelech we get additional evidence that such was the case and why the nickname **Ephrathim** was applied to that large extended family.

This is one of those several places that we're going to get a bit technical today. Where in the CJB it says that Na'omi had a "relative", the Hebrew word being translated is **moda**. So especially in some bibles where **moda** is translated into "kinsman" (as an abbreviation of kinsman redeemer), the English translator was jumping to some conclusions. **Moda** simply indicates a familial association or an acquaintance. So in no way is Boaz at this point in the story being painted as anything but a rather distant relative in Elimelech's clan. There is no assumption of family obligation on Boaz towards Na'omi at this point.

If you've ever had the interest to look up Boaz's name to see what it means, you've found that there is little agreement about it. Boaz is very unique in that no other bible character shares that name. In fact outside of the association with the book of Ruth we find the only other use for the name Boaz is as the name of one of the two enormous pillars (the other being **Yachin**) at the entry to Solomon's Temple, and even then there is much disagreement as to what it signifies. So rather than speculate we'll just leave the meaning of the name Boaz as the mystery that it currently is.

Ruth and Na'omi represent the poor of Bethlehem, and as widows they have no visible means of support so Ruth does what was the norm for that era, she decides to go out and "glean". Gleaning was the "food stamp program" of ancient times; gleaning gave the poverty stricken the opportunity to obtain food. But we have to keep in mind is that in this agricultural society gleaning occurred simultaneously with harvesting. So just as a farmer has to sow, then tend, and then wait for the crop to grow up and ripen before he can harvest it and use the produce so it was for gleaners. The poor had to work behind the reapers (the harvesters), immediately picking up what the reapers left behind, with the idea of gathering more than they would use in a single day. They would need to store up the produce (usually grain) that they gleaned to use during the bulk of the time that was the planting and growing cycle, when there was no gathering of food (no harvesting) occurring.

Let's also be clear that gleaning was a right of the poor in Israel, not a privilege; it was not

something that the field's owners could grant or not grant to gleaners according to his charity. The Torah made it God's law that the owner's **MUST** not harvest all their crops but rather leave sufficient for the poor, and especially for widows. So Ruth could literally wander around and choose at her own discretion which field she would like to glean. In fact part of the law on gleaning was that in lean times the owners of the fields were required to make **MORE** of their crops available to the gleaners than usual. That is quite a contrast to the more typical human reaction whereby in tough times (like our nation and the world in general are experiencing now) that people give **LESS** of their incomes to charity even though the number of needy is on the rise.

Verse 3 explains that Ruth "happened" upon a part of a field owned by Boaz to do her gleaning. The Hebrew when translated most literally says, "She chance, chanced upon the field of Boaz". Now to the uninitiated that sounds like luck; she just happened by serendipity to pick the field that was owned by Boaz. But that is neither the Hebrew nor the heavenly meaning here. Hebrews did not believe in luck; they believed that all things were guided by God's hand. Rather a better translation might be, "by divine providence she came to the field of Boaz". I'm not saying this in result of hindsight or as allegory; rather that was precisely what the Jewish mindset of that era meant to convey.

So the Lord guided Ruth to Boaz's field, but of course Ruth was completely unaware that the God she only recently gave her allegiance to was behind it. Sometime after Ruth began her gleaning, Boaz comes out from his home in Bethlehem to check on the progress of his field workers. In the previous verse we are told that she came to the "part of the field" that was owned by Boaz. It was usual that fields were common fields shared by several farmers. A farmer would simply own and plant part of that field. Often some rocks would be a boundary marker between fields, at other times there was none at all and a farmer simply recognized where his crop began and ended. Unlike Europe where we will find hedgerows that separates plots of land in a most definite way, Hebrews did not usually employ fences or barriers. On several of our trips to Israel people on the tour have asked me about the rock "fences" they see in almost all the fields of Israel; but in reality what they're looking at are walls used for terracing the hilly terrain. They are not meant to designate property lines although I'm sure in some rare instances it served that double purpose.

Boaz comes to the field and greets the reapers by saying "Yehoveh be with you"; they respond with "Yehoveh bless you". This must have been the rather standard greeting format for that local area. When we remember that the time of the book of Ruth was during the days of the Judges, and recall the spiritual darkness that hovered over Israel that typified that era, this greeting and response indicate that Beit-Lechem was an enclave of true worshippers of the God of Israel who continued to dedicate themselves to the purer ways rather than to give in to the rampant apostasy of the times.

Boaz notices Ruth and asks the man supervising his other workers about her. He asks, "who is this *na'arah*?" The term means a young girl, who is under someone's charge. Perhaps she was a servant, or more typically still lived at home under her father's authority. It's not a term that would be used for a married woman or a person who was a known widow. And the field supervisor answers Boaz by referring to her as that girl from Moab, the one who returned with

Na'omi. This shows us that in small towns and cities very little happens without it getting around, and so Ruth and Na'omi's story was well known among the locals. The harvest supervisor goes on to explain to Boaz that she came to him asking to glean in this field and she has been gleaning continuously except to stop for a short break.

Now there's a bit a twist here that can go unnoticed and lost in translation. Verse 7 has the supervisor saying that Ruth asked to glean after the reapers "among the sheaves". Now that is somewhat problematic and unlikely that she asked to glean among the sheaves because that is NOT where gleaning took place. Sheaves are the stalks of grain that have been cut, gathered, and bundled by the reapers. The sheaves are the harvest and thus the property of the owner. Not only would that have been a very arrogant request on Ruth's part, the supervisor certainly would have rebuked her for it and possibly even suggested she try somewhere else. So, what was it that she asked? After all, the following verses show that Ruth was meek and humble in attitude and deed and would have been anything but disrespectful or arrogant.

The problem comes from the Hebrew word that can be either *mirym* or *marym* and it stems from the fact that while those two words mean two slightly different things, they are spelled identically. OK, minor detour time. Hebrew utilizes an alphabet of all consonants and a person (on their own accord) must add vowels to make a Hebrew word pronounceable. This was a problem even for the Jews especially after the Roman dispersion of the Jews from the Holy Land not long after Yeshua was executed. The problem was that as the generations of young Hebrews grew up and scattered all over the Asian and European continents, and as they assimilated into the many gentile cultures, they lost track of exactly how to pronounce many words of their native Hebrew language. So especially when reading Hebrew with its all-consonant alphabet, you could vocalize a word a number of ways depending on what vowels you decided you needed to add to it.

Don't let that statement or concept throw you, it's quite similar for most languages. In our own language of English, let's take the word "t-e-a-r". We can vocalize it as "Teer" meaning the byproduct of crying, or we can vocalize it as "tare" meaning to rip something like a piece of paper or cloth. The point being that even though it is spelled the same way, a slightly different way of saying it completely changes it's meaning and a person has to have sufficient knowledge and experience of the language, the culture, and the context of the subject to know which way to say the word.

Now imagine if English was an all-consonant alphabet (no a-e-i-o-u) like Hebrew and when we read the word "tear" it had no vowels in it so it would simply be written "tr". NOW what do we do? Well that's the problem with EVERY word in Hebrew. You had to know by context and experience how to see a word in Hebrew and pronounce it. But after a few hundred years of the Hebrew community being scattered and existing only in enclaves and villages among gentiles, the experience of using the Hebrew language waned and how to communicate the Hebrew written word (so that it could still be spoken) became in danger of extinction. So along came a group of Jewish scribes and teachers who (over 1000 years ago) invented a system of little symbols that they added to the Hebrew letters and words that TOLD the reader what vowel sounds to add and so how to pronounce it. That system is today called the Masoretic

system and it is incorporated into almost any Hebrew text you'll stumble across.

In our case here in Ruth the question is, which is correct for WHERE it is that Ruth asked to glean: would it be among the *mirym* or among the *marym*? Many bibles say that the word is *marym*, which means bundled sheaves; but it almost certainly ought to be *mirym*, which means stalks. That is the stalks are either uncut (because the reapers scythe passed them by), or were cut and lying there on the ground unbundled (because the reapers' helpers didn't pick up every last stalk to bundle into a sheaf). It would be totally against Ruth's character to ask to glean among the bundled sheaves, something that generally was not done.

In verse 8, now that Boaz knows who Ruth is, he speaks with her and begins with the words, "did you hear that my daughter?" There are two expressions wrapped up in one, here: the first is "did you hear that" and it has the sense not of actually asking her a question but one of making sure he has her full attention. It's like our saying, "pay attention carefully to this, OK?" The second part of the expression is "my daughter"; and "my daughter" is not a statement that she is his daughter or even under his familial authority, it's just the way an elder speaks to a younger person affectionately. So just as we saw Na'omi refer to Ruth as "my daughter" in an earlier verse, now we have the equally elderly Boaz addressing the considerably younger Ruth in that same way. So, sorry ladies; this is not the tale of a dashing young man riding to the rescue of a lovely damsel in distress. Boaz is an old guy.

Boaz offers Ruth the chance to glean his field full time. She would not have to work this field for a while and then go try another. This is an interesting bit of information because she may have worked there for possibly a couple of months. Even more, we know that she arrived at a time when the barley was still being harvested. But the wheat harvest usually began while the barley harvest was nearing its end, so a new crop was available to glean.

The beginning of the barley harvest is at the biblical feast of Bikkurim, also known as Firstfruits; it was at the same time as Passover and Unleavened Bread. Shavuot, Pentecost, which would arrive 7 weeks later, was during the wheat harvest. So it was within this particular 7-week timeframe (between Firstfruits and Shavuot) that Ruth's interaction with Boaz took place.

Boaz tells Ruth that he has instructed the young men who are doing the reaping to allow her freedom to do her work and not bother her. Not only that, she has been invited to drink from the water jugs that Boaz's hired reapers can drink from. This was the summertime in Judah; it was quite hot and water was critical. If a person had to go get his or her own water, it would take away from gleaning (or reaping) time. So by offering Ruth the opportunity to drink from the hired workers' water jug Ruth could be more productive. This is not something that the other gleaners would have available to them; Ruth was getting special treatment. But why? Was she exceptionally beautiful and this old man, Boaz, was attracted to her? That could have played a role, although if so only a minor one and probably not at all.

This same question puzzled Ruth: why the favoritism towards her? So Ruth falls down prostrate at Boaz's feet, thanks him for his kindness, and inquires why he would be acting so favorably to her (especially since she is a foreigner). There it is again, that reference to Ruth and her Moabite heritage. Although Ruth (to Na'omi's surprise) rejected her past identity to

take on a new one with Israel and Israel's God, her ethnicity as a Moabite remained with her.

Ruth is surprised at such grace shown to her by Boaz. How has she merited such a thing?

In verse 11 Boaz answers her question and we need to take it as honest and truthful and not read anything extra into it. Boaz says that it's her CHARACTER that he so admires. He has heard the stories of Na'omi's Moabite daughter-in-law who came to Bethlehem with her and has so devotedly cared for this old Jewish woman. Even more he is impressed by her complete show of sincerity and unity with the Jewish people when she gave up her own people, left the comfort of her own mother and father (who could have ensured a decent and protected life for her until she got a new husband), left behind her own nation (meaning she has switched allegiance from Moab to Israel), and even more has come forward to Judah without knowing anything about the Jews or what to expect. Such is the commitment and faith that Ruth the gentile exhibited that fascinated Boaz and would soon bring her great reward from the God of Israel.

Gentile Christians take notice. I know many of you expected a nice comfortable study of Ruth where the standard focus was on the parallel between Boaz and the Messiah (and that is certainly in there and we'll examine it closely). But up to this point in Ruth that subject simply is not present. If we're going to take the story of Ruth as a type and shadow of Christ and His church, then we need to accept the whole of the matter and take it fully in context, and not just the parts we prefer. This first part of Ruth is as much about a gentile's relationship with the people of Israel as the last part of Ruth is about a gentile church and it's relationship with our Jewish Savior.

Boaz blesses Ruth in verse 12 and ends his statement with an interesting wordplay that we'll find used later in the story in a different way but I need to connect it for you now so that it's not missed. He says to Ruth, "may you be rewarded in full by Yehoveh the God of Israel under whose wings you have come for refuge." The operative phrase is, "under whose **wings** (God's wings) you have come for refuge".

The Hebrew word that is translated as wings is **kanaph**. And the usual image is of a mother bird stretching out her wings over her chick to guard it and protect it from storms and predators. But while the idea of protection and rest is certainly intended, I think the choice of words is to draw a parallel. So let's briefly jump ahead to Ruth 3 and see that parallel.

CJB Ruth 3:6 She went down to the threshing-floor and did everything as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 After Bo'az was through eating and drinking and was feeling good, he went to lie down at the end of the pile of grain. She stole in, uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night the man was startled and turned over, and there was a woman lying at his feet! 9 He asked, "Who are you?" and she answered, "I'm your handmaid Rut. Spread your robe over your handmaid, because you are a redeeming kinsman."

This is the part of the story that most of us have heard before because it is so dramatic and (for the girls) romantic. But look at the last sentence; it says that Ruth asked Boaz to "spread your

robe over your handmaid, because you are a redeeming kinsman". What it actually says (with a little Hebrew added back in) is, "spread your **kanaph** over your handmaid, because you are a **go'el**". **Kanaph**, earlier translated metaphorically as God's **wings** being spread over Ruth for her heavenly well-being, is now used in the very same way (just hidden because of the English translation) that Boaz should spread HIS **kanaph** (his wings that are metaphorically his robe) over her for her earthly well-being. And this is because Boaz is Ruth's **go'el**, kinsman redeemer. See: the spreading of his robe over her was a sign of him "taking her under his wing", taking her to a place of refuge.

I'm not sure if the connection is becoming clear to you, but I hope so. Ruth the widow back in Moab didn't know much about Yehoveh, but God put enough faith into her for her to know she wanted Him. But now this naïve gentile is in process of learning more about the true God of the Cosmos whom she has given herself over to. God the Father is Ruth's ultimate place of refuge and she has CHOSEN to put herself under His **kanaph**. Ruth did this when she made her 6-part declaration back in Moab and then returned to Judah with Na'omi. And you know, Ruth didn't do this passively, she insisted. She glued herself to Na'omi and to Yehoveh and wouldn't take no for an answer. She attached herself to God and to His people and wouldn't let go no matter how logical and practical Na'omi's argument against this course of action seemed.

Well in Ruth chapter 3 (which of course we'll come back to and study in much more depth), Ruth thrusts herself upon Boaz and essentially insists that Boaz be her **kanaph** on earth. Ruth didn't sneak into the place Boaz was sleeping and crawl under his robe to take no for an answer. And essentially Ruth tells him that she is HIS obligation to redeem because HE is her **go'el**, her kinsman redeemer. We're going to talk a lot about the kinsman redeemer in the coming lessons.

Let's go back to chapter 2, and verse 13; there, after Boaz has blessed Ruth for being so dedicated to Na'omi and to the God of Israel, she responds to Boaz with: "my lord I hope I continue pleasing you. You have comforted and encouraged me, even though I am not one of your servants".

Let me put that another way, because the intent is for us to understand her to say: "You are a Jewish man with much wealth, and even though I am a poor gentile and I can offer nothing, you have comforted and encouraged me". This ought to be every gentile's prayer of thanksgiving to our Messiah, Yeshua.

In verse 14 Boaz begins to draw nearer to Ruth and offers his dining table to her. Boaz was demonstrating one of the most valued qualities of a human: **chesed**. He was actively showing her kindness. Gleaners were usually at best left alone to fend for themselves; but Boaz instead offered Ruth food from his own table. He offered for her to dip her bread in a concoction called **chometz**, which is a sour sauce of sorts that is used to spice up dry bread. Not only that but Ruth was allowed to sit with the reapers, those of higher status who were paid wages to harvest for the owner, Boaz. She was offered roasted grain, a rather standard fare for reapers during the harvest season, and was allowed all she could eat and more.

But Boaz's **chesed** is magnified when after the meal Ruth gets up to go back to her gleaning and Boaz instructed his supervisor and reapers to allow Ruth to glean "even among the sheaves". Remember how we examined earlier the statement that Ruth (according to some versions) had asked to glean among the sheaves, but that the problem was that the Hebrew word could have been either **mirym** or **marym** ? And I said that the context of the earlier statement demanded that the word be **mirym**, stalks, because she never would have assumed to ask to glean among the **marym**, the sheaves. Well here Boaz is generously telling his men to have her glean among the **marym**, the actual bundled sheaves. Even more they are to pull some of the stalks away from the bundles and let her take those! This is a most magnanimous act of charity.

We'll talk about another aspect of this removing of stalks from the sheaf for the sake of a gentile next time we meet.