

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## The Kindness of Boaz

### Ruth 2:14-23

*14. Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, "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.*

When the laborers break for mealtime, Boaz looks out for Ruth once again, inviting her to eat at his table. Moreover he feeds her well indeed, and gives her more food than she can eat at one meal, as hungry as she must have been after the hard labor she has been undertaking. So she is satisfied, and saves what was left over. She is not a wasteful woman, and wants to make good use of this extra food. Certainly in the situation she and Naomi are in, they cannot afford to pass by any good thing that comes their way.

Again, Boaz's blessing on Ruth is an excellent picture of the way God treats us. He also provides His people with blessings in abundance, giving them more than they need, and all through His grace.

*15. And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her.*

Boaz knew that according to the law, Ruth was only supposed to glean what had accidentally fallen to the ground while the rest were harvesting, or else from the corners of the field which they had passed by in gleaning. Yet Boaz is concerned what might happen if Ruth does not know this, being a Moabitess, or perhaps he worries she might get tired and accidentally stray where she should not go among the grain they have not yet harvested. So Boaz becomes worried when he thinks about this, and makes provision for it, just in case. He therefore orders his servants not to stop her even if she does glean from the unharvested grain. Now, I doubt for a moment that Ruth actually would have done this. She would have been instructed by Naomi as to exactly what she could and couldn't do. She would have known that this would not be right, and she was a careful young woman. Yet Boaz shows how much he has been impressed by her and the concern he has for her, as he wants to be prepared for any eventuality, knowing she is a foreigner and unfamiliar with their customs.

So our God watches over us as His children, and is there with His grace and forgiveness, even when we might go astray and do things which we should not. He forgives us for them, not because they are not wrong, nor because we deserve such forgiveness, but rather because of His love and care for us.

*16. Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."*

Boaz knows how hard Ruth's labor is, and that it cannot be easy searching the ground for the grain that has been accidentally dropped. Therefore, he determines to make Ruth's task easier. So, he commands his reapers to drop handfuls of grain on purpose as they harvest! Then, she can find and glean these, and they should not rebuke her. Boaz was looking out for Ruth indeed, in every way he could.

In the same way our Yahweh looks out for us, and He can and often does purposefully add His blessings to our labor.

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

Finally the evening comes, and Ruth takes stock of what she has gleaned. She finds that she has gathered about an ephah of barley, which is about a bushel and three pints. This was a huge amount of barley considering the way she had to harvest it, and was far more than she should have been able to pick up from what was accidentally dropped. Of course, we know that the reason why she got this much is because of Boaz's care for her, and his orders to his servants to drop grain purposefully for her.

So this is quite a load of grain that Ruth has to carry back to Naomi. She must have been a strong young woman to carry it all! She was burdened down with the wealth of riches Boaz had provided for her, just as God weighs us down with the unsearchable riches of His grace, as Paul informs us He does in Ephesians 3:8.

*18. Then she 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 picks up her gleanings and carries them into the city. She arrives at whatever poor hovel she and her mother-in-law had found to stay in, and Naomi sees what she has managed to glean. She must have been shocked at the amount, for she must have known that the type of gleaning that the poor were allowed to do should not have produced this much grain. While Naomi is still admiring the results of her labor, Ruth gets out her leftover lunch. She does not know why she was fed so well, but she loves her mother-in-law, and wants her to share in her bounty.

*19. 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."*

*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."*

Ruth is a foreigner, and this whole concept of the poor gleaning is new to her. She did not know what to expect, or how she might expect to be treated. Although she must have known she was being treated very well, having little to compare this to, she had no way of knowing for sure if this was unusual. Naomi knows it immediately, however, and knows from the amount of grain she has brought home that this is far more than she should have been able to glean. It is immediately clear to her that someone must have taken notice of Ruth and aided her. Then when she sees that Ruth was actually fed and fed well, as if she was a hired laborer rather than a free-loader, there can be no doubt in her mind but that someone has been very kind and gracious to Ruth. So she blesses her unknown benefactor. Then, she asks of Ruth the details. She wants to know where she gleaned, and Ruth tells her quite innocently that the name of the man was Boaz. She had no idea that this was in any way significant, or what that name would mean to Naomi.

It would be interesting to have heard and seen how Ruth said this. She had gone into this man's field as a beggar, and had been treated by him like a daughter. This was surely a most unexpected and gratifying experience. There can be little doubt but that she thought about Boaz with gratitude at this point, if not more than that.

*20. 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."*

Naomi rejoices upon hearing this news, and again blesses Boaz, this time knowing who she is blessing! She blesses him in the name of the LORD, which is surely a good recommendation to us of her focus at

this time, at least. She blesses Boaz for not leaving off kindness to the living, meaning herself and Ruth, and the dead, meaning the rest of her family.

We might wonder how it could be that Boaz could have shown kindness to Naomi's husband and sons, since they were dead? We do not think that a dead person can receive much in the way of kindness. But we need to have it in mind from our study of the rest of Scripture that a man in Israel received an inheritance which was his from the LORD. It was crucially important that he have sons of his own to carry on care over that inheritance for him. If he failed to do so, it was like he was failing every one of his ancestors, going all the way back to the first ones to arrive in Israel and receive their inheritance at the time of Joshua! For Boaz to step into the place of a kinsman here, then, would not only benefit Naomi and Ruth, but all the dead in the family of Elimelech going back to the conquest and apportioning of Israel. That is how Boaz is being kind to the dead.

Naomi now explains to Ruth, who must be wondering about her joyful outburst, that Boaz is a close relative of theirs. In fact, he is a kinsman-redeemer, for this is the meaning of the Hebrew word translated "close relative" in the New King James Version. How much Ruth knew about kinsman-redeemers it is hard to say. It may be that Naomi had talked about this with Ruth before, as they surely must have discussed the laws in Israel, and what they could possibly do to get out of the poverty and dilemma they were in. It is unlikely that Naomi would not have mentioned the law of the kinsman-redeemer contained in the law, and the possibility that one of their close relatives might step in to help them. Clearly, they had not thought this likely enough to stake everything upon it, nor had Naomi apparently shared with Ruth the names of those who were their kinsman-redeemers who could have done this. Yet now unexpectedly, Ruth has stumbled upon one of them, and he has shown favor towards her, which might well signify his willingness to help. No wonder Naomi had rejoiced! Ruth too must have caught her excitement as Naomi explained more to her about what this could mean.

Since most of my readers are not Israelites, and are probably not so well-versed in their laws and customs as Naomi was, some might be wondering what this is all about, just like Ruth must have been. Therefore, we will take the time to explain the concept here. Basically, "close relative" is a totally inadequate phrase to express the concept of what Naomi was talking about in the Hebrew here. The Hebrew word she used is *ga'al*. The *ga'al* was a relative, but he was also far more than that. A *ga'al* was a redeemer. He is often called the "kinsman-redeemer." A "kinsman" is just an old name for a relative, it is true, so it is proper to translate this as "relative," as the New King James has done here. Yet the idea of redeemer is inherent in the word, so if we are not going to call this the kinsman-redeemer, then we should call this relative the relative-redeemer. I will refer to the *ga'al* as the kinsman-redeemer throughout this study.

There were several tasks that the kinsman-redeemer was supposed to do. One was that he was supposed to redeem the blood of his relative if that relative was murdered by executing the murderer on his relative's behalf. Numbers 35:9-34 outline the laws for how this was to be done, for he was not allowed to execute the murderer if the murder was not done on purpose, but rather was accidental manslaughter. Yet if the murder was done on purpose, the kinsman-redeemer was allowed or even expected to carry out the execution. Without going through the entire passage, a summary of this is found in Numbers 35:19.

**19. The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death.**

The word here translated "avenger" is the word *ga'al* or "kinsman-redeemer." In this case, he was the redeemer of blood, seeing to it that his relative's blood shed unjustly was avenged. In that way, his relative could be "redeemed." This might seem rather strange to us, but this concept seems to go back to the very beginning, for Cain after murdering his brother Abel worries to the LORD, **"I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."** Genesis 4:14b.

Yet not all of the *ga'al*'s duties were so violent. The other primary task of this kinsman-redeemer was to buy back an inheritance that had been lost. If any Israelite family had become poor and had to sell

off their land inherited from the LORD to pay their debts, it became important for the family to buy that land back. However, if that family was unable to earn back enough to redeem their own land, it became the job of the *ga'al* to buy it back for them. Leviticus 25:25 sets this forth.

**25. 'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold.**

Here, the *ga'al* is translated as “redeeming relative,” and that is what he is. So this is what Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is. Naomi hopes that his compassion on Ruth is a sign that he will buy back their inherited land for them that they sold when they moved to Egypt. She wants him to be their kinsman-redeemer.

For the believer today, our Lord Jesus Christ is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He is the One Who paid the price to buy back for us what we had lost because of our sin. He paid that price by His death for us on the cross. Our *Ga'al*, our Redeemer, loved us very much indeed! This beautiful story of Ruth gives us a wonderful picture of the truth that we find in Him.

*21. Ruth the Moabitess said, “He also said to me, ‘You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’”*

Ruth reports to Naomi that Boaz wants her to stay with his servants until the harvest is over. She is still repeating the favorable things that Boaz said and did for her, remembering as many of them as she can, since they clearly are pleasing Naomi.

It is interesting that Ruth is called “the Moabitess” here. This is probably to remind us that she was not versed on all the customs set forth in the law, so it is unlikely that she really grasped the full implications of the kinsman-redeemer, at least, not until Naomi explained it all to her. She could see that Boaz’s identity was making her dear mother-in-law very excited, but she could not entirely grasp why. Yet she had been excited by how kindly Boaz treated her as well, and she is happy to repeat more of what he said and did to Naomi.

*22. 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.”*

Naomi lends her enthusiastic support to this, and advises Ruth that she should follow these instructions carefully. She must go out with Boaz’s servant-girls, like he said. People should not meet Ruth in any other field but his.

As I said before, this romantic and beautiful story of Boaz and Ruth is very much a picture for us of the Savior and the one He redeems, and this is a good lesson for all who have come to trust in His watch and care. Sad indeed if anyone should meet one of God’s people in the field of any other! We should seek aid from no other savior besides Him.

*23. So she stayed close by the young women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.*

Ruth obeys this command of Naomi’s, and continues to glean day-by-day with the young women of Boaz. This situation continues unchanged throughout the barley harvest. Next comes the wheat harvest, and the same situation continues through that time as well. Throughout this time, Ruth works with the maidens of Boaz, and lives with her mother-in-law Naomi. This time is about the time of the Feast of Weeks (or “Pentecost” as it is called in the New Testament.) Remember, that is the time this book of Ruth was read, according to Hebrew tradition.

Time passes, however, and the time of wheat harvest draws to a close. Now, the harvest time is over, and Ruth returns from her work in the fields to dwell with her mother-in-law. Now, the issue of what Ruth and Naomi will do next must be faced, for there will be no more harvests to feed them for quite

some time to come. They were doubtless able to store up quite an abundant harvest due to Boaz' generosity, but there is still the question of their future that must be answered. What can these two women do now?

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