

In much of this chapter, Ruth is gleaning in Boaz's fields. At an ancient harvest, reapers (men in this case) would cut the stalks of grain for women to bind into sheaves, or bundles, to carry to the threshing floor to separate the grain from the straw and chaff. A gleaner would follow behind the harvesters and collect any stalks that were overlooked or fell out of the sheaves. It would be hard work, stooping over for hours to scrape out a meager living.

Gleaning was reserved as a social safety net for the disadvantaged of Israel. Landowners were not to maximize their return on investment: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge" (Lev 19:9). They were also told, "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" (Deut 24:19). Ruth fits two of these categories so is entitled to glean by the law of Moses. That she requests to be allowed to glean in verse 7, rather than demands to do so as her right, probably indicates these rights were not always respected.

Gleaners, however, had no claim on any stalks already bound in sheaves. Boaz's instructions to let Ruth gather

among the sheaves (verse 15) may indicate he trusts her to not filch stalks from the bound sheaves as other hungry gleaners might be tempted to do.

But Boaz goes one step farther. He actually tells his reapers to draw some stalks out of the sheaves and drop them in Ruth's path for her to gather. It appears it is to be done without her knowledge to spare her embarrassment.

This is the very definition of grace: Favor that is freely given regardless of any merit or claims we have. Ruth's earlier **faith** in cleaving to Naomi has now been met with **grace** in the form of Boaz's kindness.

When some unexpected benefit comes into our lives, do we say "Oh, that was lucky" or "It was pretty sharp of me to spot that opportunity"? Or do we thank the Owner of the field who pulled a stalk of grain from the sheaf and dropped it in our path?

Notes

2:1 Boaz means "quick" or "in him there is strength."

2:17 An ephah of barley would be about 3/5 bushel, a large bounty for a day of gleaning.

2:20 A kinsman-redeemer was somewhat like the executor of an estate, charged with bringing land back into the family if a poor relation had been forced to sell it. See Lev. 25:25.

Questions:

1. What in Ruth's character and behavior is attractive to Boaz?

2. List the kindnesses that Boaz performs for Ruth.

3. Why does Boaz not simply give Ruth an ephah of barley out of the harvest? Is there a spiritual lesson for us?
4. Where do we see the hand of God in the events of this chapter?
5. In verse 8 Boaz tells Ruth not to glean in another field. Why? How could this apply to us?
6. Explain verse 20.
7. How does Naomi or Ruth symbolize the believer in Christ?