

Week 47, Lecture 149.¹ Ruth 2:1-3, Ruth Goes to Glean

Alice Laffey's Outline of Ruth. ² I found this in her commentary on Ruth in the *NJBC*.

Certainly a more detailed outline is possible, but this gives us a good overview of what is going on.

Note to self: no need to go through the outline aloud. Jump to the translation of verse 2:1.

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B. The Action: Relationship & Return	1:8-21
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Introduction. ¹ And Naomi had a **relative** **[friend]** of her husband, a prominent-man of wealth from the clan of Elimelech, and his name [was] Boaz.

Background information. This introductory sentence gives the reader “background information.”

At this point in the story neither Ruth nor Naomi are planning to meet Boaz.

Chapter 1 has told how Naomi’s life has become empty and bitter.

Chapter 2 begins the reversal of this process.

And. Most narrative sentences in biblical Hebrew begin with a word most often literally translated “and.”

It is bad style in English to begin even one sentence with “and,” let alone a series of sentences.

Therefore most modern English translations render the word in a variety of ways depending on the context.

A good rendering here might be “Now” (RSV, NET). NAB and NABRE simply leave the word out.

I usually will translate it by “and,” just to give you a feel for the repetitiousness of the Hebrew.

¹ Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week's 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

² Alice Laffey, “Ruth,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall, 1988) 554.

Qere - Ketiv	(What is read / What is written)		
English	consonantal text	Vowels added	Pronunciation
relative	מֹדַע	מֹדַע	môda'
friend	מִדַּע	מִדַּע	meyuddā'

You can see that the two words look very much alike in a text without vowels.

The “long letter” is called a *waw* or *vav* (modern Israeli pronunciation). The “short letter” is called a *yod*.

In printed texts the letters are easily distinguished. Often hand-written texts are not so clear!

What if you get a “three-quarter-length” letter? Is it a short *vav*? Or is it a long *yod*?

This is how some textual variants happen.

The best text the Masoretes had said “friend.” But they were pretty sure it should have been “relative.”

Masoretes Edit the Text.

They did not change the consonant from short to long, ׳ > ׳̄, such was their respect for the consonantal text.

Rather when they edited the text, they

- 1) put a mark by the consonants for “friend”
- 2) inserted the vowels (“dots,” etc.) for “relative” into the text. [Remember: He stepped into a pile of “shut*”]
- 3) placed the consonants for “relative” in the margin.
- 4) the lector was to read the marginal consonants with the vowels of the text. [Remember: DNG*, “DuNG”]

See what you miss when all you have is an English translation!

B. Scene 1, Ruth and Boaz, 2:2-16.

2:2-3, Ruth Goes to Glean. And Ruth the Moabite-woman said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field, and I will glean among the ears-of-grain, after **whomever I find favor in his eyes**. And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” ³And she went, and she gleaned in the field after the harvesters. And **she chanced by chance** on the part of the field [belonging] to Boaz who was from the clan of Elimelech.

V. 2 “... whomever I find favor in his eyes.” The poor had a legal right to glean.

Deut 24:19-22. "When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten 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. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the sojourner [i.e., the foreigner, PJM], the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean it afterward; it shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this. (See also Lev 19:9-10; 23:22)

Social welfare in a simple, agricultural society.

Hermeneutical implications. [Exegesis = what it mean when ink was wet; hermeneutics = meaning for today.]

Legal Right vs. Reality. The poor have a legal right to glean.

However the land owner could make it a very unpleasant experience.

Suppose a poor person felt mistreated? What could he or she do about it?

The “good old boys” at the city gate would generally prefer the testimony of one of their wealthy friends to the word of a poor man -- or in this case a poor woman, a foreigner

Ruth is aware of the precariousness of her situation.

V. 3, “**She chanced by chance.**” Observation by Adele Reinhartz, *JSB*.³

God is mentioned numerous times by the three main characters [Naomi, Ruth, Boaz], but the actions of the story are never explicitly mentioned as deriving from God. Rather, God remains in the shadows, implying that divine activity lies behind the reversal of the deprivations that have afflicted Naomi and the nation as a whole.⁴

Error Correction.

Last week I said the *JSB* was edited by Marc Zvi Brettler and by Amy Jill Levine.

They collaborated on another project, the *Jewish Annotate New Testament*.⁵

Brettler’s co-editor on the *Jewish Study Bible* ⁶ was Adele Berlin.

I had the honor of having Professor Berlin as a teacher for “Hebrew Poetry” when I was on sabbatical a few years ago.

The course at Catholic University was scheduled to be taught by Michael Patrick O’Connor, who died just before the semester began. Adele Berlin came down from the University of Maryland one day each week to teach the seminar.

Thanks to Deacon Mike Bolesta, one of our online students, whose sharp eye caught this error!

Week 47, Lecture 150. Ruth 2:4-16, Ruth & Boaz

Note: This was originally one lecture on Ruth 2:4-23. Because it went 26 minutes, I divide it into 2 lectures.

2:4-7, Boaz & His Foreman. And behold, Boaz came from Beth Lehem, and he said to the harvesters, “YHWH [be] with you-all.” And they said to him, “YHWH bless you!”⁵ And Boaz said to his servant the overseer of the harvesters, “**Whose** young-woman [is] this?”⁶ And the servant, the overseer of the harvesters, answered, and he said, “The young woman, she [is] the Moabite-woman who came back with Naomi from the field of Moab.”⁷ And she said, ‘Please let me glean, and I will gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters,’ and she went and has been standing from morning until just now -- **this, her sitting, the house, a little.**

Whose young-woman?

This question lets us know we are dealing with a patriarchal culture.

Typically, a young-woman would be under the authority & protection of her father or of her husband.

Ruth, as a young widow, has lost the authority & protection of her husband.

By leaving her country, she has lost the authority & protection of her father (or nearest male relative).

This, her sitting, the house, a little. The end of v. 6 is difficult to translate.

The note in the *JSB* says “Meaning of Heb. uncertain.”

The NET note says: “The syntax of the Hebrew is awkward, and the meaning is uncertain.” [reference below]

So I know it is not just me who is having trouble! Here are some sample translations.

The first two represent **ancient** translators:

She did not rest a bit in the field." (NETS, reflects ancient Greek translation)

and hath not gone **home** for one moment. (Douay, reflects Jerome’s Latin).

She has rested but little in the **hut** (Tanakh) (Torah Nevi’im Kethuvim; Law Prophets Writings)

³ This week I am [generally] following the paragraphing of the *JSB*. I find it more helpful than the paragraphing of the *NABRE* which I used last week.

⁴ Adele Reinhartz, “Ruth,” *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring the Tanakh Translation -- Torah, Nevi’im, Kethuvim* (Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 1579. [A second edition has come out. My page numbers are from the first edition.]

⁵ ISBN 13: 978-0190461850. Highly Recommended.

⁶ ISBN 13: 978-0199978465. Highly Recommended.

except for sitting in the **resting hut** a short time (NET)
without resting even for a moment." (RSV, NRSV)
with scarcely a moment's rest." (NAB, NABRE)
with hardly a rest from morning until now.' (NJB)

The NET has a good note, which I greatly abbreviate here.⁷

It details a scholarly attempt to make sense of the text by emending it -- changing a few vowels, leaving out a word.

F. W. Bush . . . emends *shivtah habbayit*, "her sitting [in] the house" to *shavtah*, "she rested" omitting *habbayit* [= "the house"] as dittographic.

This yields: "this, her sitting, [which you see right now] [is] [only] a little [while]. OR, in better English . . . **just now she has stopped only a moment.**"⁸

Any translation that does not mention "house" or "home" or "hut" has also decided on this same solution.

2:8-16, Boaz & Ruth.

2:8-13. Conversation between Boaz & Ruth. ⁸ And Boaz said to Ruth, "**Listen, my daughter**. Do not go to glean in another field. And also do not cross-over from this [place]. And stick close to my female-servants here. ⁹ [Keep] Your eyes on the field which they are reaping. And walk behind them. **Have I not commanded** the young men not to touch you? And [when] you are thirsty, then you will walk to the vessels and you must drink from [the water] which the young-men have drawn."

¹⁰ And Ruth fell upon her face and bowed to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you notice me, and I [am] a foreigner."

¹¹ And Boaz answered and said to her, "I have indeed been told all that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your man. And that your have forsaken your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and you have journeyed to a people that you did not know yesterday or the day before. ¹² May YHWH repay your deeds, and may your wages be complete from the presence of YHWH, **the God of Israel**, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

¹³ And she said, "Let me find favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me, and you have spoken to the heart of your handmaid, and (= even though) I **am** not like one of your handmaids."

8. Listen, my daughter. In Hebrew this is literally a question. "Have you not heard?" (so KJV and NETS).

Idiomatically, it is a "polite command" (RSV, NRSV, NAB, NABRE, Tanakh).

Similarly in v. 9 "Have I not commanded . . ." means "You can be sure that I have commanded . . ."

12. Remarks on the name YHWH.

Before the Exile, "the name" would have been pronounced. After the Exile, it was not pronounced.

When -- centuries later, 600 years after Jesus! -- they put in the vowels

The did not put in the vowels for **YaHWeH** or **JaHVeH** they put in the vowels for **'adonay** (= my Lord).

[The Hebrew letter **׃** can be represented either by **Y** or **J**; The letter **ׂ** by either **W** or **V**].

So the lector saw something that looked like "**JaHoVaH**" which is gibberish in Hebrew.

The lector would see it, and say: Oh, I am not allowed to pronounce that! I am supposed to say "Adonai."

So what was **read** (*qere*) was different from what was **written** (*ktiv*).

But this one happened **thousands** of times, so they did not mark it in the margin.

It is called the "perpetual *qere-kativ*."

At the beginning of the Enlightenment (17th century) Christians started reading Hebrew, and did not know this.

⁷ <https://bible.org/netbible/>

⁸ Fredric W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, vol. 9, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 107.

The non-word “Jehovah” got into some of the first Christian Bibles. It’s not a problem in **most** contemporary Bibles.

12. The God of Israel.

Notice that YHWH is “the God of Israel.” Early Israelites thought that each nation had its own god.

Each god was in charge of a certain amount of “turf.”

Early Israelites thought of YHWH (the LORD) as one of many gods.

Is this expression an indication for the early dating of Ruth.

Or is it simply an “old-fashioned” expression inserted to make the story appear old?

The Dating of Ruth. Scholars are all over the place. Some date the story to Davidic times (about 1,000 B.C.)

Others date it to the post-exilic period (after 500 B.C.) Still others somewhere in-between.

Old fashioned expressions are arguments for early dating -- or are they intentional archaisms?

The fact that Jews place it in “the Writings” is a possible indication of a late date.

A “compromise position” is that the story is ancient, told for centuries by word of mouth,

but only written down after the exile.

I am partial to the post-exilic dating. I think this book has an “edge” to it.

At the time Ezra and Nehemiah were insisting that all Jews divorce their foreign wives, this book is “pushing back.”

2:14-16, Boaz Gives Commands to Ruth & to His Servants. ¹⁴ And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here. **You must eat some of the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar.**” **And she sat beside the harvesters,⁹ and** he passed parched grain to her, and she ate, and was full, and had some left over.

¹⁵ And she arose to glean, and Boaz commanded his male-servants, saying, “Even if she gleans among the sheaves, you must not shame her. ¹⁶ And also drop some -- on purpose -- from the bundles of grain, and leave [it], and [when] she gleans it, you must not rebuke her.

Remarks. Boaz is being “super generous.”

This could be simply because he was very pious, observing the commands of Leviticus & Deuteronomy.

It could also be simply because he admires her loyalty to her mother-in-law.

However, I think he likes her!

14 minutes 56 seconds (before edits --13:50 after edits). Divide Lecture at this point.

Week 47, Lecture 151. Ruth 2:17-23, Ruth & Naomi

C. Narrative Transition. 2:17-18.

¹⁷ And she gleaned in the field until the evening, and she beat out what she had gleaned, and behold! About an **ephah** of barley! ¹⁸ And she picked [it] up, and she went to the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Then [**literally “and”**] she took out and gave her what was left over after she was full [i.e., at the earlier meal in the field].

Ephah. Approximately 30 pounds. This would have been a tremendous amount for one woman to glean.

The NET Bible remarks that this testifies both to the generosity of Boaz, and the hard work of Ruth.

D. Scene 2, Naomi & Ruth, 2:19-22. ¹⁹ Then [**literally, “and”**] her mother-in-law said to her, “Where have you gleaned today? And What have you done? Blessed be the one who took notice of you!” And she told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with, and she said, “The name of the man I worked with today [is] Boaz.” ²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed [be] he by YHWH, who has not abandoned his **covenant-loyalty** to the living

⁹ I accidentally left this line out. If I were a scribe this would be **haplography**. **Dittography** is when a scribe writes something twice something twice. **Haplography** is when a scribe leaves something out. Here my eye missed a whole line!

and to the dead.” And Naomi said to her, “This man [is] a close-relative to us. He [is] among our **redeemers**.²¹ And Ruth, the Moabite-woman said, “Also, he indeed said to me, ‘You must stick with the servants who belong to me until they have completed the harvest that belongs to me.’”²² And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “[It will be] good, my daughter, that you go out with his female-servants, so that **men will not touch you** in another field.”

V. 20, Covenant-Loyalty. *Hesed*

Sometimes translated “mercy.” It is behind the petition, “Lord have mercy.”

“Mercy” can be a misleading translation. More than about forgiveness of sins.

Hesed comes from a **prior relationship** and results in **action on behalf of someone**.

Comment on Psalm 136 (Sihon & Og)

The first occurrence in Ruth is 1:8, which I translated as “fidelity”

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go! Return, [each] woman to the house of her mother. May YHWH show **fidelity** to you, just as you have shown to the deceased [husbands] and to me.

V. 20, Redeemers, *go’alm*, singular *go’el*.

For us today, “redeem” is churchy talk. In the OT it was not a “spiritual” idea. It was very down-to-earth!

The *go’el* was the “next of kin.”

If someone were captured into slavery, it was the duty of the *go’el* to buy them back (redeem them).

In the case of widowed female relatives, “redeemers” had rights over more distant relatives.

21, Moabite-Woman. We already know this!

Ruth & Orpah were described as “Moabite-women” (plural) in 1:4. The singular was used of Ruth in 1:22; 2:2, 6. She **will be** called a “Moabite-woman” in 4:5,10.

The author is stressing that Ruth is a foreigner. (This is an “ax” the author is grinding.)

Recall Ruth’s earlier statement to Boaz about his kindness, “And I am a foreigner.” (V. 10)

22, So that men will not touch you . . .

To this day in a patriarchal culture, an unaccompanied woman is liable to be “hit on.”

E. Narrative Transition.²³ And she stayed close to the female-servants of Boaz to glean, until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. **Unintentionally omitted from lecture.**

Harvest Time. NET Bible Note.

Barley was harvested from late March through late April, *wheat* from late April to late May (O. Borowski, *Agriculture in Ancient Israel*, 88, 91).

We are to imagine that a significant amount of time has passed before chapter 3 begins.

Liturgical Reading in the Jewish Tradition¹⁰

Ruth is traditionally read at the feast of Weeks (Shavuot or Pentecost), which comes at the end of harvest time.

According to Jewish tradition, King David was born and died on Shavuot.

Since the 2nd or 3rd century A.D., Shavuot has been identified as the time the Torah was given at Sinai.

The Exodus took place at Passover, the Torah was given 7 “Weeks” (a week of weeks) later.

Shavuot means “Weeks.”

Many rabbis considered Ruth “the ideal Jewish convert. A convert takes on “the yoke of the Torah.”

Reading Ruth at the time the Torah was given to Israel highlights this theme.

¹⁰ Reinhartz, “Ruth,” *JSB*, 1579.