

PART 2 OF 4: RUTH 2

INTRODUCTION

What is a hero? If I allow modern society to define *hero* for me it becomes rather easy to recite the formula. First, a hero must be handsome or beautiful. Consider the vast majority of the heroes presented in modern comics and Marvel movies and you will find them to be amazing examples of physical fitness, great looks, and perfect speech. How many members of The X-Men struggle with weight problems, are marred by crooked teeth, or have their monologues hampered by a lisp or stammering?

And I am one of the people that has fallen into the world's way of looking at life. Growing up I just accepted at face value what DC comics told me about Batman: tall, handsome, rich, anglo male. And then one day I saw Batman in my yard. (See *Figure 1* below.) I was shocked to find out that Batman is actually a short African American kid.

Second, a hero generally must command great financial and/or material resources in order to be effective in the effort to right wrongs, protect the innocent, or shape the outcomes of events that affect us all. With these things

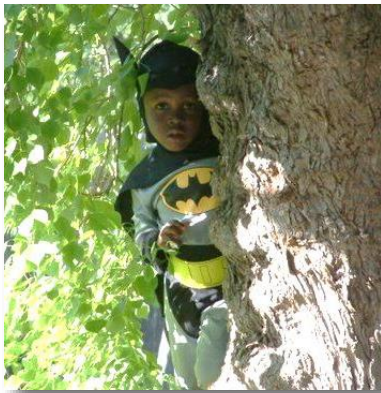


Figure 1: President Elias Barnes, 20 November 2003

in mind we can say that ruthless society has relegated many of us either to the role of sidekick, fan, or insignificant bystander. The value system of ruthless society says that in the absence of a charismatic personality, stunning good looks, or the billions required for being an effective enemy of evil and powerful promoter of good, being a hero is not likely.

Third, a hero must be young. With the exception of a few, none of our modern heroes are better than 30 years old. I remember my dismay when a popular show about the early life of a certain red-caped crusader emptied its casts of anyone with grey hair. (I was particularly saddened by the removal of Tom Schneider and John Glover.) And shows like American Idol have made it clear that if you are not between the ages of 16 and 28 you need not apply.

Ruthless society has relegated the regular person to status of insignificant bystander in the comic of life.

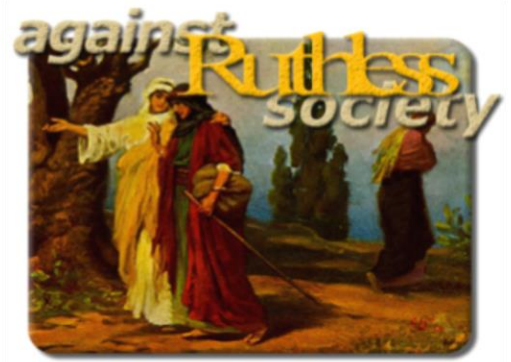
La sociedad despiadada ha relegado a la persona normal al estado de espectador insignificante en el cómic de la vida.

The outworking of this has been the programming of people to be superficial in their quest for leadership, for friendship, and a marriage relationship. Young men and women, searching for the person that they will spend their lives with, have filtered out the non-heroes. I have counseled dozens of godly young men and women who refuse to consider courtship with people that are not supermodels, that are less than affluent, or who are outside of just the right age range. However, when I consider what God has to say about being heroic or attractive it has nothing to do with appearance, affluence, or age. God is chiefly concerned with the content of our character and the meditations of the heart (Psalm 19:14; 1 Samuel 16:7).

A NEW HOPE (RUTH 2:1-3)

¹ There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. ² So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after *him* in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³ Then 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.

A NEW HOPE (RUTH 2:1)



Chapter one of Ruth began with famine and death and, excepting the light of the courageous and compassionate commitment of a young Moabitess to a bitter old woman, ended in sadness. The men of Naomi's (*Pleasantness*) immediate family have all died; her husband (Elimelech – *My God is King*) and sons (Mahlon – *Sickly* and Chilion – *Wasting Away*) are gone. Lacking the resources to live in Moab the childless widow Naomi begins a return to her hometown of Bethlehem with her Moabite daughters-in-law Ruth (*friend*) and Orpah (*back of the neck*). While *en route*, partially because of her own urging, she is abandoned by Orpah. Her losses of husband, family, and welfare have brought Naomi to the point of becoming bitter with God (Ruth 1:20-21). Instead of faulting her family for its misfortunes she blames Yahweh. But in returning to the land of promise the people in some ways, Naomi in particular, are seen also as returning to God.¹ And He begins to restore. The problems of poverty, barrenness², and loss of loved ones are large. The writer, having given his readership dilemmas, daunting issues, and dark attitudes begins to present solutions. We are introduced in 2:1 to someone who immediately appears as light in darkness, hope for the hopeless, help for the helpless. While we are not immediately told his name, we are told that he is **a relative**, that he is rich, and thus he is potentially *goel* (Deuteronomy 25:9-10; Genesis 38:1-10).

A NEEDED HELP (RUTH 2:2)

Although she is a Moabite, native to a land of pagans and inveterate enemies of the Israelites, Ruth is distinguished by her understanding of the Mosaic covenant. She likely is aware, according to the word of God given to the Jews through Moses, that the Israelites were commanded by their law to be merciful to the stranger, the fatherless, the widow, and the poor. The corners of fields were not to be reaped, and grain that was accidentally left behind was not to be retrieved; it was to be left for the needy (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22). Food was to be left in the field for the poor to glean.³

⁹ ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

²² ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.’ ” (Leviticus 23:22)

¹⁹ “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 stranger, 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 stranger, 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 stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing. (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)⁴

¹ Strictly speaking, only Naomi is making a return. To what? To the land of Judah. That is plainly what the text says. Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum says, “The Hebrew word used here is the word *shuv*. *Shuv* is used of a physical return, but it is also used of a spiritual return throughout Scripture.” *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: Judges and Ruth, Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, Texas 2006), pg. 295.

² In Ruth 4:13 the Lord intervenes to give Ruth a child. Indicators that God has caused barrenness are congruent with Him being the cause of the famine (Deuteronomy 7:14).

³ But Ruthless society is so concerned with preventing the stranger from unlawfully using our national resources that we arrest the stranger at the border and deport them for trying to get what we all want. Ruthless society has the audacity to claim that it has Judeo-Christian roots while simultaneously cutting off those that come looking for opportunity. For my patriotic brethren who keep saying this please remember that God told Israel that they are not to forget “that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.” (Deuteronomy 24:22) We are in the land by His grace. More importantly, let not those of us who have been delivered from slavery to sin forget our former state and begin to despise those who are still living in spiritual bondage.

⁴ It is noteworthy that Israel is asked to base its resolve toward compassion on two things: (i) Sympathy rooted in their experience [remember that you were a slave] (ii) and (2) the Sovereignty God [I command you to do this thing].

Having been married to Jews she has learned something of their laws and customs and her words to Naomi seem to be based on these laws. Thus, Ruth the Moabitess said to her mother-in-law Naomi, **“Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain”** (Ruth 2:2).

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD (RUTH 2:3)

It must be noticed that the author says that **Ruth happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech**. What seems random is actually being guided by God (Romans 8:28).

The Hebrew is rather unique here: “She chance, chanced upon the field of Boaz.” The expression is found again only in Ecclesiastes 2:14-15. From a human perspective, the phrase means it was a stroke of simple good luck: she “chance, chanced” upon the field. The expression emphasizes that she did not understand the full significance of what she was doing. She did not know the people; she did not know the owner of the field; she came to a field purely by chance, working a particular section of the field belonging to Boaz. But that is the human perspective. From a divine perspective, this was all divine providence.⁵

As Ruth steps out in the direction indicated by the Law, the Author of the Law directs her steps (Proverbs 3:5-7). The passage says **she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech**. She is guided by His hand to the field of Boaz.⁶ We cannot overlook the fact that Ruth took steps: **then she left, and went** (Ruth 2:3). I often hear of people wanting to know God’s will before they go forward. However, the promise in Scripture is that He will direct my steps.

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

The Bible says that the just shall walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7); it does not say that they shall *mysteriously move* by faith or walk by facts (Hebrews 11:8).

Having acknowledged God’s sovereignty in all affairs the true hero steps out believing that God will be faithful to His promise to provide direction (Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 11:8; Proverbs 3:5-7).

Habiendo reconocido la soberanía de Dios en todos los asuntos, el verdadero héroe deja de creer que Dios será fiel a su promesa de proporcionar dirección (Génesis 12: 1-4; Hebreos 11: 8; Proverbios 3: 5-7).

We cannot condition taking action on the receiving of three dreams and a vision. Fixation on receiving signs and wonders to confirm our decisions only confirms that we are a wicked and adulterous generation (Matthew 16:4). The true believer steps out without necessarily having any feelings that confirm they are moving in the right direction. Indeed, stepping out is often accompanied by the fear of either the unknown or the promise of persecution (2 Timothy 3:8-12). Our steps are ordered by His word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thank God for the peace that is attendant those who are doing God’s will.

THE PREACHER, THE PROTECTOR, THE PERCEPTIVE (RUTH 2:4-13)

⁴ Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, **“The LORD be with you!”** And they answered him, **“The LORD bless you!”** ⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, **“Whose young woman is this?”** ⁶ So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, **“It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.”** ⁷ And she said, **‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’** So she came and has continued

⁵ Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G., *Ariel Bible Commentary – Judges & Ruth, Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, pg 307

⁶ Although we are inclined to think that Ruth had done this on purpose in light of Ruth 2:1 this would be incorrect. The information provided in 2:1 by the writer was for the benefit of the readership; Naomi and Ruth did not conspire to seduce Boaz at this point. Ruth 2:20 makes it clear that Naomi is surprised by the turn of events and attributes their good fortune to God.

from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.”⁸ 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 by my young women.⁹ 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.”¹⁰ 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?”¹¹ And Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that 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.¹² The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”¹³ Then she said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.”

THE RISE OF STRENGTH (RUTH 2:4)

Boaz (*in him is strength; come in strength; strength; fleetness*) comes from Bethlehem (*house of Bread*). The allusion to Christ is obvious (John 6:33,35,48,51); Boaz is a type of Christ and in some ways foreshadows the ministry of the Redeemer. Strength has now risen out of the house of bread to do what? The writer answers this question with the first words that we hear from Boaz: “The Lord be with you!” Strength has risen out of the house of bread to bless. Boaz speaks with God on his lips. And the people bless him in return. While I am not given to finding allegory in Scripture it seems clear to me, insofar as I accept that Boaz is a type of Christ, that the response of the people is a type of praise. It is certainly not to be construed as the worship that belongs to God alone. However, it is not saying too much to say that it prefigures the praise that a Man from Bethlehem will receive from His people (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; John 12:13) and eventually the nations (Revelations 15:4).

THE REQUEST ABOUT THE STRANGER (RUTH 2:5)

Ruth is visibly set apart from the other workers. Is it because she is a woman? Before we answer in the affirmative we must notice that there were other women present (Ruth 2:8,13,22-23) and that she is set apart even among the women (Ruth 2:13). Perhaps Boaz notices Ruth because he is familiar with his workforce and notices changes in personnel. Or maybe she looks good and exotic and he could not help but notice her youthful and yet foreign beauty. This is conjecture; the text does not say this much.

THE REPORT ON RUTH (RUTH 2:6-7)

Ruth has three commendations that had won her respect. First, she had come with Naomi although there was nothing to gain. Indeed she had left the comforts of home to comfort someone who did not appreciate her presence (Ruth 1:21). She has sworn herself to her aged mother-in-law and to the God of the Jews (1:16-17). *She is the epitome of dedicated.* Second, she had asked permission to pick up what the reapers left behind. In doing this she shows both humility and determination to provide for a mother-in-law that, at this time, does not hold her in high regard (1:21). *She is the epitome of determined.* Third, she had worked steadily in the foreign climate in the arduous task of gleaning; meanwhile everyone regards her not by who she is but rather by the fact that she is a foreigner... *a Moabite*. She is undaunted by the moniker of Moabite and does what is needed to procure food for her household. *She is the epitome of diligent.*

Ruth is an ironic hero because she is a Gentile dedicated to God and his people, determined to succeed in the face of racism, and diligent in the work that comes to her hand.

Ruth es una heroína irónica porque es una gentil dedicada a Dios y a su pueblo, decidida a triunfar frente al racismo y diligente en el trabajo que le toca.

The passage says nothing about what she looks like. And yet, I see her plainly. Indeed the image is so vivid that I am moved to tears as I write. She is representative of all the unsung and humble people who serve without being thanked and are not regarded as people. They go on because they love God and the people in their loves. They continue because they are driven by a compassion toward people that in many cases do not reciprocate their kindness. Ruth is amazingly beautiful. She is most aptly represented by the modern migrant worker laboring the fields of our modern United States. Many do so to escape an existence that crushes the spirit or dangers that threaten to take their lives. And when they get here they serve in squalor to receive a wage that is disrespectful to their inherent dignity as human beings. But many do it because they love somebody so much that they are driven to give their lives away to make someone else's life better.

Ruthless Society pretends not to see them while eating the fruit they pick. And when they are brought to the attention of ruthless society it is ready to either extort them or export them back to where they came from.

La Sociedad Despiadada finge no verlos mientras come la fruta que recoge. Y cuando son llevados a la atención de una sociedad despiadada, está listo para extorsionarlos o exportarlos de regreso a su lugar de origen.

Thank God for the spirit of Boaz. He is her self-appointed protector; this is the commandment of God. He promotes Ruth's prosperity (Ruth 2:8), protects her (Ruth 2:9), and is a picture of the husband described in Ephesians 5:22-33. Also note how perceptive he is; Boaz is careful not to remind Ruth of her nationality (Ruth 2:11). Compare with her own language where she indicates that she is obviously different than the women around her (Ruth 2:13)

THE PROVIDER (RUTH 2:14-17)

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. 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. ¹⁶ Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." ¹⁷ So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

Boaz looks out for Ruth's social needs (Ruth 2:16). He is mindful of her feelings and looks for opportunities to encourage her. He is aware of her social status and makes a point of including her in the group activities (Ruth 2:14). Perhaps his congeniality is rooted in knowing the experience of his mother Rahab (Joshua 2:1-7; Ruth 2:1; 4:1-13; Matthew 1:5). She was a harlot that defected to Israel (Joshua 2:1-7; 6:17-25). While she was accepted and joined the line of Christ it must have been difficult joining the community of faith. Boaz, himself the descendant of a Gentile harlot, gives Ruth a kind welcome.

In teaching this material in the past I have often asked my audience what Boaz looked like. One young lady named Debbie described him as being tall and well-built; She said he was "handsome." When I asked how she knew that he was good looking there was an awkward pause. After insisting that he had to be good-looking because he was such a great man I pointed out that the passage says nothing about his appearance. It only indicates he is older than Ruth. I suspect that his appearance was neither especially good or bad.⁷ However, what matters most for the writer and the reader is that he was a man of outstanding kindness. He used his resources, as did Ruth, to help others. All of this he did with the Lord in mind.

Boaz is a hero characterized by need-meeting kindness toward those who cannot help him. He provides protection for those who cannot protect themselves. What about his appearance? He is obviously a stud!

⁷ In cases where the man or woman is especially handsome or beautiful the author, led by the Holy Spirit, will make that known to the reader.

Booz es un héroe caracterizado por la necesidad de satisfacer las necesidades de aquellos que no pueden ayudarlo. Brinda protección a quienes no pueden protegerse a sí mismos. ¿Qué hay de su apariencia? ¡Obviamente es un hombre guapo!

I write in hopes that my reader will stop believing the falsehoods being preached by the value system of modern society. Truly attractive people are the ones with hearts that feel compassion for the downtrodden and who get up in the Spirit of Christ to do something about oppression, extortion, and the plight of widows and orphans. True heroes, regardless of a scandalous lineage or their build, are characterized by a compassion that flows from a heart yielded to the Lord. The measuring of a hero is better done in the light of an unappreciated migrant worker from Moab or the godly old son of a harlot. Indeed, it is best done in the light of Someone who had no physical beauty, no money, and was from the worst part of Palestine:

² For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is no beauty that we should desire Him.* (Isaiah 53:2)

What can you do? Looking at the examples of Ruth, Boaz, and ultimately at Jesus you can embrace your calling to be a real hero. That will mean service that is often unappreciated, sacrifice that sees you letting go of your life to help others live (John 15:12-13), and surrendering to yourself God unconditionally.

The Lord would have us to stop looking at people through the lens of nationality, race, socio-economic class, and party and to gaze intently at the more important issue of character. He would us to be Ruth to those in real need and Boaz to people whose spirits are breaking with the dehumanizing effect of refusing to acknowledge their humanity. In this way we will work affectively Against Ruthless Society.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

- What am I looking for in the people that will provide leadership, companionship, and help in life? (Ruth 2:2,7,11; Isaiah 53:2)
- Does it matter that Boaz is a relative of Naomi? (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)
- Men: What caused Boaz to notice Ruth? (Ruth 2:10-12; Proverbs 31:30-31) Do I protect purity, provide for the women in my life, and promote their wellbeing?
- Women: What causes you to notice a man? (Ruth 2:14-16; Isaiah 53:2; Matthew 16:24)