A Study in the Book of Ruth  
Week Six

Act 2: A Glimmer of Hope for the Royal line.  
Scene 1: A New Beginning: **Ruth 1:22-2:3**

**Preparation**

This week we begin Act 2 of the play that is the Book of Ruth. Chapt 1, vs. 22 provides the transition from Act 1. This verse now sets the stage for the events that will unfold in Bethlehem. Thus far, Naomi appears to be the main character, but in Act 2, we will see her step to the back as Ruth begins to take center stage.

1. Naomi’s future does not appear to require “shades” at this point, but there are some positive signs in the making. Can you, in retrospect, see some glimmer of hope during a time when you were in difficult circumstances?

2. Has God ever brought you blessings in an unexpected way?

**Bible study**

It was not Naomi’s plan to have Ruth come with her back to Bethlehem. She had tried hard to dissuade her, but Ruth stood firm in her decision to commit herself to Naomi, to cut all her ties to her people and her old gods and to go forward to be with Naomi, her people and the God of Israel.

This is the odd couple that returns to Bethlehem; a defeated Israeliite widow and a non-kosher daughter-in-law. Ruth was like a neon sign that declared Naomi’s sin of unbelief. Yet, as God had commanded, the people of Bethlehem, and especially the people of the clan of Elimelech, were beholden to provide for Naomi and Ruth (Le 19.34; Nu 9:14).

But in the final verse of chapt 1, we see a sign of hope. They arrived in Bethlehem “at the beginning of the barley harvest.” This statement is the first hint that Naomi is not reading her situation correctly. She has seen her life go “from full to empty” i.e. from a husband and sons to a widow without family (vs. 21), yet before her now in Bethlehem is just the opposite. When she left Bethlehem, it was empty. Now, as the barley harvest indicates, God is bringing fullness. Maybe Naomi’s future is not as bleak as she thinks.
1. Three key pieces of information are provided about Ruth in vs. 22. Can you spot them? This information about Ruth is especially important to what will soon transpire.

Vs. 22b tells us the women arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. The timing is very advantageous, for it means that Naomi and Ruth arrive in “the house of bread” (Bethlehem) in late spring just when the grain for bread is ready to be cut. Since barley was the first crop to be harvested each year, the timing of their arrival meant that Naomi and Ruth could get settled at a time when food would be relatively plentiful and crops were being stored up for the dry season.

2. Look back at 1:5-6. Consider the sequence; Mahlon and Kilion die, Naomi is now doomed to poverty, she hears the famine has ended in Bethlehem, she decides to go home. Is this mere chance or bad luck followed by good, or great critical thinking by Naomi, or is something else at work in these events? (cf. Pr 16.33; Ac 2.23; Ga 4.4)

Chapter 2 begins by introducing a new actor in the play. His name is Boaz.

3. Three important details are given about this man in vs. 1 that are essential to understand. What are they?
The focus shifts away from Boaz and back to Naomi and Ruth in vs. 2, but the roles are suddenly reversed. Ruth begins to take charge of their situation and asks to go gather food for them. The writer is careful to state again that Ruth is a Moabite for the purpose of emphasizing the extraordinary nature of her request. It’s extraordinary because Ruth is an alien in a foreign land, a woman, and a widow.

This gathering of food is called ‘gleaning’ and it is prescribed by the Mosaic law (Le 23.22; De 24.19) and was intended as a means to help aliens and the needy. And while it was the law, not every Israelite saw it that way (remember this is the time of the Judges!) Ruth, as a Moabite and a widow, was qualified to glean under the law on two counts. But she knew that she could not count on the goodwill of the locals. She knows she is dependent on the mercy of the harvesters and the owner of the field. Naomi gives her blessing, and her tender words, “my daughter”, in the Hebrew indicate her bitterness is subsiding.

4. What does this tell you about Ruth? What does it say about the “welfare” system in ancient Israel?

Vs. 3 finds Ruth headed to the fields to glean. Knowing that there is some risk to her quest, as readers we can’t help but wonder what will happen. It’s not long before we have the answer. Vs. 3b; “...she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.”

The original Hebrew wording is literally “her chance, chanced upon” emphasizes the writers intention to make sure we don’t miss the point; this is not mere human ‘chance’ or ‘luck’, it is God’s providential hand at work.

5. In Question 3 we listed 3 significant things about Boaz. How are they now important at this point in the story? What does this say about God’s providence?
Seeing Christ in the scriptures

1. Soon we will learn about the kinsman-redeemer aspect of this story. But at this point, what was Ruth looking for in gleaning and in her hope of finding someone who would be kind to her?

2. What comfort can you find in seeing how God works providentially?

Next week: Ruth 2:4-16