

THE LIGHT OF THE MESSIAH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin

And when she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying: 'Let her glean even among the sheaves, and put her not to shame.

And also pull out some for her on purpose from the bundles, and leave it, and let her glean, and rebuke her not.'

So she gleaned in the field until evening; and she beat out that which she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

And she took it up, and went into the city; and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned; and she took it out and gave to her that which she had left after she was satisfied.

And her mother-in-law said to her: 'Where did you glean today? and where you worked? blessed be he that took notice of you.' And she told her mother-in-law with whom she worked and said: 'The man's name with whom I worked to-day is Boaz.'

And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: 'Blessed be he of HaShem, who has not left off His kindness to the living and to the dead.' And Naomi said unto her: 'The man is a kin to us, one of our near kinsmen.'

And Ruth the Moabitess said: 'Yea, he said to me: keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.'

And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law: 'It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maidens, and that you be not met in any other field.'

So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law. (Ruth 2:15-23)

After Boaz and Ruth ate together, things went back to the way they were. Ruth returned to gleaning in the field and Boaz to being its master. So it went until the barley harvest passed and also the wheat harvest - a period of almost three months. Behind the scenes, however, Boaz was taking care of Ruth's material needs in a way that did not leave her beholden to him or even aware of his kindness. He commanded that sheaves be left for her, as if forgotten in the haste of the harvest, so that she bring them home and accumulate a store of grain. Ruth, however, did not know from where this largesse came and refused to take it. Perhaps it came from the lads who labored in the fields, perhaps they meant to curry favor with her or had their own designs or hopes or expectations. Ruth

kept her dignity and remained aloof, taking only the gleanings to which she was in any case entitled.

When on that first day Ruth returned home, she carried a large quantity of grain and she also brought with her remains of a prepared supper that she saved for Naomi- parched grain, perhaps slices of bread dipped in vinegar. The poor who glean in the fields do not get fed. Naomi assumed that Ruth did not only glean but hired herself out that day - "where did you glean and where did you work?", she asks in surprise. Naomi is concerned, for clearly some stranger was overly kind to her daughter-in-law, perhaps for the sake of heaven, perhaps not for the sake of heaven. So Ruth tells Naomi who the man is and then is surprised in turn. Boaz is a kinsman! Naomi blesses God for she knows that this could have come only from Him and that in some way He has a Plan.

Ruth must have been torn between a sense of obligation and fear. Shouldn't Naomi hear what took place between Ruth and Boaz, would Naomi understand, would she grasp what unfolded, would the act of telling her sully the ephemeral, delicate and evanescent things that passed between Boaz and Ruth. Perhaps it isn't even true, for nothing was made explicit or clear. Could it be that her poverty and sorrow play tricks with her mind, evoking fantasies, portraying things that were not and never could be? A foreigner, a Moabite beggar, and the Prince of the people?

Ruth communicates to Naomi in the only way that befits a refined and intelligent woman like her - by allusion. The servants stand in by proxy for Boaz, "He said to me: keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest"... but Naomi does not grasp her intent.

So months pass by without another conversation. For reasons that remain obscure to us until later, Boaz does not reach out to Ruth. On the surface, the story has stalled but behind the scenes, Hashem is working toward His purpose.

And it was at that time that Judah went down away from his brothers... R. Shmuel bar Nachmeni began: "For I know the calculations (Jeremiah 29)". The brothers were busy with the sale of Joseph. Joseph was occupied with his fasting and sackcloth. Reven was occupied with his fasting and sackcloth. Yakov was occupied with his fasting and sackcloth. Yehudah was occupied with finding a wife. And the Holy One Blessed be He was occupied with creating the light of the Messiah (Gen. Rabbah 85:2)

No one can rash the light of the Messiah. Boaz, Ruth and Naomi continued to think, consider, hope and evaluate. When the time comes, they will be ready; their thinking clarified, their emotions purified, their purpose certain. Like pregnancy, the determination was growing within them for three months; when the barley and wheat harvest was completed, so was the Plan. Now all the actors are ready and in chapter 3 the Actor brings it to fruition.

Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).