

Ruth 2

Overview

We continue to follow an adaptation of Peter Lau’s (NICOT 2023) chiastic structure for the book (Figure 1). The chapter is an extensive chiasm (Table 1, chart).

2:1, Background

The events of this chapter require the narrator to introduce to us another character.

1 And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's,—The Jewish scribes disagreed over this term. The consonantal text says simply “an acquaintance,” “a friend” מֵיַדָּע *meyudda* H4129 (chart). He is not even Naomi’s friend; he is simply her husband’s friend.

When the Massorettes wrote down the vowels of the text in the first millennium AD, they preserved a tradition that read, not “friend,” but “kinsman,” preparing for the significant role that Boaz is to play later in the story. But perhaps the consonants capture what the narrator wants us to know at this point: Elimelech had a friend. Later, he will build on this simple statement.

a mighty man of wealth,—This Hebrew expression, גִּבּוֹר חַיִּל *gibbor xayil* H1368 + H2428, is usually translated “mighty man of valour,” “man of ability,” “valiant man of might.” Perhaps, in the tumultuous times of the judges, he was effective in defending Bethlehem against the Midianites.

of the family of Elimelech;—He was more than Elimelech’s friend; he was a member of his “family” מִשְׁפָּחָה *mishpaxa* H4940, a social group one step below the tribe. About 60 of them are given in the OT.¹ As the story unfolds, his identity will become more refined: in 2:20 he is near enough to inherit property (קָרֹב *qarōb* H7138), and also one of those who are eligible to redeem (a “redeemer” גּוֹזֵל *gozēl* H1350), a term we will consider more at that point, and in 3:2 he is called a kinsman מֹדַעַת *modaʿat* H4130, a form of the word the Massorettes wanted to read in 2:1.

and his name was Boaz.—The name may mean “in him is strength,”² which would certainly be appropriate to the role he is to play in the story. It also aligns very well with the title *gibbor xayil* “mighty man of valour.”

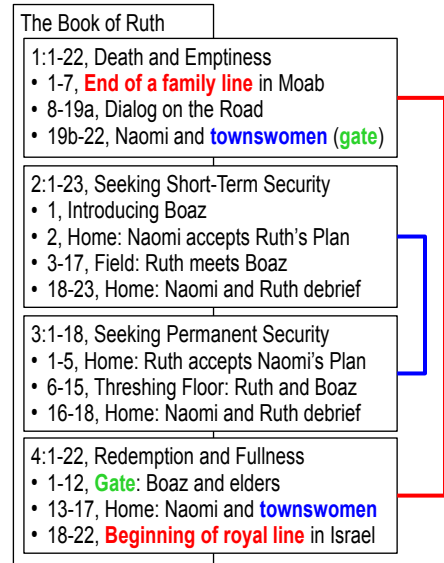


Figure 1: Lau's Analysis of Ruth (modified)

Ruth and Naomi	2 Ruth asks permission	↑ ↓	18b-22 Naomi explains Boaz
Ruth commutes	3a		18a
Ruth gleans	3b		17
Boaz speaks to workers	4-7 blesses reapers, talks to overseer		15-16 gives Ruth special favors
Boaz speaks to Ruth	8-9 stay close to my workers		14 share our lunch
Ruth speaks to Boaz	10 find grace in thine eyes		13 find grace in thine eyes
Boaz blesses Ruth	11-12		

Table 1: Chiastic Structure of Ruth 2. Blue: Naomi’s home. Pink: in the field.

1 Andersen, F. I. (1969). Israelite Kinship Terminology and Social Structure. *The Bible Translator*, 20(1), 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000608446902000106> uses the anthropological term “phratry.”

2 Thus LXX and Vg *booz*, though we might expect *plene* vocalization of the first syllable.

2:2, Planning at Home

2 And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn³—Gleaning (טקל *lqt* H3950) is simply collecting or gathering together. Jacob “gathered stones” in Gen 31:46 to make the pillar that marked the boundary between himself and Laban. The law of Moses institutionalized gleaning as a means of providing for the poor:

Deu 24:19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: **it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow**: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. 20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: **it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow**. 21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it [ללל go over repeatedly] afterward: **it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow**.⁴

This mode of provision for the poor required generosity on the part of the wealthy, but also effort on the part of the poor. It was not a dole. “If any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thes 3:10). Diligent effort might also open the door for employment as a day laborer.

The verb “glean” טקל *laqat* H3950 appears 37x in the OT. It is most common (12x) in Ruth, nine of the other instances are in Exodus 16, describing the gathering of the manna.

Ex. 16:4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and **gather** a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. 5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they **gather** daily.

Again, we see the same combination of bounty on the part of the giver (in this case, God), and responsibility on the part of the recipient. The Lord could have set up a DoorDash system of angels to deliver meals to each family. Instead, he requires people to work for their sustenance.

Ruth submissively asks Naomi’s permission. Gleaning was not strictly an Israelite custom. It is attested in Sumer before 1800 BC, and in Egypt 1300-1100 BC.⁵ But as a foreigner, she may have been uncertain about its status and the details of how it is practiced in Israel (including whether a foreigner would even be welcome).

after him in whose sight I shall find grace.—To “find grace” is to receive something that is undeserved. She is uncertain of the reception she will meet, but wants to make the effort.

And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.—Naomi assures her that she would not be out of place. The law of Moses prescribes gleaning to support “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow,” and Ruth meets two of those three conditions.

3-18a, Gleaning in the Field

3 And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers:—As is usual in Israel, Bethlehem is on an elevation, leaving the low ground available for cultivation (Figure 2). The

3 Not maize, but grain generally, in this case, barley.

4 The verb “glean” טקל does not appear in this passage, or elsewhere in Deuteronomy. It is used in Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22, which describes the same situation.

5 David L. Baker, “To Glean or Not to Glean...” *The Expository Times* 2006 117: 406 DOI: 10.1177/0014524606067178

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figure shows the traditional “shepherds’ field,” associated with the episode of Luke 2:8, but in the agricultural ecology of Palestine, shepherds graze their flocks on the stubble of the grain fields, so these would be the same fields worked by Boaz and Ruth.

Psa 129:7 (chart) distinguishes two steps in ancient harvesting.

Psa 129:7 Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.

The “mower” grabs a bunch of stalks, cuts them off with a hand sickle, and lays them on the ground. Another worker gathers these cut bunches into sheaves, tying them with a length of straw. Figure 3 shows the harvesters, and the sheaves they leave throughout the field.

The parable of the tares follows these two steps with a third, collecting the produce for storage:

Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, **Gather [glean, pick up]** ye together first the tares, and **bind** them in bundles to burn them: but **gather [transport]** the wheat into my barn.

Deuteronomy also anticipates this final collection:

Deu 24:19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast **forgot** a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow:

Figure 4 shows the crops on the way to storage.

The gleaners then follow “after the reapers,” after the cutting, tying, and collecting of the harvest.

and her hap was to light ויקר מיקרה on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz,—“Hap” (מיקרה *miqreh* H4745) means “accident, chance.” The encounter with Boaz is presented as a random event. Compare the plan by the Philistines to see if the plagues that fell on them after they captured the ark were a coincidence or not (chart). They separate two milking cows from their calves, yoke them to a cart bearing the ark, turn them loose, and see which way they go.



Figure 2: “Shepherds’ Field” in Bethlehem. Village is to the right. Van and Anita Parunak, October 1974



Figure 3: Women harvesting lentils near Debir. Note bundles (sheaves) throughout the field. June 1975 (Van and Anita Parunak)



Figure 4: Gathering produce from the fields, near Susiya. June 1975, Van and Anita Parunak

1Sam. 6:9 And see, if it [the cart] goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a **chance** **מִקְרָה** that happened to us.

But when we get to 2:20, even Naomi recognizes that this “accident” is an act of God:

2:20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness **חֶסֶד** to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin **קָרוֹב** unto us, one of our next kinsmen [**מִגֵּאֲלֵינוּ**, close enough to fulfill the legal function of the kinsman redeemer].

The whole episode demonstrates the principle,

Pro 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

who was of the kindred מִשְׁפָּחָה of Elimelech.—Here again is the word for the extended clan, the next step down from the tribe.

4 And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem,—Our attention is suddenly drawn to the arrival of Boaz. He was not there when Ruth began gleaning.

and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.—We have learned about his genealogical qualifications to help Ruth and Naomi. Now we have a glimpse into his spiritual character.

5 Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? 6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is ~~the~~ a Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab:—Note the lack of the article in Hebrew. “That’s some Moabite girl. She says she’s with Naomi.” The overseer emphasizes her foreign identity.

7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers ~~among the~~ in sheaves:—Recall the three-step process of cutting the grain, binding it into sheaves, and taking the sheaves off the field. A request to gather “among the sheaves,” before they are removed, would be extraordinary. In v. 15 Boaz grants her just this privilege, but it is very unlikely that she would have requested it, and in fact Boaz uses a different preposition “among” in 2:15 (**בֵּין** *beyn* H996) from the one that appears here (**בְּ** *be*, no Strong’s number). Rather, she is expressing the step in the harvesting process that she will perform. She will not cut the grain, but will collect overlooked stems into her own bundles to take home.

so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now,—The Hebrew is ambiguous. It may mean that she has labored continuously, but it could also indicate that because she is a foreigner, the overseer has not been willing to let her glean, and she has in fact been kept standing, waiting for permission from Boaz.⁶

that she tarried a little in the house.—The grammar of these words is obscure, and their meaning elusive. There would not be a “house” in the middle of a grain field.⁷ Perhaps the best suggestion is that of Lys, adopted by Hubbard, “this field has been her residence; the house [her residence] has meant little to her.”⁸ But the Hebrew is extremely obscure.

6 Lau and others

7 Though there might be a watchtower with an enclosed room in a vineyard, Isa 5:2.

8 Compare Coverdale (1535, the first complete modern English translation of the Bible): “And within a litle while she wolde have bene gone home agayne.”

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The irregular grammar may itself make a point, reflecting growing uncertainty on the part of the overseer as to the action he has taken. It would be very interesting to see Boaz's face at this point. She is a foreigner: has the overseer been too permissive with her? But we will shortly learn that Boaz has already taken an interest in this girl (2:11). Does his expression suggest that the overseer has not done enough for her?

8 Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter?⁹—The negative question marks a strong affirmative (GKC §150e): “Now pay attention.” We see this again in 2:9b, “have I not charged the young men . . .,” and 3:1, 2 (“Shall I not seek rest? Is not Boaz of our kindred?”)

Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence,—First, he wants her to stay in this field, and not even to think about going on to another. He is thankful that his overseer's critical attitude has not driven her away.

but abide here fast by my maidens:—The verb “abide fast by” (דָּבַק *dabaq* H1692) is the one that described Ruth's attachment to Naomi in 1:14. When Orpah kissed Naomi good-bye, “Ruth clave unto her.” The word recalls the establishment of the family unit in Gen 2:24, which says that a man “shall cleave unto his wife.” 1:14 emphasizes her faithfulness to Naomi's household. But now Boaz instructs here to join his household, staying with his own servants. “Don't just stay in my field; stay close to my maidens, the women who are gathering the sheaves together for me.” Ordinarily the gleaners would stay well behind the workers employed by the landowner, but Ruth is encouraged to work alongside those who are working for Boaz.

There is a lovely picture here of our Lord's encouragement to a new believer. Society at large “gleans” many benefits from the righteous conduct of God's people, but at a distance. But when we are the Lord's, we have the privilege of close fellowship with him and with those who are his. We ought never to take this privilege for granted, but use every opportunity to join with other believers in our joint service to the Lord.

9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them:—Only leave this field if they move to another of my fields, and in that case follow them.

have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?—Again, he uses a question to make a strong affirmation. We can imagine that the young men in Boaz's employ might be tempted to be fresh with the poor girls who are gleaning. Boaz has already spoken to them, making her off-limits.

and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.—Not only are they not to molest her, but they are to allow her to drink water that they have drawn up from the well.¹⁰

This initial provision for her thirst is supplemented on the other side of the chiasm with participation in their meal, v. 14.

2:10-13 are the center of the chiasm, and thus its focal point.

10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?—Note the repetition of “find grace in the eyes of someone” from 2:2, and in 2:13.

9 Following Lau's observations on Boaz's words

10 See Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* 58-60 for an interesting interpretation of this detail as a variant of the common betrothal scene at a well. I am indebted to Lau for this reference.

She asks help from Boaz, on the basis of his unmerited favor. Note the source (Boaz) and basis (grace) of the blessing she seeks (chart).

11 And Boaz answered and said unto her,—His response, at the center of the chiasm, surrounds a prayer with several statements, (Figure 5, chart). His view of the basis and source of her sustenance contrasts with hers.

- In 12a, the *source* of her sustenance is not Boaz, but the Lord.

- The *basis* of this divine blessing is not grace (unmerited favor), but what she has done, described in 11 and 12b.

11 all that thou hast done unto Naomi ...
 thou has left thy father and thy mother
 [thou hast left] the land of thy nativity
 thou art come unto a people ...

12 May the Lord recompense thy work
 May a full reward be given thee of the Lord ...
 Thou art come to trust under his wings

Figure 5: Basis (outside) and Source (center) of Blessing in 2:11-12

Let’s start with the blessing he prays for her in 12a, and then consider his interpretation of what she has done in 11 and 12b. Then we’ll step back and ask how his overall statement aligns with the NT principles of justification by grace through faith and apart from works.

12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel,—The blessing is in the name of the LORD, that is, Jehovah, the covenant God of Israel. Twice Boaz asks the Lord to bless her because of what she has done, as reward for her actions.

In support of this prayer, he lists her actions, in 11 and 12b.

It hath fully been shewed me,—Boaz mentions intimate details of Ruth’s history. We do not know the source of his intelligence. It might be from gossip originating with Naomi in her interactions with the women of Bethlehem,¹¹ 1:19 (where “they said” is feminine, reflecting the women of the town), but given her depressed state, it is not clear how open she would have been about her prior dealings with Ruth. Perhaps the Lord revealed these things to Boaz in a dream.

As Boaz recounts Ruth’s actions, he is interpreting them in the light of God’s previous dealings with Israel, as recorded in the books of Moses (chart). Paul does something similar with the Corinthians. He compares Israel’s exodus with their circumstances, and then warns his readers,

1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for **ensamples**: and they are written for our **admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Boaz is forming his opinion of Ruth based on Scriptural precedents. These precedents show him what the Lord has done in the life of this Moabite girl. So we, in evaluating situations, should seek to compare them with biblical “ensamples.”

all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband:—This would include not only her kindness to Naomi in Bethlehem, which he might observe, but also her life in Moab after her marriage to Mahlon, which Boaz has no way of knowing directly.

and how thou hast left עזב *ʿazab* H5800 thy father and thy mother,—The verb appears with “father and mother” only in one other place, which we have already noted with respect to the verb “cleave” [chart]:

Gen 2:24 Therefore shall a man **leave his father and his mother**, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

¹¹ Esler, JBL 137:3 (2018): 645-666

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There, the man leaves his parents when he married, but Ruth's example shows that the wife was also understood to break her family ties. By adopting the phrase from Genesis, Boaz recognizes the significance of her departure from her parents: she is to enter into a new family.

Ruth uses this verb in 1:16, "intreat me not to leave thee." She acknowledges her bond with Naomi to be stronger than her natural bond to her parents. But again, who told Boaz? Would Naomi, in her depressed state, share Ruth's beautiful promise of 1:16-17?

and the land of thy nativity ארץ מולד *perets mōledet* H776 H4138—Boaz compares her action not only to Gen 2:24, but to Abraham. In commissioning his servant to fetch a wife for his son Isaac from Haran, he forbids him to take Isaac back to the family homeland (chart):

Gen. 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the **land of my kindred [H4138]**, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land;

Boaz recognizes that Ruth's willingness to leave her home country is in the best tradition of their common ancestor Abraham. Like Abraham, her obedience to God's leading shows true faith.

and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.—Not only has she abandoned the familiar surroundings of her childhood, but also the culture and customs in which she was raised. As we saw in the law of gleaning, the stranger (גֵר *gēr* H1616) is grouped repeatedly¹² with the orphan and the widow as a person with no social standing.¹³ The first instance of this triple in the Bible makes these people the special concern of the Lord, and commends them to the care of his people:

Deut. 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: 18 He doth execute the judgment of the **fatherless** and **widow**, and loveth the **stranger**, in giving him food and raiment. 19 Love ye therefore the **stranger**: for ye were **strangers** in the land of Egypt.

By emphasizing her status as a stranger, he is reminding himself of the special privileges to which she is entitled by Israel's law.

After listing the actions in 2:11, Boaz prays for the Lord's blessing on her, and then turns again to describe what she has done in 12b. This clause appears to be a summary of her actions, in terms of the attitude they show on her part toward the Lord. What is the deeper meaning of her willingness to abandon her home and family and join herself to Naomi and the people of Israel?

12b ... under whose wings thou art come to trust.—Once again, Boaz interprets her action in terms of the Scripture that God has revealed already. The image of God as a mother bird protecting her young under her wings is common in the Psalms,¹⁴ but those were written after these events, and David's use of the image may be inspired by the family history of what Boaz here tells Ruth. The only instance of this image earlier than Ruth is in the song of Moses,

12 Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19-21; 26:12-13; 27:19; Psa. 94:6; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5

13 HALOT: "גֵר is a man who (alone or with his family) leaves village and tribe because of war 2S 43 Is 164, famine Ru 11, epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter and residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed"

14 Psa 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4.

Deu 32:11 As an eagle stirreth up her nest, **fluttereth over her young**, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: 12 So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.

In 1:16, Ruth said to Naomi, “thy God [shall be] my God.” Boaz sees this statement as a summary of all of her righteous actions. By leaving her land and birth family, cleaving to Naomi, and coming to a land where she is a stranger, Ruth has decided to place herself under the care of the Lord. In NT terms, she has received the Lord as her Savior. Her works in 2:11 are the evidence that her trust is in the Lord. This trust is what the Lord is rewarding.

Boaz is not declaring salvation by works that contrasts with the NT doctrine of justification by grace. The NT also teaches that coming to trust in the Lord is a work of obedience:

Act 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were **obedient** to the faith.

Act 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now **commandeth** all men every where to repent:

1Pe 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto **obedience** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

Her actions in coming to Bethlehem show her faith in the Lord, and the Lord will reward her.

13 Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord;—Why is she asking for what she has already received? It is preferable to render, “I am finding favor in thy sight,” as an expression of gratitude.¹⁵ The idiom here probably has the sense of an expression of gratitude.

for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.—Most of the references to the maidens of Boaz, including references to Ruth by others (2:6), use the Hebrew word נַעֲרָה *naʿarāh* H5291, meaning simply a damsel. But Ruth uses more specific terms to refer to herself (chart), and they appear to form a progression.¹⁶

- 2:10, “I am a stranger נֹכְרִי *nokrî* H5237,” a foreigner
- 2:13, “thine handmaid שִׁפְחָה *shiphxa* H8198, a female servant, typically a lady’s maid
- 3:9, “thine handmaid אֲמָה *ʾāmāh* H519, a female servant, often as wife or concubine to the head of the house.

Now we’re working out of the chiasm. Note the intensification of themes from the first panel.

14 And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.—In 2:9b she was offered water that they had drawn. Now she participates in their meal (Figure 6).

15 And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying,—In 2:4-7, Boaz greeted the reapers and consulted with the overseer about Ruth. Now he speaks again to the workers, granting her two extraordinary privileges.

15 Thus the imperfect of מִצָּאָה in similar contexts: Gen 47:25, 1 Sam 1:18, 2 Sam 16:4. See discussion by Block (*NBC*) and Bush (*WBC*).

16 Thus Lau, though whether אֲמָה is socially superior to שִׁפְחָה is debated in the literature.

Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not:—She need not wait until the sheaves are removed from the field, but may go among them., coming closer to the reapers.

16 And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them,—As she approaches, they are to drop some stalks right in front of her.

and rebuke her not.—He told her in 2:9 that he had charged the young men not to molest her. Now they are not even to rebuke her, if she comes closer than other gleaners.

17 So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned:—Small quantities of grain were threshed by beating with a stick (Figure 7). This separated the grain from the stalk and the chaff, leaving only the edible kernel.

and it was about an ephah of barley.—A ephah was a common measure of volume in the Bible. The account of the manna relates it to another measure, the omer (chart):

Exo 16:36 Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah.

It also states that an omer of manna was a day's ration for a person:

Exo 16:16 This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. . . . 22 And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man:

So Ruth goes home with enough to feed a person for ten days.¹⁷

Estimates of the size of an ephah in modern terms range from 20 to 36 liters (see note). The latter would be just a bit over a modern bushel (35.24 liters). The larger measure would seem to be appropriate, in view of the imagery of Zechariah:

Zec 5:5 Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what is this that goeth forth. 6 And I said, What is it? And he said, This is an **ephah** that goeth forth. He said moreover, This is their resemblance through all the earth. 7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this is **a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah**. 8 And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. 9 Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out **two women**, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they **lifted up the ephah** between the earth and the heaven. 10 Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither do these bear the ephah? 11 And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar: and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base.



Figure 6: Harvesters eating in the field.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.10148/>



Figure 7: Woman beating out grain with stick.
Dalman 3 plate 25; cf.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.06350/>

¹⁷ <https://tyndalehouse.com/explore/articles/how-to-read-weights-and-measures-in-the-bible/>

Here the ephah is big enough that a woman (presumably, a small one) could crouch down it, and for two people to carry together.

In either case, Ruth took home a significant quantity of grain.

18 And she took it up, and went into the city:—A bushel of barley would weight nearly 50 pounds, and she would have a bit of a job to carry it home.

18b-23, Debriefing at Home

and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned:—Naomi is duly impressed with the result of Ruth’s day’s work.

and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.—Ruth has also tucked away a bit of her lunch, which was prepared and ready to eat, so that Naomi can have something to eat without the labor of preparing the raw barley.

19 And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee.—Naomi prays a blessing on Ruth’s benefactor, as yet unknown to her.

Note the form of her blessing (chart): first the wish that he might be blessed, then the behavior he has exhibited that leads to her wish. This is the standard form of blessings in the book: recall Naomi’s blessing on the sisters,

Rut 1:8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

She asks the Lord to bless them, because of their kindness to her and her deceased menfolk.

And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.—Ruth answers her question, revealing the name of her benefactor.

20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead.—This verse is best understood as a refinement of Naomi’s blessing in v. 19, based on the information that Ruth give her in 19b. She prays that Boaz may be blessed, because he (like Ruth and Orpah in 1:8) has showed kindness to her and her family. The one whose kindness is in view is Boaz, not the Lord.¹⁸

“Kindness” רַחֲמֵי *xesed* H2617 is the word for loyal love, often reflecting a covenant obligation. In 1:8 she said that the girls, as daughters-in-law, had exhibited this kind of behavior to her, her husband, and her sons. Now, hearing Boaz’s name, she realizes that he also stands in a relation to her in which *xesed* is appropriate, and sees his kindness as evidence of this virtue.

And Naomi said unto her,—Naomi goes on to describe the relation of Boaz to the family. We know from 2:1 that he was an acquaintance of Elimelech, but Naomi tells us much more. She uses two technical terms from Israelite property law, specifically inheritance and redemption.

Both of these laws are concerned with maintaining equitable distribution of property in Israel. The tribes received fair allocations under Joshua, and there was a concern that marriages between tribes and commercial transactions might lead to economic imbalance. For example,

18 B.A. Rebera, “Yahweh or Boaz? Ruth 2:20 Reconsidered.” *Bible Translator* 36:3 (July 1985) 317-327.

property originally belonging to Judah could be transferred to Benjamin, thus destroying the parity among the tribes. Limiting inheritance ensured that property stayed within the clan, and redemption provided a way to recover property that had been sold out of the family.

The man is near of kin [קרוב *qarob* H7138] unto us,—The first term reflects the Mosaic legislation concerning inheritance, and describes who is eligible to inherit from whom. This legislation was motivated by a case brought to Moses by the daughters of Zelophehad just before Israel entered the land. Their father died without sons, and they wanted to ensure that his descendants through them would have a share in the land. (Another provision, in Numbers 36, requires them to marry within their father’s clan [משפחה], 36:6, so that the property does not “remove from tribe to tribe,” 36:7.)

Num 27:8 If a man die, and have no **son**, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his **daughter**. 9 And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his **brethren**. 10 And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his **father's brethren**. 11 And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his **kinsman that is next to him** שארו הקרב אלי of his family משפחה, and he shall possess it: ...

The heir had to be in the same “family,” using the term for extended clan mentioned in 2:1. But not just any clansman could inherit. It had to be the closest clansman. Naomi knows that Boaz is close enough to be a candidate to inherit the property of Elimelech. But we will see that he is not the closest kinsman.

one of our next kinsmen.—“Kinsman” is גאל *goʿal* H1350, one who exercises the function of a redeemer, another economic institution designed to keep property distributed throughout the society. Redemption provided for the situation where poverty forced an Israelite to sell part of his patrimony, thus removing it from his family’s share. It allowed a kinsman to buy back that property into the family.

Lev 25:25 If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to **redeem** it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

“Kin” here is קרוב, one qualified to inherit according to Num 27:11.

The mechanism was extended to the case of slavery to a non-Israelite. Israelite slaves had to be freed after seven years, but a foreigner could buy an Israelite as a permanent possession.

Lev 25:47 And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: 48 After that he is sold he may be **redeemed** again; one of his brethren may redeem him: 49 Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him [שארו בקרוב] of his family [משפחה] may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.

Again, the responsibility rests on a close relative.¹⁹

These terms show what Naomi means by describing Boaz’s action as *xesed*. The family relation of Boaz to Elimelech imposes certain obligations on him, and his kindness to Ruth shows that he honors these obligations. Naomi begins to conceive a vision, that this powerful landowner might in fact marry Ruth, providing security for both of them.

¹⁹ Num 35:16-21 extends the role of the kinsman redeemer to avenging the blood of a murdered person, but Naomi’s reference is to the economic function that Boaz is eligible to perform.

21 And Ruth the Moabite said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by דבק my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.—In 2:8, Boaz told her to “abide fast by my maidens,” using the verb דבק that described Ruth’s devotion to Naomi in 1:15, and that describes familial connection in Gen 2:24. In 2:8, she was to cleave to the maidens, who were gathering up the cut grain and binding it into sheaves. Here, she is to cleave to the young men, who are presumably doing the cutting. This would bring her within range where they could drop handfuls of grain for her, as Boaz instructs them in 2:16.

“Young men” הַנְּעָרִים is masculine plural. Ruth may be referring to the men and women together, without implying a separate instruction from Boaz. But Naomi is apprehensive about the possibility it opens up for Ruth to make the acquaintance of some of the men.

22 And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law,—Naomi’s response to Ruth’s added information about the “young men” shows her concern not to compromise the match she has begun to conceive between Ruth and Boaz. She has two concerns (chart).

It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens,—First, Naomi is apprehensive about the idea of Ruth “cleaving” to the young men. It might indeed give her more grain by bringing her closer to the reapers, but it might also open her up to romantic attachments. So she urges Ruth to stick with the maidens, and not get involved with the fellows.

that they meet thee not in any other field.—Second, she should take advantage of the protection that Boaz has offered. The verb “meet” פגע *pagaʿ* H6293 can mean simply “encounter,” but often also refers to a hostile encounter, as often in Judges. Recall the words of Zebah and Zalmuneh to Gideon,

Judg. 8:21 Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, Rise thou, and **fall upon us:** for as the man is, so is his strength. And Gideon arose, and slew Zebah and Zalmunna, ...

“They” here is impersonal. In the field of Boaz, she is under his protection:

Rut 2:9 have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?

Rut 2:15 And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and **reproach her not:** 16 And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and **rebuke her not.**

In another field, she would be vulnerable to the kind of abuse from which he is concerned to protect her, and if her reputation is compromised in this way, Boaz will not want her.

23 So she kept fast by דבק the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.—Ruth, ever the submissive daughter-in-law, does as Naomi says, until the entire grain harvest is complete.

Notes

Greek Verbs for Gathering

	3950 ὑρέω	7197 ἠρέω	622 ἠρέω		Total
συνάγω G4816	30	4	0		42
συνάγω G4863	6	1	121		360
Total	37	8	200		

How Big is an Ephah?

The most thorough discussion I have found is M.A. Powell in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, "Weights and Measures." An interesting datum is that the capacity of the sea in Solomon's temple is given as 2000 baths in 1 Kings 7:26 but 3000 in 2 Chr 4:5, suggesting that the size of the bath used after the exile was 2/3 that used before, perhaps as a result of the Jews' adopting Mesopotamian measures. Ezek 45:11 equates the volume of the bath (properly liquid measure) and the ephah (dry measure), so the ephah would exhibit different values based on the age of the tradition. Curiously, though, Powell associates a larger 3.6 liter omer (and thus a 36 liter ephah) with the *postexilic* system, p. 903.

Scott, BA 1959, traces the 22 liter bath to Albright, reasoning from vessels marked *bt* from Tell Beit-Mirsim (pre-exilic). But he cites other authorities for values ranging from 20 to 46 liters.