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Bo'az and the Overseer

2: 4-7

Bo'az and the overseer DIG: What was Ruth looking for? What did she find? What does Bo'az's greeting tell us about him? In what sense did Bo'az inquire about Ruth at first? What did the overseer tell Bo'az about Ruth's request earlier that day? What had Ruth been doing all morning? Why? What did that tell Bo'az about her? What can we gather about Ruth's character from this scene?

REFLECT: Who is a boss or leader you have served with whose presence always made you feel special? Who are some leaders you are serving with right now? What are you gleaning (good or bad) from them?

When **Ruth** set out that morning to **glean in the fields**, **she** was looking for **someone** who would show **her** grace. **She said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor" (2:2, also see 2:10 and 13).** Grace is given on those who don't deserve it and can't earn it. As **a woman, a poor widow, and an alien, Ruth** wasn't above anyone. In fact, **she** was at the lowest rung of the social ladder.

The channel of that grace was **Bo'az**. How good to know that **YHVH** has good people living in bad times! The book of **Judges** makes it seem as if righteousness had vanished from the earth (**Psalm 12:1-2; Isaiah 57:1; First Kings 19:10; Micah 7:2**). However, there were still godly people like **Bo'az** who knew **ADONAI** and sought to obey **Him**.⁴⁹

Just then Bo'az arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. No finer introduction could be given to an unknown person than what was said about her to Bo'az. We know, from the introductory remark to this chapter that he was a man of importance. Now, as he appears on the scene, we learn that he combines with his wealth, a rare nobility of character. Very often in the Bible, a person's first words tell you something significant. **Bo'az's** first words certainly do. **He** greeted **his harvesters** by saying,

“ADONAI be with you,” and they answered him, “ADONAI bless you” by granting a rich and abundant crop (2:4). The narrator included this exchange so that we can immediately tell that **Bo'az** honored **the LORD** in **his** work and was respected by **his** workers. **The rabbis teach that each overseer was in charge of forty-two workers.**



Bo'az visited **his** field to see the progress of **the harvest**. Barring discovering something unusual, **he** would simply check on things, encourage **his workers**, and be on **his** way. But no sooner had **he** greeted **his** workers than someone caught **his** eye . . . an unfamiliar figure. **Then Bo'az asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to” (2:5)?** **Bo'az** knew all of **his** young, female **workers** since **he** was the one who hired **them**. Failing to recognize **Ruth**, **he** asked who **her** employer was.⁵⁰

The rabbis teach that the interest of Bo'az was aroused by her extreme modesty. She would only pick up the ears of corn when two of them fell from the hands of the harvesters but not if three, as the law prescribed (Peah 6:5). Moreover, she would never inelegantly stoop to take the gleanings, but would gather them either standing or squatting. All the other women lift up their skirts, but she kept hers down. All the other women jest with the harvesters, but she was reserved.

The overseer replied: **She is the Moabite who returned (shuwb) from Mo'av with Na'omi (2:6).** **Bo'az**, as with all Beit-Lechem, knew of **Na'omi's** return; therefore, because **Elimelek** was a **[blood] relative from the same clan (2:1a)** **he** was related by marriage to this young **woman** and instantly took an interest in

her and started to treat **her** differently (**to see link click [As - Bo’az’s Grace and Ruth’s Gratitude](#)**).

Ruth asked **the overseer** if **she** would be allowed to **glean**, piling **her gleanings** in different parts of **the field**, then return and gather all the piles together. Then **she** asked: **Please let me gather what falls from the bundles behind the harvesters (2:7a)**. This was an unusual request because **the harvesters** cut the barley with **their** sickles while the female **workers** followed behind **them** binding the cut **barley** into bundles. **Ruth** asked if **she** could walk with **the** female **workers**. This gave **her** the first chance at the best **barley** and was regarded as a special favor (**2:15**). One suspects it would have increased **her** chances of gathering enough **grain** to provide for both **Na’omi** and **herself**.

Then **the overseer** explained to **Bo’az** what had happened earlier that day before **he** came to check on **the harvest**. **The overseer** said: **She came into the field and has remained standing** (Hebrew: *amad*) **here from morning till now** (before lunch), **except for a short rest in the shelter (2:7b)**. Evidently, **Ruth** had asked **the overseer** that morning if **she** could gather what **fell from the bundles behind the harvesters**. But because it was such an unusual request, **he** didn’t feel like **he** had the authority to give **her** permission. **She** stood there in the hot sun all **morning** waiting for permission for **her** extraordinary request until someone other than **the overseer**, who apparently either refused answer **her** or lacked the authority to give permission, arrived. It seemed like the only break **she** took was to sit **for a short rest in the shelter** for **the workers** on **the field**. Therefore, **2:3** is not to be understood as the beginning of **Ruth’s gleaning**, but as a summary statement of the entire account (**21-17**). When **Bo’az** arrived, **he** immediately responded to **her** request (**2:8**).

From this scene the narrator develops the character of **Ruth** . . . indeed, a model of true devotion. **She** had shown admirable determination and patience. These traits not only made **her** attractive to **Bo’az** (not an unimportant point) but also contributed to a major theme. By stressing **her** worthy character, the narrator offered **Ruth** a divinely given exception to the strict provisions of **Deuteronomy 23:3-6**. **He** implied that **the Moabites**, who evidenced both providential guidance and the exemplary traits of **Israelites**, were welcomed into the house of **Isra’el**. **She** was, in fact, worthy to be **Bo’az’s** wife, with all the civil and religious rights that went with marriage.⁵¹

Dear Wonderful **Father God**. Nothing happens by accident. Sometimes we have to

wait to hear **Your** answer, but **You** have heard us immediately and reply at the best time. Though often we cannot see **Your** fingerprints on what happens in our lives, it fills us with hope and peace to know how great is **Your** tender care for each of **Your** children. Someday all our trials will be over. **He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Nor shall there be mourning or crying or pain any longer, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:4).**

Help me to keep my eyes on **You** and not on the problem. As I choose to meditate on the many times you have shown your gracious love and mighty power to **Your** children, my problem becomes smaller. I choose to place my difficult situations into **Your** big hands for **You** are my Mighty Sovereign **Father God** who is more than able to handle any situation! I love **You, Father,** and delight in pleasing **You.** In the name of your holy **Son** and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen