

Bo'az and the Overseer

2: 4-7

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 gleaned (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 keeps 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 (see **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