



## A Chance Encounter and a Kind Hero

### *Ruth 2*

The Psalms teach us that God is good and does good (Psalm 119:68). Often, that good to us through other people as the channels through which God causes His goodness flows. In Ruth 2, we are introduced to one more important character in this story: Boaz. Through Boaz God is going to pour out His kindness on Ruth and Naomi. As we see this example, it ought to both remind us of the goodness of our God, but also create within us a desire to be God's channel of kindness to others.

In our previous lessons we saw that Naomi found herself reduced to a hopeless state after losing her husband and two sons. But at the end of chapter one there are several small rays of hope peeking through her bleak circumstances. God ends the famine in Judah, gives Naomi a loyal companion, and brings the women back to Judah just in time for harvest. God will now continue to show His kindness, but this time with a little help from Boaz.

***Can you think of any examples of God using someone in your life to do good to you?***

***Why do you think it is that God chooses to use people to do good to others?***

### **Ruth Sets Out to Glean (2:1-3)**

We aren't told how much time elapses, but probably shortly after arriving Ruth asks if she can go out and glean in the fields. As we will see, this is a more hazardous request than we might pick up on as modern readers. Ruth chapter 2 hints all throughout the chapter that for a young, single widow to go gleaning was not necessarily safe. Regardless, Ruth recognizes that they need food and Naomi is not the one who should be doing the manual labor, Ruth is. So Ruth takes the initiative and offers to go gleaning.

### **Ruth's proposal to Naomi (2:2)**

As we read these opening verses carefully, an important detail should stick out. Ruth said she would glean in the field of one who showed her grace, or favor.

***Why do you think Ruth was concerned about finding favor with a landowner?***

According to Israelite law, widows and foreigners were permitted to pick up what was left behind by the reapers (Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Leviticus 23:22) and to reap the corners of the field (Leviticus 19:9-10). Yet it would seem that such laws were not always practiced.

***As you read through the story, are there any other hints that might indicate Ruth's right to gather behind the reapers couldn't just be assumed?***

Beyond Ruth's statement that she would search for someone who showed her favor, we see later on that she specifically asked if she could gather in this particular field (2:7). The fact that Boaz will later instruct his men not to harass Ruth (2:9, 15-16) suggest that both Ruth and Boaz knew that was a possibility. Beyond this it's important to remember that the book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges. A quick read of the sordid finale in Judges 17-21 should be enough to convince anyone that this is a dangerous time to be a woman, let alone a woman without a man to protect her.

### **God's providential guiding (2:3)**

Ruth goes out to begin gleaning, and the story tells us that she ended up gleaning at Boaz's field. The phrase is a little quirky in Hebrew. Literally translated it would read: "Her chance chanced upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." We might paraphrase it something like, "She just so happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." Obviously, the author of this story doesn't think that it was luck that led Ruth to Boaz's field (2:20). Proverbs 16:33 reminds us that behind all so-called "chance happenings" is the invisible hand of God guiding and directing our affairs. God is sovereignly directing the path of Ruth to a place where she will be cared for and her needs will be met. Similarly, God as it at work in our lives as well, both the mundane and the spectacular.

***How have you seen God's providential hand in the "random" events of your life?***

## **Boaz Arrives (2:4-7)**

The story continues with "behold!" as if the storyteller is pointing down the road to draw our attention to Boaz walking up. Boaz has been officially introduced in 2:1, but here the author gives us a little bit more of a look into the character of Boaz.

### **Boaz is a man of influence (2:1)**

Boaz is described in verse one as "a mighty man of wealth." The exact meaning of this phrase is debated, as some modern translations will go with similar terms such as "a worthy man" (ESV) or "a prominent man of noble character" (CSB). Although the Hebrew phrase can mean that, in the context here most translators agree that the idea is that Boaz is a wealthy man, as suggested by the fact that he has reapers working under him. In those times, as is often the case in modern times, wealthy people were influential and important people. This means Boaz has not only the family connection but also the means to help Naomi and Ruth. Now the only question is if he will want to.

## **Boaz demonstrates a godly perspective (2:4)**

Our first introduction to Boaz shows him warmly greeting his workers with a blessing from the Lord, and they responded in kind. This simple gesture tells us a lot about the character of Boaz. Even in the mundane, the heart of Boaz for the Lord shone through, and it inspired the same focus in others as well.

*In what ways can our devotion to God be seen throughout our days in the “little moments” of life?*

## **Boaz learns about Ruth (2:5-7)**

Boaz asks the young man over his reapers “Whose damsel is this?” Boaz is probably asking whether she has a husband or father, or perhaps what her lineage is. The response of the servant demonstrates perhaps a little uneasiness. He begins by identifying her twice as from Moab: “the Moabitish damsel... out of the country of Moab.” Ruth’s history in Moab is frequently brought up in the book (1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 3:5, 10) and as we discussed in the first lesson, the history of Israel and Moab wasn’t a pretty one. The fact that the overseer mentions this point twice in one sentence might betray a certain prejudice.

Beyond that, the Hebrew at the end of verse 7 gets somewhat mangled. Translations smooth it out for us, but literally it would read: “And she came and remained from then... the morning until now... this her sitting the house a little while.” Although some have tried to “fix” the Hebrew, it’s entirely possible the author of Ruth wanted us to read this phrase as the broken-up stammering of a nervous servant. Boaz shows up to see a foreigner sitting in the house (likely a booth where there was shade for the reapers to take a quick rest), and the overseer stumbles to assure him that she had been working all morning and had just recently sat down.

Ruth and Naomi didn’t know how Ruth would be received. It’s possible that even this servant didn’t know for sure how Boaz would respond. So how does Boaz respond?

## **Boaz Shows Kindness to Ruth (2:8-18)**

The response of Boaz is far above what Ruth, Naomi, or any widow or foreigner could have hoped for. Boaz allows Ruth to continue but goes beyond that to shower her with kindness. Boaz’s response is over the top and far more than what the law would have required. Boaz saw through the bare requirement to the heart of God behind the law, and Boaz exemplified that heart of generosity to Ruth.

*What are some of the ways in this passage that Boaz shows kindness to Ruth?*

### **Boaz speaks kindly to Ruth (2:8-12)**

Up until this point in the story, Ruth has essentially been ignored. She is overlooked by the women who recognize Naomi. She must initiate the conversation with overseer. No one really seems to notice Ruth until Boaz does, and when he does he walks up and starts a conversation with her.

- **Boaz reassures Ruth (2:8-9)**

Boaz goes up to Ruth and after respectfully calling her “my daughter” goes on to assure her that she will be safe working his fields and instructs her not to go to another field. He assures her that

he has told his men to leave her alone and also lets her know that if she is thirsty she can drink from the water that his servants brought out.

- **Boaz commends Ruth (2:10-13)**

Ruth doesn't understand why it is that Boaz is showing her such kindness. Boaz responds with two answers 1) he is impressed by her love and loyalty to her mother-in-law and 2) she has trusted in the LORD for protection, and Boaz wants her to know she made the right choice. Last week we had noticed that Naomi, in her bitter and spiritually depressed state, didn't think following the Lord was worth it for Orpah and Ruth and tried to convince them to go back home. Here we see a faithful Israelite who feels the opposite. He sees a foreigner give up her gods for the true God and does everything in his power to show her how well God takes care of those who trust in Him.

***Why do you think it was that Boaz saw Ruth's character rather than her status as a foreigner? Why is he the first to take note of her in the book?***

### **Boaz honors Ruth (2:14)**

Boaz doesn't merely let Ruth continue to glean, he makes sure that during mealtime she joins everyone else for lunch and even gives her food to eat. For a foreigner who appears to be used to being ignored (2:10), this must have been quite the statement to Ruth and everyone else that was working. Boaz wanted everyone to know that Ruth the Moabitess was part of Israel now, and she belonged with them.

### **Boaz protects Ruth (2:15-16)**

Boaz gives strict instructions to his men not to lay a finger on Ruth or to stop her. Boaz here demonstrates the heart of a true man in that he protects the weak and the vulnerable. Whereas many powerful men have used their wealth and influence to take advantage of others, Boaz makes sure that others are not taken advantage of.

***How can we use the resources God has given us to protect the weak and the vulnerable?***

### **Boaz provides for Ruth (2:14-18)**

Boaz makes sure that Ruth has lunch and water provided when she gleans. He goes so far as to tell his reapers to leave a little barley for Ruth to gather up. When it's all said and done, Ruth beats out what she has gathered and after removing the inedible parts of the barley is left with an ephah. How much is an ephah? Estimates vary, but most would say that in modern terms it was likely 20-50 pounds of barley, and that after only one day's work! This is a massive amount of food, and if that pattern continues Ruth and Naomi are going to be just fine.

Boaz stands out in this book as a remarkable example of what God wanted the typical Israelite to be. He was hard-working, caring, kind, and generous. He was concerned for the foreigner and the widow. At the end of Judges we find Israelites behaving like Canaanites, and the result is idolatry, robbery, rape, murder, kidnapping, and civil war. Yet even during this time there were examples of what God wanted His people to be, a light to the nations showing them a different way to follow the Lord.

***In what ways can modern day believers exhibit the character of God and of Boaz? How can we show a concern for the weakest and most vulnerable among us? How can we show the lavish kindness of our God to our neighbor?***

### **Ruth Reports to Naomi (2:19-23)**

It's interesting to think about what Naomi's day would have been like. As She watched her daughter-in-law head off to go reaping Naomi knew the danger involved. What thoughts would have filled her mind? Did she doubt that Ruth would somewhere to glean? Did she fear the worst, afraid that Ruth would be turned away or worse yet assaulted? Did she dare to hope that Ruth might come home with a few pounds of barley, or that after a long day of searching she had finally found a kind landowner who agreed to let her start gleaning tomorrow? Did she pray, begging God to be kind to Ruth and keep her safe? Whatever Naomi's fears might have been, you can almost hear her jaw hit the floor when Ruth walks into the house with a massive bag of barley.

#### **Naomi sees God's provision in the food He provides**

Naomi of course is first blown away by the amount of food that Ruth comes back with. Not only has Ruth come back with food, but she has come back with way more food than Naomi was expecting. Naomi was likely nervous what disaster God had in store for her next, but rather than disaster she saw God's provision.

#### **Naomi sees God's provision in the relative He provides**

If Naomi wasn't prepared for the good news of a gracious landowner who took care of Ruth and allowed her to walk away with a lot of his food, she was even more shocked when she learned his name: Boaz. Naomi knew exactly who Boaz was, and couldn't believe that God has orchestrated the details of Ruth's travels so that Ruth ended up in Boaz's field. Naomi had basically told Ruth she had little chance of finding a husband if she came back with Naomi. Now shortly after returning Naomi's eyes light up with the possibility of a redeemer: "The man is near of kin to us!"

***Why does God sometimes wait until we have lost hope before He moves? How can we continue to trust that God is up to something good when we can't see what He is up to?***

***Can you think of other hopeless situations God turned around in an instant, whether biblical or personal?***

Ruth 2 teaches us a couple of important lessons. First, Boaz here is a picture of God's kindness to us, and of the kindness that God wanted all Israelites to display. But this story holds up Boaz as an example, not just for ancient Israelites, but for modern-day Christians as well. God is a kind, generous, protecting God, and He wants for His heart for the outcast, the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan to be the heart of His people as well.

But not only do we get a glimpse of God's kindness, we also see His sovereignty. Naomi ends chapter 1 without hope, but by the end of chapter 2 hope is back. When we serve God, we can trust Him to do us good all the days of our lives. When we like Naomi can't see what God is up to, we need to be reminded that He is good and kind, and that at any moment He can intervene and start a brand new chapter of our story.