

INTRODUCTION

Last time we left Ruth and Naomi back in Naomi's homeland, they are destitute with very few prospects, but they are believers in the Lord and in this chapter we see how the Lord works out his providence in order to provide and care for Ruth and Naomi. We are introduced to a man called Boaz, a man who as we will see is the key to the story. Boaz a relative of Elimelech's was a man of standing, which means he was man of wealth.

This man is capable of looking after Ruth and Naomi. Now we are introduced to Boaz in order to prepare us for the next chapter. For according to Leviticus 25:25 the nearest relative had the right to redeem the inheritance his relative had lost. This relative was permitted to marry the widow of the owner of the property in order to keep his family name and line alive (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

But we will deal with this law further when we get to chapter 3 but for now we simply need to know that behind all that is going on is God working out his purposes in the life of Ruth and Naomi. This is what we want to look at as we discover God's care for his people.

1. GOD'S PROVISION FOR RUTH

Now Ruth and Naomi are poor they have no means of support so Ruth decides to go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain after the harvesters have reaped it. Now it is probable that Naomi put this idea into Ruth's head for this was a provision made by God for the poor of the land (Leviticus 19:9-10). So now Ruth decides to put this law to the test but she has no real plan of action she simply hopes that she can find favour or grace in the eyes of some landowner.

This probably indicates that although God had made this provision for the poor of the land it was not always adhered to or the landowners found ways round it or it could be that the landowners made the poor so unwelcome that the poor were put off and felt very vulnerable.

Now although this was Ruth's decision to act in accordance with the provision that God has made if you notice the text says, "As it turned out" which sounds that purely by chance she found herself in the field, which was owned by Boaz the relative of Elimelech. However if as we will see Boaz is to become Ruth's Kinsman Redeemer then they would have to meet and of all the fields that Ruth could chose she finds herself in Boaz's field.

It doesn't sound as if this was a plan from Ruth to go to the field of Boaz she simply chose one and went there hoping that the owner would show her grace. God was going to provide for Ruth both in the short term and in the longer term so he is the unseen guiding hand in all that is going on here. But not only does God lead her to the right field but also he leads Boaz to show her favour. Now Boaz appears to be a godly man; note the way he treats his employees (v 4) and when he sees Ruth he asks his Forman about her and as a result he shows kindness to Ruth.

He tells her not to go to any other field for he will care for her. He assures her that she will be safe in his field and with his workers and he will even make sure that she is provided with water (v 9). Boaz even goes as far as instructing his workers to make sure that Ruth has plenty to glean, he is deliberately providing for Ruth. This all happens because of the guiding hand of the Lord and because of Ruth willingness to obey God's word and Boaz's willingness to care for the poor as required by God.

Now there are a number of lessons here for us.

a) God is the unseen guiding hand behind all our decisions. Although all our decisions are our decisions, which we are responsibly for, yet behind all those decisions is God who is working everything out for his own purposes. There is no such thing as chance or luck as far as God is concerned; He it is who is in control and works behind the scenes of all our decisions even the ones that appear to be small and insignificant.

We cannot see the future but God can and therefore we have no idea where our decisions might eventually lead us. Did Ruth know that day; that when she decided to work in that particular field that it would lead to her marriage, her wealth and eventually her position in the genealogy of Christ. Yet Ruth and Boaz would not have married if she had not of gleaned in Boaz's field that day.

Therefore let us see life from God's perspective sometimes we can get so weighed down with the everyday mundane events of life, let us lift our eyes to the wise God who is working out those mundane everyday events of life for his purposes and for our ultimate good. Let us not divorce God from life; let us not be guilty of focusing upon God only on a Sunday as if somehow God is not interested in the rest of the week.

Everyday we ought to be submitting ourselves to him we ought to be asking him to guide us with every decision that we make and we need to remind ourselves that ultimately God is at work behind the scene in all that we do and he is doing so in order to accomplish his purposes in our lives and in the world at large. So this week try to see God in everything you do try to see him behind every decision that you make and remember that whatever happens he is working his purposes out for his glory and for our good.

b) God's providence does not excuse us from making the right decisions – Just because God is in control and working behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes does not mean that we cannot be blamed when we make wrong decisions. Nor does it mean that we are not to do the right thing in every situation. The providence of God does not lead to a fatalistic view of life, 'what will be will be' sort of approach but it leads to us doing everything with our eyes fixed upon our Maker.

This is clearly seen in the lives of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth didn't sit back and say now that I am converted and a follower of the living God I will just sit back and wait until God works his purposes out for me. God has promised to care for me therefore I will wait and see how he will do it. God expects us to make the right decisions in life and through each one of those decisions God will work out his purposes while at the same time making us responsible for those decisions.

God had made provision for those like Ruth who were destitute but Ruth had to go out and find a field and glean. As she does that God works his purposes out. Boaz knew God's law about providing for the poor, but he was responsible for making sure his workers did not harvest right to the edges of the field so that those who were destitute could harvest and find some food. As Boaz obeys the Lord then the Lord works behind the scenes to bring about his purposes. Now it is very important that we keep the balance here. Yes God is sovereign and works his purposes out through his providence but he does so through our decisions for which we are responsible and accountable.

Therefore when we make the wrong decisions in life, when we fail to obey the clear teaching of the word of God then we are responsible and accountable for that but at the same time even through those wrong decisions and times of disobedience God is still at work accomplishing his purposes.

He does not cause us to be disobedient or to make wrong choices but he uses every decision for his own purposes. Christians do not take a fatalistic view of life as if anything that we do does not matter or does not affect anything. That is not true our decisions are very real decisions and affect others and our disobedience is real disobedience which carries with it real consequences for us

and others but behind all of these things is our sovereign God working his purposes out for his glory and our ultimate good.

You may not understand that; but we don't have to understand how it works we are simply called upon to believe it. Here is a girl I went to school with. She was a Christian and she went out with a non-Christian. She married him and she did so because she believed that she could influence him for Christ. In the good providence of God her husband was converted but did his conversion justify her actions? Well the bible would clearly say no.

She clearly disobeyed God's word in marrying an unbeliever she was accountable for her disobedience yet in a strange sort of way she was the means of her husband's conversion. God in his providence used that marriage for his purposes yet in doing so he does not excuse the sin of that lady.

That is probably the best illustration I can think of which shows God's providence at work even though the girl concerned did not make the right decision or choice. She was responsible for her disobedience but God worked his purposes out in that situation. So every day we need to ask for God's wisdom so that we will make the right choices and the right decisions.

We need to learn to discern the mind of the Lord and to keep our eyes fixed on him throughout all the decisions of life knowing that we cannot trust our own understanding but must wholly trust upon the Lord and his word (Proverbs 3:5-6).

c) God provides for his people – This is the third great lesson that we learn from these verses. Ruth has given up her old way of life and has committed herself to God and to his people. She was not sure what that would mean but she was prepared to pay the cost. But in this passage we see the Lord's gracious provision for Ruth. He provides for her not in any miraculous way but by the simple kindness of Boaz. Ruth has trusted herself to the God of Israel and she has come under his wings (v 12), now we see God's protection and care for her as he brings her into contact with Boaz.

The Lord also provides for each one of us and it's important that we learn this lesson. He provides for us by giving us jobs through which our needs are met. He provides for us through the kindness of our families and through the friendships we enjoy.

He provides not just physical things like food, clothing and shelter, but he provides us with security and protection. If you have come like Ruth to be under his wings then he sees to it that our needs are met and that the protection that we need is provided. He does occasionally do this in remarkable and sometimes unusual ways but normally he does this through the mundane and routine things of life. Your job may not seem very exciting at times, but it is God's means of providing for you.

Your home may not be as you want it to be but it is God's provision for you. Your family may cause you many a heartache but they are God's gift to you and help towards provision of our many needs. Our church may not be all that we want it to be, it might not always do things our way but it is God's provision to meet our needs. You see whatever our needs may be whether they are physical, material, mental, emotional or spiritual do you see how God provides for each one of your needs.

There is a great danger in our Western Culture that we put God into a little compartment so that we separate our working life, social life from our religious life. The people of God in the Old Testament and indeed the New Testament didn't think of God like that, for them everything came from God and the result was that they were more God centred than perhaps we are. All that we have and all that we need comes from the good hand of God.

So do you thank God for that job that is so boring and mundane? Do we thank God for that home and car that he has provided for us? What about the food on the table today did you stop and think of God's provision for you. The clothes that we are wearing today the church building that we are in and the church that we belong too are all God's gracious provision for us. If you are a Christian then you have come under the wings of God.

He is your refuge and therefore we need just to pause and think of all the ways that God demonstrates to us that he is our refuge. Then we need to turn those thoughts to praise and prayer to him.

Amen