

Ruth 2

The presence of God has been referred to as his “invisible providence”. The word “providence” comes from the Latin, *providentia* meaning to “see ahead of time.” The book of Ruth shows that Almighty God, in his *providentia*, is arranging the timing of Naomi and Ruth’s initiatives to accomplish His gracious and loving purposes and plans.

Are there some specific ways you can identify in which God has demonstrated his “providence” in your life?

Getting Oriented

Naomi’s life had been hard. Ten years earlier things got so bad in Bethlehem after a severe famine, that she migrated into enemy territory with her husband and two sons just to survive. While living in Moab her two sons married Moabite women. However, her husband died and she became a widow. And then she lost both of her married sons before either had fathered a child. Now she is returning to the land of her birth with her daughter-in-law named Ruth from the despised country of Moab. Naomi had urged Ruth to return to Moab where she would have a positive future. But Ruth would not leave her mother-in law.

Naomi feels vulnerable in this period of lawlessness. She can’t manage to shake off feelings of depression, and she believes that God has turned against her. However, the author of the book leaves us at the end of the first chapter with a hopeful sign. Ruth and Naomi are returning to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. “Harvest” is an indication of God’s blessing. Just as God sent rain to refill Bethlehem “the house of bread” with grain at harvest time, so He was about to end the famine in Naomi’s life.

Read Ruth 2

(look for signs of God’s providence)

Key Terms and Historical Background Notes

Gather leftover grain (v 2) When the wheat and barley were ready to be harvested, harvesters were hired to cut down the stalks and tie them into bundles. Israelite law demanded that the corners of the fields not be harvested. In addition, any grain that was dropped was to be left for poor people, who picked it up (this was called *gleaning*) and used it for food (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). This law served as a type of welfare program in Israel.

I have told the men not to touch you (v 9) The ideal position for a gleaner was right behind the harvesters, where one would be the first to pick up whatever stalks fell from the sheaves. However, a gleaner who followed too closely was vulnerable to rough treatment by the workmen.

Half a bushel (v 7) between thirty and fifty pounds of grain; about a month’s worth of the grain ration usually allotted to male workers.

Family Redeemer (v 20) responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family.

Exploring the Passage

1. Do you see God's actively at work in the story or do you see the events that occur as merely coincidences? If you think God is actively working, how would you describe the nature of his involvement?

NOTE: In the ancient Near Eastern worldview, God played the most important role in cause and effect, both in history and in nature.

1. Previously Naomi had expressed thoughts and feelings that suggested that God was against her. She urged her daughters-in-law not to return to Bethlehem with her stating that *"Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has caused me to suffer."* And when she returned home she instructed the women in her town: *"Don't call me Naomi, ... Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the LORD has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy?"* Observe the change in her perspective in our reading for this evening. Why do you think that her thoughts and feelings about God changed?

2. A single woman had few ways to support herself in those days. She could beg, sell herself into slavery, become a prostitute, look for a husband among the eligible men of the village, or seek support from her nearest male relative. Or, during the months of harvest, she could glean. Consider the risks of gleaning and the alternatives facing Ruth and Naomi. What do you learn about Ruth from her work in gleaning to support both herself and her mother-in-law?

NOTE: The author continually reminds us that Ruth was from Moab. Israel regarded Moab as an inferior people, descended from an incestuous union (Genesis 19:30-38). Moab had been hostile towards Israel since the days of Moses. Moab also oppressed some of the Israelite tribes for eighteen years toward the beginning of the judges' era (Judges 3:12-30).

3. What do you most admire about Boaz in this passage?

NOTE: The law of gleaning did not require the landowner to provide either food or water or protection from the men.

Charting Our Course

1. How convinced are you that God wants to be involved in your life to accomplish his purposes and plans? What evidence (or lack thereof) can you point to in supporting your conclusions?