



Key Passage: Ruth 4:14-15; Esther 4:14
Key Thought: God's Providence In Action

The gospel in Ruth:

Ruth and Esther are two stories centering on faithful women at a time when all hope seems lost. God comes to the rescue by providing more than could have been imagined (Eph 3:20).

An Israelite woman, Naomi has experienced the terrible loss of her husband and sons, leaving her with no means of support. In her words, she went away full, but has returned empty (Ruth 1:21). However, she experiences redeeming love from her daughter-in-law, and God provides an unexpected family relative to declare His own providence.

Ruth is not an Israelite. Yet she pledges her faithfulness to Naomi.

Boaz is a relative and a “kinsman-redeemer,” which means he has responsibility for caring for the extended family. God has providentially provided Naomi with a relative who will stand by her, and God has provided Ruth with a relative who shall redeem them both. Naomi and Ruth not only enjoy food and security; they enjoy abundance. And...the Messiah shall come through their blessed union.

Naomi was living a hopeless, empty life—not unlike all of us when we were “without” (without hope, and without God in the world, Eph 2:12). But God provides (1) a friend whose love knows no end, (2) a redeemer who not provides fullness of (this) life in abundance, and (3) an heir through whom will come the Messiah who provides fullness of life for all. Compare John 10:10 & Ephesians 3:16-19.

“God became flesh in Jesus Christ in order to become our guardian-redeemer and fill our emptiness with the fullness of life. We no longer have to be satisfied with scraps and an uncertain future; we eat the bread of life now and know our future is secure with God.”¹

The gospel in Esther:

The story of Esther takes place at a time when God’s people were under Persian rule. When Esther enters the scene, the people are feeling lost. Her father and mother were dead. Raised by her cousin, Mordechai, and responding to his advice, Esther keeps her Jewish identity a secret as she is called to the King’s herem. God is at work, elevating Esther above all others to become queen, and through her, to conquer the enemy and to redeem Israel.

The enemy, Haman, made his case against Mordechai (and the Jews) by describing them as “a people who keep themselves separate” (Esther 3:1). But it is this separateness that reminds the reader that Israel was promised covenant-protection by God. We see God’s providence at work throughout the story, and it ends with God’s people being rescued and elevated. Esther is an unlikely hero, but so is the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth! This all happens at “just the right time” (Gal 4:4-5), which is why providence involves God raising up people “for such a time as this.” The book of Esther ends with a feast day declared to remember God’s deliverance. We also enjoy a feast of remembrance for our deliverance every Sunday.

Mordechai went to great lengths to notify the people (Esther 8:10). We, ambassadors of Christ, do the same (2 Cor 5:20).

¹ Michael Williams, *How To Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.43.

Hook Questions:²

1. Are the things you are relying on for fulfillment only leaving you empty instead? Do you really believe that other people would know how to meet your deepest needs and desires better than the one who created you? Isn't it time for you to choose fullness over emptiness?
2. Is your Christ-card maxed out? Are you cashing in on all the fulness of life in Christ? Do you know the contentment that God wants for you whatever your circumstances may be? How could you raise your credit limit?
3. What does it mean to be Christ's ambassador? What does an ambassador do? Do you speak to others in the King's name and authority or in your own? How does your worshipping community work together to make the good news known?
4. How could you be an agent of God's deliverance in the place where he has put you? What are the ways you could make the good news known to those who are perishing? How far are you willing to go to be used by God to bring about the deliverance of his people?

² Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens* (Zondervan, 2012), p.44 & 68.