

Subject: God's Providence in a Mother's Life

Scripture: Ruth 1:1-22

One of the most comforting truths in the Bible is the providence of God. Providence means that God is working in all the events, circumstances, and details of life for His glory and for the ultimate good of His people. Two great verses describe this truth of God's providence, one in the OT and one in the NT.

Genesis 50:20 *But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

God's providence is a theme that runs all the way from Genesis through Revelation. Two books of the Bible put God's providence on full display. Both of these books are named after women: the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther.

The world believes in good luck and bad luck. Someone put an article about a dog in the lost and found section of a local newspaper. It said: "LOST DOG—brown hair with several bald spots; right leg broken in car accident; left hip hurt; right eye missing, one ear bitten off in a dog fight; answers to the name Lucky."

Scripture teaches no such thing as good luck and bad luck. It teaches us about God's providence. In fact, God's providence is so obvious in the Bible that the word providence was once used as a name for God Himself. For example, listen to this statement by W. J. Townsend.

"The vastness of the sway of Providence cannot be imagined. It ranges from the archangel to the microbe, from the highest heavens to the humblest anthill; nothing is too large for His grasp, nothing is small enough to elude His notice." - W. J. Townsend

As the story of Ruth unfolds we see many links in God's providential plan.

1. THE FAMINE (vs. 1-2)

This was already a tough time to be living (vs. 1, in the days when the judges ruled). It was the dark days of Israel's history, a time of rebellion and immorality, summed up in the words of Judges 21:25.

Judges 21:25 *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

But now there was a famine. Hard times got even harder. Like many problems we face in life, this famine was unexpected, unwanted, and unpleasant. Ironically, this family lived in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread," but now there is no bread, so Elimelech took his family and moved to Moab. Through this unwanted, unexpected famine God set in motion His plan for a family. God's providence often involves trouble.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

(NLT) Enjoy prosperity while you can. But when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. That way you will realize that nothing is certain in this life.

2. THE FUNERALS (vs. 3-5)

The family went to Moab to escape the famine and stay alive, but death came anyway. The family went to Moab with the hope they would return when the famine was over, but it didn't turn out like they planned. Elimelech died, and in the meantime, his two sons married and they died, leaving wife Naomi as a widow and mother who lost her two sons. She probably wondered, why did God let all this happen? Death shouldn't be a surprise, but it usually is. We're never fully prepared for it. And yet God makes it clear that all of us will die.

Hebrews 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

We don't know where or when or how we may die, but we know that we will die. Death is an appointment we must keep. When death came to this family, it was another step in God's providential plan.

3. THE FAREWELL OF NAOMI (vs. 6-14)

Naomi learns that the famine is over and she decides to return to Bethlehem. This is a very touching part of the story. Naomi encouraged her two daughters-in-law to return to their homes in Moab and she speaks words of God's blessing on them (vs. 9) and tries to convince them to go on with their lives and find husbands to care for them. It will be impossible for her to have more sons and even if she could they would not wait until they were grown. Apparently Naomi loves her daughters-in-law and they love her.

4. THE FAITH OF RUTH (vs. 15-18)

This is a turning point in the story. Orpah turned back and went home, but Ruth was determined to stick with Naomi and, even better, she was converted to the one true God. Ruth made one of the greatest statements of faith in the Bible (vs. 16-17). Ruth decided to give up her people and her false gods to be with Naomi and her people and her God. How would Ruth have known Naomi and her God if it had not been for the famine? How would she have come to live in Bethlehem had it not been for the death of her husband and Naomi's decision to return home?

5. THE FRUSTRATION OF NAOMI (vs. 19-21)

When Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, it was big news. But the years had taken a toll on Naomi, and people wondered is this really Naomi? She said, "Don't call me Naomi (pleasantness), but call me Mara (bitterness)." She called God the Almighty (Heb. *Shaddai*). She left Bethlehem full, and she came home empty, and she knew that God was in control of everything that happened (vs. 19-21).

6. THE FIELD OF BOAZ (1:22—2:3)

It was the right time, the beginning of barley harvest (1:22), and it was the right place, Ruth went out to glean in the field of Boaz. He was a near relative, a wealthy man, and a gracious and kind man. Ruth went out to glean (pick up the leftovers) in the field, and God led her to the right field. Ruth and Naomi were weak; Boaz was strong. Ruth and Naomi were poor; Boaz was rich; Ruth and Naomi were needy; Boaz was generous and kind.

7. THE FAMILY LINE OF DAVID (4:13-17)

God's providence brought Naomi from Bethlehem to Moab, and then providence brought Naomi and Ruth from Moab to Bethlehem. Providence then brought Ruth to the field of Boaz and then providence brought Ruth and Boaz together in marriage. Then providence brought a baby to their home, a little boy named Obed who was the grandfather of David.

God's providence has brought you here today, and God will provide for all your needs. The most important thing is to know Him as your God, your Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. You can only know Him when you repent of your sins and trust Him as your Savior and Lord.