

# I Will Redeem You

## An Expository Journey Through the Book of Ruth

### Ruth 1:1-22

#### 1 The Almighty Has Dealt Very Bitterly with Me

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July 16, 2017

#### Ruth 1:1-22

**1** Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

**2** The name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

**3** Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.

**4** They took for themselves Moabite women *as* wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.

**5** Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

**6** Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food.

**7** So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

**8** And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

**9** "May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

**10** And they said to her, "*No*, but we will surely return with you to your people."

**11** But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

**12** "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

**13** would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

**14** And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

**15** Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

**16** But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.

**17** "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me."

**18** When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

**19** So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

**20** She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

**21** "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

**22** So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

To the Glory of God

What do you *do* when the Almighty deals very bitterly with you? How do you *respond* to unimaginable sorrow and tragedy? What are your thoughts when all your plans are ruined? What is your disposition toward God when you suffer seemingly unending afflictions? Why would God create a famine among His Own people, in the Land that He gave to them? And why would that famine be so great that the only food is in the land of the unbelievers? Where is the sovereign Lord when your husband abandons his faith and "goes over" to the pagans? What do you do when, after he leaves the faith, he suddenly dies? How

are you to think about God and His Glory and His absolute control over every aspect of the Universe when your two sons fall in love with, and then marry unbelievers? And what do you do when, in that situation of sin and compromise and unbelief, they both die? Naomi says in verses 20-21:

**20... "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**

**21 "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

Here, Naomi has assigned God to be the Cause of her bitterness and affliction. And the fact that she talks about God this way tells me several things about her:

- ✓ She believes that God is absolutely Sovereign over everything- all the time.
- ✓ She believes that nothing can exist without God.

Now some might say that Naomi was simply overcome by her grief, that these words were nothing more than the "ramblings" of a woman near the end of her endurance. But, when we look at God's Word, we see that Naomi agrees with Job, when he said:

**Job 2:10b**

**... Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**

and

**Job 1:21b**

**... The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away...**

Now people like Benny Hinn have a lot of negative things to say about these statements by Job, but the writer of the **Book of Job** gives us an editorial comment about what these statements mean and what they don't mean when, on two different occasions, he wrote:

**Job 1:22**

**Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.**

and

**Job 2:10**

**In all this Job did not sin with his lips.**

Now this tells us two things:

1. Job crediting God with being the Source of all his troubles was *not* sinful.
2. Job crediting God as being the Source of all his troubles was *not* "blaming God".

Now how could that be? How could the writer of the **Book of Job** say that what sure *looks* like an accusation against God is really *not* an accusation against God? How could the writer say that Job crediting God as being the Source of, not only his blessings, but also his troubles, *not* be sin?

I would suggest to you that the overwhelming majority of the leadership of the modern Church would have gone to Brother Job's house to counsel him, and maybe even rebuke him, because in their mind Job was, in fact, sinning, when he could think that the one, true, and living God would ever bring what we would call "evil" upon anyone. So, why did the writer say this? And is this true? And the answer lies in what Job said at the *end* of one of his statements. After Job said:

**... The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away...**

... he followed that statement with this one:

**... Blessed be the name of the Lord.**

And this *last* statement shows us that Job was *not* blaming God at all. He was not assigning "blame" so that he could find fault or so he would be justified in railing out against God as though God is unfair or mean or cruel.

This statement means that Job was saying that, not only did God do what had happened to Job, but that God was Right to do what He did. Job was acknowledging that God was not simply powerful enough to bring adversity to him, but that God was Good to do so. In other words, Job thought it was *correct* and *proper* and fully in accord with God's Glory and God's Will and God's Purposes, and his own Salvation that God had sovereignly brought all of the "adversities" upon him.

And lest you think that I am out of line here, the writer of the **Book of Job** agrees with my conclusion, because this is what he called all of the things that God had sovereignly brought upon Job in **Job 42:11**:

**Then all his brothers and all his sisters and all who had known him before came to him, and they ate bread with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversities that the Lord had brought on him.**

So, even though Naomi is very much out of step with many in the modern Church in equating God as being the Source, and the Cause, and the Initiator of her "bitterness", she was *not* out of line with God or His Word. Naomi agrees with Job. And Job agrees with God's Word. And God's Word is in perfect harmony with God and His Will and His Purposes.

So, my question is why is that kind of statement so out of sorts with the prevailing sentiment among the people of God in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Why is it that what Naomi says here in the first Chapter of Ruth is so vastly *different* from what many are being taught about the Source and the Cause and the Initiation of things like "Sorrow" and "Suffering" and "Tragedy" and "Afflictions"?

I will tell you that it is because over the last several years, the people of the visible Church have lost sight of what the Bible actually teaches about these difficult issues. And that would be bad enough, that God's people no longer know what God has said about a very important issue. But it gets even worse, because not only do far too many people simply not know (or care) what God has said, *infallibly*, in Scripture about things like "Pain" and "Sorrow" and "Suffering" and "Anguish", but they have gone about to make up their *own* logic, and their *own* doctrines, and their *own* formulas to try to explain these things.

In other words, much of what is taught and believed about these very serious issues in the modern Church are not only *not* true, they are actually in *contradiction* to what the Bible does teach. And so, there is a literal sea of people who say they believe that God's Word is true, who have no idea why God has brought suffering into their lives. And so, they flounder, trying to make sense of what is happening in their lives, using the false and man-made teachings as their guide, while the Glory and the Answer in God's Word remains silent and unknown to them.

Naomi is bold to say that it was God, Who had brought her back "empty". And both Naomi and Job said that it was God Who had "afflicted" them. And so, I seek to delve deeply into this inspired Old Testament Book, *not* so that we may come to agree with Naomi or Job, but so we may come into agreement with God, about things like "Sorrow" and "Tragedy" and "Pain" and "Misery" and "Afflictions" and "Suffering" and "Bitterness".

So, what do you do when afflictions from God come your way? Well, if you're Job, you *don't* blame God and you *don't* sin and you *do* bless the Lord. And, if you're Naomi, you *yield* yourself to the afflictions that God has sovereignly brought your way. You *trust* that even though you don't know what God is doing, you are confident that God knows what God is doing, and that God is Good. And so, you cooperate in the afflictions and in your bitterness so that God's Will can be done in the earth and the Messiah can be born.

Now several months ago, *before* we completed our expositional "journey" through the **Gospel of Luke**, the Lord began to burden my heart to carefully examine the Old Testament **Book of Ruth**. So, beginning this morning, we will go through all eighty-five verses contained in four Chapters in what many have called "*the* single greatest example of Hebrew literature" ever produced.

Now according to Jewish tradition, the events of the **Book of Ruth** were handed down by "word of mouth" through several generations, until the Prophet Samuel was moved along by God the Holy Spirit to pen it down. And I know of nothing that would allow me to challenge that, and so, that is what I believe as well.

Now the first part of verse 1 gives us insight into *when* the events of this Book took place. Verse 1 begins by saying:

**Now it came about in the days when the judges governed ...**

So, the time frame of this Book is at some point *after* the Jews began to settle in the Promised Land. And the *first* "Government" that God gave His people was a system based on a *plurality* of Judges who would govern the people for about 400 years, according to the Law of God that He had given to Moses (1500BC-1100BC).

So, at this point, Israel was *unique* among the nations of the world in that they had no king. They had no Congress or Parliament. They had no legislative or executive branches of Government. They had no elections. Nobody ran for office and nobody voted. The nation of Israel was governed by the Judges.

Now the Book of Ruth comes immediately after the Book of Judges in our English Bibles, and you can see from the very last verse in Judges what sort of period it was:

### **Judges 21:25**

**In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.**

So, it was a very dark time in Israel. The people would sin, and God would raise up enemies against them to bring them to a place of repentance, and the people would then cry to God for help, and God would mercifully raise up a Judge to deliver them. And this process repeated itself over and over and over again for about 400 years.

Again and again the people rebelled, and from all outward appearances, God's Will and God's Purposes for Righteousness and Glory in Israel had been utterly defeated, that God's Plan for His people had been thwarted. And so, what the **Book of Ruth** does for us is to introduce us to something called the "Hidden Work of God" during even the worst of times.

**Ruth** teaches us that, God's Determination to get Himself Glory and to save all whom He has chosen to save from before the foundation of the world cannot be stopped or negated by the evil decisions of wicked men. **The Book of Ruth** teaches us that God is effectively and sovereignly working, even in our sorrows and in our tragedies and in our pain and suffering, to accomplish *everything* that He has determined to do.

Now, the word that was used for many years to describe this "hidden" Work of God, which is all that God is doing *behind* the scenes, unseen and unknown to us, was "Providence". You see, God is never still. God is never silent. The man-made religion that teaches that once God created everything, He just stepped back and is now unengaged (and unconcerned) with us and the Universe, isn't Christianity, it is the false religion of "Deism".

The 66 Books of the Holy Bible reveals a God Who is *intimately* involved and concerned with us and with what He created. One of the main differences with the God of Scripture and other false and man-made "gods" of the barbarians and pagans is that God not only pays attention to nations and kings and those powerful people who exert great influence in the earth, but our God pays attention to the weakest among us, the helpless, and those that the rich and powerful; many times the passed over, like the unborn child, the widow woman, and the sick and the poor. The Almighty hears *their* cry and He moves Heaven and earth to answer their prayers.

So, the one, true, and living God, Who is revealed in the Bible, is therefore, very busy, *assuring* that what He has decreed in ages past will come to pass, *exactly* how and when He wills. He is *constantly* "moving", pushing and pulling, raising up and casting down, causing and allowing ten thousand different aspects all at once, of which we might only see a few.

And God does this not simply because He likes to keep secrets, but so that we will learn to trust in Who God has revealed Himself to be. So, what is hidden from us, what God is doing that is left unseen and unknown, is not revealed so that those who say they love Him will not sin or blame Him when what He is doing conflicts with their *own* will and plans, but they will bless the Lord, even in their grief.

Let your eyes dwell on the last seven verses of the last Chapter for just a moment. There, the Prophet Samuel writes:

**Ruth 4:16-22**

**16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse.**

**17 The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.**

**18 Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron,**



**19 and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab,  
20 and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon,  
21 and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed,  
22 and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.**

The child born to Ruth and Boaz during the period of the Judges is Obed. And Obed becomes the father of Jesse, and Jesse becomes the father of David, who led Israel to her greatest heights of glory, and from whose loins the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was born. Now, remember, this is the *same* Naomi that we see here in Chapter 1 that said:

**20... "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**

**21 "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

Now this is not a fairy story where things just happened to work out and "they all lived happily ever after". The Book of Ruth is true, it is real, not some myth or children's story book. These events really happened and Naomi was really in the depths of her grief, and God was really working sovereignly and providentially to cause His Will to come to pass.

So, what we should all get out of this is that the "hidden Work" of God, the *Providence* of God, was at work, even in Naomi's agony. So, one of the main messages of this little Book is that God is *always* very busy at work, even in the worst of times. And God is so Big, so Powerful, so Invincible, and so Good, that even through the sins and faults and failures of His people, He can and He does *unendingly* labor for their Good.

And that illustrates a Divine Principle that is absolute and that never wavers:

The final testimony of genuine believers is not one of defeat or tragedy  
it is a testimony of victory and glory

All of God's Wrath that was against us because of our sins has been forever removed by and through the Person of Jesus Christ and

His finished Work. And so, the Promise of God to all genuine believers is this:

### **Romans 8:28**

**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.**

Now this is not a Promise from God that teaches that you will *always* recognize everything that God either sovereignly *causes* or *allows* to come into your life as being "Good". No, this Promise is that God will be faithful to take those things that we call "Evil" and will work them together with those things that we call "Good" to produce *in* us and *through* us an infinitely *greater* Good, an *eternal* Good, a *lasting* Good, which is the Glory of God and ultimately our eternal Joy in Him.

And so, God was at work on a *national* level with the entire nation of Israel. But, as you go through the **Book of Ruth**, you will see that it is *also* true that God was very busy *providentially*, at the lowest *personal* level, to the most insignificant person in the room.

So, even though God's Work on our behalf to save us and to keep us saved and to make us holy is mostly hidden to us, God is faithfully busy, even in the worst of times. *Especially* in the worst of times. So, what is ironic about the Ways of God is that when we think God is the *farthest* away, or even that He has turned against us, the Scriptures are clear. It is during *those* times that God is very busy at work, making *sure* that His Will and Word are coming to pass *exactly* as He has said, and that the fullest expression of Joy and eternal Happiness will be ours. So, let us look closely at the first Chapter to see if this is true.

### **Ruth 1:1-5**

**1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.**

**2 The name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.**

**3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.**

**4 They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.**

**5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.**

Here we see the deep and profound misery of Naomi. Verse 1 says that there was a terrible famine in Judah where Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, lived. And this Jewish family is familiar with Who *causes* famines. They know that God is Sovereign and causes famines. As good Jews, they knew what Moses wrote in **Leviticus 26:3-4**:

**3 'If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out,**

**4 then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit.**

... so, when the rains are withheld, it is the hard Hand of God.

Now as a result of the famine, this Jewish family makes a hard decision: in order to survive, they have to leave the Land that God gave to them and live in Moab, a pagan land with foreign gods (**Judges 10:6**). Now this was playing with fire. God had called His people to be separate from the surrounding lands. So, when Elimelech decided to “go to Moab”, it was a form of unbelief and a traitorous act against his own people.

So, there had to be second guessing going on between them the whole way. But when Naomi's husband dies, what is the only conclusion that a Jewish woman could come to? Obviously, God was not pleased with her husband's choice, and now this widow woman, not only struggled with the fact that she was now in a pagan land, but she was also face with the stigma that God had judged her husband. So, shame, fear, and rejection was now *added* to the curse of the famine. So, to Naomi, everything is just getting worse. Surely nothing else could happen that was as bad as this.

But then her two sons, who had been raised to be faithful Jews, follow in the unbelief of their father, and take Moabite women to be their wives. So, “sons of the Law” were now married to pagans. Believers in the one, true, and living God, who were called to be holy

and distinct from the other nations of the world, were now *unequally* yoked together with unbelievers! The grief that Naomi must have experienced over this act of betrayal must have been enormous.

So, we see one tragedy piled on another to a chosen woman of God. One anguish added to the next. When will it ever stop? Why doesn't God do something? And where is God, anyway? Why has He allowed this to happen? What eternal Good could possibly come forth from all this evil? Naomi could only come to one conclusion: Surely God is angry with her and is judging her.

And just about that time when Naomi is about as low as a human being can go, verse 5 says that both of her two sons suddenly died. Now, there is no mention here of a war or violence, so all we can assume is that both of these men died suddenly from what we would call "natural causes". But to Naomi, it surely looked like Divine Judgment.

So, let's see what Naomi was into: First there was a famine (that by itself would indicate that God is angry), which precipitated a Jew moving his family to a pagan land (that Naomi would have thought was wrong), and then her husband suddenly dies (fulfilling Naomi's fear). So, now this widow woman sees her two sons, who had been raised to trust in God, marry unbelievers, idol worshippers. And then they suddenly die (verifying that God was against her). So, Naomi is left widowed and childless, with two pagan daughters-in-law, no money, in a pagan land. So, she does the only thing she knows to do, return back to the Land that God gave the Jews. And now you can understand why, when people who knew her, called her by her name, she said:

**20... "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**

**21 "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

Now the name "Naomi" comes from a Hebrew word that means: *pleasantness or amiable*. But "Mara" comes from an Aramaic root and means: *bitterness*. Now look what happened next:

### **Ruth 1:6-13**

**6** Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food.

**7** So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

**8** And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

**9** "May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

**10** And they said to her, "*No*, but we will surely return with you to your people."

**11** But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

**12** "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

**13** would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

Now these three women either got all the way back into Israel, or else they went part of the way back. But, at some point, Naomi tries her best to get her two daughters-in-law to go back to Moab. And Samuel spends a lot of time writing about this, and so, it is significant. And I see at least three reasons why Naomi spent so much time trying to persuade them to go back:

1. This scene emphasizes the depth of Naomi's grief.
2. This scene introduces a Jewish custom that is central to what God is doing *Providentially*.
3. This scene illustrates the sovereign Work of God in Ruth.

### **1. This Scene Emphasizes the Depth of Naomi's Grief**

#### **Ruth 1:11-13**

**11 But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"**

**12 "Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,**

**13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."**

In other words, Naomi has nothing to offer these women. So, *her* condition is actually *worse* than theirs. If they do what is right and try to be faithful to her and to the name of their husbands, they will find nothing but pain, because God is obviously working *against* her. So, Naomi reaches a conclusion at the end of verse 13,

**No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.**

In other words, "*Don't come with me because God is against me. If you stick with me, your life will become as bitter as mine*".

Now we can certainly have compassion on Naomi. And God has moved in some lives that are here this morning in such a way that you may have reached a similar conclusion as Naomi. But the **Book of Ruth** is in the Canon of Scripture to tell all of us that *whatever* was going on in Naomi's life to bring her to this conclusion, her conclusion was wrong. It wasn't true.

God was *not* working against Naomi at all. As terrible as things looked at this moment, the rest of this Book tells us that God was *faithfully* working, unseen by Naomi. So, God was not *judging* Naomi at all. He was *secretly, providentially*, very busy bringing Naomi and her pagan daughter-in-law to the exact place where, not only would God's Will come to pass, but where they both would find the fullness of Joy!

**2. This Scene Introduces a Jewish Custom that is Central to What God is Doing *Providentially***

Back in that day, when an Israelite husband died, his brother or his nearest relative was to marry the widow and continue the brother's name.

### **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**

**5** "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be *married* outside *the family* to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

**6** "It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

**7** "But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.'

**8** "Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And *if* he persists and says, 'I do not desire to take her,'

**9** then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, 'Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.'

**10** "In Israel his name shall be called, 'The house of him whose sandal is removed.'

... and here in **Ruth 1:11**, Naomi is referring to this custom when she says she has no sons to marry Ruth and Orpah. So, to Naomi, it is hopeless for Ruth and Orpah to remain committed to her husband's family. Evidently, Naomi has forgotten that there is *another* relative, named Boaz, who might perform the "duty" of her husband's brother.

Now this illustrates how unqualified we are to determine what God may or may not be doing in any given situation. Our ability to see, and to reason, and to determine reality is greatly *hindered* by our limited vision. At best, we see only in the "here and now", and *that* very vaguely. But we are not able to look into the future at all. And we have mostly forgotten the past. And so, our vision, and therefore, our ability to determine reality is not reliable. But the Bible reveals that God is "Omniscient", and He can see the past, present, and future all at once.

So, when we assess our own situation and with this limited vision, come to the conclusion that God has acted contrary to His Will, or that

He has forgotten us, or that He is determined to destroy us rather than bring us to a place of repentance and hope, it is at *that* moment when we should recognize that our assessment of our situation is wrong, and return to what we know to be true, the Word of God.

Now like I said, it is *understandable* that trials and afflictions and anguish attack our ability to hope in God. But that is precisely *why* God has been so Good to give us the precious gift of His Word. When we read inerrant Scripture, we are looking at God's Will. And as Divine Truth penetrates our eyes and goes into our minds, we are able to "stand in God's Shoes", so to speak, and look at our situation, as God sees it, and *not* how our own limited vision describes it.

Understanding God's revealed Will in Scripture allows us to use what the Puritans called "The Logic of Scripture", rather than flawed and fallen human logic. And this builds our faith and gives us the Power that we need to trust in God. The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 10:17**:

**So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.**

"Hearing" eternal and unchanging Truth allows us to glimpse "behind the veil" and "see" what God is doing through His "hidden Work". Now Scriptures doesn't tell us all the details of our particular situation, but it gives us the basic understanding of what God is doing, *providentially*. And this is never more useful to us than when things look their worst.

When circumstances and situations compel us to doubt God, we come to the wrong conclusion that by allowing evil to touch us, this means that God is against us, rather than meaning that He is "working" that evil together with everything else so that His Will and our Joy can become real. The result is that we become so bitter, because we can't see the rays of light peeping out around the clouds.

We must remember that even though it was God Who sovereignly *caused* the famine in the first place, it was also God Who broke the famine and opened the way home for Naomi. And even though it was God Who took her husband and children, it was also God Who providentially preserved a kinsman to continue Naomi's line. And even though God *allowed* her son to marry a pagan, it was God Who dealt with Ruth's heart so that she would stay faithful to Naomi.



So, yes, God allowed evil to touch Naomi. But that's not *all* God did. He also *continued* to "work", *in* the evil, *sovereignly, hidden, providentially*, to guarantee that His Will and Naomi's Joy would come to pass. So, Naomi's bitterness, her wrong response to all that God had allowed, her anguish, *created* by God's hard Providence, made her *unable* to see His abounding Mercy that was at work in her life. But God was merciful. He didn't leave Naomi like that. God *continued* to work.

### **3. This Scene Illustrates the Sovereign Work of God in Ruth**

The *third* reason for verses 8–13 is to make Ruth's faithfulness appear as it really was, a breathtaking example of God's Grace and Mercy. We need to understand that Ruth's faithfulness did not bring her any glory, because Ruth was nothing but a pagan, unbelieving sinner. When God moved *providentially* in Naomi, through the harshness of famine, unbelief, compromise, death, and bitterness, He was also moving in a pagan woman of Moab to save her and use her to help bring about the Birth of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, who would not only rescue Naomi and Ruth from God's Wrath against their sins, but all who call on His Name.

Had Ruth never met Naomi, she would have died in her sins. But the only reason Ruth met her was because God caused great hardship to come to afflict Naomi. So, before He made the world, God chose to "set His Love" upon *both* of these women, one a Jew and the other a pagan. And God literally spared nothing to cause *both* to be saved, and for a former idol worshipper to become the great grandmother of King David, out of whose loins would come the Savior of the world.

Ruth's faithfulness was a result of God sovereignly, quietly *intervening* in her life, bringing about events to *interrupt* her plans, and *violate* her will. God moved *decisively* to change her location and her disposition, so that she would be saved and become the woman that God called her to be.

So, what seems to be so hard and so terrible, and even wrong in the *beginning* served to be so good and so wonderful and so right at the end. So, when we ask this question: *Why did God allow all this evil to come to Naomi?* How should we answer? The answer is: *So, the Glory*

*of God's Grace could be displayed through the saving of all of God's elect through Jesus Christ, the Son of David.*

Now the fact that Ruth stayed with Naomi is all the more amazing when you consider Naomi's grim description of what her future would be like. Ruth stays with her *in spite of* an apparently hopeless future of widowhood and childlessness. Naomi painted the future very black and Ruth took her hand and walked into that blackness it with her. Listen to her response:

**Ruth 1:16-17**

**16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.**

**17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me."**

Now the longer you ponder these words, the more amazing they become. Ruth's commitment to her destitute mother-in-law is simply astonishing. First, it means leaving her own family and land. Second, it means, as far as she knows, a life of widowhood and childlessness, because Naomi has no man to give, and if she married a non-relative, her commitment to Naomi's family would be lost. Third, it means going to an unknown land with a new people and new customs and new language. Fourth, it was a commitment even more radical than marriage:

**Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried...**

... in other words, Ruth will never return home, even when Naomi dies. But the most amazing commitment of all is this:

**Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God.**

Now keep in mind that Naomi has just said in verse 13:

**the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me**

... so, Naomi's experience with God was nothing but bitterness. And so, the only thing Ruth knew about Naomi's God was that He had treated Naomi very harshly. As far as the natural eye was concerned, things looked much better in Moab with their pagan gods than in Israel with the God of Heaven. Yet, in spite of this, Ruth *categorically* rejects her entire religious heritage and makes the God of Israel her God.

And this kind of response is not rational. It is simply not rational for people to choose in contradiction to their own best interests. So, what we have here is a sovereign *intervening* by God in Ruth to convict her of sin and to save her soul. And so, Ruth's awareness of her own sinfulness caused her to trust in God, even though on the surface it looked like her life would get measurably worse. This is a picture of true repentance. False repentance causes someone to come to Jesus so that their lives on earth can become measurably better. So false repentance is people "coming to Jesus" that is entirely *self-centered*. It is *using* Jesus to get out of Him what will benefit them. And that is entirely a work of human ingenuity. But true repentance is a gift from God. And it is a genuine brokenness over our sin, and a willingness to follow and obey, even when our lives on earth get measurably worse. And that is solely a Work of God's Spirit.

And so, in this Book, the Prophet Samuel is giving us a picture of God's ideal woman. Faith in God that sees beyond present bitter setbacks. Freedom from the securities and comforts of this present, evil world. Courage to venture into the unknown and the strange. Radical commitment in the relationships appointed by God. O, that God would raise up that kind of woman in the Covenant of Peace Church!

So, Ruth and Naomi return together to Bethlehem of Judah. And it was then that we read verses 20-21:

**20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.**

**21 "I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**

So, what do you make of Naomi's theology? Personally, I would much rather that people see things like Naomi does than in the shallow, sentimental way that many people in the evangelical world view God in

our day. Because, in spite of her grief, Naomi is unshaken and sure about three things:

1. God exists
2. God is absolutely Sovereign
3. God has afflicted her

Now the problem with Naomi is that she has forgotten the story of Joseph who also went into a foreign country. He was sold as a slave. He was framed by an adulteress and put in prison. He had every reason to say, with Naomi, "*The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.*"

But Joseph kept his faith and trust in God. And the key lesson for Joseph is in **Genesis 50:20**:

**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.**

Naomi is correct to believe in a Sovereign, Almighty God, Who governs the affairs of nations and families, and gives each day its part of pain and pleasure. But she is *incomplete* and *inconsistent* in her view and needs to open her eyes to the signs of God's merciful Purposes in and through the hardships. Because it was God who took *away* the famine and opened a way home. And please notice the delicate touch of hope at the end of verse 22.

**And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.**

If Naomi could only see what this is going to mean. Not only that, Naomi needs to open her eyes to Ruth. What a gift! What a blessing! Yet, as she and Ruth stand before the people of Bethlehem, Naomi says in verse 21:

**The Lord has brought me back empty.**

Not so, Naomi! You are so weary with the night of adversity that you can't see the dawn of rejoicing. What would she say if she could see that in Ruth she would gain a man-child, and that this man-child would be the grandfather of the greatest king of Israel, and that this king of

Israel would foreshadow the King of kings, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Universe? I think she would agree with William Cowper and say:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His Grace;  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling Face.

So, I come to at least four conclusions in this first Chapter:

### 1. God's Sovereign Rule

God the Almighty reigns in all the affairs of men. He rules the nations (**Daniel 2:21**) and He rules families. His Providence extends from the U.S. Congress to your kitchen. So, let us strive to emulate the women of faith in the Old Testament. Whatever else they doubted, they never doubted that God was sovereignly in control of every part of their lives, and that none could stay His Hand or thwart His Purposes (**Daniel 4:35**). God gives rain and He takes rain. He gives life and He takes life. In Him we live and move and have our being. Nothing, from a toothpick to Mount Everest, is rightly understood except in relation to God. He is the all-encompassing, all-pervading Reality of the Universe. Naomi was right, and we should join her in this conviction. God the Almighty reigns in all the affairs of men.

### 2. God's Mysterious Providence

God's Providence is sometimes very hard. God *had* dealt bitterly with Naomi, at least in the short run it could only feel like bitterness. Perhaps someone will say: it was all owing to the sin of going to Moab and marrying foreign wives. Maybe so. But, not necessarily. **Psalm 34:19** says:

**Many are the afflictions of the *righteous*, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.**

Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament promises that believers will escape affliction in this life. But let's suppose Naomi's calamity was owing to her disobedience. That only makes this Story *doubly* encouraging, because it shows that God is willing and able to

cause His Will to triumph, even in sin. If Ruth was brought into God's Will by sin, it is doubly astonishing that she is made the grandmother of David and ancestor of Jesus Christ. So, don't ever think that the sin of your past means there is no hope for your future.

### 3. God's Good Purposes

That leads to the third lesson. Not only does God reign in all the affairs of men, and not only is His Providence sometimes hard, but in *all His hidden Work, His Purposes are for the ultimate and eternal Good of the Glory of God and the happiness of His people*. Who would have imagined that in the worst of all times, the period of the Judges, that God was quietly moving in the tragedies of a single family to prepare the way for the greatest king of Israel?

But not only that, He was very busy working to fill Naomi and Ruth and Boaz and their friends with great Joy. If *anything* has come your way to make your future look hopeless, learn from Naomi and Ruth that God is right now at work for you, to give you a future and a hope. So, trust Him. Wait patiently on the Lord. The ominous clouds of rain are full of Mercy, and they are promised by a God Who cannot lie to break upon you with blessings on your head.

### 4. Freedom Like Ruth's

Finally, we learn that *if you trust the sovereign Goodness and Mercy of God to pursue you all the days of your life, then you are free like Ruth*. If God calls, you can leave family, you can leave your job, and you can make radical commitments and undertake new ventures. Or you can find the freedom and courage and strength to keep a commitment you have already made. When you believe in the Sovereignty of God and know that He loves to work mightily for those who trust Him, it gives a freedom and joy that can't be shaken by hard times.

The **Book of Ruth** gives us a glimpse into the "hidden Work" of God during the worst of times. And so, like all the other Scriptures, as Paul says (**Romans 15:4, 13**), this Book was written so that we might abound in hope.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.