

Charles Spurgeon on trials and Providence, *"There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass, one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not."* None of us know what shall come nor the depths of difficulties that shall arise. When you go through a trial, the sovereignty of God in the pillow on which you lay your head.

1. The Circumstances of Their Time (Vs. 1-2)

- (a) It was the time when "the judges judged."
- (b) Jethro, who was Moses' father-in-law, first suggested he use judges to help judge matters among the people.
- (c) The time period was at times unstable and chaotic, but the lack of mention of this indicates a period of peace during Ruth.
- (d) There was a famine in the land. Famines were not uncommon in Israel.
- (e) Elimelech sojourned with his wife and sons to the land of Moab (a son of Lot where his descendants dwelled).

2. The Suffering and Grief (Vs. 3)

- (a) Family tragedy
- (b) She was left with her two sons.
- (c) A famine has driven them to Moab, and now the death of the leader and provider of the family.

3. Moabite Wives and Joy and More Grief (Vs. 4-6)

- (a) Israel was commanded not to intermarry, and this was not because of ethnic reasons, but spiritual. Moabites were forbidden from entering the assembly of the Lord (for 10 generations) because of their mistreatment of Israel during the time of wandering.
- (b) Now the death of her sons and her husband (ten years ago) left her in a dire situation. For a woman to be "left without" her husband and her sons was serious enough in her own community, but in another land, she would be in desperate straits.
- (c) A famine drove you away. Your husband and sons have died, and we don't have any information on her daughter-in-law's ability to bear children. It's a desperate and troublesome time.

4. A Return to Home (Vs. 7-13)

- (a) On the road, Naomi realized what difficulties may come. She blessed them and said for them to return to their mother's home where they would likely be remarried.
- (b) May you find rest (in the comfort and security of a husband) as the modern culture today destroys marriage. You can see how God designed it and the great benefits of it.
- (c) They pledged themselves to return to Judah with her, abandoning their families, friends, homeland, deities, and prospects for remarriage. It is remarkable devotion and says much of the character of Naomi.
- (d) Naomi points out the absurdity of them following her. She's old, can't have children, and if she did, would they wait?
- (e) Naomi's feeling of bitterness. But the true bitterness of Naomi's lot was that she believed the Lord was punishing her. Naomi offered no explanation as to why she thought God was her enemy. Perhaps she could not really understand the calamities that had struck her.

Application: Why did Naomi think God was her enemy? Typically, this was the assumption of the time. Bad things happen, and it's punishment from God. For us today, we have the whole of Scripture to see more so than Naomi did. I am reminded of John 9:1-3. *"As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, Rabbi, who*

sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind? Jesus answered, it was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Too often, we see the grief and trial and not the providence.

5. Hard Decisions (Vs. 14-22)

- (a) Orpah isn't criticized for returning home. She returned to "her gods," and nationality in the ancient Near East was closely tied to religion. For Orpah and Ruth, going back to their people included returning to the deities of that land. Conversely, for Ruth, the choice to follow Naomi is also the choice to worship Yahweh.
- (b) Her commitment to follow her and her God, Yahweh (vs. 16-17).
- (c) Naomi's response to her arrival at Bethlehem.
 - (i) Call me Mara "bitter." Naomi means "pleasant" vs. 2. Given her circumstances, she feels bitter is better than pleasant. And she has assumed that her circumstances are calamity brought on by God. Naomi felt God was her enemy, cf. Job 16:9 as he felt similar, *"His anger has torn me and hunted me down, He has gnashed at me with His teeth; my adversary glares at me."* Even Job felt this way. However, just as with Job, Naomi's tragedy was part of a larger series of events that would result in God's blessing.

Application: In God's providence, we don't see what He is orchestrating or working out in the midst of our circumstances. Truly, Romans 8:28 applies in our current plight. Furthermore, what we can't see doesn't mean He is punishing us, Psalm 115:3 *"But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."*

Naomi returned with the "Moabites," and foreigners were generally excluded from worship, often viewed as enemies and separate laws for them. Consider this: a Moabite woman would receive favor and be included in the lineage of David. We aren't enemies anymore in Christ.

Finally, consider the last vs. 22, *"And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."* Naomi left for Moab because of a famine; now, through grief and tragedy, the Lord has brought her back to a harvest. Whatever today is your circumstance, God is not without divine providence in doing so in your life.

I think we can say that the trials brought her to the harvest. If it wasn't for the trials she wouldn't have gone back to the harvest. Which would lead to a redeemer.