

Title: The Theology Of Naomi

Text: Ruth 1:6-13, 19-22

Main Idea: We must learn how to make sense of bitter providence and meet it with faith.

Division Statements:

1. God exists (vv. 8-9, 19-22).

it is plain that Naomi believes that God exists. Don't gloss over this fact, because it is often a temptation, especially of those who have undergone serious trials to simply throw up their hands, take up the mantle of the fool according to Psalm 14:1 and say, "If God truly existed, then none of these things would be happening to me." They take pain, tragedy and the existence of evil in the world and use that as an excuse for unbelief. Much to her credit, Naomi does not do this, in spite of her personal tragedy.

2. God's power is without limitation (vv. 8-9).

In the ancient near east it was commonly believed that gods were limited in their authority to a particular nation's borders and people. But here, Naomi assumes the authority of the God of Israel over all things, an authority that extends beyond the nation's borders and into the land and homes of the Moabite people who worshiped Chemosh.

Now that isn't so radical for a Jew, though it would be radical for a Moabite or a person from another nation at that time to think such a thing. But what is entirely radical for a Jew is the thought that God might actually look beyond the Jewish people to love and bless and care about the situation and future of these people who were definitely not Jews. Thus Naomi in her prayer tosses aside two common conventions of her day that were assumed to limit God's authority: geography and race.

3. In His power, God is capable of showing great favor and concern for the poorest and neediest of people (vv. 8-9).

Naomi hopes that the Lord will give "*Chesed*" – "deal kindly" in the NKJV – to these women. This is a key theological term throughout the entire Bible and definitely in the book of Ruth. It is a Hebrew word that cannot be translated with one English word, because it wraps up in itself all the positive attributes of God's love: faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty etc. In short, it refers to acts of devotion and lovingkindness that go above and beyond what is called for under the circumstances up to and including the application of special covenant blessings (e.g. Lev. 26:3-13; Deut. 28:1-14).

Naomi recognizes the acts of lovingkindness that Orpah and Ruth have given on behalf of the dead, her deceased husband and her to sons, and herself in verse 8. Her praise presents these two women as models of grace and she hopes that God will look on this and grant them “rest” (*natan*), security in the homes of new husbands. She wants them to be spared a life of insecurity, want and restlessness and desires that they enjoy peace, permanence and a deep satisfaction and sense of well-being in new homes. She evidently believes that God may very well concern Himself with these two poor needy Moabite widows and actually do such a thing.

4. In His power, God is almighty and exercises sovereign providence over all things (vv. 13, 20-21).

Naomi calls God “Almighty” twice, *Shadai*. And in His almightiness God is sovereignly responsible for and in total control of all things. It is not a matter of chance. It is not simply bad luck. It is the “hand of the Lord” verse 13 and the “testimony” of the Lord, His word, verse 21 that has brought these things to pass.

What is providence? The doctrine of God’s providence has to do with His *preservation*, His *concurrence* and His *government* over all creation. It is so detailed that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His will (Matt. 10:29) and even a hairs of your head are numbered by Him (Matt. 10:30). Thus God rightly has power and authority over all things, even calamity such as Naomi’s. Isaiah 45:7, “I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these *things*.” Lamentations 3:38, “*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That woe and well-being proceed?*” Ephesians 1:11, “... according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will ...”

5. In His power, God’s sovereign providence can be very hard on even His children (vv. 20-21).

Naomi accuses God of having dealt very bitterly with her and says that the Lord has done three things to her in these verses: 1) He has brought her back home empty; 2) He has “testified against” her; and, 3) He has “afflicted” her.

All of these things are true. The problem is that Naomi’s theology stops short of truly understanding the character of God. She’s right in her thinking as far as it goes, but her thinking doesn’t go far enough. She doesn’t ask the helpful questions, “What is God’s motive in afflicting me? Why has God brought me into this bitterness?” She doesn’t ask, “What makes the difference God’s blessing and affliction?” Or more importantly, “Are these two always distinct or even easy to see with human eyes? Is it possible that bitter providence could actually become great favor for the children of God?”

Asking these questions and looking beyond the surface of her circumstances with

the eyes of faith, **this** is what makes Naomi fundamentally different from Joseph, Isaiah, Paul, James, or even Ruth, herself, who willingly embraced hardship and defied the advice of her grieving mother-in-law so that she might take refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, the very God who had brought this hardship to pass.

6. In His power, God will redeem all things, including the hardship He has ordained, to work grace and kindness toward those who take refuge in Him.

This is the critical truth that is missing from Naomi's otherwise excellent theology. It is helpful here to consider statements from those who endured bitter providence: Joseph in Genesis 50:19-20); Isaiah: [Jesus Speaking] in Is. 61:1-3; Paul in Rom. 8:28 & 2 Cor. 12:9-10; James in James 5:11; etc.

Bridging From Text To Sermon

Textual Idea: The text unfolds Naomi's understanding about the nature of God and her interpretation of her own tragedy

Sermon Proposition: We must learn how to make sense of bitter providence and meet it with faith.

Interrogative: How did Naomi interpret the bitter providence of her own life?

Transition: The text reveals five specific beliefs of Naomi regarding God and His working, and the absence of one more very important one.

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