

# Three Principles of Providence

## Ruth 1-4

**CONTEXT:** We are in a series called, "Storyline" that is tracking the unfolding story of God from creation to culmination through the 66 books of the bible. The purpose is to recognize that to rightly understand any story you have to see how and where it fits into the META-NARRATIVE of all of scripture. THEN, to recognize how you are a part of that story.

Hopefully, you are beginning to see how the NT is completely interconnected with the OT. I heard one guy describe it like **Velcro** - there are hundreds of little connections that cause the two units to hold together.

The last time we were together we saw that Joshua had successfully led the descendants of Abraham into the land God has promised to them. They had taken possession of the land.

This begins what is known as **THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES**. The period of the Judges covers over 400 years of Israelite History. It takes place about 1,000 year before Jesus was born, so this was around 3,000 years ago from our current time period. ...

While it's only one book - we must remember it covers more time than our Nation has been in existence. Over this 400 year time span we see a cycle developing.

1. The people humbly walking with God, God's showing them His favor and blessing.
2. The people getting comfortable and drifting away from God.
3. The enemies of the people attacking and plundering.
4. God raising up a Judge to deliver them. Now **OT Judges** aren't like the guy who wears a black robe and serves the court - they are more like supernaturally empowered **warriors**.

The final Judge in the book is **SAMSON**. Samson is the PROTO-TYPICAL AMERICAN MALE - he's ridiculously strong. If I were casting a movie for Samson I'd get someone like Dwayne Johnson "the Rock" (or Maui from Moana) to play the part. He's just muscles on top of muscles. Samson is this amazing, supernaturally strong warrior. He was probably tan, probably could sing well. The women wanted him, the men wanted to be him.

Now see that - this man who had everything most men want - STRENGTH, WEALTH, WOMEN, AUTHORITY.... was a disgrace to God.

**This hero among men - EXCHANGES the safety of his nation for a few cheap thrills.**

**Meanwhile** during the same time period of Samson... in the little town of Bethlehem lived a young lady named **RUTH**.

*If I had to attach one theological concept to the book of Ruth it would be the idea of PROVIDENCE.*

**DIVINE PROVIDENCE** - is God's ability to perpetually guide and govern all of creation in such a way that His ultimate ends are realized.

*Providence must be understood in the context that God is both All Powerful and Entirely Good. If he were Good by not Powerful - he would want to help but be unable. If he were Powerful but not Good he might rule like some Divine Hitler. But he is good and powerful.*

**RUTH TEACHES US THREE THINGS ABOUT PROVIDENCE:**

## **1. When things seem really bad, God is up to something really good.**

Ruth was what most Americans would consider THE PROTO-TYPICAL LOOSER. She was a part of a dysfunctional family, had married a backslidden Jew, the son of Elimelech and Naomi. Her family had done about everything they could to offend God. They lived in Bethlehem, but they left the land of God's promise, God's Covenant and sojourned down into Moab.

The Moabites were born of an incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughters. In **Psalm 108:9**, we find an interesting description of Moab. We read, "Moab is My washpot" - that's a word that mean something like garbage can.

So Elimelech and Naomi move to Moab, their sons Malon and Chilean marry unbelievers. We don't know how it happen but Elimelech dies in Moab, then his sons die and early death.

Naomi - who's name means something like, "sweet" changes her name to "mara" which means bitter.

Naomi decides to go back to Bethlehem. She tells her daughters in law to go find new husbands... Orpah is said but she agrees and goes back to Moab... but we are told of Ruth - Ruth 1:16 (ESV) <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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."

By the way, that is a marvelous picture of salvation - I am going to identify myself with the God of the People and I'm going to identify myself with the people of the God.

So now - imagine if you will... in one part of the land SAMSON, the American dream, flirting with disaster... then in the little town of Bethlehem a simple girl, from a dysfunctional family a broken home with a bitter mother-in-law, homeless, helpless, in a land not her own, a refugee living on welfare.

WHO WILL GOD USE? Samson or Ruth?

- MIRACLE - We see God working through Samson through his seen hand of miracle.
- PROVIDENCE - Ruth on the other hand did not enjoy God's seen hand of miracle, but rather God's unseen hand of Providence.

**Providential Timing - notice when they returned...**

**Ruth 1:22 (ESV)**

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

**This is important because as we learned when we read through Leviticus the Hebrews had a marvelous system of welfare called, “Gleaning”.**

**Leviticus 19:9-10**

9 ‘Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 ‘Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God.

*It was a marvelous system that upheld the Biblical principle that if a man would not work, he should not eat.*

**Providential Relationships...**

**Ruth 2:1 (ESV)**

1 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

The Hebrews had another social help for the widow called the KINSMAN REDEEMER.

- The idea was that they wanted to keep things within the Tribal boundaries that God gave through Moses.
- If a Hebrew lost her husband, a close kinsman was to marry her or to take care of her.

**A kinsman redeemer had to have 3 things:**

1. They had to be the closest, living relative willing to do this.
2. They had to have the money to pay off the debt.
3. They had to want to do it of their own free will.

**Ruth 2:2–3 (ESV)**

2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” 3 So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, **and she happened** to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

Now on one had this was a very basic decision - it is was comparable to deciding whether to shop at Publics or Kroger. She simply was choosing a field in which to gleam.

She probably considered things like:

- Which field is near her?
- Which field is not already filled with gleaners?
- Which field seems to be safe?

But it was basically a simple decision - the kind of decision we make 100 times every day. But the writer clues us in on the fact that God was at work providentially behind the scenes.

You see, God only knows the significance of each decision.

Don't let that fact paralyze you - because God's Providence means that he carries that weight not you.

ILLUSTRATION: I remember a girl in college who realized how the entire course of history could be changed by one bad decision. The more she thought about it the more it paralyzed her - she couldn't decide which color nail polish to wear.

That's not how Providence works - you walk with God, you live your life, you make the decision - God causes all things to work together for your good and His glory.

**Psalm 37:23** <sup>23</sup> The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD:

As Christians we do not believe in good karma, we don't believe in luck, we believe in a Good God who works all things after the counsel of his will (Eph 1:11). We worship a Good God of PROVIDENCE.

*That is why we pray! We believe God can change things! That is why we don't worry, we trust that God is big enough to alter the events of human history!*

*OUR CHILDREN KNOW THIS – “He's got the whole world in His Hands”*

If you imagine God shaking on His throne just fretting and hoping things work out down here on Earth...

- No wonder you don't pray
- No wonder you don't trust
- No wonder you try to get involved in everybody else's business trying to fix things instead of taking it to the Lord in prayer.

YOUR GOD IS TOO LITTLE!

*When things seem really bad, God is up to something really good.*

## **2. Just because God is working doesn't mean you don't have to**

*The parts of the Bible that highlight the Providence of God are saturated with people who take personal initiative.*

### **Ruth 2:4–7 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.” <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “**Whose young woman is this?**”

Perhaps there is no time in our lives when God's providential hand is more important than when we are choosing the person with whom we will spend the rest of our lives. Sadly, this is often the time when people drift spiritually. Rather than fully and passionately pursuing God, we compromise, we backslide, we drift and in the drift we fall in love we marry someone who doesn't love God... and about the time your first child is five years old we come to our senses and we start to beg God to BLESS THIS MESS.

MAKE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS from a place of spiritual health.

Fast, pray, surround yourself with a multitude of good and godly counselors. We we drift we grab at straws. And when you make a decision to get married during a time when you are drifting spiritually... that doesn't weaken the terms of the Covenant.

Thankfully, Ruth was walking with God, Boaz was walking with God... and God in great love, mercy and kindness causes their paths to intersect.

Boaz instructs his servants to show extra kindness to Ruth.

1. He instructs her not to glean from another field but to hang around his.
2. He tells his servants to protect her but not to flirt with her.
3. He lets her drink from the water his servants have drawn.
4. He tells his servants to intentionally drop some wheat for her.

It says at the end of the day she would have an "Ephah" of wheat. Historians tell us this would have been very heavy, which we see Ruth just throwing it up over her shoulder - so this was like an OT Crossfit kind of girl. She was jacked... BTW, the Pro. 31 woman strengthens her arms... working out is biblical ladies.

NAOMI'S ADVICE:

**Ruth 3:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? <sup>2</sup> Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. <sup>3</sup> Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup> But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." <sup>5</sup> And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

NOW - in Old Testament this was basically a proposal of marriage.

NOTE: Girl's in our culture this is not a good thing to do. Guys, if you do this you will likely go to jail.

But here is what I want you to see.... this book that is about God's unseen hand of providence doesn't present it's key players as passive at all.

Trusting God never means you passively set back, let go and let God.

**SOMEONE SAID**, *"God seems to favor those who do not sit back and wait for their ship to come in, but they swim into the harbor hoping to meet it half way."*

**ILLUSTRATION;**

*John Wesley traveled 250,000 miles on horseback, averaging twenty miles a day for forty years; preached 4,000 sermons; produced 400 books; knew ten languages. At 83 he was annoyed that*

*he could not write more than fifteen hours a day without hurting his eyes, and at eighty-six he was ashamed he could not preach more than twice a day. He complained in his diary that there was an increasing tendency to lie in bed until 5:30 in the morning. It was that man that God Providentially used to bring a sweeping revival to the US and Europe.*

**Julius Erving (Dr. J)** was asked one time how it felt to be an overnight success... he respond, "I have spent all my life becoming an overnight success."

**The Roman Poet Virgil said,** "Fortune sides with him who dares."

Trust is always an action verb, it takes initiative.

There is one problem... there is a relative to whom the right of redemption belongs.... we aren't given his name because every decision he makes is self centered and selfish.

### **Ruth 4:1–6 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. <sup>2</sup> And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. <sup>3</sup> Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. <sup>4</sup> So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." <sup>6</sup> Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

*1. When things seem really bad, God is up to something really good.*

*2. Just because God is working doesn't mean you don't have to*

## **3. There is More On the Line Than You Can Possibly Imagine**

### **Ruth 4:13–17 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup> Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!"

Now - just that much and it's a great story. Ruth finds Boaz, Boaz finds Ruth and they all live happily ever after. But there is always more on the line... look at verse 17.

<sup>17</sup> And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

David - the man who would ultimately bring a true Godly Kingdom to Israel.

But you and I know more of the story... it didn't end with David - because we've been looking for the SEED of the Woman, the SEED of Abraham, the one who would take the Scepter of Judah, the one who would sit forever on the throne of David.

Now you see, Ruth wasn't only the Grandmother of King David...And so David has a son who has a son who has a son and about 25 pregnancies later—or to use the biblical term, “25 begots later”—we have Jesus.

### **CONCLUSION:**

So see that it's not the Mighty Samson that ultimately saves Israel - but it's the girl in field, her hair is a mess, she's in a dysfunctional family, her skin isn't the right color, she's on welfare.... but it is ultimately her that God uses to provide a good and godly King and ultimately it is her legacy through which Jesus the Messiah is born.

So here's the invitation:

1. Are you Samson? Got it all together, blessed with a few natural talents, do you have wealth and position? We perhaps we should pray for you that God will break you... humble you... because you aren't usable if you are great in your own eyes.
2. Are you Ruth? Are you small in your eyes, but following a Big God who holds the whole world in his hands? Blessed are you.

### **1 Corinthians 1:27–29 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

REMEMBER: it wasn't the great strong man who saved us... but it was lowly Jesus, meek and mild... also born in the little town of Bethlehem.

You are not on a rock barreling through space without a driver... there is a driver, his name is Jesus. It's a good idea to get to know him.