

## **Ruth 1:13 “The Hand of the Lord Has Gone Out Against Me.”**

### **Disappointment with God**

In our study of the book of Ruth thus far, we’ve read about the trials and tragedies that Naomi has endured. She’s lost her husband and her two sons. She is now an older widow with virtually no hope for the future. In vs. 13, she claims that “the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” In vs. 20, she asserts that “the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.” She went out full and returned empty. Her name had been Naomi, meaning “pleasant, beautiful,” but now she wants to be known as Mara, “bitter.” And she places the responsibility for this squarely with God. This is God’s doing. The Lord brought about these calamities, and Naomi is bitter about the disasters that she has endured.

This brings up a topic that I think we should address before moving on in the book of Ruth, and that is, *disappointment with God*. Unless you live a charmed life in which nothing has ever gone wrong, you have experienced disappointments, disasters, tragedies, and trials. If you have not experienced them yet, just wait; you will. We live in a fallen world and in perilous times. Every one of us will experience disappointments if not disasters. Pain, sorrow, and death are universal.

For the secular person or the atheist, luck or chance are the reason for disasters and calamities. Some people are lucky, some are unlucky. It’s all a matter of chance and random circumstances whether disaster strikes or does not. There is no one in control; life is just a throw of the dice. The universe is blind and indifferent to our suffering. There is no meaning or purpose behind any of it on the evolutionary point of view.

But for a Christian, and especially one who has a robust faith in God’s sovereignty, disasters and catastrophes are *not* the results of blind luck or random chance. We believe that God is in control of all things, even the small details of our lives. So questions naturally arise, such as, “How can a good God allow his people to suffer? Why doesn’t he prevent such painful things from happening? Why do the heathen prosper and the righteous suffer?”

As you might imagine, God’s people have been trying to answer questions like these for thousands of years. Stated more formally is the question, “How do we vindicate God in the face of human suffering?” That is, how do we understand God’s relationship to disasters and calamities? This is the problem of evil—how can God be good and still allow evil and suffering in a world that he controls?

The Bible very clearly teaches that God can do anything he wants to do, including intervening in our lives to prevent disaster or to heal disease. So the fact that God often does not prevent disaster or heal disease is a bit of a problem. When God allows disaster and catastrophe, some people—like Naomi—become disappointed or even bitter.

As we study the book of Ruth, I want to consider two related topics: 1) How to vindicate God in the face of pain and disaster; and 2) how to prevent ourselves from becoming bitter when we experience trials, pain, and disasters. I'll deal with the first today and with the second next week, DV.

Let's consider this morning how to vindicate God in the face of pain and disaster, or how to handle disappointment with God.

#### I. Understand God's relationship to disaster and suffering.

When calamities strike, we have several options:

A. Some might say that God had nothing to do with it. God is *not* sovereign. Perhaps he's unaware. Maybe he could do nothing to stop it; he's powerless to do anything about it. Some conclude that there is no God. Or if there is a God, he doesn't care about us.

1. The problem with that is that the Bible teaches just the opposite. God exists. God is omnipotent; he can do anything consistent with his own character and nature. God is not restricted by his own creation; he can overcome any obstacle. All things are possible with God. He can prevent disaster and suffering.
2. And the Bible assures us that God is aware of every little detail of our lives. His thoughts toward us are innumerable (Ps 40:5). He is aware of the number of hairs on our heads (Mt 10:30). He's known about us from eternity past, and he is aware of our every movement and thought (Ps 139).
3. God cares deeply about his people, and he wants the best for us. God is love, and he loves us with great compassion and concern.
4. So the idea that God is unaware of or unable to stop disasters, or that he doesn't care about us, does not square with the Bible.

B. Some might say that the devil is responsible for all the calamities and disasters that happen. Satan is to blame, not God.

That doesn't really solve our problem, because Satan can do only what God allows him to do. E.g., the book of Job.

- C. Some might say that God never intervenes in a way that would threaten human freedom. God values human freedom so much that he subjects himself and his actions to the decisions of man. God acts independently only when human decisions are not involved. So if human choices are involved, God stands aside. God will never violate the free choices of man. E.g., the 9/11 attacks.

The Bible contradicts this idea as well. God can influence human choices if he wants to. A prime example of this is the fact that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Another example is Nebuchadnezzar—God took away his reasoning for a season. So the idea that God is somehow restricted by his own creation is almost blasphemous.

- D. I believe that the proper way to understand this issue is that God is powerful enough to prevent disasters, but also that he allows them in our lives for a purpose. God is both good and powerful, but that does not mean that he intervenes directly to prevent all possible disasters from happening. Nothing in all of creation can restrict God. He could intervene to prevent disasters, but usually he does not.

This seems to be the most biblical approach to the problems. We believe God is sovereign over human affairs, and we believe that God wants the best for us because he loves us. Disasters, tragedies, pain, suffering, and sorrow play a part in God's will for us. Like Naomi, we affirm that when disasters strike, God was involved either directly or indirectly. Disasters and tragedies are in God's control, and God can use them for his own purposes.

God's ultimate purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). God can use trials and tribulations to do that.

Rom 5:3-4 ... *we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:*

James 1:3-4 ... *the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

**Trans:** Why do the righteous suffer? There's really only one biblical answer to that question. The suffering of the righteous is somehow within the providential will of God. God allows it for his own good purposes.

- II. How do we explain the fact that a good God allows disasters when he could prevent them? This is a very substantial question, and it's one that we should consider very carefully.

Several thoughts we should keep in mind as we approach this issue:<sup>1</sup>

A. God is under no obligation to explain His ways to us.

Dan 4:35 *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

1. God doesn't have to explain himself. No one has the right to ask God, "What are you doing?"

In many biblical passages, the problem of evil arises, but the text never explains it.

a) For example, in the creation story, God does not reveal why Satan was allowed to become evil, why he was allowed in the Garden of Eden, or why God didn't prevent Adam and Eve from falling into sin. God could have prevented man's fall into sin, but he didn't.

b) In Job's case, rather than explaining His actions to Job, God shows him that he has no right to question the Creator. Job didn't know why he suffered, but we find out in the book that God had His own reasons.

c) God is under no obligation to explain himself to us.

2. God acts according to His own will. He does not submit Himself to the judgments of sinful men. God's thoughts and ways are above and beyond us.

Isaiah 55:8–9 *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Romans 11:33–36 *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? ...*

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<sup>1</sup> This material is largely from my apologetics material, "The Problem of Evil, part 2."

3. In Romans, Paul asserts that God has the sovereign right to do as He wishes, and no further explanation is necessary. He rebukes those who would charge God with unrighteousness (Rom 3:3-8, 9:18-24), concluding that those who bring such charges against God are justly condemned.
4. All of this together shows that we will often not understand God's purposes in allowing suffering. But we must believe that God has a purpose and that there is good will behind everything that God allows in our lives.
5. In some cases, God removes pain and suffering. God occasionally heals people miraculously. Sometimes he allows doctors and medicines to provide solutions and alleviate suffering.
6. But in many cases, God allows nature to take its course. Illness leads to suffering and death. God does not directly intervene to prevent suffering and death. God's will for most people is that they experience suffering and death.

*John 16:33 ... In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

*Acts 14:22 ... we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

E.g., most of us know friends or family members who have died because of covid.

7. We should not demand that God explain himself or provide a satisfactory reason for us. God is not obligated to explain himself. He is the Creator; we are merely the creation. He's the potter, we are the clay; he's the parent, we are the children.

**Spurgeon Quote:** “There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldlings . . . [than] the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His [treasury] to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth. And we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that . . . men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love.”

In our trials, suffering, and tribulations, we should remember that God is sovereign and that he has a purpose for everything he allows.

B. Jesus suffered for us.

1. Jesus is the suffering servant of Isa 53. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities...
2. Suffering was part of God’s will for him (Acts 2:23). Jesus knows suffering by experience. Jesus has suffered more than any of us ever will.
3. Since he suffered, he has compassion for those who suffer (Heb 4:15). Jesus sympathizes with us in our weaknesses. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5-6).
4. We are not alone in our suffering. It’s part of the human condition that Jesus experienced.

- C. Suffering, pain, and disaster are the result of the Fall; suffering because of sin is now part of human experience. Some people experience more than others, but unless you live some kind of charmed life, you will suffer.

Job 2:10 ... *Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?*

Jesus suffered and died. So did Paul and all the other apostles. The universal human experience for both sinner and saint is suffering and death.

Further, Satan currently has vast influence in the world. He's called the "god of this world" and "the prince of the power of the air." Think about how much suffering and death are brought about because of satanic influences.

Suffering and death is part of the curse. We live in a broken, sinful, corrupt world. Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. For his own purposes, God allows us to experience life, suffering, and death on this cursed world. We should not expect to avoid it.

- D. Wondering why evil takes place is not sinful. But when doubt turns to accusation, then questions become sinful.

1. When we express doubt regarding God's goodness or when we demand that God explain Himself to us, then we are exalting ourselves over our Creator.
2. We have no right to demand that God satisfy our desire to know why certain things happen. Doing so is like a clay pot demanding an explanation from the potter (cf. Rom 9:20-21). The potter has total power over the clay and is under no obligation to explain his choices to the clay.

Likewise, children often do not understand what their parents are doing. They don't understand the reasons and purposes behind their parents' decisions. The parents have good reasons and purposes, but that doesn't mean that the children understand.

**Quote:** God, as sovereign Lord, is the standard of His own actions. He is not subject to human judgment; on the contrary, our judgment is subject to His Word. We can be assured, despite our circumstances, of God's good character—God is holy, just and good. On that matter God's Word is clear. God expects us to trust Him, not doubt His good intentions. The very nature of faith is to persevere despite unanswered questions. God's Word encourages us to hold on tightly to God's promises and not to be overcome with doubt.<sup>2</sup>

- E. God may use evil/catastrophe/adversity to produce a greater good.
1. God's ultimate aim is to glorify Himself, not to make us more comfortable and happy. If something serves to advance God's glory and purposes, it may be thought of as good, even if it seems to be associated with catastrophe. The greater good is from God's perspective, not man's.
  2. For example, the death of Christ was both good and evil—good in that it brought about the redemption of believers, but evil in that it required the death of God's Son. Thus, something obviously evil (murder) may still bring about a greater good (salvation).
  3. The same is true today. Many individuals can testify to the fact that it was only through terrible circumstances that they repented and trusted Christ.  
**E.g.,** Ruth's circumstances produced a great good.
  4. What greater good comes from evil, suffering, and/or pain?
    - a) God's grace and justice may be displayed through suffering (Rom 3:26; 5:8, 20-21; 9:17).
    - b) God uses evil to judge wickedness (Matt 13:35; John 5:14).
    - c) Disaster and calamity may shock unbelievers into repentance (Zech 13:7-9; Luke 13:1-5).
    - d) God uses suffering as a means of chastening His people (Heb 12).

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<sup>2</sup> Frame, pp. 178-79.



- e) Those who have suffered are able to comfort others who suffer (2 Cor 1:4).

**Quote:** When the Christian observes evil events ..., he can and should consistently trust in God's inherent goodness by [believing] that God has a morally good reason for the evil that exists. God is certainly not overwhelmed or [hindered] by evil in the universe. He could put an end to it at any time. God has planned evil events for reasons that are morally commendable and good. He does not usually reveal what those reasons are. But Christians should trust that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.<sup>3</sup>

E.g., the deaths of Naomi's husband and sons

So suffering and disaster may result in a greater good. We trust that God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing it.

F. God has promised to abolish evil.

- 1. In the end, the problem of evil will be solved—there will be no more evil. God will triumph over it and abolish it. If we believe that such a time will come, it should strengthen us to face the evils of today. Evil, suffering, pain, and calamities are temporary.

*1 Cor 15:55-57 O death, where [is] thy sting? O grave, where [is] thy victory? The sting of death [is] sin; and the strength of sin [is] the law. But thanks [be] to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- 2. We have to endure suffering and death for the few decades of our earthly lives, but then an eternity devoid of evil awaits us if we are saved.

BTW, if you are *not* saved, evil will be permanent, not temporary, not abolished. The inhabitants of hell will suffer evil eternally. There will be no end of evil for the wicked.

- 3. In the future, God will punish all who deserve it and reward all who deserve it. The culmination of history will reveal that God has been righteous all along. Even the judgment of the wicked will serve to bring glory to God.

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<sup>3</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, p. 172.

**Quote:** Eventually this present world order will be judged and brought to an end, and God’s Kingdom will be fully manifested and established. He will wipe away every tear, and pain and sorrow will cease.<sup>4</sup>

G. God’s relationship to evil is a mystery.

1. In the final analysis, we have to conclude that God’s infinite wisdom is beyond our grasp. All that we need to know is that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen 18:25; cf. 50:20) and that all things work together for our good and God’s glory (Rom 8:28).
2. Although the problem of evil is a troublesome one, the existence of evil in the universe should not cause anyone to reject Christianity. The presence of evil does not disprove the Christian faith or discredit the Bible.
3. Actually, concern about evil is a proof that God exists. Atheists and evolutionists should have no concern about suffering, pain, and death. After all, according to atheistic evolution, nature is “red in tooth and claw.” The universe has no creator and no purpose. All is merely “pitiless indifference” according to evolution. The weak die off and the fittest survive. There is no moral basis for concern about suffering and death under evolution or atheism. Star dust doesn’t worry about that kind of thing. Fizzing chemicals don’t think about the problem of evil.  
  
If people are concerned about human suffering, it’s not because of atheistic evolution. Christianity is concerned about such things, but not atheism—it has no answer for human suffering.
4. Part of the Christian life is walking by faith, trusting that God is good, holy, just, and powerful, even in the presence of suffering and pain. He can and often does restrain evil. Yet He also uses evil for His own good purposes without contradicting His own attributes.
5. Retaining our faith in God without wavering during times of suffering and hardship is a mark of Christian maturity. True Christians persevere in faith and in good works no matter what trials and tribulations they might face.

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<sup>4</sup>Eric Frank, “Why Doesn’t God Do Something ... Now?” *WRS Journal*, vol. 3, issue 1 (Winter 1996).

I wonder if any of these principles went through Naomi's mind as she experienced the tragic loss of her husband and sons. These truths should permeate our minds as we encounter disaster, pain, sorrow, and loss.

Someday, suffering will be completely banished for Christians. There will be no more weeping or pain. We have an eternity to enjoy all the good things that God provides for his people. We will be eternally free from disaster and disappointment.

Until then, we can be assured that...

*2Co 4:17 our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory,*