

TO MOAB AND BACK

RUTH 1



A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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To Moab and Back: Ruth 1
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Ruth 1: Introduction

The book of Ruth starts with tragedy, as a faithless man leads his wife into exile in Moab. Rather than trust the Lord and remain in the land of promise, Elimelech trusted his own wits and good ideas. But what seemed like a good idea would become a tragedy, costing the death of a husband and two married sons.

Thereafter, Naomi, hearing that God had visited and blessed the land of Judah, made her way back from Moab. She knew the judgment of God had come upon her. What she did not know was that God was preparing great blessings for her and her faithful Moabitess daughter-in-law, Ruth.

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We hope you find this study of Ecclesiastes a challenging and stretching experience of journeying more deeply into the Word of God. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Famine Flight

Opening Prayer: Psalm 142.1, 2

I cry out to the LORD with my voice;
With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication.
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare before Him my trouble.

Sing Psalm 142.1, 2, 5, 6

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

With my voice, O Lord, I cry – hear my plea for mercy, Lord!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:
Refrain v. 5, 6
Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

Read Ruth 1.1, 2

Preparation

1. Why did Elimelech take his family to Moab?
2. When does this story take place? What was Israel like in those days?

Meditation

The story of Ruth is set in the latter days of the judges – between the end of the conquest of the land under Joshua and the story of Samuel, Saul, and David. The anonymous author of Ruth explores various aspects of the fall and its effects, centering on the immediate crisis of a famine descending upon the land around the city of Bethlehem (chapter 1), before pointing to themes of redemption and restoration (chapters 2-4).

Given the crisis of the famine, how should a man who trusts in God respond? Certainly not like Elimelech. Had he trusted in God and His Word he would not have repeated the mistakes of the patriarchs in fleeing famine to pagan lands without consulting the Lord (cf. Gen. 12.10; 26.1-6).

Further, he would not have taken his family to Moab, a place which was under the special condemnation of the Lord because of its hardness toward the people of Israel as they traveled toward the land of promise (Num. 20.21-30). Elimelech's response to famine – an effect upon the groaning creation of the sin which entered with Adam's rebellion (Gen. 3.17-19; Rom. 8.20-22) – demonstrates his lack of trust in the Lord. His name means "my God is king", but he was ruled by his stomach and his fears.

As we begin the story of Ruth, therefore, we suspect a further exacerbating of the situation of Elimelech and his family, for we know from the Scriptures that the way out of sin and its effects is not along the road of more sin.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Naomi. Ruth gets top billing in this story, but Naomi set the stage for her to emerge. Naomi is that woman who did her husband good and not evil all the days of her life. The heart of her husband safely trusted her, and she watched over the ways of her household (Prov. 31.12, 11, 27). Naomi

might have known better than to go to Moab, but she went because Elimelech wanted to go. And God watched over her. “The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow...” (Ps. 146.9). Very often, obedience to God doesn’t make much sense or even seem to be fair, but God does know best, and His ways are perfect. And our obedience is part of being a living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service, that we may “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12.1, 2). Naomi isn’t glittery and happy, but she was solid and faithful. “...a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31.30).

Reflection

1. Had you been there, what would you have said to Elimelech?
2. When are you tempted to depart the ways of the Lord and wander among the Moabites?
3. How can believers help one another to persevere in faith, even in the midst of trials and hard times?

Elimelech's care to provide for his family, was not to be blamed; but his removal into the country of Moab could not be justified. And the removal ended in the wasting of his family. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Ruth 1.1-5*

Let me never turn from You, O Lord, and let me never be enticed to abandon you by...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 142.3-7

Cast your burdens on the Lord. Seek refuge in Him. Trust in Him to provide for you and meet all your needs today.

Psalm 142.3-7

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

When my spirit faints away, You my falt'ring pathway know.
Where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain vv. 5, 6

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

Lord, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.
Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain

Hear my cry, Lord, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.
Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

Out of prison lead me, Lord! Thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain

2 Left, Left

Opening Prayer: Psalm 123.1, 2

Unto You I lift up my eyes,
O You who dwell in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God,
Until He has mercy on us.

Sing Psalm 123.1, 2

(Darwall: [*Rejoice, the Lord is King*](#))

To You we lift our eyes, O God enthroned above!
With longing gaze and heaving sighs we plead Your love!

Refrain v. 2

We look to You! Have mercy, Lord,
upon us by Your sovereign Word!

Read Ruth 1.3-5

Preparation

1. What happened to Naomi's family in Moab?
2. How long did Naomi's family live in Moab?

Meditation

Here is clear indication of God's displeasure with Elimelech. He fled Judah to avoid starvation, yet he died, apparently quite early on, in the land of Moab. Outside the promises of God – symbolized by the land of promise – there is no hope of life and blessing (Eph. 2.12).

Suddenly alone, and with boys perhaps too young or frail to travel, Naomi hunkered down in the land. There she allowed her sons to marry pagan women, yet another transgression against the Law of God (Deut. 7.1-4). Compromising the Law of God is the way of death, and Mahlon and Chilion, after a respite of ten years, died, like their father, beyond the pale of God's promises, leaving Naomi alone once again.

What seemed like a good plan in the eyes of one man turned to disaster, threatening even the wellbeing of his obedient wife. The writer thus casts an eye back at the last verse of Judges and demonstrates the futility of living only according to what seems right in our own eyes. As we shall see, the story of Ruth will point in another direction for the hope of redemption.

God allowed this faithless man and his family to come to disaster – precisely what they were hoping to avoid by fleeing the promised land. God is faithful to His promises, as well as to the sanctions that come with them. He cannot deny Himself, but allows men to come under the judgment incurred by their rejection of His clearly-revealed way (Rom. 1.18-32).

Yet we see His grace even here, in that He did not leave Naomi to the same end of her husband and sons. Even as the judgment of God is falling, His redeeming and renewing grace can be seen to be at work. This is foreshadowed in the name of one of Naomi's daughters-in-law: Ruth means "mercy."

As we shall see, the mercy of God will attach to Naomi, even in the bitterness of her trial, and that mercy will be the way of redemption for her, and for the people of God and all the world.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Three men dead; three women left. “The foolishness of a man twists his way” (Prov. 19.3) and leaves innocent people hurting and destitute. That doesn’t seem fair. Elimelech stepped out of God’s will, and others suffered for it. Don’t we feel the same way sometimes? We step out of God’s will, things go wrong, people get hurt, and we cry, “That’s not fair!” Israel said the same: “The LORD is not fair” (Ezek. 18.29). They departed from His will, and He brought them to judgment, just as He had promised. God reminded them, as He reminds us, “O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord GOD. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin” (Ezek. 18.29-31). God has no pleasure in our suffering (Ezek. 18.32), but our suffering is fair and deserved, each time we depart from Him. What’s *not* fair is Jesus’ suffering for us. But only because of His suffering can we have hope. Because of Jesus, “His compassions fail not. *They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness* (Lam. 3.21-23). We stray, one man dies. Fair? No, but just, and merciful. Great is His faithfulness. Thanks be to God!

Reflection

1. We don’t take sin as seriously as we should. Why do you think that’s so?
2. If we really believed others would suffer from our bad choices, would we be more careful? Explain.
3. It’s not fair that Jesus had to die for our sins. But it’s just. How can we show our gratitude to God for this unfair justice?

Changing our place seldom is mending it. Those who bring young people into bad acquaintance, and take them out of the way of public ordinances, though they may think them well-principled, and armed against temptation, know not what will be the end. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Ruth 1.1-5*

Lord, keep me in the way of Your promises, and help me so that I will always...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 123.2-4

Seek the mercy and grace of God for all your activities today. Call on Him to take away all fear and every doubt, so that you may serve Him faithfully in all you do.

Sing Psalm 123.2-4

(Darwall: [Rejoice, the Lord is King](#))

As servants strain to see their earthly lord’s command,
so we would in Your presence be and firmly stand!

Refrain v. 2

We look to You! Have mercy, Lord,
upon us by Your sovereign Word!

Have mercy, Lord, we pray; our souls are weary, worn.
The wicked world condemns our way and heaps up scorn.

Refrain

Our souls are sore oppressed by this world's ease and pride.

In You we would be healed and blessed, and in You hide.

Refrain

3 Turning

Opening Prayer: Psalm 137.4, 5

How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*

Sing Psalm 137.4, 5

(The Gift of Love: [*Though I May Speak*](#))

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

Read Ruth 1.6, 7

Preparation

1. What did Naomi hear about God's people?
2. What did she do then?

Meditation

Word reached Naomi that the famine had lifted in the region around Bethlehem; the report was that God had "visited" His people and blessed them with food, just as He had promised. That word, "visited," is significant, for it recalls the "numbering" of the people of Israel in the wilderness, when every tent was "visited", and every inhabitant accounted for by name. Again, God is still in the background, continuing to be faithful to His promises and to care for His faithful people.

Naomi's decision to return is a type or symbol of repentance, without which there can be no redemption or renewal. In deciding to return to Judah (v. 1), she demonstrated a renewed longing for her home, for the promises of God, and a desire to leave behind the place and pain of her family's sojourn beyond the pale of faith.

This is the first mention of God's active Presence in our story. We see it in two ways: In His blessing on the faithful in Bethlehem ("House of Bread"), and in sending His Word to Naomi, still wandering in sin and separation from Him. Here we observe the power of God's Word to draw His chosen ones to Himself, in His way and time. Naomi's daughters-in-law were attached to her, and followed as she led in making her return to the Lord. Let us not underestimate the powerful effects our repentance can have on those closest to us.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

She heard. She went. And her two daughters-in-law with her. At this point they were all heading to Bethlehem for bread. They all knew where the blessings of God were to be found. Their hearts were set on some sort of "repentance".

"Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mk. 1.5). These people, too, had a sort of "repentance". But most of them lacked a change of heart. Within three years, these same people were calling for the crucifixion of Jesus!

A little water on the outside cannot clean up the mess inside. All three women were on their way to blessing, but only two finished the course. Yes, true repentance does have life-changing and powerful effects on those around us.

Reflection

1. What is repentance? Who needs to repent? To what does repentance lead?
2. What does it mean to say that God “visited” His people? Does He still do this? Explain.
3. Paul wrote that the goodness of God leads us to repentance (Rom. 2.4). Why is this so? What’s the message in this for our witness to the Lord?

This is the first mention of God’s name in the story. God Himself is at the center of the book. This verse illustrates the mercy of the Lord, who supported even His disobedient people with food. He visited His people both for blessing, as in this verse, and for discipline (Ex. 20:5). Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Notes on Ruth 1.6

Lord, thank You for “visiting” me each day! Turn my heart always to You so that I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 137.1-6

This is a difficult psalm to pray, for it calls out from the depths of anguish, resentment, and sorrow. But the verses selected here can remind us that this world is not our home, and one day we will all be together with the Lord. Use these words to turn your heart toward the heavenly Jerusalem, and the new world which is coming.

Sing Psalm 137.1-6

(The Gift of Love: [*Though I May Speak*](#))

We sit beside the waters deep in broken pride, to mourn and weep
for Zion's woes and all our sin: How great our foes, without, within!

No songs have we of joy to sing. Our enemy, to taunt and sting,
bids us rejoice, as they oppress: We have no voice to praise or bless.

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

If ever praise forsake my tongue, if Zion's ways no more be sung,
if greater joy by me be found, my lips destroy, no more to sound.

4 “Return”

Opening Prayer: Psalm 102.1-4

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
And let my cry come to You.
Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble;
Incline Your ear to me;
In the day that I call, answer me speedily.
For my days are consumed like smoke,
And my bones are burned like a hearth.
My heart is stricken and withered like grass,
So that I forget to eat my bread.

Psalm 102.1-4

(Leominster: [*Not What My Hands Have Done*](#))

Lord, hear my prayer and cry; hide not Your face from me!
In my distress and tears I sigh – Lord, hear my earnest plea!
My days like smoke blow past; my bones are scorched with sin.
My heart, like wilted, withered grass bends low to earth again.

Read Ruth 1.8, 9

Preparation

1. How did Naomi bless her daughters-in-law?
2. How did they respond to that blessing?

Meditation

Naomi was probably quite well-meaning here. She knew – or so she believed – that no Moabite would ever be welcome among the people of Israel (Deut. 23.3-5). Invoking the Lord’s blessing on them, she therefore urged her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers’ homes, where they might yet be able to find a husband.

Naomi acted in accord with her understanding of God’s covenant; yet, as she would discover, God’s covenant was a work-in-progress and would evidence surprising powers of inclusion neither she nor her neighbors could anticipate.

The love she showed for her daughters-in-law overcame the bitterness she felt (vv. 20, 21); this, too, is evidence of the redemptive and renewing grace of God in her life. Further, let us not overlook the courage Naomi showed in this decision. She would have to make the journey back to Bethlehem on her own, without the help and companionship of her daughters-in-law. The journey back to full restoration with the Lord can sometimes be lonely and difficult; however, they who are truly called and repentant will take it up courageously, relying on the grace and favor of the Lord.

We note some development in the character of Naomi. We sense her genuine concern and compassion for her daughters-in-law, and we hear the first expression of her faith in the Lord. She seems to be more concerned for their wellbeing than her own, yet she was trusting in the God of Israel to provide for her as well. Only the Lord can renew and restore His people, rebuilding their

lives from the ruin that sin has made of them.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Naomi said, “Go, return” to two. One did go and return, the other stayed and traveled on with her. These are three women feeling all the emotion of loss, uncertainty, and fear of the unknown. Not unlike lost sheep without a shepherd.

How hard it must have been for Naomi to encourage them to go find “rest” with new husbands. And they, having lost their husbands, were now losing their mother-in-law, and all the shared memories of the life they had. Everything was topsy-turvy in their lives; and yet, they found hope in the idea of “return”.

One did return to her Moabite family; but two traveled on to return to the LORD. “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (I Pet. 2.25).

Reflection

1. Naomi showed compassion for her two daughters-in-law. How can we learn to be more compassionate toward the people in our lives?
2. What is God’s covenant? How does the new covenant in Jesus fit into God’s covenant? What benefits come to us as participants in that covenant?
3. How can you know when God is calling you to “return” to Him?

Naomi seems to have been a person of faith and piety. She dismissed her daughters-in-law with prayer. It is very proper for friends, when they part, to part with prayer. She dismissed them with affection. If relations must part, let them thus part in love. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Ruth 1.6-14

Closing Prayer: Psalm 102.12-14, 22-28

Give thanks to God that He hears your prayers, even when you are discouraged and doubting. Call on Him to revive you, and to lead all His churches more fully into the blessings of His love.

Psalm 102.12-14, 22-28

(Leominster: [*Not What My Hands Have Done*](#))

But You, O Lord, abide forever in Your place.
Arise and stand on Zion’s side and lavish us with grace!
Revive Your Church, O Lord! Let all her dust and stones
be strengthened by Your mighty Word, and compact be as one.

Yet let us tell God’s Name and praise His glorious grace;
Let all as one His love proclaim together in this place.
Though now our strength is low; though shortened grow our days,
our God will not forsake us so, but keep us in His ways!

Of old You made the earth and heavens by Your hand.
Though they shall perish You endure; forever shall You stand.
They change, yet You remain the same, without an end.
Our children shall Your favor gain, and theirs shall be Your friend.

5 Love that Clings

Opening Prayer: Psalm 13.1, 2

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
Having sorrow in my heart daily?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Sing Psalm 13.1, 2

(Melita: *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*)

How long, O Lord, O Lord, how long will You forget me and my song?
How long will You conceal Your face and keep from me Your precious grace?
How long must I my soul consult? When shall my weary heart exult?

Read Ruth 1.10-14

Preparation

1. How would you describe Naomi's attitude toward her daughters-in-law?
2. Why did she want them to go back home?

Meditation

Naomi was urgent that her daughters-in-law should take steps to care for their own needs. Clearly, she understood that she and her family had come under the displeasure of God (v. 13). This had created a bitterness in her soul, but not toward God.

Naomi demonstrated true faith by turning from her bitterness and pain to seek the Lord according to His Word, in the land of His promises. This is ever the way of redemption and renewal. Her bitterness, though it was from the hand of the Lord, was partly of her own making.

We also note a "smallness" in Naomi's faith here. The only blessing she could imagine for her daughters-in-law was that which accorded with her experience and reason. That God might have something completely different in mind did not occur to her. So, reasonably enough, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and returned to her home. Ruth, however, showing a deeper love than even Naomi's, clung to her mother-in-law.

Do not miss the hint of God's sovereignty, and how He works to accomplish His redemptive purposes for His people. Although Naomi and her family had brought their own misery upon themselves, the hand of the Lord was in it. God does not cause us to sin; nor does He bring evil upon people. However, He will allow us to follow our own paths, and to receive the consequences of our own sinful choices. Even this process is not outside the scope of His sovereignty, although we cannot hold Him responsible for our misery. Nor can we fathom the mysteries of the working of His grace.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

"Turn back... Turn back" (vv. 11, 12). The three have walked toward Israel for a while, but then Naomi stops the progress and urges her daughters-in-law, once again, to return home. Her spirits

must have been lagging, and the full weight of the future bore heavily on her heart. For several years now she has known the truth of what has happened: “And He gave them their request [food, shelter, life], but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106.15).

And now she feels responsible for everyone and everything. Oh my. Poor Naomi.

And yet, the very fact that she is plodding on toward hope speaks volumes! Ruth must have sensed the hope and the possibilities too, for she “clung to her” (vs. 14). And they both set out clinging to the LORD: “Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (Ps. 27.14) “The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed. Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; Shepherd them also, and bear them up forever” (Ps. 28.8, 9). Do you suppose David wrote those words while thinking of these two courageous and hopeful women in his lineage? I do.

Love that clings to God is memorable.

Reflection

1. How can we see Naomi’s faith at work in these verses? How did her faith lag?
2. Faith “plods” and “clings.” Explain.
3. What does it mean to “wait” on the Lord? Why is important we do so?

Ruth follows after her holy mother-in-law, whereas Orpah abandons her; one daughter-in-law demonstrates faithlessness, the other fidelity. The one puts God before country, the other puts country before life. Does not such disharmony continue through the universe, one part following God and the other falling headlong through the world?
Paulinus of Nola (355-431), *Poems 27.511*

Lord, help me cling to You, even in the face of adversity, even when I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 13.2-6

Cast all your burdens on the Lord, knowing that He cares for you. Thank Him for His many blessings. Meditate on His saving mercy. Rejoice in His salvation.

Sing Psalm 13.3-6

(Melita: *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*)

Exalt not, Lord, my enemy; Lord, hear my prayer and answer me!
Give light unto my weary eyes; let not death claim me for its prize.
Let not my foe rejoice to say that I have fallen in the way.

Yet I have trusted, Lord, in You; Your lovingkindness sees me through.
My heart breaks forth in happy voice; in Your salvation I rejoice!
Thus I will sing triumphantly: “My God has dealt full well with me!”

6 Return to Blessing

Opening Prayer: Psalm 142.1, 2

I cry out to the LORD with my voice;
With my voice to the LORD I make my supplication.
I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare before Him my trouble.

Sing Psalm 142.1, 2, 5, 6

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

With my voice, O Lord, I cry – hear my plea for mercy, Lord!
My complaint mounts up on high, bringing You my troubled word:

Refrain vv. 5, 6

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!
O receive my plaintive song!

Read Ruth 1.15-22

Preparation

1. Why did Ruth refuse to leave Naomi?
2. How did Naomi regard her place with the Lord?

Meditation

Orpah has done the “sensible” thing. She has returned to her pagan home and ways. Just how deep Ruth’s commitment to Naomi was is made clear in these verses.

Together, Naomi and Ruth make a perfect example of the nature of repentance, the first step to redemption and renewal. Naomi feels the bitterness of her family’s foolish decisions (vv. 20, 21), and she longs to be restored in full to the good and faithful God of Israel. Ruth was willing to leave everything about her life as a pagan – home, family, prospects, gods – in order to make the journey of faith into a new people and land (vv. 16, 17). From this point forward, Ruth will have a new identity, a new context, a new orientation, and a new hope. This is the essence of the redeemed life.

Naomi’s repentance is complete as she admits her folly to her former neighbors. There is no slighting of God in her words; she takes full responsibility for her sin, and seems to admit that her punishment was just. Her use of the words, “Almighty” and “Lord”, in referring to God indicate her faith in God’s covenant, as these terms recall God’s manifestation of Himself to Abraham (Gen 17.1, 2) and Moses (Ex. 3.13-15). Thus, even in her bitterness and repentance, Naomi holds out the hope of restoration by invoking the Name of the covenant God.

The mention of the barley harvest (v. 22), together with the thrice-repeated mention of Bethlehem (“house of bread”, vv. 19, 22), points forward to the promise of blessing and what we shall see as the return of the Lord’s favor upon Naomi. God’s blessing for His people can only be known within the framework of His promises, here symbolized by the town of Bethlehem. Repentance is a necessary first step toward redemption and renewal. It is to be performed within the circle of the transgression, thus restoring relationships not only with God but also with one’s neighbors.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Naomi said to Ruth, "Return." (vs. 15) But Ruth said to Naomi, "Entreat me not to leave you, *or to* turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if *anything but* death parts you and me" (vv. 16, 17).

Ruth was determined to follow Naomi.

Jesus doesn't say to us, go back; but boldly says, "Follow Me" (Matt. 9.9). And we determinedly say to Him, "Please, never tell me to leave You or to turn back from following You. For wherever You go, I will go. And wherever You lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people. And Your God will be my God. You have died for me. I will be crucified with You, so that it is no longer I who live, but You live in me. And this life which I now live, I live by faith in You, Jesus, because You loved me and gave Yourself for me. And nothing will ever separate me from this love that I have for You, and the love that God has for me because of You" (Gal. 2.20; Rom. 8.39).

We must be as determined to love and follow Jesus as Ruth was to follow Naomi.

Reflection

1. How is Ruth a good example for us as disciples of Jesus Christ?
2. Why did Naomi need to confess her bitterness to the people of Bethlehem?
3. What can we learn from Naomi about sustaining a rich and growing relationship with the Lord?

The cup of affliction is a "bitter" cup, but she owns that the affliction came from God. It well becomes us to have our hearts humbled under humbling providence. It is not affliction itself, but affliction rightly born, that does us good.
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Ruth 1.19-22*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 142.3-7

Let the Lord search your soul in silence. Confess any sins He brings to mind. Call on Him to restore the joy of your salvation. Commit your day to the Lord, to walk with Him and serve Him in all you do.

Sing Psalm 142.3-7

(Dix: [*For the Beauty of the Earth*](#))

When my spirit faints away, You my falt'ring pathway know.

Where I take my journey they traps have hidden to my woe.

Refrain vv. 5, 6

Lord, You are my Refuge strong!

O receive my plaintive song!

Lord, look to my right and see: None takes notice of my plight.

Is there refuge left for me? Is my soul out of Your sight?

Refrain

Hear my cry, Lord, I am low! They are strong who seek my soul.
Jesus frees from every foe; He will keep and make me whole!

Refrain

Out of prison lead me, Lord! Thanks and praise to You shall be.
Righteous men armed with Your Word will Your grace bestow on me.

Refrain

7 The Beginning of Blessing

Opening Prayer: Psalm 4.1

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have relieved me in *my* distress;
Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.

Sing Psalm 4.1

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent*](#))

Answer when I call, Lord Jesus, God of all my righteousness!
Bend Your holy ear, relieve us from all terror, all distress!
Lord, receive our prayer, release us; send Your grace to save and bless!

Read Ruth 1; meditate on verses 6 and 7.

Preparation

1. Why did Naomi say to call here by the name, “Mara”?
2. Compare verse 1 with verse 22. What contrasts can you identify?

Meditation

There is an elegance to the structure of the book of Ruth. Whoever the writer was, he or she wanted to make this book a joy to read. We see that already in chapter 1, where verse 22 contrasts with verse 1 to plant the seeds of hope and blessing in the soil of rebellion and loss: famine, harvest; leaving, returning; to Moab, from Moab; with a faithless husband, with a faithful daughter-in-law. There is a simple beauty in this careful structuring of Ruth’s story that we will see in various other ways as we continue. The effect of this is to make the story delightful, memorable, and compelling.

Naomi experienced a good deal of bitterness in the land of Moab. She lost her husband and two sons. She seemed to understand the hand of the Lord was in this; He is sovereign over all things. But she did not rail at the Lord nor curse His “unfairness.” She accepted His work in her life and sought Him once again. God had not blessed her in Moab – at least, so she thought. She longed to return to the place where God visited His people and blessed them. Returning would be painful, but she was willing to admit her mistakes and be reunited with the people of God, whatever that required.

While in Moab, she gained the great blessing of Ruth, the Moabite. Ruth loved her, sympathized with her suffering, and determined to accompany her wherever she went. She was willing to give up future prospects of a husband and family, if that’s what accompanying Naomi required. She committed herself to Naomi’s God, although she could not have known very much about Him at this stage. She knew enough to believe in Him as good and faithful. God would take it from there.

What is the purpose of the book of Ruth? We’ll have more to say about this later in our study. For now, the purpose is to turn our eyes to God, call us to seek His promises, and hope in Him, rather than in our own wits or wiles, for the blessings we need. Chapter 1, which looked like the beginning of disaster, will turn out to be the beginning of blessings, which always begins in repentance and return to the Lord and His promises.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“Now they [Naomi and Ruth] came to Bethlehem...” (Ruth 1.22)

“Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child” (Lk. 2.4, 5). They came also.

Naomi and Ruth had hope because they had heard the stories about God. Mary also had hope because she too had heard about God. And before these three faithful and hopeful women, there was Rahab. She had hope because she had heard about God: “I know that the LORD has given you the land...For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites...And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2.9-11).

Rahab was recounting to the two spies things that had happened forty years before; and yet the terror and awe that these people felt about God was palpable. “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down...by faith...Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb. 11.30, 31).

Here are the stories of four women who by faith believed the things that they heard about God. And their simple and determined faith led to actions that were the beginning of blessings that have reached through history to us in Jesus (Matt. 1.5; Ruth 4.17-22; Lk. 2.11-16).

Have we heard about God? Do we believe what He says? And do we act on what we believe?

Reflection

1. What had Rahab heard about God? What about Naomi and Ruth? How about Mary?
2. What have you heard about God? What does God expect you to do with what you’ve heard?
3. What blessings might you expect to see in and through you as you act on what you’ve heard about God?

“I say with the prophet, in the words, as it were of destroyed Jerusalem, ‘He who should comfort me has departed far from me.’ ... For I, my good man, have, as it were, lost my children, since through earthly cares I have lost works of righteousness. Therefore ‘call me not Naomi, that is lovely; but call me Mara, for I am full of bitterness.’” Gregory the Great (540-604), *Letter 1.6*

Closing Prayer: Psalm 4.6-8

Seek the joy of the Lord for the day ahead. Rest in His Presence and love. Commit your concerns and fears to Him. Review your day at the end of the day, and lie down in the Lord in peace.

Sing Psalm 4.6-8

(Picardy: [*Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent*](#))

Wicked men may scorn and try us, casting doubt upon Your grace;
send Your Spirit, Lord, don’t deny us till we see Your glorious face.
You Who sent Your Son to buy us, fill our hearts with joy and grace.

Safely in Your peace, let us lie, Lord; keep us in Your love and care.
Rooted in Your strong and wise Word, may we know Your comfort there.
Guard and keep us till we die, Lord; go before us everywhere.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What did Naomi understand about her sojourn in Moab? What can we learn from her response?
2. Why did she decide to return to Bethlehem? What does this symbolize in the life of faith?
3. How is it evident that God was working in Ruth's' heart?
4. How does the structure of chapter 1 help us to appreciate the grace of God at work in this story?
5. What's the most important lesson you have learned from Ruth 1? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.