

Title: **When Going Back Means Moving Forward (Part 1)**

Passage: **Ruth 1:6-15**

Theme: **Naomi and Ruth**

Number: **0912Ruth1.6-15(3)**

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{Read Passage}

[i] Last week we left off in verse 5 . . .

In t/space of those 5 vv. we covered 10 yrs of this story // we saw much tragedy: a husb. / father named Elimelech moves his family from Beth. in Judah to a pagan land known as Moab in order to escape a localized famine.

They ran away from famine in order to escape death and ran into the arms of death in escaping famine.

The father, Elimelech, dies. A decade or so later t/2 grown sons die leaving behind 3 childless widows living in a foreign land.

[ii] 3 woman under t/pain of tremendous loss

3 widows -- and the plight of widows was grim.

Younger widows were to stay in their father's home (Gen. 38:11).

Older widows, those whose parents were dead, were supported by their children. Here we have 3 women who apparently have no where to turn.

As we've noted ==>

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

has quickly turned into ==>

B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)

1. *First Crisis in Moab: Elimelech Dies (3)*

2. *Interlude of Hope: Wives for Two Sons (4)*

3. *Second Crisis: Hope Dashed in Death (5)*

Ruin was in Moab. Hope is in Bethlehem.

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

"Sometimes Going Back Means Moving Forward"

Think about that...

That's what we see here.

It's easy to second guess a decision when it's t/wrong one!

If you wrap your mind around what happened to this family in t/aftermath of a decision to leave t/promised land of Israel for physical well-being in a godless culture you can't help but think that this was all a big mistake.

Wouldn't they have been better off in Bethlehem, just 5 miles from t/holy city of Jerusalem?

What if they would have trusted in t/Lord's faithfulness to provide for those who trust Him rather than move out from under t/shadow of His wings to a land where t/light of t/Gospel was no where to be found?

That presupposes that what they did probably wasn't t/right move.

Look back in your own life. What decisions have you made that you would like to take back? Decisions that you know weren't right.

Or even decisions that seemed like t/right thing to do but didn't work out t/way you had hoped?

What do you do when the pieces begin to fall down around you faster than you can pick them up?

Do you keep pressing forward? Trying to force good out of bad?

Or do you realize that sometimes taking a step backward is t/way to move forward?

A. Scene One: *Retreat from Bethlehem* (vv. 1-2)

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B. Scene Two: *Ruin in Moab* (vv. 3-5)

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C. Scene Three: *Return to Bethlehem* (vv. 6-22)

It becomes an issue of trust. We see Romans 8:28 all over this chapter (entire book).

This chapter is a commentary on Proverbs 3:5-6 . . .

"But what about the time I wasted?" "What about all the effort?"

Sometimes you feel like you've accomp. so little w/your life.

Is it all wasted effort? Or do we trust that our sovereign God weaves it all into t/mosaic of His sovereign glory?

That's t/theme we're going to follow t/next two weeks as we close out this chapter: "God's sovereign glory."

What is sovereign glory?

God is sovereign. Sov. means He alone is King (a sovereign is a King). Theologically we mean by that that all of His attributes work together in his absolute control over everything.

What are His attributes? We're talking about things like Love, Mercy, Goodness, Holiness, Omnipotence, Omnipresence.

All that God is is perfectly good & absolutely powerful.

All that God is works seamlessly together with all that He does.

Nothing, not even sin, can ultimately change His purposes. // can detract from His glory because if His glory could be compromised He would no longer be God. Can't be anything less than what He is.

God's ultimate glory is not ruined by famine, disaster, or even bad decisions.

We have to look at this book on at least 3 different levels.

First, t/over-arching level of who God is (big picture).

Second, t/lower level of his work in t/lives of men (our lives).

Third, How He works both of those together to His sovereign glory in providing a redeemer for all men: JC.

C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

We can break this "Return" into two parts: Leaving Moab (vv. 6-18); Arriving in Bethlehem (vv. 19-22).

This scene divides into 4 dialogues / conversations bracketed by an introduction and conclusion:

Introduction (6-7)

Dialogue 1 - Naomi speaks to Ruth and Orpah (8-9a)

Transition - Tears of Separation (9b)

Dialogue 2 - Ruth and Orpah Object & Naomi Overrules (10-13)

Transition - Tears of Separation (14)

Dialogue 3 - Naomi and Ruth (15-18)

Transition - Traveling to Bethlehem (19a)

Dialogue 4 - Naomi and the townspeople (19b-21)

Conclusion (22)

1. Leaving Moab (vv. 6-18)

a. Naomi Learns of God's Visitation: God's Sovereign Glory in Famine or Feast (vv. 6-14)

God works to His Will and Our ultimate good regardless of circumstances. Suffering. Well-being.

Easy to say when things are going well. When we "feel" blessed or when we are not under any suffering.

Can we see t/hidden hand of God in the bitter experiences of his people. The worst of times are not wasted in light of eternity.

(1) First half of verse 6

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab . . .

The story is now going to focus on Naomi.

Why would she return (implied - return to Beth.) from Moab?

(2) Second half of the verse

. . . for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food.

Some translations render this "giving them bread" (lit. translation).

בֶּחֶלְבֵּי cf. Bethlehem.

One popular English version paraphrases the thought ==>

. . . she had heard that the LORD had shown concern for his people, reversing the famine by providing abundant crops. [NET]

Captures t/idea and avoids what modern readers may see as God tossing bread to hungry people. (cf. v. 1).

Point is: God had visited His people.

Naomi wants to be where the Lord has blessed // under His blessing.

(a) The LORD (YHWH) - v. 6

i. the "Tetragrammaton" (used 6823 times)

God's personal covenant name (English Bibles t/difference between LORD and Lord). "Jehovah"

Prob. comes from Exodus 3:15 =>

And God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

Never definite.

LXX translates with the noun κυριος. Note where κυριος is used in sense of YHWH for Christ in the NT (E.g. Romans 10:9 ff.; Philippians 2:9-11).

(b) Use of YHWH is significant

The LORD had stopped the famine and given rain; not Baal, who the Canaanites believed was the god who sent rain; or Chemosh, the false god of the Moabites.

(c) Naomi Resolves to Return . . .

Return is a key word in Ruth. Chapter 1 (6,7,8,10,11,12,15).

All forms of the Heb. word שׁוּב. (Heb. word for repentance).

i. Good illustration

Naomi reversed direction. She turned away from Moab and the errors of the past. She turned her back on sin and death -- t/graves of her husband and sons -- and reversed her course to Bethlehem to be blessed by YHWH.

We often talk about the fact that t/Xn life is a life of repentance. Not something we do once.

(3) Verse 7

So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

Wonder at this point in light of t/rest of t/chapt. why Ruth & Orpah were going w/her.

Probably have the 3 of them walking along toward t/King's Hwy that lead to t/Ford where t/Jordan River could be crossed into Palestine. In Naomi's mind they are walking with her part way before they say their goodbyes.

a. Naomi Learns of God's Visitation: God's Sovereign Glory in Famine or Feast (vv. 6-14)

She knew that God ruled t/rain to His sov. glory.

Perhaps she remembered t/story of Joseph recorded in Gen. 37.

Joseph, t/son of Jacob, was sold into slavery by his brothers. He ends up in Egypt where God places him in control over t/affairs of t/nation as second in command.

Like Ruth during t/time of t/Judges there was a famine. // the ancestral line of Messiah was in jeopardy.

God worked all of that out to bring about t/salv. of His people. Sinful actions of Joseph's brothers were t/means by which all Israel would be saved, including them.

The questionable decision of Elimelech was sov. ordained by God to bring about t/salvation of Ruth who was chosen to be part of

t/messianic line -- a Moabite, a Gentile, became an ancestor of t/Son of God, t/Savior of every tribe, tongue, nation.

Naomi knew that feast or famine came from t/hand of God.

Psalm 105:16–17 **And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread.17 He sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.**

Genesis 50:20 **“And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”**

William Cowper, the great hymn writer was no stranger to intense suffering.

Cowper often struggled with depression and fits of despair. One night he resolved to end his own life. He called for a carriage and told the driver to take him to the Thames River where he planned to drown himself. However, as t/story goes, thick fog came down and t/driver was lost. After driving about aimlessly the driver finally gave up and stopped. To Cowper’s surprise, he found himself on his own **doorstep.** [adapted from <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/g/m/gmovesmw.htm>]

Even in our darkest moments, God watches over us.

Even as a man whose hope in Christ was so tortured by his own suffering, he could write ("God Moves in a Mysterious Way").

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

... God's Sovereign Glory in Famine or Feast (vv. 6-14)

{Pause}

(1) First Dialogue - Naomi speaks to Ruth and Orpah (8-9a)

(a) Naomi gives a request followed by a two-fold expression of desired blessing

i. Request (8a) ==>

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. . . .

(i) Go = force of an imperative (gain attention)

LXX uses t/Gk. imperative mood ("go!").

(ii) Why "mother's house?"

In the OT a widow was to return to her "father's house."

Suggestions: The fathers are dead (but 2:11)

Mothers are sensitive (know how to comfort)

Parallelism: Naomi wishes to emphasize that a widow ought to return to her mother rather than stay with her mother-in-law. .

(iii) Better way to understand this

Indications in t/OT such as SOS 3:4, 8:2 there's an indication t/*mother's house* was a phrase used to refer to a mother's role in matters pertaining to her daughter's marriage.

(iv) Genesis 24 - Isaac & Rebekah

Isaac was Abraham's son. In his old age, A. made his servant swear that he would find a wife for Isaac among his own people and not from among t/Canaanites.

T/Servant travels to a spring outside t/city of Nahor in Mesopotamia.

Servant prays ==>

“Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; now may it be that the girl to whom I say, ‘Please let down your jar so that I may drink,’ and who answers, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels also’; —may she be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master.”

Who shows up? Rebekah!

He asks her: “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room for us to lodge in your father’s house?”

And she said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel . . .

The man gives her gifts - so the handwriting is on t/wall as far as what all this is about.

What does she do next?

Verse 28 **Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things.**

When Naomi says ==>

Go, return each of you to her mother's house. . . .

She's in effect saying, *"Return home where you will be able to find husbands who will protect and care for you."*

(a) Request followed by a two-fold blessing

i. Request (8a) ==>

Go, return each of you to her mother's house. . . .

ii. Blessing (x2) prefaced by "may" (8b)

. . . May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

The "dead" is simply "Naomi's way of referring in general to her two sons, now deceased"). They were faithful wives to her sons.

Kindly = רַחֲמֵי - (covt. faithfulness). First of 3 uses in t/BOR.

lovingkindness

Psalm 13:5 **But I have trusted in Thy lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation.**

Psalm 31:7 I will rejoice and be glad in Thy lovingkindness, Because Thou hast seen my affliction; Thou hast known the troubles of my soul,

We can all be partakers in רָצוּן {see above}

Grace extended even when it's not deserved.

ii. Blessing (x2) prefaced by "may" (9a)

“May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” . . .

Naomi's desire that her daughters-in-law end up finding other husbands. Might be possible in a polygamous culture, difficult in a monogamous one considering how important it was to a man in that culture that he have a wife that can bear children.

Here you not only have two widows (no longer virgins) but you have two widows who are apparently barren. May have been wishful thinking on Naomi's part, but from her (short-sighted) perspective, it was about the best there was.

(2) Transition - Tears of Separation (9b)

. . . Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

How can they bear to now lose their beloved mother-in-law?
No guarantee they would ever see her again.

Kissed = saying goodbye.

Lifted up their voices & wept = crying w/loud, agonizing sobs.

(3) Second Dialogue - Ruth and Orpah Object & Naomi Overrules (10-13)

(a) Objection (v. 10)

And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.”

(b) Overruled on Two Counts (vv. 11-13)

But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters.

i. Physically: She has no sons to offer

Why should you go with me?

Rhetorical question.

Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

IOW - The Law dictates that should I have any sons they are to marry you so that they can raise a progeny in t/name of your dead husband. Deut. 25.

But I have no sons, in my womb or otherwise.

“Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband.

Not too old to marry (she was probably no older than 50)

Idiom meaning "too old to bear children."

Even if she was able to bear children ==>

If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons,

[awkward verse break]

. . . would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?

i. Physically: She has no sons to offer

ii. Spiritually: God's hand is against her

No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you,

Difficult phrase. Could be translated "for things are very bitter for me because of you" (RSV; JB; GNB); "for things are far more bitter for me than for you" (NASB; NIV); "for things are too bitter for me for you (to share in)" (NAB).

. . . for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me."

We'll look at this further when we get to t/end of t/chapt. (vv. 20-21)
-- esp. answering t/? is this a fair accusation? Does God ordain suffering?

As Job asked long before Naomi --

Job 2:10 . . . **Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"**

Naomi has been criticized for suggesting that they return to pagan Moab.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

. . . Naomi tried to influence the two women to go back to their families and their false gods. . . . I may be wrong, but I get the

impression that Naomi didn't want to take Orpah and Ruth to Bethlehem because they were living proof that she and her husband had permitted their two sons to marry women from outside the covenant nation. In other words, Naomi was trying to cover up her disobedience. If she returned to Bethlehem alone, nobody would know that the family had broken the Law of Moses.

Reading too much into this.

Remember ==>

The position of an unmarried woman was perilous. To be in the house of a husband was to be in *a place of rest*, according to the Jews.

That opportunity was theirs in Moab. Not so much in Israel as it was against the law to marry an outsider.

Cox paraphrases Naomi's intent:

"I know and love you: and, had I sons, I would take you with me, that in their homes you might find the asylum every woman needs and craves. But I have none, nor am I likely to have any, nor could you wait for them if I had. And outside my household there is no prospect for you, for the men of Israel may not take to wife daughters of Moab. Alas it is more bitter for me to tell you this than for you to hear it. It is harder for me than for you that we must part. But the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. I have no hope for the future. I must walk in my darkened path alone. But you, you may find an asylum with the people of your own race. Your future may be bright. You will at least have one another. go, then, and return each to her mother's house." [cited by Barber, 56]

At this point the full reality of what has happened and where they stand with Naomi, with Israel, and with Moab hits. We see this in the next verse.

(4) Transition - Tears of Separation (14)

And they lifted up their voices and wept again;

or "continued to cry."

...and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Cf. verse 9 --

Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Verse 14, Orpah kisses Naomi while in v. 9 it was the other way around.

Signifies that t/relationship between Orpah and Naomi has come to an end. Orpah has gone back to her people and her gods.

And at this point Orpah leaves the scene never to be seen again.

Contrast! In light of Ruth's clinging to Orpah.

(5) Dialogue 3 - Naomi and Ruth (15-18)

d. Orpah Leaves; Ruth Cleaves: God's Sovereign Glory at Work in His Choice (v. 15)

Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods;

return after your sister-in-law."

What will she do?

As we'll see in the following verses, She follows Ruth in the worship and service of YHWH.

It seems to be that for Orpah, remaining in Moab meant t/worship of idols. Idolatry.

For Ruth, leaving Moab for Israel meant true conversion.

Why one and not the other? Why did Ruth become a follower of YHWH, an heir to eternal life, and forever have her name inscribed in t/genealogy of JC? Was she smarter than Orpah?

Evidence of the sovereign grace of God.

Think about it - Everything around her was an obstacle for her. Her background was; she was from Moab where they worshiped the god Chemosh. Her circumstances were; look at all she lost. If this is t/way t/God of Israel treats His people, why follow Him?

she follows God in spite of suffering (like Job).

She believed but only because God pursued her.

God pursues us with the result that we pursue Him. In good times and in bad.

... God's Sovereign Glory in Famine or Feast (vv. 6-14)

Dark time. But out of darkness light. Out of the darkness of the Judges and t/shadows of suffering that permeated t/lives of Naomi & Ruth would come the light of JC.

God's sovereign glory in famine or feast?

God's sovereign glory in the sufferings & joys of Christ!

So w/TAP who was no stranger to the book of Ruth we can say

But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [Gal 6:14]