

**The Book of Ruth**  
**The Journey Home, Part 2**  
**Ruth 1:6-22**  
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I entitled the opening paragraph of Ruth that we studied now several weeks ago, the first five verses, I entitled it “The Far Country,” because it really is, in a very real sense, the picture of the prodigal: those who leave Israel in the midst of God’s chastening hand to go Moab, to go to an idolatrous country, and there to linger and to find God’s chastening hand. It is the far country. The paragraph begins, you’ll remember, with the desperate circumstances of the nation. Verse 1 of Ruth says, “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed.” These were the darkest, 300 plus years in Israel’s history. Politically, there was no central government, and so every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Religiously, it was a time of great idolatry. Read the Book of Judges, and you’ll see that. Morally, therefore, it was a time of great wickedness. They were living out Romans 1. As they abandoned God, God abandoned them. And with that came great and deep sin.

Verse 1 says, “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land.” Because of Israel’s rebellion and idolatry, God did what He promised in the Law to do. He brought the natural disaster of famine on the land of Israel. For several years, He withheld the rains that they so desperately need to survive their crops and the agricultural life that was part of that time. And so the story begins in the time of the judges when the people had sinned against God and were experiencing His chastening hand.

In the middle of such times, the writer tells us about the disastrous choice of one family. Verse 1 goes on to say, in those times “a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.” One man, rather than choosing to humble himself in repentance and to trust God to restore the rain, to restore the crops, decides to uproot his family from the land God had given him and his ancestors and to move, unthinkable, to Moab. Verse 2 says, “The name of the man was Elimelech.” His name means “my God is king.” Obviously, he was born into a devout home in Israel; “and the name of his wife, Naomi,” which means “pleasant”; “and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, [they were] Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah.” In other words, they were a prominent family. They had been in Bethlehem for a long time, since beginning of the time that it was developed and built. So this prominent, Bethlehem family of four, part of the aristocracy, a family with a rich spiritual heritage of devotion to God, decides to leave their relatives, leave their town, leave Israel, and

move to Moab. Verse 2 says, “they entered the land of Moab and [they] remained there.” I shared with you last time a quote from Daniel Block, but I think it summarizes these verses so well. He says, “Instead of recognizing the famine to be punishment for the nation’s sin, and repenting of their spiritual infidelity, they left their people and their land for the unclean land of Moab. Elimelech designed his own solution.” That’s really the story of this family.

As a result, verses 3 to 5 go on to describe the divine consequences of their rebellion:

Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

Now, you really have to put yourself into the time and into what happened here. Think about this. Let this sink into your soul. Within a 10-year period—in our time of reference between 2005 and 2015—this is what happened to this family. There was a famine in their own country. There was a sinful decision to move away to a pagan land of idol worship. There was the unexpected death of Naomi’s young husband. There was the marriage of her boys to women who worshiped the god Chemosh. The barrenness of her daughters-in-law: both of her sons were married for 10 years, and neither of them had children. Then came the premature death of her two sons; still in the prime of life, they suddenly and unexpectedly died. This was the divine consequence. These were the divine consequences of the far country.

Now that brought us then to the second section in this book, scene two, if you will, or act two: the journey home. The journey home. Let’s read it together again. Ruth chapter 1. I’ll begin in verse 6:

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food. 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. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I

should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.”

And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back 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. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.” When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

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

As I noted to you last time, in this section of the story Ruth is not the hero, Naomi is not the hero, obviously Boaz, whom we’ve not yet met, he’s not the hero; instead, Yahweh is the hero of this story. In fact, the theme of this section we’ve just read together could be described this way: Yahweh demonstrates Himself to be a Savior by restoring the land of Israel from drought and famine to food, by restoring Naomi from sin to repentance, and by converting Ruth from idolatry to salvation. So this section is the remarkable story of the repentance and the spiritual restoration of one of God’s own, and the spiritual conversion of one of God’s enemies.

Now last time we considered the first part of that, and that is, the spiritual restoration of God’s child. I noted for you that the restoration of Naomi began with a deliberate decision. Verse 6 says, “Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab.” She decides, after 10 years, it’s time to go home. And she decided this out of a very sincere motive. Verse 6 goes on to say, “For she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited

His people in giving them food.” The Lord had come like a vassal king to check on His people. And perhaps having found them in repentance, He brings blessing. He had visited them. We also saw in her response a genuine love for others, because in verses 7 to 13, out of genuine love for her two daughters-in-law, she presents a series of arguments to try to convince them to return to their families in Moab. Most of it was just out of concern for them, and most of it was genuine love. I think there was lacking some wisdom even as we’ll see tonight. But it was born out of a genuine love for others.

In response to her arguments, there were two possible decisions before these two women, her daughters-in-law. Verse 14 said, “And they lifted up their voices and wept again,” as they realize that this is really the end and that they have to make a decision, that life as they knew it will cease to be.

In response to Naomi’s arguments there were two distinct responses. The first was the normal, human response of unbelief. It’s Orpah. Verse 14 says, and she “kissed her mother-in-law.” This was a final farewell. This was, “I’m going home.” Naomi’s arguments made perfect sense to her. And so she gives Naomi a final farewell kiss, and she heads for home, back to Moab. Hers was the response of unbelief. Notice verse 15 says she is returning to her own land and to her own gods. She knows who it is that Naomi worships, but that’s not enough to persuade her. Her response is the response of unbelief. But Ruth’s response was the surprising response of faith. Verse 14 says she “clung to her.” But in the passage that follows, that fills out so much more. We come to understand that it’s not just her love for Naomi that drives this woman. Something radical is happening in her heart.

Tonight we need to consider this second choice in more detail. Let’s call the second section of this part of Ruth, the spiritual salvation of God’s enemy. We’ve seen the spiritual restoration of God’s child. That’s Naomi. Now let’s look at the spiritual salvation of God’s enemy. This is Ruth. This section begins with really with an acknowledgment of the desperate need of salvation in the lives of both of these women, both Orpah and Ruth.

Verse 15, Naomi says to Ruth, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” You can see the scene unfolding. Orpah, having given her farewell kiss, has begun to head for home. She’s still within eyesight. And so Naomi points at Orpah, who’s headed down the road back to Moab, and she urges Ruth to join her. But notice how Naomi interprets Orpah’s actions: “Your sister-in-law has gone back to her people.” The word “people” here is not so much a political term, like nation; probably better considered a relational term. She has returned to her own people, to her relatives, to her kinfolk.

Then Naomi adds, she’s gone back to “her gods.” The word for “gods” in Hebrew is “elohim.” It can be singular, as when it’s used in the true God of the Bible, but it can also be plural. It’s the

word that's used of the gods of the nations. So Naomi here may be referring to all the gods of the Moabites, or she may be referring to the one, chief god among the gods of Moab, Chemosh. We're not sure. You see, the Moabites were henotheists; that is, they were polytheists (they worshiped many gods), but they venerated one god above the others. And the name of that god was Chemosh. Just as Israel was known as the "people of Yahweh," the Moabites were known as the "people of Chemosh." Numbers 21:29: "Woe to you, O Moab! You are ruined, O people of Chemosh!" Who was Chemosh? He was a warrior god. And one of the darkest parts of the worship of Chemosh was he accepted, at times demanded, child sacrifice. You can read about it in 2 Kings 3:27. This is the god. This is the god that Ruth worshiped. This is the god that Orpah worshiped. An idol who demanded child sacrifice.

It's troubling to hear Naomi insist that Ruth return to Moab where she will worship Chemosh. Though well-intentioned, why wouldn't she encourage Orpah and Ruth both to accompany her where they could be further exposed to the true God? She's not yet thinking thoroughly, spiritually. She's thinking only worldly; what will be the best for their life in this world?

Verse 15: "Return after your sister-in-law." For the fourth time, Naomi commands Ruth to return to Moab. Ruth, follow your friend's example. Follow your sister-in-law's example. Moab is where you belong. Ruth, here, finds herself caught between her own desire and her mother-in-law's commands. You see, Ruth, as we see her here in verse 15, she desperately needs spiritual rescue. She needs salvation. She, like Orpah, stands in the valley of decision. Is she going to continue to live the way she has lived? Is she going to continue to worship the false god Chemosh? Or is she going to choose Naomi's God? She was an idolater. Do you understand this? Ruth was an idolater headed to eternal hell.

We are all in that condition apart from Christ—aren't we?—in the same situation as Ruth. Every one of us is, by nature, an idolater. We are all hardwired to worship, hardwired to worship the true God, but because of our fallenness, we take that hard wiring and we pervert it. And if we don't worship the true God, we will worship something. And that's what happened with Ruth and Orpah. She desperately needed salvation.

Next we see the genuine expression of her repentance and faith. For the first time in the book, we hear from Ruth. Daniel Block writes, "The first words we hear from Ruth's lips are among the most memorable in all of Scripture; that is, from her lips alone. Few utterances in the Bible match her speech for sheer poetic beauty and the extraordinary courage and spirituality that it expresses." Robert Hubbard writes, "With the reading of poetry, the now familiar words, her very first in the story, soar on the wings of rhythm. They still tower as a majestic monument of faithfulness above the biblical landscape." Look at what she says. Verse 16. Caught in the crosshairs between her sister-in-law headed down the road back to Moab, and her well-intentioned mother-in-law suggesting that she also return, and her own desires, Ruth says, "Do

not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you.”

And then she makes a series of promises of her allegiance. I want you to notice the specific promises she makes as she rehearses this allegiance. First of all, she renounces her own independence, and she commits to stay with Naomi. Verse 16: “For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge.” “Where you go.” That is, wherever your travels take you, I will travel with you. She commits to be Naomi’s constant companion. And then “where you lodge.” It’s an interesting expression. The word “lodge” is ordinarily used of staying the night somewhere or of temporarily residing somewhere. But in this context, clearly it’s speaking of wherever Naomi makes her residence. There, Ruth says, I too will make my residence. She commits, not only to accompany Naomi on her journeys, but to live wherever Naomi chooses to live and to be her constant companion and caregiver. She renounces her independence and commits to care for Naomi.

There’s a second promise she makes. She renounces her family and nation to belong to Naomi’s family and nation. Verse 16, she says, “Your people.” Literally, “Your people, my people.” Your people, my people. The Hebrew word for “people” can refer to one’s nation or one’s ethnic group, but it’s used most often to refer to one’s extended family, one’s clan or one’s tribe. In English we would say, your relatives or your kinfolk. So Ruth, here, is renouncing her own immediate family, her extended family, her clan, her tribe, her nation. And she is saying that from this point forward, Naomi’s family will be her family, and Naomi’s clan or tribe will be her clan or tribe, and Israel will be her nation.

Now this commitment required extraordinary courage. I’ve told you often before, one of the best pieces of advice I learned from my father-in-law was, when you read the Bible, read it with a sanctified imagination. Put yourself back into that circumstance. Imagine what that would be like. As far as we know, Ruth had never visited Israel, much less Bethlehem. She has no idea, at this point, how she’ll be received, or if she will be welcomed at all. Frankly, as one author described it, “In Bethlehem in those days, a Moabite woman like Ruth would have been as welcome as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah.” Nevertheless, she makes this commitment. Robert Hubbard says, “She willingly abandoned her family, her familiar surroundings, and her religious traditions. She took on the uncertain future of a widow in a land where she knew no one, enjoyed few legal rights, and faced possible, ethnic prejudice.”

But Ruth’s change of heart goes far beyond where she will reside or what nation or what family she’ll belong to. The promise of her allegiance in these verses transcends all of those earthly things, because at its core, her commitment here is a spiritual commitment. It is a change of spiritual devotion, of spiritual allegiance, because thirdly, notice she promises that she will renounce her idols and become a genuine follower of Yahweh. In verse 16 she says, “and your God, my God.” And your God, my God. She makes it clear here that she has made her choice,

and it will not be Chemosh, it will be Yahweh. It reminds me of Joshua. You remember when he called the people of Israel in his day. In Joshua 24:15, he says, “If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve [Yahweh], choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land [you’re] living; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh.” That is essentially what Ruth is saying. Ruth’s statement here manifests true repentance, because she is turning from something. She is turning from her past, her religious past. She’s turning from Chemosh. And it also manifests her genuine faith, because she is not merely turning from Chemosh into a vacuum. She is turning to Yahweh. This is really the point.

And this becomes very clear in chapter 2. Turn over to chapter 2, verse 11. Again, we hear from Boaz, and Boaz interprets Ruth’s decision. And I want you to see this. Ruth 2:11: “Boaz replied to her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother (still had both parents living; you left them, you left) the land of your birth, and [you] came to a people that you did not previously know.’” So far it could just be something at a human level. But notice what he says in verse 12: “May Yahweh reward your work, and your wages be full from Yahweh, the God of Israel, (Watch this) under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.” This describes the reality of this commitment: your God will be my God. It’s what Paul said to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: “For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.” That’s exactly what happened with Ruth. This is what she commits to.

But I want you to see not only the promises of her allegiance here, but I want you to see the permanence of her allegiance. Look again at verse 16: “Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back 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.’” Now, it’s clear in verse 16 that Ruth is making these commitments for the rest of Naomi’s lifetime. You see that? She will never be separated from Naomi during her lifetime. But her allegiance transcends Naomi’s lifetime. Notice verse 17: “Where you die, I will die.” In other words, Ruth is making a commitment not only for the rest of Naomi’s life but for the rest of Ruth’s life.

Now at this point, Naomi, as we noted last week, is likely around 50 years old. Ruth, on the other hand, is probably only 25 to 30, perhaps, years old. So Ruth could spend the next 15 to 20 years caring for Naomi. Then after Naomi’s death, she could still return to her home in Moab. And it’s even possible at the age of 35 to 40; she may be able to find a husband in Moab at that point.

But here’s where we learn that Ruth’s allegiance is not just to Naomi, because she adds, “Where you die, I will die.” In other words, after your death, Naomi, I will continue to live in Israel

among your family, among the nation of Israel, worshiping your God, until I die. But the permanence of Ruth's allegiance goes even farther. Notice verse 17 again: "and there I will be buried." That's an extraordinary comment in that time of history. Ruth is here making a commitment not just for Naomi's lifetime and not just for her own lifetime, she is making a commitment for eternity. In the ancient world, people could leave their family and their nation and live in a foreign land, but where they requested to be buried was a testimony of where they felt they truly belonged. And it looked to eternity, to their life after death.

A great example of this is Joseph, who spent most of his life in Egypt. But what did Joseph request be done with his body after his death? Genesis 50: 24-25:

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

I don't want to be buried in Egypt. I want to be buried with my people, because that shows where my allegiance is, that shows where my commitment and trust is forever. So when Ruth promised Naomi that this commitment she was making included her body being buried near Naomi in Israel, she was making an eternal commitment of her allegiance to Naomi, to Israel and to Yahweh, Israel's God.

And she seals this extraordinary statement of her allegiance; notice in verse 17, with a sobering oath: "Thus may Yahweh do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." Now this was a fairly typical, self-imprecatory oath. You would call down God's judgment on yourself if you failed to do whatever it was you had promised. But notice, this Moabitess, former worshiper of Chemosh, specifically calls Yahweh to witness. This clearly shows that she now considers Yahweh to be her God. Notice in the curse itself she says, "Thus may the Lord do to me." She's calling for God to produce dire consequences on her, personally, if she doesn't keep these promises that she's making.

Now, what is "thus"? We're not told exactly what "thus" is, what the consequence will be if she breaks these promises. There are a couple of possibilities. She may be saying, "May I die a premature death." I mean, she's in context been speaking of Naomi's death. Maybe she's saying, "May God take my life prematurely if I don't keep these promises." Or she may be saying, "May God visit the curses He promised to bring onto His people onto me." In other words, she could be referencing the curses on disobedience found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28: May God bring plagues and fire and famine and war on me. A third possibility is that when she said these words "thus may the Lord do to me," she made some



nonverbal gesture of what she was inviting God to do if she broke the promise. For example, in our culture someone might draw their hand across their neck to mimic slitting the throat, or they might use a finger pointed at the temple to indicate an imaginary pistol. We don't know exactly what she meant, but clearly, regardless, Ruth was calling on Yahweh to produce the direst consequence in her life if she broke these promises. And then she adds—I love this.—”and worse.” “And worse!” I'm asking Yahweh to place upon me any curse He chooses if I fail to keep my word. And her assumption is, it's going to be worse than the normal list of plagues and fire and famine and so forth.

And what was it she was swearing an oath she wouldn't do? She would never allow anything but death to part her from Naomi. But notice, there's an interesting little observation here in verse 17. Do you notice the words “anything but” are in italics? What that means is that the translators have added those words, in their thinking, for clarity. It's possible, however, that we should read it without those words: “thus may the Lord do to me and worse if death parts me and you.” Ruth may be swearing that even in death; that is, where her body is buried, and in eternity, she will not be separated from Naomi. What I want you to see here is that Ruth, the Moabitess, the idolater, the worshiper of Chemosh, the demander of child sacrifice, has been genuinely and truly converted. She has been rescued by Israel's God.

Think about how He accomplished this. It's an amazing providence. God even used the sin of Elimelech to reach into a foreign country and bring an idolater to Himself, one He chose in eternity past. Listen, don't stop praying for that person in your life that you love and that isn't in Christ. You have no idea what God can do to accomplish His purpose in a life. Here, He uses the most unthinkable of circumstances to bring this woman to Himself. This is God seeking sinners and bringing them to Himself, just like He did with us.

By the way, this was the reason. Illustrated in this story is the reason God chose Abraham and out of Abraham, He made a nation. You see, God never intended that Israel would become the frozen chosen living in isolation from their mission field. Instead, it's clear from their inception that God intended Israel to be His witness nation to the world. Look back at Exodus 19. Exodus 19. This is the inception of the nation's constitution. Verse 3:

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying,  
“Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.’”

Why? Well He goes on to say, “I want you to obey My voice, I want you to keep My covenant,” and here's why: “You shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests.” What does that mean? It means, you are

priests representing Me to the rest of the planet. You are My witness nation. That's what God was saying to Israel.

Sadly, Israel largely failed to live up to this responsibility. There were small glimpses throughout Old Testament history when Israel fulfilled this mission, this evangelistic mission, to some extent, and Gentiles came to worship Yahweh. For example, there was Rahab in Joshua 2:11. Rahab said, "[Yahweh] your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." There's Naaman in 2 Kings 5:17: "... let your servant at least be given two mules' load of earth [from Israel]; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to Yahweh." There was Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:37, who writes at the end of that magnificent celebration of God's sovereignty, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of Heaven, for all His works are true and His ways are just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." There're the Ninevites in Jonah 3:10: "When God saw their [the Ninevite's] deeds, that they turned from their wicked way [He saw the fruit of their repentance], then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it." This was their mission, and in fits and starts, it was accomplished.

But that mission, the mission of being God's witness nation to the world, has now passed from Israel to the church. This is what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9. He says, you, church, "Are a chosen race, a royal priesthood." There it is, borrowing the same language. You are priests to God. You represent God to the nations, to the peoples. "A people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Listen, do you understand that's why you're here? I've said this many times before, as it was poured into me. Everything else that we do on this planet we can do better in heaven. Your worship will be much better in heaven. Your praise will be much better in heaven. And on and on it goes. But there's one thing that you can do here that you can't do in heaven. And that's be God's witness to the peoples around you. That's why you're here. That's why I'm here. Don't lose sight of the mission. And you see this just a little bit in the story of Ruth.

Notice verse 18, back in Ruth chapter 1: "When she saw that she was determined to go with her [when Naomi saw that Ruth was determined], she said no more to her." Naomi saw in Ruth's demeanor, and heard in her voice, her absolute determination. In Hebrew, the text says, "When she saw that she had strengthened herself, she ceased to speak to her." For the rest of the trip to Bethlehem, Naomi stopped trying to convince Ruth to return to Moab.

So, we've seen the spiritual restoration of God's child in Naomi. We've see the spiritual salvation of God's enemy in Ruth. I want you to see, thirdly, an interpretation of all of this, particularly from Naomi: the spiritual perception of God's chastening. The spiritual perception of God's chastening. Verse 19: "So they both went until they came to Bethlehem."

The writer doesn't tell us how far along they were on the journey from Moab to Bethlehem when the dialog we just studied occurred, but he summarizes the rest of the journey in these words: "They went until they came to Bethlehem." Now the trip from the plains of Moab to Bethlehem was somewhere between 60 to 75 miles, depending on the route they took. Likely, they headed from Moab directly north. And then from there headed west across the north side of the Dead Sea and up through the Wadi Qelt up to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem, which was just 6 miles out of Jerusalem. This would have been the probable journey that they would have occurred, the route they would have taken. Now for two women walking, this would have been somewhere between a 7-to-10-day journey; and it wasn't a pleasant journey. They started on the fields of Moab, on the plains of Moab, where, undoubtedly, they lived. Then they would have descended 4,500 feet from the plains of Moab to the Jordan Rift. This is the road they likely would have taken—not the road in the foreground, the road in the distance. The route they would have taken passed over this area. Then they would have made their way across the Jordan River at the north end of the Dead Sea. And then they would have started up the road from Jericho toward Jerusalem through the Judean hills, climbing back another 3,750 feet to Bethlehem. So down 4,500 feet to the Jordan Rift, and then back up another 4,000 feet to Bethlehem.

Verse 19 said, "And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them." When Naomi and Ruth had come to the town of Bethlehem, we're told that the entire city stirred. Now, it's possible, at this point, the men were in the fields gathering the barley harvest that's mentioned in verse 22. And so Ruth and Naomi entered the city, and all the women saw them and came to greet them. This is, by the way, what it would have looked like when they arrived. This is a view from the north side of Bethlehem (which is the direction they would have come) looking down into where Bethlehem lies. The Hebrew word "stirred" here in this verse is a onomatopoeic word, a word that sounds like what it means. It's like the English word "buzz." In fact, the Hebrew word is not too much dissimilar from the word "hum." So the entire town of Bethlehem was humming about these two women. Remember, they're identified in chapter 1 as Ephrathites of Bethlehem. They were blue bloods, well known, well respected; and 10 years earlier, this respected family had left Bethlehem. Now, of that original family of four, only Naomi returns, and she returns with a young Moabite woman in tow. Again, try to imagine. Imagine your own response if a family that you knew and respected, a family of four, had moved away just 10 years ago, and the wife and mother returned alone, telling you that in those 10 years she had lost her husband and both of her sons. I expect your household would be humming as well.

Verse 19 says, "And the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'" The implication is, they asked this question of each other. Their question could imply excitement at seeing Naomi again. Is this really Naomi really back after all this time? We're so excited to see you! But, likely, it's more negative than that. It's more likely the difficult years have stamped themselves on Naomi's

appearance, so that she's hardly recognizable as the woman who left Bethlehem 10 years before. It's probably more like this: could this really be the woman who left us just 10 years ago?

Naomi overhears and she responds. And in what she says to these women, we get a glimpse of how she thought about what Yahweh had done in her life. Notice verse 20: "She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara.'" Naomi means "pleasant." Don't call me pleasant. That's no longer an appropriate name for me because of my circumstances. Instead, "call me Mara," which means "bitter." Why does she want her name changed? Verse 20 says, "For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." It's interesting, because in this statement, Naomi doesn't use the personal name for God; rather, she uses a title. The Hebrew word is "Shaddai." It's often combined with the word for God, "Elohim," and it's translated "God Almighty." It occurs 48 times in the Old Testament. Clearly, it's an ancient title for God. It is referred to in Exodus chapter 6, verse 3, when God says, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [Shaddai], but by My name, Yahweh, I did not make Myself known to them." So this an ancient title for God. The very first occurrence of this name in Scripture is in Genesis 17:1. When Abram was 99 years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "I am God Almighty [Shaddai]." I am El Shaddai.

Scholars have spilled a lot of ink about the etymology of this word, but frankly, its origins remain a mystery. Instead, we have to look at how the word is used to discern its meaning. And it's important in the context. Let me give you some references that help elucidate the meaning. There are a number of passages where this word is used where "power" seems to be the inherent use of it. Psalm 68:14: "The Almighty scattered the kings." Psalm 91:1: "[We] will abide in the shadow of Shaddai." Isaiah 13:6: "Wail, for the day of [Yahweh] is near! It will come as destruction from Shaddai." Joel 1:15: "Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is near, and it will come as destruction from Shaddai." Leon Morris says, "From all this it seems that the thought of power attaches to the name. There are many passages where this is the most appropriate meaning, and very few, if any, where it's not acceptable. We should take this to be the force of Shaddai as a name of God."

Now why is that important? When Naomi thinks of her circumstances, her only explanation is God's, irresistible, sovereign power. The One who cannot be resisted, whose will cannot be thwarted, He is Shaddai. He is Almighty. By the way, this is what makes our Lord's claim in Revelation 1:8 so extraordinary, because Jesus our Lord says, "I am ... the Almighty." So, Shaddai, the Almighty, notice she says, had dealt bitterly with her.

Verse 21: "I went out full, but Yahweh has brought me back empty." Literally, the text says this—catch the emphasis. The Hebrew text says, "I full went out, but Yahweh empty has brought me back." Clearly, "full" here does not mean with full stomachs and with all they needed. They wouldn't have left Israel for Moab. Instead, she means "full" in the sense of her family. She left

with a husband and two sons, and through them a secure future. And now she's returned without a husband or sons or food or even the money to buy food.

Verse 21: "Why do you call me Naomi [pleasant], since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Notice, she says two things about what's happened to her. One, "the Lord has witnessed against me." This is legal language from the courtroom. She is the accused, and Yahweh has found her guilty of sin against Him. And in light of her sin, "The Almighty [Shaddai] has afflicted me. He has brought calamity, disaster, upon me. By the way, the word "afflicted" is often used to describe the disasters related to the curses in the Mosaic Covenant. This is language of divine chastening. It's like Job in Job 5:17: "Do not despise the discipline of Shaddai." This is where she is. She is embracing the reality of the discipline that God has brought into her life.

Now in the last verse of this chapter, the writer recaps what has transpired in act one, scene two. Notice verse 22: "So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab." This recaps what's gone on in this section. The far country, and now the journey home.

How do we apply this? Let me apply it in two ways. First of all, for us as believers. Naomi's story reminds us that God brings difficult days into our lives. Sometimes it is His chastening for our sin, as it was with Naomi. Often, it's simply because we live in a fallen, cursed world that's subject to vanity, and God doesn't protect us from that, even though He loves us. But regardless, God can bring us through those times.

Look at Psalm 30. Psalm 30. I love this Psalm. David is rejoicing and thanking God for deliverance. He says in verse 4,

Sing praise to Yahweh, you... godly ones,  
And give thanks to His holy name.  
For His anger is but for a moment,  
His favor is for a lifetime  
Weeping may last for the night [It's temporary],  
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.

Notice verse 11: "You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness."

This is our God. It may be that you're going through difficulty in your own life now. Listen, God will bring you out of that circumstance. It may be in this life, and that is my prayer for you. But if not in this life, He will bring you out. He will turn your weeping, your mourning, into

dancing. He will loose your sackcloth and gird you with gladness. This is our God.

If you're here tonight and you don't know the Lord, Ruth's story has a lot to teach you. If you want to know the true God, He demands that you turn from your idols and that you put your complete confidence in Him. And in today's world, He demands that you come to Him through His appointed one, the Messiah, His Son. By the way, in a very real sense, that was true for Ruth as well. God rescued Ruth spiritually in anticipation of the Savior who would come. The very one who would ultimately be one of her descendants. In Matthew 1, she's listed in Jesus' genealogy. You see, Jesus bought the forgiveness that was the fruit of Naomi's repentance. Jesus bought the spiritual redemption that Ruth came to enjoy. And that's the only place your hope is found if you're not in Christ. Turn from your idols. Turn from those things that you've learned to worship other than God your Creator and receive the offer of forgiveness in His Son. This is the story of Ruth. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for these wonderful truths. Seal them to our hearts. And Father, I pray that You would work in our hearts. May we worship You as the Savior, as the Rescuer. And may You rescue some here even tonight. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.