

Title: **When Going Back Means Moving Forward (Part 2)**

Passage: **Ruth 1:16-22**

Theme: **Naomi and Ruth**

Number: **0912Ru1.16-22(4)**

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{Read Passage}

[i] Bring you up to speed on where we left off last week . . .

{Review}

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

Three scenes . . .

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

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"

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

This family in t/aftermath of a decision to leave t/promised land of Israel for physical well-being in a godless culture

Big mistake?

10 years later ==> better off in Bethlehem? In t/Land of promise?

What if they would have trusted in t/Lord's faithfulness? To provide?

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? Stubbornly trying to make things happen in your own strength trusting your own wisdom. 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)*

|

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

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

Trust that your sovereign God is able. Able to weave everything in your life, even your bad decisions, sin that you have forsaken, suffering, disappointments ==> into t/mosaic of His sovereign glory?

Romans 8:28? Do we believe it? Do we live it?

That's t/theme we're following ==> "God's sovereign glory."

Specifically His sov. glory for His pleasure and our good regardless of circumstances.

God's sovereign glory cannot be ruined by famine, disaster, sin or suffering.

His goal for us & our good cannot be [^]

Ro 8:28 is followed by? Ro 8:29 . . . & 30 (& ==> 31 ==>)

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

We could add ==> bad decisions, sin, suffering, disappointment, depression, failure.

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)

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.

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.

Return is a key word in Ruth. Chapter 1 (6,7,8,10,11,12,15).
All forms of the Heb. word שׁוּבָה. (Heb. word for repentance).

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.

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.

(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)

(ii) Why "mother's house?"

T/*mother's house* was a phrase used to refer to a mother's role in matters pertaining to her daughter's marriage.

(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.

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.

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

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

Kissed = saying goodbye. Loud, agonizing sobs.

(2) 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? 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.

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, 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, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.”

(c) Transition - Tears of Separation (14)

And they lifted up their voices and wept again;

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

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

d. Orpah Leaves; Ruth Cleaves: *God's Sovereign Glory at Work in His Choice* (v. 15-22)

What happens between vv. 14 & 15 (implied) ==> Orpah turns and walks away. She exits the scene. Not only is she out of the scene; she's out of t/play -- we don't see her again (her name only 2x in Script. v. 4, 14). Sad

God's sovereign glory in His choice of Ruth.

Sets up ==>

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

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? (you've read t/story).

Contast ==>

Orpah returns to t/idolatry & false worship of Moab.

Ruth, leaving Moab for Beth. = true conversion of sorts (cf. "returned" in v. 22).

(a) Ruth's Great Confession of Commitment (16-17)

What follows in the next 2 vv. is one of t/greatest statements of love & loyalty in all of Scripture.

Listen to it ==>

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or 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."

Wonderful statment of unconditional love and devotion (weddings - misses the context but applicable).

i. Ruth's confession is organized around 5 paired statements

Lit. "couplets" - 5 couplets / 5 twins.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1st pair (v. 16) | Do not urge me to leave you
or turn back from following you |
| 2d pair (v. 16) | for where you go, I will go
and where you lodge, I will lodge |
| 3d pair (v. 16) | Your people shall be my people
and your God, my God |
| 4th pair (v. 17) | Where you die, I will die
and there I will be buried |
| 5th pair (v. 17) | Thus may the Lord do to me (and worse)
if anything but death parts you and me. |

1st pair (v. 16)

Do not urge me to leave you
or turn back from following you

Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

No! (neg.).

2d pair (pos.)
(v. 16)

for where you go, I will go
and where you lodge, I will lodge

Not only will I follow you. I will live with you (implied idea is "I will care for you"). You've suffered. You have lost your husband. You're a widow. You are too old to bear children. I will care for you!

Isn't it something that t/same sufferings were Ruth's! She'd suffered // lost her husband // was a widow // while she was young up until this point t/Lord had closed her womb.

Selfless devotion means taking our eyes off our own afflictions to attend to those of others. Healing in humility.

Years ago I had gone through a difficult season of trials when this struck me. I was driving one day feeling particularly sorry for myself when God impressed upon my heart that I needed to attend to t/needs of another person who I immediately called on t/phone. What an encouragement that was.

3d pair (v. 16)

Your people shall be my people
and your God, my God

Chiasm here ==>

- 1st (16) Do not urge me to leave you
or turn back from following you
- 2d p (16) for where you go, I will go
and where you lodge, I will lodge
- 3d (16) **Your people shall be my people
and your God, my God**
- 4th (17) Where you die, I will die
and there I will be buried
- 5th (17) Thus may the Lord do to me
if anything but death parts you and me.

Your people shall be my people

I'm a gentile; a moabite but I will adopt your people, the Jews even if they won't adopt me.

and your God, my God

I will not only abandon t/land of Moab but t/idolatry of Moab also. .

Block writes ==>

With radical self-sacrifice she abandons every base of security that any person, let alone a poor widow, in that cultural context would have clung to: her native homeland, her own people, even her own gods. [Block, 641]

My theological outline point ==>

d. Orpah Leaves; Ruth Cleaves: *God's Sovereign Glory at Work in His Choice* (v. 15-22)

God was sovereignly working. God chose Ruth over Orpah.

Romans 9:10–11 ==>

10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac;11 for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls,

BUT - One thing we need to be careful of (something Evang. are often guilty of) imposing a NT doctrine of conversion on the t/OT.

What I don't mean by that ==> OT was not "works salvation". Always by grace alone through faith alone (Abraham Rom. 4). While t/object of that faith in t/OT was YHWH - God of Israel (1st person of t/Trinity); The basis for their salvation - even in t/OT was the yet-future-to-them death of X.

What I do mean is that we can't point to Ruth's statement here as a confession of faith that equates to a conversion moment.

Hear t/Fundamentalist Preacher: *"Here Ruth Confessed w/her mouth God as LORD and was wonderfully saved! And if there was an aisle, if there was an altar, she would have walked that aisle and knelt at that altar."*

We're in t/time of the Judges. Dark time in Israel's history. Lots of ignorance.

We don't know what t/state of Elimelech's devotion to t/God of Israel was // Naomi's.

Remember, 10 years had passed.

What sort of instruction in t/Law of God was going on in the household of Elimelech and Naomi? We don't know.

T/author doesn't tell us (we have to read between t/lines some and that's something we have to be careful about).

There must have been some sort of continuing ID w/Naomi and t/worship of YHWH or Ruth wouldn't have said this. She's affirming that to join w/Israel was to join w/Naomi's people // Israel was to join w/Israel's God, YHWH.

As one OT scholar observes =>

Although some would interpret Ruth's declaration as a sign of conversion, it is better viewed as an affirmation of a transfer of membership from the people of Moab to Israel and of allegiance from Chemosh to Yahweh. How much she knew about the implications of claiming Yahweh as one's God we do not know. She had indeed been observing Naomi for more than a decade, but from what we have seen of her in this chapter she hardly qualified to be a missionary of orthodox Yahwistic [Jewish] faith and theology. But this is a start, a noble beginning. [Block, 642]

4th pair (v. 17) **Where you die, I will die
and there I will be buried**

This is a total, radical commitment. This is for life.

Where you were buried was of great importance.

Even today we see that. Think about how signif. it is for t/remains of a missing soldier (Vietnam) to be recovered & buried on Amer. soil?

For a Jew to die & be buried outside t/land of Israel, t/Promised land, was to be under a curse (Amos 7:17).

Here's another contrast that we have to see.

Where was Elimelech? Where was t/deceased husband of Ruth?
Back in Moab.

Your people shall be my people; and your God, my God

Where you die (in t/land of your people), **I will die;**
and there (where your God is) **I will be buried**

She seals her pledge w/what's called an impreccatory oath ==>
5th (17) **Thus may the LORD do to me**
if anything but death parts you and me.

Till death do us part.

Culturally may have included a gesture (hand across t/throat).

Here we again have LORD. Who is Naomi's God? He is t/LORD.
The sacred name that's invoked as a witness. Typical of oaths ("Do you promise to tell t/truth; the whole truth and nothing but t/truth so help you, God").

Radical faith ==>

Ruth stands alone; she has nothing. No support group; no promises of future blessing. She may have expected rejection. In her 20s she's committing herself to a life of an old woman.

As someone else noted, there may not be a more radical decision in all the memories of Israel!

How does Naomi respond?

(b) Naomi's Silence (18)

When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

The dialogue turned into a monologue which resulted in Naomi's silence.

Some have interpreted her silence to mean she was upset; she turned away and tuned Ruth out. Nothing here that would necessitate that.

Naomi having heard t/beautiful confession saw Ruth's determination and said no more.

2. Arriving in Bethlehem (vv. 19-22)

a. Transition - Traveling to Bethlehem (19a)

So they both went until they came to Bethlehem.

Verse 1 in reverse. Around 70 miles & several days of travel on foot.

b. Fourth Dialogue - Naomi and the townspeople (19b-21)

And it came about when they had come to Bethlehem . . .

They arrive in t/city.

. . . that all the city was stirred because of them . . .

Better translated "town" - Beth. no larger a few hundred.

"stirred" = comes from a Heb. root חָרַח (onomatopoetic - "hum; abuzz").

... and the women said, [Feminine form of t/Heb. pronoun] it was t/women who were out and recognized her

... and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

rhetorical ? expecting a "yes" answer.

In biblical interpretation one thing that isn't always evident is tone of voice. Often, our understanding of words depends on things like voice inflection. (You are so needy w/different inflections)

That's why things like email get us in trouble sometimes.....

How do we take t/response ==>

... and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

ITN - sarcastically; ITN - pitifully; ITN - joyfully.

Indicators in the orig. text that it's t/latter.

The buzz among t/people of t/town would indicate excitement.

Question itself indicates a joyful recognition. Could be understood:

"Why look! It's Naomi!"

Naomi means "pleasant" & here's a pleasant surprise.

(1) But is Naomi "pleasant"? (v. 20-21)

And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

Hebrew "mara" = bitter. Moses & people of Israel following t/Exodus wandering in t/wilderness looking for water (15:23 - they couldn't drink t/waters of Mara - why? they were "bitter")

(a) Waters of suffering for Naomi were bitter

“I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.

What a word play!

Why did they leave Bethlehem a decade earlier? They were empty. Famine. Physical issue.

But she says

“I went out full,

Full of hope. Moab represented a place where they could escape t/sufferings of famine. Rather than escape suffering they ran headlong into it.

. . . but the LORD has brought me back empty.

Full stomach but an empty heart. Misery in Moab.

“Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

I can just hear t/voices out there "defending God"

"No Naomi - it was your own bad choices. God was helpless in t/matter." "No Naomi - it was t/enemy who stole your joy." "No Naomi - God didn't do this; He would never have a hand in suffering or affliction."

Sentimental Hogwash! (shouldn't invoke "hogs" in a Jewish tale).

John Piper ==> I would take Naomi's theology any day over the sentimental views of God that permeate so many churches today. Endless excuses are made for God's sovereignty. Naomi is unshaken and sure about three things: God exists, God is sovereign, and God has afflicted her. [Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, 37-38]

Her theology of God's sovereignty was correct.

[Almighty 2x which is fitting]

God rules t/affairs of t/nations&t/flight of birds.(Dn. 2:21; Ma 10:29)

He directs t/winds and the lightening.

He even governs t/roll of t/dice (Prov. 16:33) - not an excuse to g.

He gives life and takes life away (Job. 1:21).

He works all things acc.to t/counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11).

He's as sovereign over t/pile of junk on your desk as He is over t/destiny of your own soul.

Her theology of God's sovereignty was correct.

But her theology of God's providence / love and care for his children was lacking.

As Piper also observes, she wasn't yet at the place of Joseph.

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

Verse 6 - Naomi knew that God ruled t/rain to His sov. glory.

That was evident in t/acct. 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.

But she allowed her own bitterness to obscure how God worked through suffering to bring about the salv. of His people.

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.”

c. Conclusion (22)

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.

Even here there are some things to note . . .

Ruth the Moabitess

Returned (Ruth returned)

Barley Harvest.

Naomi and Ruth arrive in “the house of bread” just when the grain for bread is ready to be cut, that is, in late April or early March by our calendars.

Barley was the first crop to be harvested each year, the timing of their arrival meant that Naomi and Ruth could get settled at a time when food would be relatively plentiful and that they were around to lay up stores of each crop for the dry season.

Addition of "B.H." also points us forward to hope (chapter 2). In a barley field that Ruth will meet her Kinsman Redeemer.

Lessons?

1) "going back means moving forward."

Philippians 3:13 . . . one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

2) Suffering and afflictions are bitter, do not allow them to move your hearts toward bitterness.

Just as God brought famine; He took it away. He visited His people in bringing them food (v. 6)

3) Trust Christ no matter what. Do right no matter what.

That's hard when times are hard. But it's during those times that we trust best. See with the eyes of faith. Bitterness is a powerful blindness.

"God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

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.

3) Suffering isn't necessarily a commentary on God's displeasure

IOW - we think God is punishing us. While that may be true; if it ever is true; it's his loving hand of discipline. But it's always out of love. Remember that the one who suffered the greatest deserved it the least (not at all) - JC.