

Good to see you all. Let's open our Bibles tonight. We're gonna get started in the book of Ruth. Back to our Old Testament going through the Bible. If you've been with us for any length of time, you know that we kind of dropped off at Judges and then spent the last sixteen months going through the book of Acts. So we've done Genesis through Judges in-depth; they are all available in the book store if you weren't with us. It is our intention to continue through the Old Testament from Ruth to the book of Ezra, which will complete the historical books of the Old Testament. Everything beyond Ezra can be fit back into what we're going to be studying over the next several months.

The books that we're looking at are pretty much in chronological order - starting with Deuteronomy and then Joshua and then Judges, which will bring us all the way to the first king of Israel through Samuel, the last judge, to Saul and to David. Through the life of Moses, the children of Israel had been led out of Egypt, had been delivered from the hands of their enemy, had been given a national identity. Through Joshua's ministry, they possessed the Land of Promise that God had promised them from the beginning through the ministry of Abraham. By the time that Joshua died, much of the land still needed to be conquered. It remained in the hands of the enemy. However, every strong and organized power had been defeated. The individual tribes had been given their allotment of land, if you will, by the LORD. They were given an urgent injunction by Joshua, before his death, that they should finish the work of destroying the enemy found in their area that God had given to them - that could do that by God's power and by God's leading and that they should possess their possessions.

Unfortunately, that didn't happen, and so we find ourselves in the book of Judges. As you go through the book of Judges (and we did in very slow detail), about 410 years of history pass. Well, that's kind of an overlapping timeframe; 340 years of actual history move forward, and we find ourselves from 1380 or so to the time of Saul, about 1040 B.C. The narrative found in the book of Judges (the book right before what we're going to look at tonight) covers a lot of years in very quick succession and quick review. The lessons are life-changing. If you didn't go through the book of Judges with us, I would really encourage you to go back and do that. Much of the book speaks of the failure of God's people to follow Him, but

yet many of the judges themselves were godly men and women in leadership and influence. There are about fifteen judges in the book of Judges that are mentioned during that time period until we get to the last judge, which is going to be Samuel (we're going to run into him after the book of Ruth here in three or four weeks). They rarely had total power, these judges. They were usually very influential in different parts of the country. They are not all listed very chronologically. Some of the judges were mentioned in passing; we know nothing about them except their name. Other people like Deborah or Gideon or Samson we know a lot about, and we've learned by studying their lives.

If you go through Judges 1 and 2 - and the reason I'm going over the judges so much is Ruth occurs during the time of the judges - if you go through the first couple chapters of the book of Judges, you get immediately from God the cause and effect of the problems that the nation was facing. And the defining verse is in chapter 2:10 of Judges, which says, "When all that generation" (Joshua's generation) "had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel." So in just very quick succession, a nation rose up who didn't know God personally and wasn't influenced by what God had done in the past; which is why the book of Judges tends to be such a sad state of affairs.

The final five chapters of the book of Judges stop the chronology altogether, and they kind of give you a broad overview of the kinds of things that were happening in those days. In fact, the chronology stops with Samson, if you will. But these last chapters in the book are kind of an appendix to give us insight into Israel's history to the time of religious confusion, to the political upheaval, to the great tragedy that befalls a nation that sets God aside. Though the nation had begun to walk with God, over time they degenerated into idolatry, and by the time we get to the end of the book of Judges, it is mayhem amongst God's people. The nation doesn't believe in God. They don't believe that God, obviously, has a plan for them. They've forsaken God as their Deliverer. They're questioning whether His Word is true. They've forsaken the approach to God that the sacrifices God provided for them. In other words, they just cut themselves off from everything that God had given them as His chosen people.

The theme of the book - the book of Judges - is found in the recurring phrase that says "and the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD." In fact, seven times this sin-drome is explained to us in the book of Judges, where

this sad generation - one after the other - finds rest in God's goodness. It leads not to thanksgiving but to rebellion. Rebellion, because God loves them, leads to retribution; makes it hard on them, He doesn't want to lose them. At some point - sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly - it leads to repentance. So, rest to rebellion to retribution to repentance. When repentance comes, God brings redemption - a delivering judge. And then they find themselves at the beginning again - rest - and that thing just starts all over again. The final five chapters of the book of Judges are characterized in an illuminating phrase. It says, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." If you read early on in the book of Judges, we read, "They did evil in the sight of the LORD." That's the description that's used four or five different times. But in the last five chapters, that recurring phrase is, "They did what was right in their own eyes." So they rejected the LORD and His ways, and now they're making up their own.

So, if you read the first sixteen chapters or so of the book of Judges, you will focus on the deliverers, on the judges. But in the last five chapters, there are these little cameos - kind of different random pictures of a society where people are living by moral relativism: what everyone thinks is good, everyone's doing what they want. There're no absolutes. And it's just a mess. What is good to me might not be good for you, and so I'll do my thing, and you do your thing.

Well, this last judge, Samuel, that we'll get to here, like I said, in four weeks, which will pick up the chronology from Samson forward, if you will, in the midst of that is this book of Ruth. It is a hidden gem that tells the story that God deems worthy to be given its own book. It is, after all, our favorite book of the Bible because that's the one we're studying. But it occurs during the time of the judges, and it's set forth in that kind of a mindset, of the people doing what they want in their own eyes and doing evil in the sight of the LORD, as a lesson of redemption at a time of tremendous moral and spiritual decay. That should interest you because you're living today in a state of real moral and spiritual decay, and yet you and I have to be witnesses for Christ and live for the Lord. There is this sin-drome that is going on. There is this waywardness amongst Israel's majority. And yet God was at work, working out His plans in the lives of those who were willing to look to Him, even in the midst of this mess called the book of Judges. The principle repeats in every generation for there is always a faithful remnant of Christians or saints in every age, even though their story is told in the backdrop of rebellion in the land. So don't be too discouraged because God will work in those who are looking to Him. When Elijah was really discouraged, even though he had fought the fight against

the prophets of Baal and had been victorious, when Jezebel threatened his life, and he ran in his strength as far away as he could, he complained to the LORD (there in 1 Kings 19), and he said to the LORD, "I'm the only guy left. You should be happy to have me! I'm the only one. They've killed Your prophets. I'm alone, I'm left. They're trying to take my life." And the LORD, in no uncertain terms, just kind of said, "Shut up. I've got thousands of people more than you. Now if you want to get back to work, that's great. But if not, I'll get somebody else. I've reserved seven thousand in Israel - they haven't bowed their knees to Baal. Every mouth hasn't kissed his. So come on, buddy. Let's go!" But he felt like that, like he was an isolated figure, an island in the midst of great despair.

Today, gosh I watched the news for the last couple of days in Israel - they kind of cover it differently than we do - but the morality of every culture is dictated by majority view. So that produces what we call relativism. Right? Everybody throws their ideas in the ring, and whoever agrees the most with one another, that's the way it works. From God's perspective, God's plans are absolute which means that they are to be everyone's personal guidelines for life. He doesn't change even if the generations change. He doesn't really care what the majority thinks. He's just makin' the rules Himself. He's God. And to the extent that we submit to Him, we find the kind of life that God wants us to have.

So the remnant here is represented, if you will, by the story of Ruth and a few others. They live by God's standards while the world is driven by the popular view and humanistic philosophy. Through it all, God is at work quietly, accomplishing His purposes. But at a time when the consciousness of God was missing from most people in the society - where His Word was set aside and people just did what they wanted - there's Ruth. There's the book of Ruth, and the heroes in the story are very unnatural, almost unexpected. But yet there're so many lessons, I think, for us to learn. We're to be the lights that the Lord wants to use in dark places we walk because we walk in obedience to Him amongst a world that is determined to refuse or to ignore Him.

It's only eighty-five verses, this book. I hope you've read it. But there are some powerful lessons in it, not the least of which is God has a tendency to work amongst those who will live in the world but not be of the world. And one of the, I think, overbearing lessons that I hope you'll walk away with from our favorite book here is that Ruth is a book about God's providence. Now let me try to define for you, very simply, what providence is from a biblical standpoint. It is God doing

naturally in our lives, weaving together many intricacies, to bring about a supernatural outcome. It's the natural work of God that produces a supernatural outcome. You have to watch to see it. He can slip it by you. There're plenty of people who go, "I don't see God working." Well, but the believer does because He works all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

Ruth is only one of two books in the Bible named after a woman. What's the other one? (Congregation says "Esther".) Oh, man, you guys are gonna be way ahead of me. In the Old Testament patriarchal society, these two ladies hold a distinction as being the central focus of their book. In fact Ruth is the only book named after an ancestor of Jesus, and that relationship becomes the focus of this book as we go. Ruth is the only book named for a Gentile (because she is), and yet we find her in the genealogy of Jesus Christ as a woman, as a Gentile, as a Moabite. The story of Ruth is a story of a heathen young woman who comes to the knowledge of God and faith in Him through the repentance of her mother-in-law. It wasn't that her mother-in-law, Naomi, was going to witness to her, "I want to win her to the LORD." No. Naomi was in the wrong place at the wrong time, doing the wrong things, suffering terribly for it; and in her repentance, Ruth found a relationship with God. In the end, Ruth will become King David's grandmother, and you will find her, like I said, in Matthew 1 in the lineage of Jesus. It is a story about redemption. If you go to the New Testament, redemption is always portrayed against the backdrop of slavery. That's kind of the connection. Right? Slave to sin, freed in Christ. If you go to the Old Testament, most of the backdrop for redemption is about land and people ownership and the exchange of a payment for a debt as it relates to the land or to the individual. So redemption is always painted in that portrait in the Old Testament rather than the New. The law of God allowed for a method of purchasing back both land and person when you lost them in debt; the practice known as a kinsman redeemer - an Old Testament Jewish practice that will spell out the work of Jesus in His coming to redeem man from his sin. Saint Augustine, who lived in 300, 400 A.D. (he was a saint of God in North Africa), wrote "the New is in the Old, contained; the Old in the New, explained" or the way we tend to quote it, "the New Testament is in the Old Testament, concealed, whereas the Old is in the New Testament, revealed." So, when you see these kinds of relationships where redemption is modeled out in the Old Testament Law, it is the seeds (kind of) of the New Testament in anticipation of what God is going to do. And we'll get that in this book. Honestly, we're going to get to chapter 1. Don't worry. I want you to have good footing.

Of the eighty-five verses in the book of Ruth, fifty of them are dialogue. It's mostly a conversation back and forth. And in them Ruth will demonstrate that if we are to be wiped out, God can restore us; and if we are left out, He'll make room for us. Every chapter (all four chapters) has a different setting. Chapter 1 is in the fields of Moab; chapter 2 in the fields of Bethlehem; chapter 3 at the threshing floor up on the hill of Boaz; chapter 4 near the gates of the city. Each of the chapters has a varying theme. Chapter 1 talks about the resolve of love - a young girl's resolve to follow her mother-in-law back to her homeland. Chapter 2 looks at love's response as she, gleaning, meets Boaz and his response to her. Chapter 3 is love's request - when she asks Boaz to redeem her, lays at his feet. And chapter 4 is love's reward. So the book of Ruth begins with a famine, closes with a family; opens with a funeral, ends with a wedding.

All right. Let's go to chapter 1. That's enough of that. I'll tell you everything I don't know. Verse 1, "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled," (so, again, we're putting you back to the book that we finished sixteen months ago) "that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion - Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there." The Elimelech family. Names are pretty important in the Old Testament, and certainly they give us, sometimes, great insights into the individuals. Sometimes kids are named in a way that expresses the parents' hope for them. Other times they describe the circumstances in which the children were born. Esau - his name means "hairy"; he was born like a cat. Jacob was a "heel catcher" because he grabbed a heel of his brother. Elimelech means "my God is King." It's a pretty good name; beautiful description. I suspect his parents had great hopes. It says to me, because it says it was during the time of the judges, that he came from a family that was walking with God, that they wanted to do the right thing when everyone else was doing the wrong thing. He was a man that grew up surrounded with the things of the LORD. If he lived up to his name, awesome; if not, disastrous. "My God is King." His wife, Naomi, means "delightful, pleasant." They had two kids. They were born, apparently, during the famine that was described here in Israel. Their names would say so. The word Mahlon means "sickly," and the name Chilion means "crying." So I suspect they were in poor health when they were born; it could very well be the cause of them dying early, later on. But, regardless, their names were not so pleasing; it seems to describe the conditions in which they were born.

The family, notice, lived in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the place that David would later be born; it would be the fields of Bethlehem. (We had a chance, just a week ago, to stand in the fields of Bethlehem and talk about that place.) It would be a place where the announcement of Jesus' birth would be made by a band of angels to a group of hearty shepherds, some 1300 years down the road in your Bibles. The name Bethlehem means "house of bread." But yet it was there that they had a famine, and the family of Elimelech could not find any food. This family lived in the Land of Promise. You remember, in chapter 28:15 of Deuteronomy, the LORD said, "Look, if you won't obey My voice" (and this was one of their challenges) "then My curses will overtake you, and the curse will be upon your basket and your kneading bowl and the fruit of your body and the increase of the land." And so He talks about losing the benefit of the lands in which God has put them, in the land of milk and honey, the place of promise. Put yourself back in the memory of the book of Judges. This was no doubt a dealing from God with His people because, again, there was that sin-drome, and famine is a great way for the LORD to lean upon His people so that they would cry out to Him. And you'll find it used constantly throughout the Scriptures.

Because we read here that they were Ephrathites, which was an early name for the area of Babylon, we can learn that this family had been here for a long time. They were relatively wealthy; they were successful. There was a godliness in their lives. And, from what we read down in verse 21, it was Naomi that said, "I went out full but have returned empty." So they had everything that they needed. It was certainly nothing that you could have wanted for the family. But notice that God brings this judgment of famine because these were the rebellious years. Right? The setting of the book is the book of Judges. And to God's people, famine was oftentimes a sign of God's displeasure with the way that they had chosen to live. "I will close the heavens and make them like iron," the LORD said in the book of Leviticus (26:19) to them. Haggai (1:10) said that "the LORD would withhold the rain and call a drought upon the mountains, and the grain and the new wine would disappear, and the labor of your hands would produce nothing." But it was always about God's relationship with the people through the provision that He made. And so that's the picture here - bad times, judges, godly family, successful family, blessed family, raised in a home that was interested in the things of the LORD, and yet they are caught up with everyone else in the chastisement of God, which is designed to bring them back to the LORD in faith so that He might bless them again. And that was His desire. In fact, you'll read down in verse 6 that they will hear in "Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread." So this

was just for a time. It was a shaking. It was a direct dealing of God with His people, and it was during that time that they decided to move away. Sin has a way not only of affecting an individual but a nation. So, God loves His people, He chastens His people, He wants to deal with them to keep them close.

We read, in verse 2 here that, during the time of the famine, Elimelech forgot his name. What is his name? "My God is King." And he sought to move his family away from the "house of bread" to escape the dealings of God and save his possessions, in the process relocating to the land of Moab. Now, when we had our folks standing in the fields of Bethlehem last week, if you look 30 miles to the east - and you could on a clear day, and we were there on a pretty clear day - you could see the hills of Moab, which was right across the Jordan River in what today is Jordan - the hills of Moab. So you could see where the fields of Bethlehem were and where they walked, 30 miles away. They went running from the dealings of God with the people in the land whom He loved.

We read, in verse 1, they "went to dwell." "Went to dwell" is an interesting phrase because, at least in the Hebrew, it suggests a temporary stay. It doesn't say they moved somewhere to live. It was kind of like we're going on a sabbatical, we're going away for a little while, and the very verb tenses would suggest that this was to be a temporary stay. Perhaps Elimelech said to himself and to his family, "Things are getting bad here, but if we can just walk a couple of days across the border, we can kind of wait it out. There's no famine over there. I'm not gonna stay over there. I'm just gonna visit the land of the heathen, and then I'm gonna come back." Now that's a bad lesson to learn because it's an easy promise to make to God, but it is harder to keep. And kind of like the church of Sardis in Revelation 3, where the Lord said to them, "You have a name that lives" (in other words, "Your reputation is one of godliness"), "but now you're dead." Here's a guy that forgets he has God as his King, and he makes a decision for his family to relocate them into a very heathen place; a tremendous enemy to Israel who always had been and always would be their enemy so that he could escape the dealings of God with the nation in hopes of surviving it himself without loss, if you will. You can't run from God when He seeks to deal with you. He should have stayed in the Land of Promise by faith. He should have gone through the fire. If he lost everything, he was still in the place where God would want him to be. He was serving where the LORD had called him. So, for the sake of his material gain, he chooses to run from God's dealing and runs to the world. He would rather forsake the Land of Promise, the "house of bread," the people of promise, the God who

promised, to try to save his own skin. That's a big mistake! I don't want you to miss the rationale behind that. When Isaiah was speaking in the name of the LORD to a nation that was suffering tremendously, waiting upon God's deliverance, he said to them, in chapter 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you." The LORD's promise to His people was, "Whatever you have to go through, I'll get you through it." But Elimelech, "My God is King," wasn't buyin' that right now, and so he walks by sight like Lot, not by faith like Abraham. And temporary gain or loss is never a good criterion for making good spiritual decisions. Don't measure things in the short term. Look a little wider, look a little longer. So, Elimelech looks to the riches of this life, takes his family to a nation who serves false gods, who was a sworn enemy of Israel. By the way Abraham, you remember, tried this. Right? He tried to avoid a famine back in chapter 12 of Genesis and was rebuked by a Pharaoh for it. His son, later down the road, Isaac, like his father, God stopped him in chapter 26 of Genesis - tried to do the same thing. Now here's Elimelech. They're all heading away from God's place to try to save their own necks.

Notice in verse 2 we read about Moab, "to the country of Moab." Moab was conceived in a cave (Genesis 19). So was his brother, Ammon. They were both children born to Lot's two daughters with an incestuous relationship; both of them along the mountains of what today is Jordan, the mountains around the Dead Sea; both of them perennial enemies of Israel. Moab, when the children of Israel were coming to the Land of Promise, refused to let the people pass through their land (Judges 11:17-18). When they said, "Well, could you at least give us water?" they said, "You can go find your own water." Deuteronomy 23:3-4, the LORD spoke and said, "Neither an Ammonite or a Moabite will enter into the assembly of the LORD through the tenth generation. I don't want any of them with Me." That's what the LORD said of these people. "Because you didn't give them bread and water, you didn't meet them when they were coming out." And so God turned on this nation and judged them. And even at this time, if you keep reading, it won't be long before they will be completely desolated, and there're no Moabites today. We know where the mountains are; we don't have any people. In chapter 108 of Psalms, verse 9, the LORD said of Moab, "She is My washpot." J. Vernon McGee, years ago, said the word for "washpot" was an ancient Hebrew word for "trashcan," and he's right. It's not a compliment. So Elimelech leaves the "house of bread" for the "trashcan" of the world because, in his understanding, the grass looked a lot greener on the other side than staying under the chastising, loving hand of God

upon the nation. Even though he was walking with God, he was going to lose in the process.

Now I pointed out to you that, in verse 1, it says that he had planned to just go for a little while. But notice, at the end of verse 2, you read the words and he "remained there." Now that's an entirely different phrase. It literally means he moved in. His intention was just to visit. The consequence was he was going to stay. You goof around in the world, eventually you get sucked into it, and that's exactly, unfortunately, what happened to him. I always think about the first step away from the Lord is always the hardest. I think Peter's first denial of Jesus was far more difficult than the third one. The first is usually the worst; it is harder to get back: the first lie, the first affair, the first deceit. Those are the ones that the Lord deals with you, but if you can get by 'em, man, you can roll. You can be sinner with great convenience. But oftentimes when people wander away, they just don't make it back because sin gets easier as you go.

Well the story gets worse. Verse 3, "Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons." The death and loss they hoped to avoid by fleeing Babylon overtakes them on foreign soil. You want to blame the dad, the father, the head of his house. But now he's dead. So you say, "All right. Did they go home?" The answer is no. Because his bad example now has left a family that is pretty much on a course that is self-destructive as well. So his death did not turn the family home; his bad example seemed to have a lasting effect on his boys who quickly settled in, quickly married two heathen (or unbelieving, idolatrous) wives, far away (even though it's only 30 miles) from the Land of Promise that God had given them.

We read, in verse 4, "Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah," (not Oprah) "and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband." For the next ten years, this family stayed in the world, so to speak. Not only had their two ill children married unbelieving women from Moab, but now they also die pretty early in life. And now there is Naomi, a widow, and she has, now in her care, two daughters-in-law that are also widows. The word "Orpah" means gazelle. I have no idea. She runs fast and jumps high? And "Ruth" - it's a word for friendly, or sometimes the word is used for friendship; and she would live up to her name with her mother-in-law. Naomi had, over a ten-year period, lost her husband and both of her boys, and she's living in

the land of Moab. Terrible. Learn this principle - biblical lesson - that Elimelech had not: the worst that the Lord has for you is still far better than what the world holds. Amen? You cannot make that trade. Naomi was starting to realize that. And again, the story slows down to just days and weeks, but it starts off with this whirlwind of ten years, and it catches you kind of off-guard. The phrase in Judges - rest, rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration - they're working here as well. It's the same kind of steps that she goes through.

We read, in verse 6, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread." In the midst of all of this loss, after ten years of terrible suffering, we read that Naomi, for the first time, began to think about going home. In fact, the words here "she arose" is a definitive choice; it's a decisive act. It was made as she had been left alone, and now she hears that God was blessing again. But where was God blessing? Not in Moab. He was blessing again back home to His people who had been brought into the land. In what we read, the very choice of Naomi to go home was an act of repentance to the LORD and a sorrow for the consequences that had now been ten years in the making. "I'm going back where I belong. God is at work. I've been out here doing nothing but suffering. I'm going to go back to where the LORD is moving." The famine was over. Was He blessing? He was. Calamity on foreign soil, the hearing of the hand of God blessing His people, drove her home. God will get you back and receive you back. But you have to learn that on the road, I guess, because Naomi, for a long time, seemed to travel on her own. Having determined to go back to Bethlehem, looking at these two girls - both Moabite women (and you remember God's declaration in Deuteronomy 23:3-6) - He doesn't want any Moabites or Ammonites in His congregation. "They're not welcome here. They're taboo. Don't even have anything to do with them. I won't have anything to do with them." So, knowing this was going to be a tough road - even tougher for her daughters-in-law, she seeks to try to release her kids, these daughters-in-law, to go back to their families and just to go find other husbands.

We read, in verse 7, "Therefore she went out 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 to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.' " (They were good daughters-in-law.) " 'The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.' So she kissed them, and they

lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, 'Surely we will return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go - for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!' " And so she tried to send them home. In the Old Testament, for the Jew (not for the Moabite) - Leviticus 25, a wife who lost her husband without having children was to look to his brother and marry him and have a child with him named after her dead husband so that the child might carry on the name, and the inheritance for the land would stay in the right places. Naomi tells these girls, because that's her understanding, "Look, I'm not getting married anymore. I'm not having any kids. And even if I was, are you gonna wait twenty years? That's not gonna work out at all for me. So, you guys need to leave." Which is a big step for her to take because she's all by herself now. She doesn't have kids, doesn't have a husband. She's sending away her daughters-in-law. "You go back. Bless your life. God bless you. I've gotta go back. I've been in the wrong place way too long." I think it's a big step for her to take. "I'm sorry for you that God has had to deal with me like this. My sin has had great consequences." And I'm sure that, in her mind, if she didn't share it, she would say to herself, "Life in Israel for a Moabite is gonna be pretty tough. You're probably better off going home."

Well, verse 14, "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law," (see you later) "but Ruth clung to her. And she said, 'Look, your sister-in-law as gone back to her people and to her gods;' " (interesting) " 'return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said: '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.' When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her." Naomi, grieving; Orpah, leaving; Ruth, cleaving. Just a little rhyme. You just remember it, you'll be all right. Now, we hear this vow used a lot in weddings. I've done a lot of weddings where this is kind of the vows that the kids use getting married. But notice, in its context, Ruth's devotion to stand with Naomi - to live with her, to die with her, to worship her God - is powerful words not only of commitment and allegiance but of

conversion. It is the words of conversion. "Your God is now my God." This comes from a woman who lives among the idols of Moab - in opposition to the God of Israel, in opposition to the people of Israel. "Wherever you go, wherever you lodge, wherever you're going, I'm going with you. And I'm going to stay there with you, and I'm going to walk with you." It is a turning point (although it doesn't, maybe, read that way) in biblical and in world history. Had Ruth decided otherwise, the Magi might as well have stayed home because Jesus would be born in Bethlehem of the seed of David, who was born in Bethlehem to Jesse, who was born in Bethlehem to Obed, who was born in Bethlehem because Ruth and Boaz would have a son named Obed in Bethlehem. Everything that God put together begins with Ruth's conversion. The providence of God and the supernatural consequences that came from His oversight are in motion, and nobody sees it; but you should see it. Her commitment was sure. Naomi is grieving over her sin and over the sins' consequences.

We read, here in verse 20 and in verse 21, when she goes home, she'll say, "Don't call me Naomi anymore, call me bitter. The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, I came home empty. Hasn't the LORD testified against me, the Almighty afflicted me?" Naomi is broken-hearted over the consequences of her sin, and she believes that coming here and living the life that they had lived cost her her husband and two sons and now was about to cost her her kids, her daughters-in-law as well. "What kind of witness was I to them?" She believed she'd brought this upon herself. By the way, I've never met someone who's living a backslidden life who said it was a good idea. "Yeah, dude, it's great!" (Pastor Jack stands with his hands on his hips.) Never. Never ever. So Naomi is just broken over her sin. She's repentant. She's goin' home. But there's a lot of crash and burn behind her, a lot of fallout.

Orpah is leaving. Though she loves her mother-in-law, Naomi, when it got right down to it, it was more of a price than she was willing to pay. She loved her family, she loved her god, she loved her neighborhood, she loved her culture, she loved her life. And though there were a lot of emotional attachments, she was not nearly as convinced about Naomi's God as Naomi was. So she had a lot of emotion but little devotion, and she turns, and she kind of walks away. She came a long way with Naomi, just not far enough. Kind of reminds me of the rich young ruler. He saw the right things in Jesus. He was close, just not close enough. So one goes away to obscurity. We have no idea how she turned out. She just disappears from the scene.

But then there's Ruth who's not so easily put off. She's a young girl. She's got her life ahead of her. She doesn't have a husband, she doesn't have children. She's about to head for Israel, a place she's not going to be very welcome, with a woman who's been just ravaged by difficulty. And she says to her, "I want to be with you. I want to be where you live. I want to worship your God. I've seen what it has done to your life. I want that for my life." So Ruth cleaves. Right? She's committed. She counts the cost. She's steadfast in her devotion. She's willing to forsake everything for the sake of the God of her mother-in-law. She's aware and knows what Naomi's going through, and I think it has drawn her to the LORD. In fact, the repentance of Naomi seems to have reached her heart. In fact, notice verse 18. Naomi, when she listened to what Ruth had to say, even stopped trying to talk her out of it. Right? So it is the conversion of Ruth from paganism and idolatry to the true God. It's a beautiful picture of what God intended Israel to be - a light to the Gentiles with the good news of His mercy. Unfortunately, that wasn't often the case.

Verse 19, "Now the two of them went until they came" (the 30 miles or so) "to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' But 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,' " (as we mentioned) " 'and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?' So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest." Two returned to Bethlehem: one backslider, one outsider - one who, according to Deuteronomy 23, was not welcome. She comes along with her mother-in-law to discover the grace of God. They are in fellowship, they are strong together. I would say that, in verse 21 - the first part of that verse, if you're taking notes, I would underline, "I went out full and came back empty." Because it is a pretty good description of walking away from the LORD. It is a great description of why backsliding is so foolish. You go back, you're just gonna lose; you can't win. Sin will take from you everything it can, and it will just leave you sorrowful. Naomi meant "pleasant." The word Mara means "bitter." Thank the LORD that, because of His mercy and grace, they could come back at all. But, look, she comes back ten years later. She was at the wrong place doing the wrong thing and now comes home with scars that'll last a lifetime - scars that she received by leaving the place of God's blessing. She is really Naomi, the prodigal daughter of the Old Testament - like the prodigal son. She arrives

there. But notice there's very little welcome. "Oh is that her?" There's excitement. "Are you Naomi?" "Okay, yeah" (Pastor Jack says this in a less-than-enthusiastic tone). Nobody offered to help her. Nobody took her in. No one seemed to care. It's interesting when people.....sometimes, in church, you'll see them go away and get in trouble, and then they'll come back to the Lord, and sometimes people are pretty hard on them. Not so much open arms. "Oh, aren't you the guy that did that or did that?" "Yeah." "Well, yeah, I don't trust you." The city kind of did the same thing to Naomi. So, she'll have to prove them wrong and walk faithfully with the LORD.

We'll end with this statement in verse 22, where we read that they returned "at the beginning of the barley harvest," or, if you will, the time of the Passover - mid-to late April, which was the same time that, years later, Jesus would come to die for the sins of the world. Eventually Ruth will marry Boaz on Pentecost, which also happens to be the day the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church. So you have these wonderful pictures. Right? Spiritual truths painted in type.

With Ruth in tow, Naomi now has to eke out an existence. She's sorry, she's repented, she's come home. But the consequences of her sin will follow her, and the way that she handles her loss turned out to be a great light in Ruth's life. It's extremely hard to preach from the pulpit of perfection, you know? When you're doing everything right? It is far easier to preach from the pulpit of brokenness. And Naomi was broken. And so what she did and how she did it had a tremendous effect upon Ruth. The honest life of a humbled saint can accomplish much, and God can take even rebellion and forgive us and then take our losses and restore us and then still use us. So we'll leave Naomi and Ruth together again, in Bethlehem - without any welcome - and see what God has to do with them next week in chapter 2. So your assignment - read chapter 2 of your favorite book in the Bible for next week.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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