

Ruth 1

v1

"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land."

- It is important to remember the context of this story. This story is set in the times of the judges.
- *Judges 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.*
- In a time when things seemed so polluted, dark and ungodly. In a time when there was no clear sound or vision, when there was no judge to encourage and guide the people. When there was no fellowship of saints to encourage each other. In the days when there were judges, when men did whatever was right according to themselves, when the word of God was twisted and communion with God was forgotten, when the people worshipped false God's and polluted themselves.
- Many in that day would have missed this story. Many would not have given these ordinary people much attention. They were not heroes or fighters or zealots. This story was not one that affected the nation. It was not a national victory or political accomplishment. Amid that darkness and sinful wandering, God was quietly orchestrating His beautiful, sovereign plan of Salvation.
- There was a famine. There were the consequences of their choices. There was a lack of God's blessing and provision. There was a lack of life-giving sustenance. The bread was running out. The bread of life was in short supply! All of their self-effort was only causing hunger, death and loss.

"a certain man of Bethlehem of Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, his wife, and his two sons"

- Elimelech left Bethlehem (City of bread) - Instead of calling upon The Lord in faith and crying out for Him to fulfil His promise, Elimelech turned to pragmatic worldly means. Looking to the world and himself to sustain His family and appetite.
- It was convenient for Elimelech to go to Moab. He had the means and the strength to travel. He packed up His family, left his land and his people and moved for an easier life. God's chastisement wasn't going to hinder him, he wasn't going to be lowered to cry out in faith... He saw a solution, leaned on his wisdom and got out.

v2

"his two sons were named Mahlon [invalid] and Chilion [pining];"

- Consider these names and their meanings: Mahlon (Sick, sickness, sickly) / Chilion (Wasting or failing)
- What strange names to call your children... These names would seem to be indicative of their physical stature but they are also accurate descriptions of the spiritual climate in the land. Their land and its prosperity were sick and wasting. Their relationship with The Lord was famished and failing.

v3-5

"And they took wives of the women of Moab"

- If we allow/encourage our children into the world, we are sure, in time, to have the world in our homes! Consider Lot and the awful that came upon his home and family.
- It was a sin and a shame for a Hebrew to marry a gentile. They had been given clear instruction not to mix the women and people of Canaan. Considering their history they should have been especially wary of the people of Moab.
- *Genesis 28:1 So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, You shall not marry one of the women of Canaan.*
- *Numbers 25:1-3 Israel settled down and remained in Shittim, and the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, [2] Who invited the [Israelites] to the sacrifices of their gods, and [they] ate and bowed down to Moab's gods. [3] So Israel joined himself to [the god] Baal of Peor. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.*
- So understand the great and wicked downfall that had come upon Israel because of the Moabite women. Moab was a physical and spiritual enemy! However also bear in mind though the great mercy and compassion of God. He is sovereign in all things and makes all things work together for good. Just like God raised up Solomon out of something that should never have been, he also drew in a Ruth.

"They dwelt there about ten years;"

- This is ten years of testimony.
- For ten years Orpah and Ruth watched Naomi and saw how she lived her life and conducted herself. They saw how she kept herself from the gods of Moab, they saw her worship of Jehovah, they saw her humility, faithfulness and service.
- For ten years Naomi prioritised her family over her God. She had no fellowship, she had no communion with God, she had no encouragement, no one of like mind, no one who understood her ways. She could make no altar or sacrifice.

v5-6

"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab,"

- Naomi only returned to The Lord after she had lost everything.
- She lost her sons in the enemy camp. We can't know for sure in what spiritual state they died but the picture is that they died in the world. They died in Moab, not in The Lord. Naomi did not win her sons to Jehovah, but she lost them to the world.
- Consider if Naomi had returned after the death of Elimelech. Even if her sons had not followed, she would have had ten years of communion with The Lord and fellowship with His body. She could have interceded for her family before The Lord.
- Ten years of watching your children live in the world. Ten years of disappointment, worry and frustration. Yes, she got to spend ten years with them, but at the cost of their souls.
- Just as Solomon only came after true penitence and repentance so too is Ruth only revealed after Naomi's heart returns to The Lord.

"for she had heard in Moab how the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread."

- How wonderful it is that the good news reached Moab!!
- *Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*
- *Romans 10:14 ... how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?*
- Oh, this is a precious encouragement to take opportunity to spread the gospel of Jesus. Consider the testimony that came from the fact that Naomi heard the good news.
- Who told her? How did she come to know? The messenger is not important but the message!!

v7

"So she left the place where she was, her two daughters-in-law with her, and they started on the way back to Judah."

- She left where she was.
- She got up and moved! She was no longer going to live in the world. She was no longer going to tolerate their ways, their influence, their gods! She left it all! All that was now familiar to her. All that had become her home. She came to the end of her self-life. He came to her senses.
- Luke 15:17-20 *Then when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have enough food, and [even food] to spare, but I am perishing (dying) here of hunger! [18] I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [just] make me like one of your hired servants. [20] So he got up and came to his [own] father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity and tenderness [for him]; and he ran and embraced him and kissed him [fervently].*
- There cannot be a mixture in our lives. We cannot add God to our sin and we cannot continue our sinful ways in God's presence/blessing.
- Three women, one broken-hearted (Naomi), one half-hearted (Orpah) and one whole-hearted (Ruth).

v8

"But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house."

- Why did she say this hear and now? What thought caused her to dissuade them when they were already on their way? Maybe she appreciated the sending off, perhaps it was customary to walk a little way with those who were leaving. Perhaps as she walked, she remembered the ways and customs of The Lord and remembered how dramatic the change of life would be to these girls.
- What we do know for sure is that both women had watch the same testimony for ten years and both women heard the same words from Naomi. She discouraged them!! Understand this from a gospel perspective! She did not entice them.

v10

"And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people."

- They both said this. Orpah showed a willingness to follow. She spoke quickly and freely of staying with Naomi.
- Orpah shows a desire for Naomi and a willingness to travel with her. Orpah was willing to walk with Naomi.
- Mark 4:5-6 *Other seed [of the same kind] fell on ground full of rocks, where it had not much soil; and at once it sprang up, because it had no depth of soil; [6] And when the sun came up, it was scorched, and because it had not taken root, it withered away*

V11-13

"But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me?"

"Turn back, my daughters"

- Naomi discourages her daughters!
- Consider how useful it would be to aging Naomi to have two daughters to help and care for her. It would have been profitable for her. She could better establish her household. Their joint income would have been very helpful. Isn't this how many "churches/Christians" think today. They use any means they can to persuade people, to entice them to attend their building and their fellowship. Naomi was far more honest and careful in her discouragement than most congregations these days.
- Naomi understood that she had nothing to offer them. She understood that there was nothing of Moab in Bethlehem, that life would be so completely different; life would not be comfortable, familiar, easy...
- GILL: that she could be of no manner of service to them, either to give them husbands, or to support and maintain them, should they go with her; or "I have exceedingly more bitterness than you"; her condition and circumstances were much worse than theirs; for though they had lost their husbands, she had lost both husband and children: or it was more bitter and grievous to her to be separated from them, than it was for them to be separated from her; her affection to them was as strong, or stronger than theirs to her; or they had friends in their own country that would be kind to them, but as for her, she was in deep poverty and distress, and when she came into her own country, knew not that she had any friends left to take any notice of her:
- This kind of discouragement is an understanding of their hearts and a far more honest and loving conversation. We can be so quick to entice people to Christ, to save them, to convince them that we're right but the truth is... They cannot serve The Lord as they are.
- Joshua 24:19] *And Joshua said to the people, You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. [20] If you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good. [21] And the people said to Joshua, No; but we will serve the Lord.*

v14

"and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law [good-bye], but Ruth clung to her."

- We can now see the true hearts of these women and how beneficial that discouragement was.
- In ten years both had watched the same life, both had seen the same faith and testimony and both now listened to Naomi as she pleaded with them in the way.
- Orpah clearly had some appreciation for Naomi and felt some connection and responsibility towards her. She had accompanied Naomi this far, she had expressed that she would go with her to Bethlehem but it turns out that her words, though passionate, were empty and in truth her heart was not with Naomi. She had the same two options before her as Ruth but she, like Lot, saw a better life for herself and she went the way of her culture, her people and her gods. She looked back at Moab with fleshly eyes and saw a better life.
- Imagine if Orpah had come to Bethlehem. Consider how hard and turbulent life would have been. Her heart was in Moab... She would never have settled in Bethlehem. With her desire for her people's god's and customs she would have been a pollution in the land and there would have been conflict and discord.
- But Ruth clung to Naomi. This cleaving was not just holding onto Naomi but it was leaving and forsaking all else! She was forsaking her land, her people, her culture, her family... She was leaving everything that was familiar to her, leaving it all with no prospects, no promises, no gain... Understand this last point. She didn't cling to Naomi for a better life on earth!! She clung to Naomi because she loved her and saw a spiritual life within her that she desired to know.

v16-17

"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. [17] 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 me from you."

- This is repentance! A forsaking of all that she is and a cleaving to the ways of Jehovah! She left all that had characterised her behind! She left all that had identified her. She said I will no longer be a woman of Moab, those false God's shall no longer be my gods!

- Psalm 45:10-11 Hear, O daughter, consider, submit, and consent to my instruction: forget also your own people and your father's house; [11] So will the King desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, be submissive and reverence and honour Him.

- She utterly yielded to the God of Naomi and His ways. She dedicated her life to following after Him! She had seen something in Naomi's testimony that caused her to fall in love with her God.

v18

"When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined..."

- It was only when Naomi saw that Ruth was earnest, sincere and steadfast that she left off discouraging Ruth. Naomi saw Ruth's heart and she was satisfied that she could not convince her otherwise.

- Coming to Jesus is not casual decision. Becoming a Christian is no quick, emotional decision made without thought or understanding. When a believer is Born Again there is of necessity an understanding of the depravity of sin in the life, there is the realisation of guilt, the revelation that the world is empty and wicked. Just like Ruth there will be a forsaking of all that you were and a yielding/acceptance to The Lord and His command.

- It is interesting to see that it was only when this heart was revealed that Naomi left off discouraging Ruth. We do so much to entice. But Naomi revealed the hearts of these women.

v20-21

"Call me not Naomi [pleasant]; call me Mara [bitter], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. [21] I went out full, but the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

- Sin has consequences. Sin has very real and very severe consequences.

- Elimelech had led his family into the world. He lead his family away from the promises of God; out of God's promise and presence.

- Elimelech just went to Moab to "sojourn". To sojourn means a little while, like a short visit. It wasn't his intention to stay. When a believer backslides he does not anticipate how long it will last and the devastation of the consequences.

- Ritchie: *So, as we look at the message of the Book of Ruth, there is a warning given to us that when things are tough, the answer is not to run from the difficulty but to see it through. There is that statement often used "Quitters never win and winners never quit". Many a Christian has come up against hardship spiritually, and has given up like Elimelech did, and run into a worse situation instead of seeing the trials turn to victories.*

- It is a mercy of God that He died! Consider if he had not. What if life had been good? What if they had been comfortable? What if their sons hadn't died and the grandchildren had been born... Ruth would have been lost forever! She would never have met Boaz.

- Ritchie: *I wonder what kind of welcome we give to a backslider when they return to Christ. Do we give them a real welcome or do we treat them with suspicion. Someone has said the Christian church is the only people who kill their wounded. What an accusation against us.*

- Naomi was burdened and shamed by her past and this is understandable... but she was coming back to the blessing! She was coming back to The Lord! No matter how shamed or wretched we may feel (and rightly so) let return to The Lord and let us keep our eyes up on Jesus and maintain our pleasantness in His salvation, His loving kindnesses and tender mercies.

v22

"So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess,"

- Naomi comes back broken, empty, shamed... But she comes back. Compare this with Lot. Even after all that he went through he never came back to Abraham, he never left.

- We will see this phrase repeated several times. The author is making it abundantly clear and giving us no opportunity to forget that Ruth was a Moabitess! This is truly a remarkable and wonderful thing! The love, mercy, grace and desire of God is wonderful! His desire has always been for the gentile... His desire has always been that they would come!

"And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."

- Consider all the loss that they have been through. The grief, sorrow, hardship, loneliness and the lack of blessing and spiritual fellowship...

- Now they were returned unto The Lord. It was harvesttime. Time to reap and to eat. Life was about to be fruitful!

- They came back to receive blessings that they had not sown for. This is a beautiful type of the gospel of Christ. Fruit that we never would have or could have prepared for.