

Lesson 2: Turning Back (1:6-22)

Read the Bible: Ruth 1:6-22

1:6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 10 They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me." 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die - there I will be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" 18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. 19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 She said to them "Call me no longer Naomi, Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" 22 So Naomi returned together with

Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Synopsis: This passage talks about Naomi, who was widowed, bereaved, helpless and living in a foreign land. Yet even with all these difficulties, Naomi still had faith in the Lord. She believed that God would care for his people. She decided to return to Bethlehem, the Promised Land of God. Out of love and concern, Naomi suggested that her two Moabite daughters-in-law remain in Moab to remarry and begin their new lives. But Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, chose to abandon the gods of Moabites. She was determined to believe in and serve the Lord of Israel, Jehovah, together with her mother-in-law Naomi. After a long journey lasting several months during which the two faced all kinds of hardship and difficulties, Naomi and Ruth finally reached Naomi's hometown, Bethlehem, just in time for the barley harvest.

1. Mercy and Care of Jehovah (6-15)

The main reason Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem was not because of the death of her husband and two sons. It was because "she had heard ... that the LORD had considered his people and given them food." Therefore, it was God's mercy and care that woke up her soul, and helped her realize that her only hope was to return to God. Even though the sins of the Israelites during the Era of Judges brought about God's disciplinary action through famine, the Lord still remembered his covenant with their ancestors. When Naomi encountered all the happenings in Moab, she finally realized what the root of all their problems was that they had departed from the considerations of the Lord which led to all sorts of troubles. God is the ultimate source of grace and peace for mankind! Therefore, she wanted to return to Bethlehem. The word "return" indicates not only the returning to a geological location, but also the awakening of the soul as well in perceiving the mercifulness and care of the Lord Jehovah.

2. Accompanied by her Daughter-in-law (16-18)

Naomi really had good intentions when she told her two daughters-in-law to go away

because it would have been extremely difficult for the Moabite women to adjust to the Jewish way of living! Beyond that, her daughters-in-law were both young and would have the opportunity to re-marry! Although Orpah eventually chose to leave, she was nonetheless an exceptionally good daughter-in-law, as the Scriptures describes her as being kind to her husband and respectful of her parents-in-law. We are in no position to blame Orpah. But Ruth declared, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” From this we can see that Ruth had deep compassion for Naomi and there was an intimate relationship between them. We can also witness the wonderful deeds of God in the life of Ruth!

3. The Lord shall provide (19-22)

In this section we see the mother and daughter in-laws set out for Bethlehem from Moab. The journey back was rugged and full of hardship. Again we see the unwavering love they had for each other. The Lord awoke the soul of Naomi and led her to turn around from her wrong choices in the past. However, when they arrived at Bethlehem, the whole town was in frenzy. Even Naomi sighed that she had returned empty! Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that they came to Bethlehem “at the beginning of the barley harvest.” This simple statement carries more insight than merely a season in agriculture; it depicts how God had wonderful plans in store beyond anybody’s imagination and expectation!

Bible reading: 1:6-22

©Scripture Study:

1. What constituted Naomi’s decision to leave the country of Moab and return to Bethlehem? Please find the following scriptures in the Bible which depict the cases where Jehovah show concerns for His people.

2. What were the choices made by the two daughters-in-law? What were the outcomes? What difficulties would Ruth encounter with her choice?
3. Ruth was a resident born and raised in the country of Moab. What characteristics do we see in her from the words she said to her mother-in-law (1:16-17)? Did she make such a choice solely on her own?
4. What does “Mara” mean? Why didn’t Naomi want people in Bethlehem to call her Naomi but Mara? What does the name “Naomi” stand for? What’s the gracious intention of God in this name?

©Questions for discussion:

1. What character traits can we see in Naomi throughout her persuasion of her two daughters-in-law to stay behind in their home land?
2. Everybody desires to go back to his hometown in glory, but Naomi returned to Bethlehem empty handed. How did she resolve the issue of “losing face”? What revelation can we draw from this?
3. Naomi responded to God’s call by leaving the country of Moab and returning to Canaan, God’s Promised Land. Where is the Promise Land located for Christians today in a metaphorical sense?
4. When Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem, it was at the beginning of the barley harvest. Do you think this was a mere coincidence? Please share your own stories of God’s miraculous guidance and provision in your life.

©Prayer:

The Most High God, glorious Father, let the Holy Spirit move constantly in my heart. Guide me, fill me, protect me, even press me, in order that I will not be hard-hearted and indifferent. Help me learn to let go of my pride and fear of embarrassment, and lead me back when I stray. In the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen!