

BOOK OF RUTH
RETURNING HOME EMPTY
RUTH 1:19-22

Introduction:

A story is told about a foolish old farmer who one day concluded that the oats he had fed his mule for years were simply costing him too much. So he hatched a plan: he mixed a little sawdust in with the feed, and then a little more the next day, and even more the next, each time reducing the amount of oats in the mix.

The mule didn't seem to notice the gradual change, so the farmer thought things were fine and kept decreasing the proportion of oats. But weeks later, on the day he finally fed the poor beast nothing but sawdust, the mule finished his meal and promptly fell over dead.

Now that may seem like a silly story, but it can serve as a parable of the **BACKSLIDER**—the **BELIEVER** who slips further and further away from **GOD** through **SIN** or **NEGLECT**.

Though we know our souls cannot survive on **SPIRITUAL** sawdust, we may well convince ourselves that a little won't hurt too much, and a little less real **SPIRITUAL** food won't be missed. Then, over time, the proportion of sawdust increases while the oats of **BIBLICAL TRUTH** gradually disappear. Before long, the change is complete, and our starved, sawdust-stuffed **SPIRITUAL LIFE** collapses.

NAOMI never meant for it to happen to her (no one ever does), but she wound up so very far away from where the **LORD** wanted her to be. And she found herself alone except for her daughter-in-law, **RUTH!**

This passage is all about **NAOMI** coming to her senses and making her way back home to **BETHLEHEM**—returning to the place of **BLESSING!**

I thank the **LORD** that even though we may **STRAY FROM HIM** and our life becomes **DIFFICULT** for us in our **WAYWARD CONDITION**, we can also choose to **REPENT** and **RETURN!**

I've called this study tonight... "**RETURNING HOME EMPTY.**"

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I. WE SEE THE ARRIVAL IN BETHLEHEM. (Vs. 19a)

The trip from **MOAB** to **BETHLEHEM** would have taken between 7-10 days. It would have required them to cross the **JORDAN RIVER** and to climb upwards of 2000 plus feet in elevation to reach **BETHLEHEM**.

Of course it would have been easier for them to stop short of the city, but **they continued until they were WHERE THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE!**

REPENTANCE is the same way! We shouldn't stop until we HAVE COME ALL THE WAY BACK!

There is no record of their conversation as they traveled. I'm sure there was probably at least some conversation at times. But, don't you know there was some quiet contemplation of days gone by too!

A. NAOMI Was Finally Back In The City Of GOD'S PRAISE!

Remember we said that "**Judah**" means "**praise.**" **BETHLEHEM-JUDAH** was the place the **LORD** had chosen for **HIS NAME** to be **HONORED** and **EXALTED**.

But **NAOMI** had left the place the **LORD** had originally chosen for her and consequently, **there was no PRAISE in her heart when she was in MOAB.**

That CHILD OF GOD who is away from the FATHER'S HOUSE cannot have a HEART OF PRAISE, nor can their life be HONORING to the LORD!

B. NAOMI Was Finally Back In The City Of GOD'S PRESENCE!

Verse 6 says that they heard how that the **LORD** had visited **HIS PEOPLE** in **BETHLEHEM** in giving them bread.

BOOK OF RUTH
RETURNING HOME EMPTY
RUTH 1:19-22

While NAOMI was in MOAB, she was away from the LORD'S MANIFEST PRESENCE!

When a SAINT is away from the LORD'S will for his life, he can not enjoy the MANIFEST PRESENCE OF GOD!

*(Ill. Jonah - **Jonah 1:3**—"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.")*

When a BELIEVER returns, he or she can once again enjoy the BLESSED PRESENCE of the LORD.

***Psalm 16:11**—"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."*

NAOMI Was Finally Back In The City Of God's Praise...Presence...

C. NAOMI Was Finally Back In The City Of GOD'S PROVISION!

Remember we said that "**BETHLEHEM**" means "**HOUSE OF BREAD.**"

It was in the city of **BETHLEHEM-JUDAH** that **NAOMI** would find the best of **GOD'S PROVISIONS**. It was there where she could be fed!

So it is with the SAINT. GOD'S best BLESSINGS are reserved for those who will stay close to where HE is working!

D. NAOMI Was Finally Back In The City Of GOD'S PEOPLE!

She returned to a place of **kindred spirits and like-minded people.**

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RETURNING HOME EMPTY
RUTH 1:19-22

She didn't belong in **MOAB**. In **MOAB**, she was different! In **BETHLEHEM**, she belonged!

So it is with the wayward **CHILD OF GOD!**

We don't belong away from GOD...

We belong in the place of HIS PRAISE, HIS PRESENCE, HIS PROVISION and HIS PEOPLE! We'll never fit in anywhere else!

We'll never find what we need anywhere else!

WE SEE THE ARRIVAL IN BETHLEHEM...

II. WE SEE THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN BETHLEHEM.

(Vs. 19b-21)

Where it says that "*all the city was moved about them*", it means the city was **disturbed and in an uproar**. **NAOMI'S** return to **BETHLEHEM** without her husband or sons, broke, and in the company of a stranger, a Gentile at that, made news all over town!

A. NAOMI Spoke Of GOD'S PROVIDENCE! (Vs. 21)
"...The LORD hath brought me home again..."

She told of how the **LORD** worked to bring her home.

Don't you wonder how many times she had to tell of the death of her husband and her sons?

BETHLEHEM-JUDAH was still home where she belonged! She was like the prodigal son who said in **Luke 15**, "*I will return to my father's house.*"

We can try to run from the **LORD**, but we cannot hide!
(exp. Jonah!)

B. NAOMI Spoke Of GOD'S PUNISHMENT! (Vs. 20-21)

"... the Almighty hat dealt very bitterly with me." (Vs 20)

"...the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me." (Vs 21)

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RUTH 1:19-22**

She seems to blame all this on the **LORD**. But we know, as she had to know, that all that happened to her was as a result of the poor choices of her and her husband!

Her words reveal her heart, she said, (*vs 21*) "*I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty...*"

"Naomi" = "Pleasant"; "Mara" = "Bitter"

Evidently, **ELIMELECH** was a wealthy man when he left **BETHLEHEM** for **MOAB**.

(*vs. 21*) She says "*I went out full and the LORD hath brought me home again empty.*"

The LORD will fill us up, but the plan of the devil is to empty us out! GOD knows how to get our attention!

Unfortunately, for some it takes a complete emptying before GOD gets their attention!

Sometimes GOD only needs to leave us to ourselves and let sin do its emptying work on our lives!

Proverbs 1:31 says, "...they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

If we are not where we should be with the LORD, what will it take for the LORD to get our attention?

WE SEE THE ARRIVAL IN BETHLEHEM...

WE SEE THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO BETHLEHEM...

**BOOK OF RUTH
RETURNING HOME EMPTY
RUTH 1:19-22**

III. WE SEE THE ANTICIPATION IN BETHLEHEM. (*Vs. 22*)

A. It Was A Time Of Blood.

The time of **barley harvest** was also the time of the **PASSOVER!**

The **PASSOVER** was a time of **MEMORIAL of GOD'S REDEMPTION!** It was the time to shed the blood of a lamb and commemorate the deliverance of **GOD'S** people from **EGYPT. (*Exodus 12*)**

This is a picture of coming home through the blood. That's how we can come home too. (*1 John 1:7-10*)

Thank **GOD** that the **BLOOD OF THE LAMB** is sufficient to take care of the sins of the wayward saint!

B. It Was A Time Of Bounty.

This was also the time of the **FEAST OF THE FIRSTFRUITS. Cf. *Leviticus 23:10-14*** (**PASSOVER; UNLEAVENED BREAD; FIRSTFRUITS; PENTECOST; TRUMPETS; ATONEMENT; TABERNACLES (BOOTHES)**)

This was a time when the first of the **barley harvest** was offered in a **wave offering** before the **LORD**, in gratitude for the **harvest** that was about to be reaped.

When the person brought the **first fruits** and the **priest** made the **wave offering**, it was **honoring** the **LORD** and saying, "*This is just the first, there is more in the way!*"

JESUS is presented as the "**Firstfruits from the dead**" in the New Testament. (*1 Corinthians 15:20; 23*)

1 Corinthians 15:20—"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

BOOK OF RUTH
RETURNING HOME EMPTY
RUTH 1:19-22

1 Corinthians 15:23–“But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.”

Blood...Bounty...

- C. **It Was A Time Of Beginning. (A new beginning!)**
NAOMI wanted her name to be changed to "**MARA**."
But, when the **HOLY SPIRIT** mentions her in *verse 22*, **HE** still calls her "**NAOMI**."

She may have been "**BITTER**" in heart, but the **LORD** had some "**PLEASANT**" blessings ahead for this woman.

The people asked the question in *vs 19*, "*Is this Naomi?*"
The people of **BETHLEHEM** were amazed at her appearance and how her problems had affected her countenance. **SIN** always brings along trouble! **SIN** will ride you hard and put you through the ringer (so to speak)!

But the **LORD** was about to give her **BLESSINGS** and **GLORIES** that she could not have imagined!

While people may mourn over the troubles of the **SINNER** (and well we should.) We need to remember that there is **JOY IN HEAVEN** over a **SINNER** who **REPENTS**.

Luke 15:7–“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”