

INTRODUCTION. “I” says God, “*multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave **parables***” [Hos 12:10], in order to **communicate** His truth and Word to us. As children are taught through **illustrations** and **pictures**, so God, step by step enlightens His people - gradually. X constantly used parables as a means of getting a **message home** to His hearers. So, in the **history** of the OT, we have God ‘speaking’ to us and showing us in **concrete form** His will and purpose. All of Scripture is written for **our learning!** Here we have an account of God’s gracious dealings with one of His own dear children - who was brought out of pagan darkness into the blessings and liberty of God’s people!

GOD USES ‘MEANS’ to BRING HIS PEOPLE to FAITH

The **insignificant common** events of life are used by God! “*a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons*”[1]! **APP** Yes, such a **simple event** had profound and eternal **consequences!** The places we decide to go to and live, the people we meet there are part of a **chain** of circumstances under God that we just cannot tell what is significant and what is not! **All** events are **connected** together!

Yes, and **adverse/painful** providences are used too! “*a famine in the land*” – yes God can and does (more often than we think), use **adverse** circumstances to bring His people out of spiritual darkness! It was the famine that **caused** Elimelech to leave Judah and go to Moab! *But even more painful **multiple deaths** - Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion all died! Even bereavement can, under God, be blessed! Events would have taken a completely different turn if these three deaths had not taken place! **APP** Who knows what good may come out of the **suicides** in Wales! The **Ipswich** murders? So **pray** that God will bless even these sad events today!

The GREATEST INFLUENCE on RUTH

The **most direct** means was **Naomi’s character!** The best ‘means’ are Godly people! Naomi had a tremendous influence on Ruth! She

“let her light shine before men...”[Mat 5:16]. Paul gives Timothy good advice about widows *“let them **first** learn to **show godliness to their own household**”*[1Tim5:4] Naomi certainly did in her household! She was a great example! So much so that Ruth **wanted** to be **like** Naomi and respected her – and Orpah also wanted to **follow** Naomi back to Judah. **No domestic** fall outs! *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, **live peaceably with all**”*[R12] **APP** What an opportunity for Ruth & Orpah to ‘get away from this ‘Covenant God religious stuff!’ But no – they wanted it How do your household members see **you**? Do **they** want to follow **you**?

Naomi was what Paul called *“**truly a widow**”*[1Tim5:5] Such people says Paul *“has **set her hope in God** and continues in supplications and prayers night and day”*[1Tim5:5]! Having lost her husband, the visible means of her provider, she **trusts** God more than ever! God *“would supply all her needs”*[Phil 4:19]

She **believed** in the **promise** that God **would** visit His people. She believed God would ultimately make Israel a great nation. She knew God would not forsake His own inheritance! What He promised, He was able to perform. And on hearing about Israel she knew He *“**had** visited His people”*![6] She was able to **recognise** God’s hand in Providence. Luke records **twice** re Christ’s ministry, that it was the Lord visiting His people [L1:68,7:16]

Although Naomi was a godly person, she also had **PNS! Personal Negative Syndrome!** She had **her own negative disposition!** Yes! *“...the hand of the **Lord** has gone out **against** me”*[13]! *“Do not call me Naomi,(=pleasant) call me Mara (=bitter), for the **Lord** has dealt **very bitterly** with me. I went out **full**, and the **Lord** has brought me back **empty**...the **Lord** has **testified against** me and the Almighty has brought **calamity** upon me”*[20,21]! Note: she was **not angry** with the Lord (she was a good woman) but she did have ‘**low self-esteem**’ regarding her own **usefulness** for the Lord! She was a strong believer, yet she had a **negative self-view!** She may well have been **missing** her **husband** who probably **encouraged** her a lot and **enabled** her to capitalize on her talents/gifts!

Yet, Naomi was **manifestly humble!** Despite these ‘negative’ thoughts about herself, they did not prevent her from **returning** to her homeland in a much **lowly position** than when she left! She **followed** the Lord’s **will** – and her **love** for the **Lord’s** people! Regardless of the difficulties, she did what was right! No pride!

RUTH’S CHOICE and DECISION

One day Naomi stated loud and clear, she was returning back to Judah. Naomi made her decision. Now what about the girls? They too had to make a decision. We hear a lot today about having choices! Well, life is full of choices and we need to remember that **every single choice** has **consequences!** Some **very long term!**

The girls needed to count the cost! Going with Naomi would mean **leaving all** her **relatives!** And all her **associations!** The whole **culture** of Moab! **APP** following the Lord and making a decision for the Lord means leaving your **most precious idols!** That’s what leaving Moab and going to Judah meant for Ruth and Orpah!!

Jesus said a very solemn thing “*If anyone comes to Me and does **not hate** his own **father** and **mother** and **wife** and **children** and **brothers** and **sisters**, yes, and even his **own life**, he **cannot** be my disciple*”[Luke 14:26] Of course Jesus did **not mean** that we **literally** hate our family members – but **relatively** speaking, Xns are required to put X’s Kingdom before everything else!

Going to Judah also meant **new associations/friends!** Some people ‘fear’ meeting new people! Some people enjoy it!

There was **internal turmoil** within Ruth – and Orpah! They did **not** have a **personal** invitation! But of course they both knew that that Israel welcomed **aliens** and **proselytes** – just like the Church, anyone who **wants** to live under the **Lordship of Christ** is welcome! Their **own consciences** testified that they **could not use** that as an **excuse** for not going to Judah!

The CLIMAX of the CRISIS

Just because God and the Holy Spirit was ‘at work’ on the soul of

Ruth, did **not** mean she was **Stoical** and **calm** under all the considerations! On the contrary—her **emotions** were very **engaged**! Joseph did not find it easy to run away from Potipher’s wife! He **felt** the ‘tug’ of the flesh. Even with God’s grace in our hearts, it can be very difficult and heart-rending to make some of the decisions God calls us to make! So Ruth had her moments!

The **climax** was surely when **Orpah** decided to go back – that made it all the **more difficult** for her to make the opposite choice! **APP** When your closest friends decide not to ‘do church’, it can be difficult to say ‘I’m going because I believe it is right’!

But there was even more ‘**pressure**’ on Ruth when, listen for it, **Naomi**, of all people, **told her** to “*return after your sister-in-law*”!![15] That surely was **testing**! Whether Naomi meant it as a test to Ruth we don’t know, but it must have put **tremendous pressure** on Ruth! To have your mother-in-law and your sister-in-law advising you in one direction when you are disposed to another

Then comes one of the most famous sayings in the bible: “*Do not urge me to leave you or to return 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...May the Lord do so to me and more also if **anything but death parts me from you**”[16,17]*

Ruth was saying the ‘bottom line’ was she **preferred** to be with God’s people and have Naomi’s God than her former friends/gods. Her **heart** was with Israel’s God. “*We **know** that we **have** passed out of death into life, **because we love the brothers**”[1J3:14].*

Ruth “*was determined to go with her*”[18] – she refused to return to her own country! “*If they had been thinking of that country from which they had gone out, they would have **had opportunity to return**. But as it is, they desire a **better** country*”[Heb 11:15] They “*acknowledged that they were **strangers** and **exiles** on the earth*”! How **different** from **Agrippa** “*Almost you **persuade** me... a Xn*”

APP Where’s **your** home? Where do **you** feel most comfortable? Where are you a ‘**stranger**’?