

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 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**’?