

Message #3

Ruth 1:6-18

In every person's life he/she will come to some crisis crossroads in which a critical decision must be made. It may be an economic crisis; a logistical crisis; an occupational crisis; an emotional crisis or a spiritual crisis. If in that crisis moment a person decides to do what is right, according to the Word and will of God, down the road at some point in the future, that person will experience blessings of which they never dreamed or believed possible. That is the story of the book of Ruth, and a decision Naomi makes right here becomes a decision that would lead her to future blessings she could not have imagined.

WHAT PEOPLE DECIDE TO DO IN A CRISIS SITUATION DETERMINES WHAT GOD WILL DO WITH THEM AND FOR THEM IN THE FUTURE.

This book opened with Elimelech moving his wife and two sons away from the Promised Land and into the land of the Moabites. He apparently spotted some land that he felt was better than what he had in Bethlehem during a drought, so he moved. While in that land, he died. His two boys got married and they both died.

Naomi was in a foreign land without any husband or sons. All she had were two daughters-in-law. To be a widow in a foreign land would not be easy. She had no one to look out for her. She had no means of support. She had nothing to look forward to in the future.

Furthermore, her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, who were both Moabite women, were left without their husbands. So here were three widows, two of which were Moabites, and Naomi, who was an Israelite.

Now God goes to great detail to describe what happened to these women who are facing a critical crisis in life of being a widow and alone.

RESPONSE #1 – Naomi decides to return to her original home in the Bethlehem area. 1:6-7

The idea of returning to the land is critical to this section (1:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16). When some tragedy hits, each person will need to determine where they are going from that point on. They can return to the Lord and His blessings or they can return to the old life and the old ways.

Naomi made the decision that she was going to go back to where people at least somewhat loved God and His word. She decided to head back to Bethlehem. She has no idea as to where this decision is going to take her down the road. All she knows is it is time to move.

There are three facts brought out about this decision:

Fact #1 - Naomi's daughters-in-law went with her. **1:6a**

When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, her two daughters-in-law decided to go with her. That certainly would seem to suggest that they seemed to have a better relationship with Naomi, than their own Moabite family.

Fact #2 - Naomi had heard that God was providing food for people in Israel. **1:6b**

Famine times do not have to last forever even if it is a judgment of God. If God's people face and honestly admit and deal with their sin, God can and will begin to bless them again. That is apparently what was happening in Bethlehem.

The idea of the fact that the LORD had "visited" His people is the idea that God had specifically intervened and had positively come to the aid of His people in Judah and was providing food for them and blessing them. God had lifted the famine and it was a time of flourishing.

Finally Naomi heard some good news from home. God is blessing His people again.

When you drift away from the Lord, and you hear or learn of good things God is doing in the place you left, it does make you want to get back to that place because you realize God is blessing that place and those people.

This would almost force Naomi to think what am I doing here in a foreign land that has featured misery and death? She must have thought I can return to God's land where people are being blessed of God.

I don't know that she had much say in the original move to the land of Moab. It is possible that she was living with some guilt of the fact they had moved away from where God wanted her to be in the first place. She decided it was time to go home. She will not regret this decision.

No one will ever regret making a decision to move to a place where God is at work. No one will ever regret moving to a place where God is revered and His word is carefully taught. No one will ever regret honestly facing and confessing sin because that will lead to the blessings of God.

When we find ourselves in a famine time spiritually, get back to a focus on God and His word and that famine will go away.

Fact #3 - Naomi and her daughters-in-law began the trip to return to Judah. **1:7**

When Naomi made up her mind to move back to Bethlehem, she did not start the trip alone. Her two daughters-in-law went with her. So these three ladies, Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, began the trip to travel from Moab back on their way to the land of Judah.

It has been calculated that the actual distance from Moab to Bethlehem in a travel route is 50-60 miles. If these women were averaging 2 miles per hour in walk time, and they walked 8 hours a day, it would be 16 miles per day so it would take 4-5 days to make this walk.

These two girls loved Naomi and they did not want her making that trip alone. Naomi was a strong woman, who was willing to make this trip because she wanted to go home. She obviously went forward after losing her husband and two sons. She seems to have had some sort of faith in God, even in the midst of a major crisis. She had moved away and pretty much had lost everything and yet she still was a stable woman, who wanted to go to the place where God's presence and blessings were.

RESPONSE #2 – Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their home in Moab. **1:8-9**

At some point in the trip, probably before they crossed the Jordan, Naomi decided to have a heart-to-heart conversation with her two daughters-in-law.

We would observe here that Naomi is not giving the girls the best spiritual or theological counsel. She should have said, like Moses to his father-in-law, come with me to experience the goodness of God (Num. 10:29). She knew they worshipped false gods (**1:15**). Why would you advise them to return to an idolatrous land to people who worship an idolatrous deity? Had she truly been thinking right, she would have encouraged them to leave the land of the idols for the land of the true God.

Message #1 - Naomi told each girl to go to their mother's home. **1:8a**

Naomi realized these girls are traveling with me and they are leaving their family and friends. She knew what that was like because she had done it. So she said, "Look girls, you go to your mother's home." You stay here where you have your family and friends.

Message #2 - Naomi asked God to deal kindly with each girl for their kindness. **1:8b**

It is interesting that she uses the name LORD, which is the sovereign, covenant God of Israel. She knew this was the true God. On the one hand she is advising her daughters-in-law to go back to their false gods and on the other hand, she is praying to the true God and asking the true God to bless them.

The Hebrew word is "hesed" which often refers to the mercy of God. These two girls had been very kind and merciful to Naomi and she wanted God to be merciful and kind to them.

Message #3 - Naomi asked God to grant them peace and another husband. **1:9**

Naomi wanted these girls to have a good, peaceful, productive life. She wanted them to have the security of a home and a family so she prayed for that.

Naomi hugged them and kissed them and they wept.

RESPONSE #3 – Naomi’s daughters-in-law refuse to leave her. **1:10**

Both Orpah and Ruth said no we are not going home. We are going with you to your people. They truly sensed there was something about the God of Israel that was very special.

RESPONSE #4 – Naomi responds to her daughters-in-law. **1:11-13**

In **verse 11**, Naomi said why would you do that? I don’t have any more sons for you to marry. If you travel with me you won’t find another husband. Naomi is totally zeroed in on the physical and not the spiritual.

In **verses 12-13**, she said even if I remarried and had sons, it would be years before you would be able to marry them. Then you would be too old to even have children.

Naomi says in **verse 13**, no; don’t go with me because the hand of the LORD is against me.

So on the one hand she hears God is blessing Israel and wants to go back home and on the other hand she thinks God is against her.

Naomi believes she has become the target of God’s anger and wrath and she did not want the girls staying with her. In fact, she says it is harder for her than for these two girls. Each girl lost a husband, but Naomi had lost a husband and two sons.

Naomi had become somewhat of a bitter woman. One writer said, “Naomi is a bitter old woman who blames God for her crisis” (Daniel Block, *Ruth*, p. 637).

RESPONSE #5 – Naomi’s daughters-in-law respond to her wish. **1:14-15**

Now here is a crisis decision for these girls. Do they stay with Naomi and go back to Israel where the true God is or do they return to their own area and religion? This is a major crisis decision moment in their lives. The one who decides to do what God wants, will be blessed beyond belief.

Orpah kissed Naomi and headed for home, but Ruth clung to Naomi and would not leave.

In **verse 15**, Naomi pointed out to Ruth that her sister-in-law had returned back to her people and her gods and she told Ruth to do the same.

It seems that Naomi is saying my God is against me, so follow your sister-in-law back to your land and your gods.

RESPONSE #6 – Ruth responds to Naomi. **1:16-17**

If we are going to accomplish great things for God, there will be time when we will need to say no to other people’s advice and counsel.

There are the first real personal messages we actually hear from Ruth and they “are among the most memorable in all of Scripture” (*Ibid.*, p. 640). In **verses 16-17**, Ruth responded to Naomi with eight messages:

Message #1 - Do not urge me to leave you or to stop following you. **1:16a**

Ruth is basically saying stop pressuring me to leave you because I am not going to do it.

Message #2 - Where you go I will go. **1:16b**

Ruth says where you go I will go.

Message #3 - Where you lodge and live I will lodge and live. **1:16c**

Just as we have lived life together in the past, so I am going to live life with you in the future.

Message #4 - Your people will be my people. **1:16d**

Ruth is committing herself to being an ally of Israel and God’s people.

Message #5 - Your God will be my God. **1:16e**

Ruth is announcing that she is turning her back on her own Moabite deities and Israel’s God will be her God. Ruth wanted a relationship with the God of Israel.

Now she is doing this in the context of the fact that Naomi says God is sovereign and is responsible for the death of her husband and sons. Ruth does not blame God; she wants a relationship with this God.

Message #6 - Where you die I will die. **1:17a**

Message #7 - Where you are buried I will be buried. **1:17b**

Message #8 - Nothing but death will separate us. **1:17c**

Ruth is so focused on this that she even requests that God do worse to her if she doesn’t follow through with this commitment. She does so knowing God just killed her father-in-law, her husband and her brother-in-law. Notice she uses the proper noun LORD–Israel’s covenant God.

RESPONSE #7 – Naomi responds to Ruth. 1:18

Naomi didn't know what to say. She knew Ruth was serious, and she knew she wasn't going to talk her out of this. So she kept quiet.

At this point in the story, Naomi has no idea as to the monumental decision this actually is. Ruth has no clue whatsoever what God was doing. All she knew is that I want to go to where God is worshipped.