

It appears that Elimelech and Naomi had not considered their future in a prayerful way; it seems that they had not 'searched the scriptures' for the right way forward, and now disaster had struck, and Naomi was stuck in Moab, living with the hard consequences of decisions made without God.

None of us can change the past or wish it away. So it was for Naomi. She was in the place she was in and she knew something needed to change. In verses 6-18 Naomi started to make positive changes, based on news she had heard. She started a journey, but then gave some awful advice.

### **Firstly, things started so well**

#### **One, they heard good news**

After many years and much tragedy for Naomi, somehow the news came that there was, once again bread in Bethlehem. Her instinct was to return to her home town to partake of God's provision.

Three times in John 6 Jesus speaks of Himself saying, "I am the bread." Naomi wanted physical provision in Bethlehem, but we receive spiritual blessing from the One born in Bethlehem.

**John 6:35** *"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

**John 6:35** *"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

**John 6:51** *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*

#### **Two, they had good intentions**

It would have been folly not to act on the good news they had heard. Of course we always act upon what we hear – ignore, put on hold, leave to another time, or accept. It is not enough to hear good news we need to do something with it.

**Romans 10:14-15** *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"*

#### **Three, they had good actions**

Naomi realised the importance of the news she heard. Naomi's daughters-in-law were still living with her. As their elder, they bowed to Naomi's knowledge and decisions, and gathered their belongings to travel to Bethlehem. For a second time Naomi headed into the unknown. Most important here was the fact that she did leave Moab at last and headed in the right direction. But unfortunately things didn't continue so well.

### **Secondly, Naomi gave some bad advice**

In verses 7-18 we aren't just told the narrative of what happened. Instead we get to listen to a conversation. We need to remember this was the time of the Judges and people did what was right in their own eyes. As before, Naomi did not look with the eyes of faith, or think in a Biblical way and this could be observed in how she acted. It's important to remember that how we think will be reflected in what we do. Sadly Naomi's thinking and behaviour illustrated her lack of dependence on God for sound guidance.

**Romans 12:2** *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

The idea of a renewing is: “renewal, renovation, complete change for the better.” Please note that this kind of change is for the better and not the worse.

The three people in the conversation all thought, spoke and took action.

Naomi had the greatest spiritual advantages because of her family background, religious upbringing and even her home town of Bethlehem. Although Naomi was no great role model for faith and reliance on God, over the years it is implied that Orpah and Ruth had gained some knowledge about the LORD of the Israelites. As the events transpire we are both warned and encouraged.

Naomi put pressure on her daughter-in-laws. We could perhaps call this peer pressure. It is important to note that Naomi's suggestion was not mocking or intentionally destructive but it came from someone who was not spiritually walking well. Naomi wanted to do her best for her daughter-in-laws. But what she wanted and what was best were not the same thing. The initial good plan for all of them to go to Bethlehem didn't transpire due to Naomi's persuasion.

### **One, Naomi changed her mind and their plans (vs 7-9)**

They “...went forth out of the place...and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.” Naomi, Ruth and Orpah had packed up and commenced their journey. But Naomi was thinking through what they should do and she changed her mind for what she saw as a better plan.

She advised the two women that they “...return each to her mother's house...” Naomi must have had a kind streak – it seemed she was encouraging them to go back to a place where they would be looked after better physically than she could do. That was all very well, but what about their spiritual well-being?

Naomi thanked them for their kindness “...the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.” She then offered them a further blessing, “...The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.”

Naomi really thought this was the parting of the ways because “...she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept...” This was like the railway station scene in a film, loved ones kissing each other and crying as they separate. The problem was that metaphorically they should have been getting onto the same train!

### **Two, Ruth & Orpah's first reaction (v10)**

The shock quickly wore off the two would-be travelling companions. They retorted to Naomi's tearful goodbye, telling her, “...surely we will return with thee unto thy people.” So far so good – the emotional, ‘I'm doing this for you’ didn't work but the conversation wasn't over yet.

### **Three, Naomi gave compelling reasons - or did she? (v11-13)**

Naomi now gave a well thought out and initially compelling case why what she was saying was right. Sadly all thoughts of God were missing.

Naomi started by asking a simple but rather profound question “...why will ye go with me?” Why are you doing what you are doing? Even when we are doing the right thing it is always important to have some idea why we are doing it!

Naomi then set out a real problem and gave her daughter-in-laws some seemingly impossible issues to deal with: “...are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?...I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown?” Naomi was saying that realistically she could not provide these women with husbands so there was no point in them going with her.

Naomi followed this up with a very important acknowledgement: “... *It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.*” She was in essence saying that she didn't want the two women to have further physical hardship because of her bad decisions, but it also sounded like she was full of self-pity.

#### **Four, Orpah accepted the advice with tears! (v14)**

We're back on the railway platform but this time someone is definitely leaving: “...*and they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law...*” Both these young women heard what this significant person in their lives had said and now Orpah did what Naomi told her to do. People will apply what happens here in lots of ways but in reality she obeyed Naomi. She did reject Bethlehem and the people of God, but she was listening to a person of 'faith' who had made a logically compelling case.

Ruth's obedience was demonstrated in her rejection: “...*but Ruth clave unto her.*” It would be very easy to just see what Ruth does – she kept with Naomi. But bizarrely Ruth had to reject Naomi to stay with her. Ruth knew where she wanted to get to and was starting to realize just how hard it would be to get there. From the text we have only seen encouragement for Orpah to go on but now she's gone back!

#### **Five, Naomi's dreadful observation (v15)**

Did Naomi even realize what she was actually telling Ruth to do? “...*behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods...*” Ruth was given Orpah as a good example to follow. Part of the example was returning to the Moabite gods! Naomi should never have used this as a reason. She was in reality telling Ruth to go with the flow, not to stand out, not to rock the boat, just to go back and fit in.

#### **Six, Ruth answered with her testimony (v16-17)**

Ruth didn't try and answer Naomi point by point. Instead she stuck with the original plan and testified to her faith. What Ruth had to say is so important we will come back and look at her words in much more detail.

When Paul wrote to young Timothy [who was in his mid to late thirties] to encourage him, in 2 Timothy 1:12 he said:

*“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.”*

It is vitally important to know where our faith is fixed. We must also have confidence that Jesus is “*able to keep that which I have committed*” to Him!

#### **Seven, Naomi acquiesced to Ruth & they continued their journey (v18)**

Ruth had to go through all this not to get on the right path but to stay on the right path. At best Naomi acquiesced with Ruth. This meant, “accept something reluctantly but without protest.” Sometimes in life when we have come under a great deal of peer pressure what Ruth received from Naomi may be the best outcome. The other person might not change their mind but they no longer try to get us off the right track. Life isn't easy and at times we can only make the best of it! Like Ruth we need to keep looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for help and encouragement!

Does pressure to go the wrong direction always come from expected sources?

When this takes place what can you learn from Ruth?

Should kindness always be associated with being right?

Naomi was preoccupied with earthly things, rather than looking at life from God's perspective – can we learn any lessons from this?