

Book of Ruth chapter 1

THE DEPARTURE: 1:1-7

- Book of Judges was written on a national scale, dealing with the people of God as a whole.
- B of Ruth does the opposite. It deals with one family and the ordinariness of everyday life; how the Covenant with God was lived at the micro level— how one family fared in the national crisis.
- Hence, the bible reminds us that He who made the heavens and the earth, the One who governs all things, **also** deals with the affairs of the individual and the family and He governs our lives if we allow Him.
- This is expressed in Jesus' one prayer – which deals with the Kingdom of God on the macro level **and** “give us our daily bread”/ “forgive us” on the individual and family level.
- It amazes us that our small ‘nothings’ and ordinariness mean a lot to Him whose Majesty astonishes the inhabitants of Heaven, and whose Greatness is beyond our comprehension.

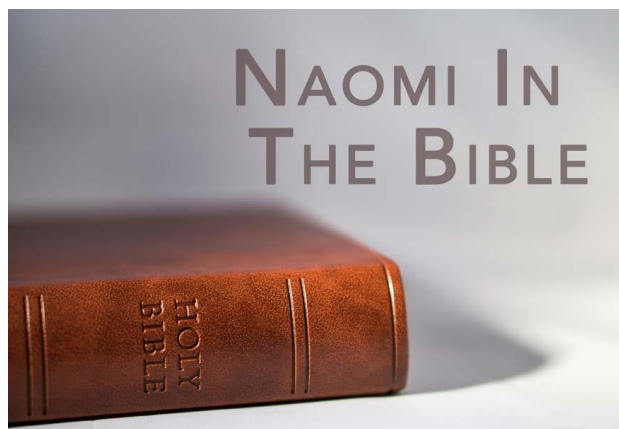
Bethlehem of Judah: is where this story is based.

- B was to be very significant in future times as the Birthplace of the Messiah: Is 7:14
- Bethlehem means ‘the house of bread’ – so if famine is experienced there we are dealing with Divine Chastisement at the time of the Judges, for it was the bread basket of Israel.
- For us, the house of bread is the Church, who feeds us with the Divine foods of God’s Word and Eucharist. If ‘famine’ comes to us it would definitely mean chastisement: Amos 8: 11-12..... **a famine of the word of God...**
- Silence from God is the worst famine, just as non-communication from parents to children is the worst thing for the child. Cf. Luisa Piccarreta on her ‘privations’!

- Elimelech and his family travelled about 50 miles to the east to the kingdom of Moab to find a new life. This means that the famine was very localised and has reference to the troubles in Judges.
- **Example:** Judges 6:3f speaks of the invasions of the Midianites who destroyed crops and cattle....
- E took his wife Naomi and their two sons to live as resident aliens in another kingdom where they stayed for about 10 years.
- He obviously thought that this was the best thing for his family, but did he not trust God’s Divine Providence to take care of them.
- If it **was** a chastisement, did he not know that God would show them mercy when they repented? See verse 6!

- Since Elimelech did not experience the blessings of the Covenant in Moab (Deut chap 28) we may conclude that he took the wrong decision.
- Why? Because the 3 men died before their time **and** childless – which was considered a punishment from God in those days. They also died and were buried away from the Promised Land, far from the Ark of the Covenant at Shiloh.
- Since we have looked a little into the relationship between Israel and Moab it is even more amazing that he took his family **there**.
- Jesus said: **By their fruits you will know them:** Mt 7:15. The result of this adventure was that 3 women were left poor, unhappy, and unable to take care of their affairs. In those days the men looked after the affairs of the family and the woman was only secure if she had either a father, husband or son to take care of her.
- So, Elimelech's decisions actually contradict his name: my God is King!
- Naomi would have had no say in the decision to move. It is only when she has to take the leadership that we see she is of a different spirit. Naomi was a true believer in Yahweh.
- E & N's children must have been born in Moab for they had Moabite names! The names given by the author of this book are very telling!
- Mahlon means 'to be sick', so he must have had poor health from the beginning and the other son was called CHILION which means 'failure' or pining!!
- The two young men eventually married worshippers of CHEMOSH the god of Moab, but neither had children!

Death in the family: 1: 3-5



- While death is normal and visits everyone, yet it is experienced as traumatic. No one can escape death, but looking at it reminds us of our own mortality, frailty, and the eternal consequences of our living on this earth, so the majority react to death with horror and want to evade it. Ps 103:13: **He knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.**
- What did death say to Naomi and her generation? They had no inkling of the NT revelation regarding death/resurrection/forgiveness etc. We don't even know if they believed in life after death, but they **were** aware of the elaborate funerary rites of the Egyptians and their strange beliefs in the journey into the next world.
- The Patriarchs **did know** that they were going back to God, so their descendants viewed death as rejoining their ancestors.... They didn't use coffins: the dead were buried in shrouds; corruption was quick because of the heat.
- Yet burial was essential.....to be left unburied was a curse because the body would be consumed by animals: Deut 28:26, Jer 22:19.

Examples: Abraham **was gathered to his people** dying in ripe old age of 175 years. The important thing for them was that **you lived a full life doing God's will.**

Jacob: Gen 49:29 **I am about to be gathered to my people**

Joseph: Gen 50:24: **I am about to die.... take my bones out of here** to the promised land.

Family Tombs: Ab, Isaac, Jacob and their first wives were all buried in the cave of Macphelah near Hebron. Important and wealthy families buried their dead in family tombs where the old bones would be pushed aside to accommodate new arrivals.

- Everyone wanted to be buried in the promised Land, God's own land, therefore a holy place, not in unholy Egypt or Moab! So, Naomi had a double tragedy in that her husband and two sons were buried in Moab!
- **SHEOL** was seen as a shadowy underworld to be feared. It was the place of the dead. No one knew the relationship anyone in Sheol had with Yahweh, their Covenant God.
- Psalm 88 shows that many thought that in Sheol, the place of the dead, souls were in fact cut off from God, so would do anything to stay on the earth!
- The Prophets in later times received more enlightenment on death. **Isaiah** was their greatest seer. He gave the wonderful revelation about Redemption in
- **Is 25:7-10** where he said that Messiah **will destroy death forever...he will wipe away the tears from every cheek.**
- And in **Is 26:19** he said: **your dead will come to life.... their corpses will rise.....awake and sing for joy!**
- **Daniel** also saw the future of Redemption: Dan 12:2 **of those who lie sleeping in the dust many will awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting disgrace.....**

- Their fear of death was their awareness of having to face God's terrifying justice!
- It was strictly forbidden to contact the dead, yet King Saul made contact with Samuel through the witch of Endor: 1 Sam 28:3-25
- Quite late in Israel's history faith and hope in God **after death** became common and is expressed in the Psalms: Ps 139: 7-8 **Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your Presence? If I ascend to Heaven you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol you are there!**
- Ps 49:15 **God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.**
- **Finally**, close to the time of Christ the Chosen people knew about **resurrection** after death, but we don't know how they came to this knowledge. Maybe it was the teaching of the prophet Daniel?
- **2 Macc 7:1-42** tells the story of the woman and her 7 sons who were martyred declaring their belief in the resurrection after death...see verses 14,20,23,28 and 29.
- Also, **Martha** in Jn 11 was able to declare her faith in the resurrection of the dead to Jesus

What about Naomi? Here is what **would trouble** her:

- Her husband and sons died childless, and this was considered a chastisement from God. They died before their time.....leaving her with a major problem apart from her own personal dilemma for survival.
- It was the fact that their names would be wiped out as if they had never lived! This was considered a disaster, and a definite punishment from God.
- It was understood that a man lived on in his sons who took his name into the future. Ps 128: 3-6 **Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall a man be blessed who fears the Lord.**
- No wonder then that Naomi goes home a bitter woman!

The Lord Visits His People: 1:6-7

- In the depths of her trouble N received good news from the promised Land: **The Lord has visited His people....AND given them food.** God visits His people either in Justice or in Mercy. This is amply illustrated in the Book of Judges.
- Since food is now available in Bethlehem Naomi realises that God has heard the cry of the poor: **give us today our daily bread (needs).**

Ps 132:15 **I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread**

Luke 1:68 **Blessed be the Lord God of Israel (Yahweh) for he has visited and redeemed his people.** In doing this he provided the Bread of His Word and the Bread of the Eucharist.

- Because of this Naomi can turn away from her recent disasters of Nation and family and let her heart rise in faith and hope in Yahweh for her future. It will soon be clear that she had kept the lines of communication with Bethlehem alive in her exile.
- It will also be clear that she had testified to her daughters-in-law concerning her relationship with Yahweh while in Moab.... she would have to explain why she didn't turn to Chemosh the Moabite deity in any of her concerns. Cf Ps 77:1-20
- Naomi's faith survived the darkness of exile, trials and sufferings. One of the ways to do this is to remember what God has done for us in the past: Cf Dan ch 3; 2 Pet3:1
- Both in the holy Eucharist and in the Hours of the Passion we constantly remember Also, in the rounds of creation and Redemption.
- Throughout the rest of this book we will see Naomi's relationship with Yahweh - her covenanted God. So, Yahweh is shown as the One who is closely bound to His people, caring for individual needs and very much involved with their lives. In the Book of Judges we were shown only His care for the nation as a whole.
- In fact, it is Yahweh's HESED – His loving-kindness – which dominates this book!

The Journey home: 1:8-9

Ps 126:5 **They that sow in tears will sing when they reap**

- N had no say in the decision to move away from God's chosen land, or from the Chosen People, yet now she must bear the consequences of the decisions and actions of others.
- The status of woman was low in those times, and the plight of the widow was awful. She could be thrown out of her home by the male relative that inherited from her husband.... even her own sons if she had any! Many were!
- As a married woman she shared in her husband's possessions, but when he died the inheritance went to the male children.... or uncles, cousins.... But not to her!
- Book of Numbers tried to change this: Num 27:8 **If a man dies without sons his inheritance is to pass to his daughter(s). If he has no daughter the inheritance is to go to his brothers. If the father has no brothers it is to go to a member of his clan who is most nearly related....**

Therefore, the woman's security rested with her husband. She had little or no rights on her own. Maybe this was why the custom developed of women keening or lamenting at funerals? Cf Mk 5:21-43 esp vs 38, and Lk 8:40-56 esp vs 52

- The plight of the widow was so awful in the OT that widows and orphans are listed together Ex 22:21 **You must not be harsh with the widow or with the orphan; if you are harsh with them they will surely cry to me, and BE SURE that I will hear their cry.**
- **Deut 10:18 It is He (God) who sees justice done to the widow and orphan – who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing.**
- The prophets also demanded that widows and orphans be properly cared for: Cf Is 1:23; Ezek 22:7, and they threatened judgement on those who misused them: Mal 3:5

NB: The one lasting hope for some social recovery for widows of marriageable age WAS TO MARRY FOR THE SECOND TIME! This is the issue for Ruth in this book.

- In the NT Jesus raised the status of woman in society. He dealt with them the same as he did with men: **examples:** He engaged them in theological debate: Samaritan woman in Jn 4; the Syro-Phoenician woman, and He gave leadership to Martha and Mary so that women disciples were treated the same as men in the early Church. This is clear from Paul's references to church leadership in Roman 16.
- Jesus clarified the rules for Divorce, making both parties responsible for decisions and consequences: Mt 19:1-14
- It is in the context of the social position of widows that Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law who are young enough to marry again to go home and just do that for their own survival. She shows her loving concern for their welfare in doing this.
- Initially they were prepared to go with her to Bethlehem, for she was their nearest relative – even if it was by marriage. They would have to walk from Moab carrying no possessions with them. The most they could take was water – which is very heavy!

Naomi's Prayer for her two daughters-in-law

- Was that Yahweh – the only true God – would be kind (HESED!) to them since they had been kind to their husbands who were part of the Chosen People, so the Loving-kindness of the Lord to His covenanted people would be shared by their spouses... a good lesson on marriage!
- She also reminded them of God's Famed Faithfulness since they had been faithful in marriage

Deut 7:9 **Know then that the Lord your God IS GOD INDEED! He is the faithful God who is true to His Covenant and His graciousness to a thousand generations towards those who love Him and keep His commandments.** Cf Ruth 2:20, where N praises God's faithfulness

- In the NT this faithful Love of God is called AGAPE which describes the self-sacrificing and self-giving love of God: I Jn 4:10-11

- Naomi sends her daughters-in-law home **to find REST**: vs 9. The only way a widow could find rest was to be enthroned in the heart of her husband's home protected by Him, so rest, for them meant the end of their bereavement for their dead husbands, the ending of loneliness and isolation in society and security again in a new family – hopefully with children!
- The attachment that the two women show to Naomi shows that she has shown loving-kindness to them in their marriages to her sons. Also, that she respected and cared for them regardless of their background, false religion or national relationship with her own people. She has fulfilled her obligation to love her neighbour as herself.
- Naomi is prepared to return to Bethlehem alone, poor and lonely – a failure in the eyes of her own people – yet Bethlehem is the place where God put her to live out her covenant commitment, so she knows that God's Will and God's Providence await her there.

Rest in God: On the spiritual plane rest becomes very rich indeed. First we have **Mt 11:28-30** where Jesus gave the call to come to Him to **find rest for your souls** which is much greater than the human rest we deal with here in Ruth.

- As we surrender into the infinite loving-kindness of God in life in the Divine Will we have the ultimate security in our Heavenly Family where all are welcome.
- We also have **the peace that passes all understanding which guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus** Phil 4:7.
- Permanent union with God is the ultimate Sabbath rest for us after the labours of our journey into God – just as God rested after the labour of Creation and Jesus rested after the labour of Redemption – so the Holy Spirit **can rest in us** after the labour of Sanctification! Cf Heb 4:9-11; Ex 33:14; Ps 23 etc



The pain of separation: 1:9-14 Our journey through life brings us the pain of separation from loved ones, whether they choose to live in another country, or breakdown in relationship with us, or through sickness and death.

- We all experience the pain of parting of ways. Jesus also **experienced** it when separating from His Mother to fulfil His Mission given to Him by the Father, and also in death when he had to leave the Apostles who were still very young and inexperienced in spiritual matters Jn 14:18 **I will not leave you orphans; Jn 16:7 it is for your own**

good that I am going.... But this doesn't take the pain of parting away! It just helps to give it meaning.

- Naomi sent the two women away with prayer, love and hope for a happy future for them. The young women wept for many reasons.... their bereavement.... the end of their marriages and therefore security in life.... fear of the unknown and uncertain future and also just the trauma they were experiencing. It seemed good to cling to Naomi but she assured them that this was not the case! She could do nothing for them.
- Both women are faced with the choice between their love for Naomi and their hope for motherhood in a new marriage.
- Naomi's strange response to them refers to the Levirate Law which these foreign women would not understand, but which explains what happens to Ruth later in the story.
- Orpah then made her choice to return to her country and to its gods, but Ruth clung to Naomi. This clinging was not just physical or emotional as she made a major decision to **choose Yahweh** as her God and to obey Him.
- Here we see that Naomi's faith and trust in Yahweh has brought Ruth to faith also.
- **Irish proverb:** It's an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody good!



Ruth's decision: was to stay with Naomi no matter what happened. She sees something in Naomi that she hasn't seen anywhere else and she is drawn to God by it. She is looking at a real relationship with God which survives disasters – which she has never seen before, so she is convinced that Yahweh is the only true God.

- Since Naomi belongs to the Chosen People Ruth chooses **what God chose**. She also chooses God personally, so Naomi has produced a wonderful fruit in all her bitterness
- Jesus said: **by their fruits you will know them** Mt 7:20
- Ruth then swore to be faithful to her new commitment to Yahweh, so she chooses Naomi as 'mother', not just mother-in-law.
- **Where you die I will die** expresses her permanent choice.

Wonderful fulfilment: On Easter day Ruth 1:16 expresses Jesus' commitment to his Church which need not stay in Jerusalem but go to the ends of the earth to spread the Good News of Redemption.....His disciples don't have to cling to the past or to shrines...or even to their previous experience of Him in the Incarnation because

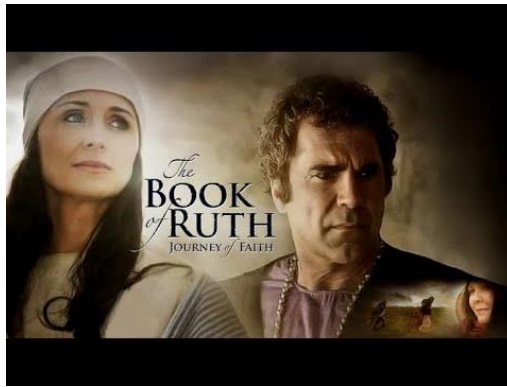
Wherever you go I will go, wherever you live I will live.....your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.... this was a joy for Jesus' disciples.... but they had another challenge...**to say to Jesus wherever YOU go I will go...** He went to the poor, marginalised etc



Naomi or Mara? Naomi arrived in Bethlehem in time for the barley harvest....

- The men would have been in the fields, so she is greeted by the women who hardly recognise her in her trauma, for she has aged. There was pain etched on her face.... she was spiritually mature, carrying a 'heavy cross', AND accompanied by a foreigner!
- The name Naomi means 'pleasant' or 'fair' but Mara = bitterness! **The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty (Shaddai) has brought calamity upon me.**
- We call God **the Almighty** when we are at our worst and He is at His best!! **For nothing is impossible with God.**
- Unknown to Naomi God had a wonderful surprise waiting for her. Divine providence had prepared a future full of hope for her and Ruth.

Ruth chapter 2



Introducing Boaz: The nearest kinsman

- Neither N or R knew that a rich farmer living in Bethlehem was a relative of Elimelech..... that Divine Providence awaited to take their tears away and give them the security of a happy home again.
- The day R met B changed everything for everyone – even the ancestry of Messiah!
- The author tells the reader about Boaz immediately so that we can be sure that God's Love deals with the ordinary things of everyday life.... That God wants to be Father and provider for the children He loves infinitely because they are His idea, and have been in His Heart ab aeterno!
- Boaz means 'strength'. He was Salmon's son from the Tribe of Judah: Mt 1:5

My Kinsman: This is the crucial piece of information for Naomi. It was the family link that N needed.

- Family at that time comprised a large group of people – not just the 'nuclear' family today. 3 or 4 generations would live on the same compound – hence **the sins of the fathers could be visited on the children to the 3rd or 4th generation:** Deut 5:9
- Noah's family consisted of 8 persons including his wife, and their sons and their wives: Gen 7: 1, 7
- Abraham's family was huge even though he had no son until he was 90: Gen 17:9-12
- Jacob's family going to Egypt included 3 generations: Gen 46: 8-26
- On Passover night a lamb was provided for 'a household': Ex 12:3, 21. The entire family was made secure by the blood of the lamb put on the door.
- God continuously works with families. His Chosen People was a nation of families. His Church is His family today. When we live in the Divine Will we enter His heavenly Family in a unique way.
- For God's people the family was the basic unit of society, and the also of the inheritance of land. In the Book of Joshua certain lands were allocated to each tribe

and they were not allowed to sell it or let it go out of the tribal boundaries – hence the men had to own the land because the women changed their name in marriage and became part of their husband’s inheritance. They didn’t buy or sell land because the land belonged to the Lord, and He gave it to Israel as its inheritance

- Cf Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kgs 21: 1-29. The king tried to force Naboth to sell his inheritance, and killed him when he refused because of the Law....
- When Elimelech died with no children – since they died also – there was the problem of ‘redeeming’ his land inheritance that he abandoned when he went to Moab. Only a ‘near kinsman’ could redeem the land.
- But ***the Levirate Law*** laid down that the ***goel*** or redeemer should marry the widow and raise children for the dead man. In our case Naomi is too old, so Ruth steps in for her. This is the role that Boaz plays in this drama.
- We are told that Boaz was a ‘man of wealth’ – which some people presume refers to riches. In the biblical use it can also mean a man ‘of moral worth’, or a man of integrity and a man of influence in his home place; ***a righteous man***.... Therefore, wealthy in both social and spiritual dimensions – as we shall see as the story progresses.

Gleaning on Boaz’ property: 2:2-3

- Ruth loses no time to try to help Naomi to survive and then get on her feet again. She humbly asked if she could glean in the fields after the reapers to bring home enough grain to eat, and if she did well she might even be able to sell a little in order to be able to buy the necessary things.
- Her humility and selfless love are rewarded almost immediately...she ‘accidentally’ found herself in that part of the land owned by Boaz.... But anyone living in relationship with God doesn’t have so-incidences. They are ***God incidences*** because Divine providence takes care of everything. His loving-kindness surrounds us: Ps 23
- **Gleaning** was one of the ways that Israel tried to help the poor and the widows. The Law required that the reapers deliberately leave enough grain on the ground for the poor to help themselves. The same applied to the vineyards and olive groves – they were to leave a portion of the crop to be collected by the needy. Cf Lev 19:9-10, 23:22; Deut 24:19.
- Israel was to do this to reflect that they imitated God Himself: **For the Lord your God is God of gods (El Elohim) and Lord of lords (Adon adonim), the Great God, triumphant and terrible, never partial, never to be bribed. It is he who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing.**

- In other words, because God is a God who rescues slaves (Israelites!) and cares for the poor, helpless, needy, so the laws of the land are to see that God's Will is carried out.
- For us who are so privileged as to have both redemption and sanctification, the obligation to take care of the poor is great. The Church has concerned herself with the poor and marginalised from the beginning of its history. On the macro level she must fight for the rights of the poorer nations also, and for the just distribution of wealth in the world.
- Even though the law laid down that grain be left for the poor...in practice that depended on the goodwill of the land owner. Ruth is aware of this so she said to Naomi: **let me go to the field, and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favour.**
- So, our introduction to the romance between Ruth and Boaz begins **with her** as a poor widow **and him** as a gracious landowner *who might look at her with favour.*
- Ruth's *lovely* relationship with Naomi is highlighted in her *asking permission to go*. Naomi is obviously her ideal of 'mother' and she genuinely loves her.
- God's providential care made sure that Ruth **just happened to come to that part of the field owned by Boaz.** It wasn't chance, but Divine Providence which led Ruth directly into Boaz' property – which Naomi will acknowledge later in 2:20.
- It is good to remember that all events in the world, and in world history are **His Story** – which may appear as chance, or even meaningless in the moment – yet they are in the hands of God whose purpose will be seen by all in the end: Eph 1: 8-10.
- Like Ruth, Naomi and Boaz **we are not idle onlookers in God's drama.** We are active participants – whose decisions determine what can happen at this time in history.
- Decisions made in love and in God's Divine Will **actually guide history forward** – as Ruth's humility does in this book. **It is God, for His own loving purpose, who puts both the will and the action into you: Phil 2:13**
- Look at the small decisions of people with free will which God used here to introduce a foreigner into the ancestry of Christ the Messiah: 1) Ruth's request to help 2) Naomi's encouragement 3) Ruth's unconscious choice of the right field and 4) Boaz' free decision to work in the field that day. This should encourage us to make **good and loving decisions in God's Divine Will to bring the New Era of divine holiness to the earth** which is languishing in moral filth right now.