

OpenTheo

Ruth 1



Ruth - Steve Gregg

This analysis delves into the book of Ruth, highlighting its position as one of the two biblical texts named after women. The speaker examines the historical context during the period of Judges and the potential authorship of Samuel. The book's focus on genealogy and the concept of redemption through a kinsman redeemer is explored, uncovering the significance of Ruth's commitment and loyalty. The speaker also delves into the motivations and devotion displayed by Ruth, emphasizing her unwavering commitment to accompany Naomi to Judah.

Transcript

In this session and probably the next we'll be covering the book of Ruth. It's a very short book, only 85 verses altogether, divided in four chapters. It's a running narrative.

It doesn't have a lot of complex subplots going on. It's just almost a chronological movement from the beginning to the end in a logical sequence of events that begins with a tragedy in the family of this woman Naomi and results in a happy ending for her. Naomi at the beginning is married with two sons.

Within the space of a few verses she loses her husband and her two sons. They all die. She's left only with two daughters-in-law and only one of them stays with her and that's Ruth.

And Ruth is the woman after whom the book is named. There's only two books in the Bible named after women and the other one of course is Esther. Ruth is not mentioned in other books of the Old Testament and is only mentioned once in the New Testament.

So obviously outside of this book in the Bible we have only one other mention of her and that is in Matthew 1 where she's in the genealogy of Christ. Along with other women who are mentioned in a long genealogy she is on the short list of women that Matthew chose to name in Christ's genealogy. And it is no doubt because she is in Christ's genealogy that we have her story.

Now her story takes place during the period of the Judges which is the book we just

finished studying. And as you saw at the end of the book of Judges there was sort of an appendix with two very separate stories to give us sort of a snapshot of the way life was in the period of the Judges. But more importantly the two stories at the end of Judges that served as an appendix were giving vital information that had to do with the fates of a couple of different tribes.

One the Danites and one the Benjamites. In the story of the priest and the Danites that story was given because it occurred during the period of the Judges and it had an impact on where the tribe of Dan would be located other than in just their original designated tribal boundaries. And also gave some background as how Dan can be compromised in terms of their worship.

So that story in the appendix of Judges told of some significant developments in one of the major tribes of Israel. And then the next one the story about the concubine of the Levite and the war that followed was there to give us some information about how the tribe of Benjamin came to be reduced to such small numbers. It was because of a great atrocity done by one of the Benjamite cities.

And when the Benjamite tribe had the opportunity to rectify the situation they refused and they stood by the wicked men of their own tribe and fought a war against the other tribes of Israel and ended up losing and being reduced to only 600 surviving men. And then of course from there they began to multiply again but they never became significant again and they lived alongside Judah until they were almost entirely absorbed into Judah. But those stories occurred during the period of the Judges and they are tagged on at the end of the period of the Judges of the book of Judges to give us as I said some idea of what life was like during that period and also some things that happened that were significant for the fate of certain tribes.

Now the book of Ruth could easily be a third story in that appendix. That is the book of Ruth though it is a stand-alone book it is of the same character in many respects or has the same functions as those two stories at the end of Judges. It is a story that tells us something about a slice of domestic life during the period of the Judges although much in contrast in terms of its morality and its uplifting nature.

Its edifying nature very much contrasted from the other two stories but apparently both kinds of situations existed during the period of Judges. Moral compromise, religious confusion but also goodness and piety in some sectors as in Bethlehem in this story. Like the other two stories at the end of Judges the appendix could have been added to with this story.

But also like those two stories it tells a significant story about the background of something that was later significant in Israel not just in one of the tribes but all the tribes particularly the tribe of Judah but of course the purpose of the book of Ruth seems to be to tell us where David's line came from or how a Moabite woman came to be part of

David's ancestry because the book ends with a genealogy which pretty much gives away the reason why it was written so that this genealogy would make some sense or that there would be some detail given that relates to this genealogy but you can see at the end of the book it gives the genealogy from Judah pretty much down to David and Boaz and Ruth who get married in this story are in that genealogy. So the story of Ruth gives us some information about the background of David who apparently was living at the time the book was written which then gives us some reasons to speculate as to who may have written the book once again as with the book of Judges Jewish tradition is that Samuel wrote it. If this is true then that would give it another reason to be included in the book of Judges.

If Samuel wrote both the book of Judges and the book of Ruth then Ruth might very justly have been added to the book of Judges as part of its appendix but for some reason it was kept out separate. It does give a very different somewhat more edifying picture of some of the life during the period of the Judges. It does have a more significant impact on the nation than the other two stories because one story only affected the Danites and one only the Benjamites but David became the king over all of Israel.

More importantly from the Christian point of view David was the ancestor of Jesus so that Ruth was the ancestress not only of David but of course ultimately of Jesus as well. But Samuel is the traditional author and there are evidences within the book that he could have been the author. Once again all we really can get from the internal evidence is more or less the time frame in which it was written.

It does talk about a time when the Judges ruled. That is how the book begins. It came to pass in the days when the Judges ruled.

That suggests that this was no longer the circumstance. The Judges were not ruling. This was back when they did.

So it would be after the coronation of Saul. With the coronation of King Saul the period of the Judges ended. So this would be after the coronation of Saul but not much later than David's rule.

In fact probably no later than David's rule because the genealogy takes us up to David but not beyond. It doesn't mention Solomon, Rehoboam and others as one would expect if this was written after David's time. It's tracing the genealogy from Judah up to probably the present time of writing which ends with David.

So it was in the lifetime of David and no doubt after David had become king or when he was about to become king that this was written. It was certainly after David had become important enough in Israel for someone to care to write his history. So David at least had been identified in the mind of the author as an important person enough to write a story documenting his background like this.

That person could have been Samuel. Samuel could have been the author. If it was not Samuel it was somebody else who was contemporary.

One of the attractive aspects of Samuel as the author is that he is a prophet and that would give this book status as a prophetic or inspired book. If it was written by somebody other than a prophet it might be a reliable history but it would not necessarily give it any status as an inspired book. Since Paul believed all the Old Testament books were inspired he must have believed that this was written by an inspired writer, a prophet.

There were other prophets in the time of David. There was Nathan and there was Gad but they were not necessarily as instrumental as Samuel was in transitioning from the period of the judges to the period of the monarchs. Samuel might be the one who has his foot in both eras.

Samuel started out his life in the time of the judges and ended it in the time of the kings. He would be a good candidate. There is certainly nothing in what I have said that would prove or even point directly to Samuel as the author but since the Jews have that tradition and it is credible in view of the material that can be found in it we will proceed with that assumption.

At what time during the period of the judges did Ruth live? I don't know if that can be determined. There are not very much time indicators in it. Of course we could go by the number of generations between Ruth and David which was two.

Ruth was David's great grandmother. Ruth would live two generations before Saul was inaugurated. Generations are notoriously in exact lengths of time.

She probably lived before Samson. Some commentators say during the period of Jair but there is really no way of knowing for sure. Some have suggested the time of Gideon but that seems fairly early to be the case.

The main indicator of that would be that it says there was a famine that drove this family from Bethlehem into Moab for survival. The book of Judges itself does not mention any famines during that period but that is not surprising necessarily. The book of Judges is not there to talk about all the weather.

It is talking about these individual judges rising and falling so that it might not be mentioned is not surprising. Although we do find in the time of Gideon that the Midianites imposed an artificial famine on the land of Israel because every time their crops would ripen the Midianites would come in and raid them. So the people were somewhat starving.

So whether the famine that we read of in the book of Ruth was artificial or natural we don't know. If it was artificial then the only case we know of in the book of Judges would

be during the time of Gideon. But as I say it seems to me that Gideon is a little too early for the fewness of the generations that exist between Ruth and David.

So we will just leave the question unanswered as to what time frame Ruth lived in. It was probably safe to say about 100 years before David in all likelihood. Now the book has some lessons that Christians have always found in it.

Its main purpose of its writer seems to have been to document something of the genealogy of David. But a secondary purpose might well have been to illustrate the concept of a kinsman redeemer. The Hebrew word is *goel*.

It means a near kinsman who is in the position to redeem somebody who has lost something. And this comes from certain things in the law of Moses. For example in Leviticus 25 and verse 25.

Leviticus 25 says if one of your brethren becomes poor and has sold some of his possession and if his kinsman redeemer comes to redeem it then he shall redeem it when his brother is sold. Now what that means is if someone comes into extreme poverty and has to sell their property although they would rather not but they have to to survive. Not just everyone can come and reclaim it from the buyer.

The person who bought it is the legal owner. Therefore getting it back to the original owner is not everybody's right to do. But somebody who is rich enough and near enough of kin, the closest relative of the poor person is entitled to step in and buy back the property for his poor brother.

And the person who has bought it has to release it to him because that is the right of the kinsman redeemer to do. And so that is one of the main themes of how Boaz comes to marry Ruth and start a family with her which is the key subject of the book. There is another aspect to the kinsman redeemer idea.

They are not necessarily joined as one concept in the law but they were apparently joined as one concept in the minds of the Hebrews at this particular time. Some of the things in the law had been modified a little bit or interpreted a certain way in the time of Ruth that you wouldn't necessarily find to be stated in the law. But in the book of Ruth you find that the person who would redeem the property of his poor brother also must marry his widow.

Now there is of course the law of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy chapter 25 which does say that if a man dies and leaves no heirs that his brother or nearest kinsman actually just falls to his brother in the law but apparently in the thinking of the Jews eventually it was thought that the brother in law marrying the widow is now connected at the hip with the obligation of the kinsman redeemer. So in Deuteronomy 25 verse 5 it says if brothers dwell together and one of them dies and has no son the widow of the

dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family her husband's brother shall go into her take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. Now what is that? It says well it shall be that the firstborn which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

Now one of the issues in the book of Ruth is that the name of a Jew may not be blotted out of Israel. Just as at the end of Judges that story about the concubine and what followed the main concern was that a tribe not be blotted out or erased from the map. The survival of all the tribes and even the survival of every individual family was a very important thing.

And when Elimelech the man who was Naomi's husband died and left two sons but they died childless that means the family line of Elimelech was done. There was no way for his family line to be carried on and the law had made an arrangement for that. Now a near relative actually Deuteronomy says his brother and it seems that technically under the law only the brother was obligated to do this but they had by the time of Ruth people had connected this with the kinsmen redeemer idea that a near kinsman could redeem the property and marry the widow and in doing so the child would be essentially named after or carry on the inheritance of the dead man.

Now see a widow could marry any other man although it says in Deuteronomy she shall not it doesn't mean because it's immoral but because if she marries another man it will not bring an heir to her deceased husband. But if the man she marries is a close enough relative to her deceased husband it is close enough to the same thing as her husband having an heir that it carries on his family name. It's just a different way of thinking in Middle Eastern ancient times than we think and that's how people were thinking.

Now therefore by the time of Ruth if there was a man who died childless and left a widow and some property but the property had been forfeit because the widow was poor and she had to sell it off then a kinsman redeemer could have the privilege of buying the property back for the family. But in the days of Ruth this privilege came along with an obligation to do the thing of a leave right marriage to marry the widow too. And we find that in this story Boaz is interested to do both but there's somebody else who's a near relative who has really the first right of redemption and that man is interested in redeeming the property but not marrying Ruth and so he gives up that right and it falls to Boaz and all that legal stuff that's in the book.

It's near the end of the book would be totally undecipherable for us it would make no sense to us at all if we don't have some sense of what this law of leave right marriage and the law of kinsman redeemer mean. But the point that many Christians observe is that Boaz plays the role of a kinsman redeemer and in so doing becomes like a type of Christ. Christ is our kinsman redeemer everywhere the scripture refers to him as our redeemer.

He has redeemed us out of our lost condition but he did so as a kinsman. God or an angel or an animal could not redeem us in the same sense. Someone had to be near enough related to us to qualify.

A kinsman redeemer had to be a near relative. And so God becomes one of us, becomes a blood relation to humanity so that he has the right of redemption. Now redemption from what? Well in our case from bondage to the devil, bondage to sin.

So Christ's redemption of us is seen by most Christians as an anti-type of Boaz's redemption of Ruth. Of course any kinsman redeemer in Israel would be such a thing but we don't have any other stories of them. We have the law about it but Ruth is the only story about it we have in the Old Testament.

Now let's look at the story. Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land and a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech.

The name of his wife was Naomi and the names of the two sons were Malon and Chilon. Now this famine was in the land of Bethlehem. These are Bethlehemites or Ephrathites.

Bethlehem is also called Ephrathah. The name Bethlehem means house of bread in Hebrew. The word Ephrath means fruitfulness and the town was known by both names.

Apparently it was a place which under normal circumstances was very productive of wheat or in this case barley. Grain crops grew in abundance there so that the town had been called the house of bread or fruitfulness Ephrath two names for the same place. These people were natives of the area that is their ancestors had settled there in the time of Joshua.

They were not sojourners there for example. So the house of bread the fruitful place became a place of famine. We don't know as I said whether this was done by human invaders stealing the crops or whether it was just a time of drought for a long season where the crops didn't grow much.

But this man at least thought that his family's survival depended on him finding another place to live. Usually in the Old Testament in times of famine in Israel people would migrate down to Egypt. Egypt always had plenty of water because the Nile was there.

An abundance of water was in the Nile and it was actually pumped up from the river to irrigate lands so there was no shortage of food even during times when there were droughts in other parts of the region. Egypt was the place where Abraham went during a drought. It was the place where Jacob went and Joseph brought his family down there because of a drought and famine in the land.

It was a no brainer if you lived in Palestine and there was a famine you could find food down in Egypt. For some reason Elimelech didn't choose to go to Egypt although it would have been I believe as near as I can tell nearer for him. Instead he crossed the Jordan and went to the land of Moab, historical enemies of theirs and yet he seemed to live more or less unmolested by the Moabites there.

There must not have been a famine there at the time so he went there in order to procure the survival of his family. However there is a certain irony in that because it was there that they died prematurely. Now they might have died also if they had been in Bethlehem but he seems to have left the promised land to go into the land of the enemy to save his life.

Like Jesus said in some cases he that seeks to save his life will lose it. If you actually compromise and do something that is not spiritually the right thing to do in order to save your life it may not produce that result in the providence of God. The judgment of God may come upon you.

Now did Elimelech do something that was wrong? It was never forbidden in scripture that the Israelites should ever go to Moab to live but why would they? God had promised to bless them in the promised land if they were righteous if they were covenant keepers God would provide for them. Going to Moab assured that his son would marry Moabite women and Moabites were of a cursed race. In fact in Deuteronomy 23 God said that a Moabite shall not enter the house of the Lord for ten generations.

Now whether that means ten generations from the time of Moses on which it probably does we can't say but it may be that this story occurred late enough that it was just maybe over ten generations after the time of Moses. Maybe the Moabites had come out from under that curse just recently but still when a man could marry his daughters or his sons off to women in Israel who were worshippers of Yahweh for him to go to a land where the worshippers of Shemash were the only people available to marry his sons does not seem like a decision made for spiritual motivation it's not a wise choice and as far as keeping his family alive it didn't really have that effect either. The man himself died we find in Moab and then his sons did.

Now his sons names were given as Malon and Chilon and these names are thought to mean weak and faint. Now why would someone give their children names that are names like that? It's possible that these sons were born small, undersized, somewhat fragile, maybe they were not very healthy specimens. They might have been named after a congenital disease or weakness that they suffered.

In any case they were names that suggested them not to be very hardy specimens, weak and faint and it may be that condition that they succumbed to when they were in Moab. Maybe they were going to die young anyway. Maybe they were people born with a hereditary condition that was not going to make them live long.

In any case they lived long enough to get married to Moabites but they didn't have any children. And so Elimelech we say in verse 3 died and Naomi was left and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab.

The name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth and they dwelt there about ten years. Now in that time it would appear they would have had plenty of time to have children but neither Ruth nor Orpah had children. It may not be their fault because Ruth later did with another husband so it's possible that these weak young men were also impotent and sterile.

In any case they were not very healthy we read then both Malon and Chileon also died so the woman survived her two sons and her husband. So she was a widow indeed as Paul uses the term. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 Paul talks about the church taking care of widows who are widows indeed.

That is not only a person who is a widow for the loss of her husband because anyone who loses a husband is a widow but a widow indeed was someone who had no sons to support her. That's what Paul says. He said that the church should take care of women who are widows indeed but if a woman has sons or even nephews who can care for her then they should take care of her.

She's not a widow indeed she has some other family members to care for her. But Naomi was left totally destitute. No sons to support her, no husbands to support her.

Only daughters in law who like herself would need to be supported. So she was given the additional burden of family members that needed to be supported and none left to support them. So they were left in a very severe state of poverty and no doubt would have been in a better condition to have stayed in Bethlehem and had the boys marry Jewish girls and have relatives nearby who could help them out.

But in Moab Naomi had no relatives and no one. Then she arose with her daughters in law that she might return to the country from the country of Moab for she had heard that the country in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited his people giving them bread. So the famine had ended in Israel and none too soon because in Moab she really was destitute.

So she thought well there's food in Israel again and also family at least I can go back and die or live some kind of existence among people who are my relatives and countrymen. So she rose up to go and of course her daughters in law initially started to go with her. Therefore she went out from the place where she was and her two daughters in law with her and they went on their way to return to the land of Judah.

And Naomi said to her two daughters in law go return each of to her mother's house Yahweh deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. Yahweh grant

you that you may find rest each in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them and they lifted their voices and wept.

But they made different decisions. They said to her surely we will return with you to your people. But Naomi said turn back my daughters.

Why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb that they may be your husbands? You see if she could have more sons then the law of lebrite marriage would require that her new sons would grow up to marry their sisters in law because of their deceased brothers. If Maalon and Chilean had had more brothers those brothers would have been obligated to marry these women. But there weren't more brothers.

And Naomi said I don't have any more sons to have. I don't have any more kids. So there is no hope for you.

If you go with me you have no hope of ever marrying again. So you go back and find a Moabite man and you can have children and families like you should. And she said in verse 12 turn back my daughters go your way for I am too old to have a husband.

If I should say I have no hope even if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons would you wait for them until they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No my daughters for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of Yahweh has gone out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again and Orpah kissed her mother in law but Ruth clung to her. Now these are the two reactions of the two daughters in law.

Naomi urged them with strong arguments to not even consider going with her because it really was a seemingly a hopeless future for them there. They were young women probably still very marriageable in their own land they could find men. But what Israelite would want to marry a Moabite? Israelites who live in Israel would have plenty of Jewish women as options and choosing a Moabite woman would not be very normal or very likely.

So the women would do better to stay in their own country and make new futures for themselves while Naomi goes back to Judah. But they make different decisions. Orpah says okay I will go home and she kissed her mother goodbye mother in law and then Ruth just clung to her wouldn't leave her.

And she said to Ruth look your sister in law has gone back to her people and to her gods return after your sister in law. But Ruth said entreat me not to leave you or to turn back from following after you for wherever you go I will go. Wherever you lodge I will lodge.

Your people should be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. Yahweh do so to me and more also if anything but death parts you and me.

And when she saw that she was determined to go with her she stopped speaking to her. I have always had a hard time not seeing this as a picture of the choices people make to follow Jesus or not. There is really not much that would account for Ruth's decision to go.

There was no prospect for her. She may have just been very fond of Naomi but that would hardly account for her throwing away all her future just to hang out with her mother in law the rest of her life. She was very clearly going to live in poverty if she went with her and might just be reduced to being a beggar and old maid never having children or a husband.

Whereas the prospect would be much better just staying in Moab but she was throwing all of that away just to be with Naomi and to perhaps do what she considered to be her duty to her mother in law. Her mother in law was giving her permission to not go but her mother in law needed someone to help her out. She was an old woman an old widow and Ruth obviously made herself available to help support her when she got to Bethlehem.

So it is hard to know exactly all the motivations Ruth had. We can see that Ruth believes in Yahweh although her people believe in Shemash and it may be that more than anything else that made her insist on going to Judah. Through her association with this Jewish family she apparently had adopted the faith in the Jewish God and sincerely so not just externally in order to get along but rather so much so that she refused to stay in the land of Shemash in the land where everybody she would know would be worshippers of a God that she believed to be false and no one she knew would be a worshipper of Yahweh.

Better to suffer poverty and widowhood and all of that and be among the worshippers of Yahweh than to have more attractive earthly prospects and have to be among those whose faith she apparently no longer held to. Because she names Yahweh as her God and she says your people will be my people your God will be my God. Nothing closer to conversion or becoming a proselyte could be imagined for a woman.

A man would have to be circumcised if he wanted to be a Jew and he wasn't born one but a woman couldn't be circumcised so basically for her to become a Jew just meant for her to profess the commitment to be a Jew. To say your God is my God your people are my people I'm a Jew like you now. Now she was a Moabitess but she was thereafter regarded as a proselyte and of course a proselyte had the same privileges as Jews and that's what she chose to be a poor proselyte rather than a rich or at least comfortable Moabite.

Now I say this is a little reminds me of people following Jesus because the commitment she makes is the commitment that we make when we become disciples and there were two people connected to Naomi who were both capable of going with her if they would but when she told them to count the cost Orpah left her, kissed her but left her. She showed affection to her but not devotion to her. I mean Judas kissed Jesus but betrayed

him.

The other disciples we don't find them kissing him but they follow him to their deaths eventually and you know devotion and affection are not the same thing. I'm sure Ruth felt affection for Naomi but so did Orpah but feeling affection giving her a kiss it was a kiss goodbye. It was a kiss goodbye.

And so I said I'm going to go another direction. But Ruth seems to be inseparable. Naomi can't shake her off and Ruth said don't even try to shake me off.

Don't entreat me to leave you. Don't try to convince me because that's not what I'm going to do. I'm not going to turn back.

I'm going to follow you no turning back. Don't ask me to turn back from following after you. I mean the song I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back could easily have been inspired by the words of this line.

Actually many wedding vows have been developed from this particular statement. Although this is not a wedding vow since Ruth was not marrying Naomi but her commitment to Naomi was so lifelong and so unconditional it resembles the kind of commitment that marriage is and of course the kind that a Christian makes to Christ in becoming a follower of his. So that I've heard this song of Ruth as it's sometimes called sung or recited at weddings because the measure of devotion that it exhibits is something that is appropriate for something that's a lifelong commitment not just friendship here.

And Ruth says wherever you go I'll go. Wherever you lodge I'll lodge with you. Your people be my people and your God will be my God.

Easily what a Christian could be saying at the point of conversion that that kind of a commitment being verbalized is exactly what we must say to Christ or if we don't say it we must have that same intention. She says where you die I will die and there I'll be buried. Now this statement Yahweh do so to me and more also if anything but death parts you from me that expression Yahweh do so to me and more is something that you find from time to time in the Hebrew scriptures.

It's obviously an idiom. It's a saying may the Lord do so to me and more. Scholars feel that there must have been something more than just the verbalizing of this that took place perhaps a hand motion.

Some say perhaps a drawing of the finger across the throat like may God do this to me and worse if I break my vow. You know I mean it's wishing upon oneself an imprecation. If I don't keep my vow may God punish me in this way or worse and so that's what is implied there though we don't know besides the words spoken we don't know what gestures may have accompanied it but it seems to imply may the Lord do this probably

this was somehow acted out and more to me if I don't keep my vow.

So she actually wishes a curse upon herself if she doesn't if anything can separate her from Naomi but death itself and that's how people should be in their marriage commitments and that nothing but death is ever going to put us apart. So you can see that traditional wedding vows might well have taken some of their inspiration from these words and so Naomi stopped trying to persuade her to leave and went with her and just like Naomi tried to persuade Orpah and Ruth to not follow her by telling how much it would cost them Jesus also did that with people who said they'd follow him and he probably put some of them off. Remember a man came to him and said Lord I'll follow you wherever you go and he said well foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

In other words you know I can't really offer you comforts even such comforts as woodland animals animals sometimes have a better deal than what I'll offer you in terms of comfort and security and things like that in the world. That's of course in Luke chapter 9 verses 57-58 and then he said to another in verse 59 Luke 9 59 he said to another follow me but he said Lord let me first go bury my father Jesus said let the dead bury their own dead but you go and preach the kingdom and another said Lord I will follow you but let me first go and bid farewell to those in my house and Jesus said to him no one having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God. Jesus had at least two of these three men actually volunteered to follow him without being asked and he put them off somewhat by saying this will cost you more than you think it will I don't think you're ready to do this.

Now they might have decided they would do it anyway we don't know what their reaction was to his comment but his comment was in a sense the same thing Naomi was doing the daughters in law said we'll go with you said no wait realize what you're getting into here and once they counted the cost one of the girls decided it was too high a cost and didn't go the other did. I don't really know that staying with Naomi was the only choice that was a virtuous choice I don't know that Orpah was wrong in a sense that to say okay Naomi if you don't want me with you you're on your own that's fine with me I don't know that she had an obligation to stay with her but the thing that made Ruth's choice so virtuous is that it was of course very selfless she was committed to Naomi not just in friendship but as we see in the following chapters how she was committed to support her financially and help her out but more importantly it was a choice to change religions because Orpah in going back to the Moabites would not know probably any other worshippers of Yahweh and she herself might not have been one either she may well have embraced without any reservations the religion of her people worship of the demon god Shemosh Ruth had been raised with that religion but she is professing a loyalty now to Yahweh so she's being converted to Yahwehism rather than the Moabite religion and therefore this is her virtue and exhibited in just good selfless decision-making for the sake of an older widow though she herself is a young widow and by

making this choice is almost certainly choosing to be a widow for life although in the providence of God those that seek to lose their lives often gain them and so she was willing to sacrifice to Yahweh her prospects of marriage but God actually gave her a wonderful marriage after all married a rich man who is quite virtuous and apparently fond of her now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem and it happened when they had come to Bethlehem that all the people in the city were excited because of them because the family had been known there had been there for generations and so all the people had known them well and they've been gone for 10 years but they were still recognizable when they came back perhaps though the people in Bethlehem had not received any news of what had transpired in the death of the Lamelech and the death of the sons in any case they did recognize Naomi and the women said is this Naomi so she said to them do not call me Naomi call me Mara for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me I went out full and Yahweh has brought me home again empty why do you call me Naomi since Yahweh has testified against me and the Almighty has afflicted me Naomi as you probably know means pleasant that's the Hebrew word means pleasant or pleasantness so her given name from birth was like the pleasant one but the word Mara we've encountered that previously that's where the waters were that Israel encountered in Exodus 15 when they had come out of Egypt and they came to some of the first water they'd seen in three days and yet it was bitter and couldn't be drunk they called the place Mara which means bitter or bitterness so she's saying you call me pleasant don't call me that anymore call me bitter now this is the reaction that many people have to their trials they choose to become bitter rather than pleasant now notice she had no doubts that God was sovereign in the matter her troubles she believed were God's doing she said Yahweh has dealt bitterly with me I went out full and I came back empty this is how God has treated me so I should be bitter or I should be called bitter or bitterness she is right and seen the hand of God in this and it's very important I think when we are facing trials if we want to avoid becoming bitter if we want to become instead better through our trials then we need to see some things that are not seen naturally remember Paul said in 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 that our light affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory while we look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen so our afflictions can work a glory in us rather than a bitterness in us we can become more glorious more like Christ through our trials or we can just become more bitter and less like Christ when we are in a trial when we face hardship it's a crossroads it's a test and our reaction will determine whether we move forward in our sanctification or backward in it whether we become more like Christ or become more alienated from God through bitterness about our trials the choice Paul said is made in looking at the things not that are seen but the things that are not seen not looking at the things that are seen but looking at the things that are not seen now what things are not seen what invisible things have to be looked at when you're in trials in order that those trials might work for you glory instead of harm well one of those things certainly is to see God's hand in your circumstances to see God as sovereign as Joseph did when he said to his brothers you intended evil against me but God meant it for good or as the apostles

saw it in the death of Jesus that Pilate and Caiaphas and the Romans and the Jews they did to Jesus what God foreordained should be done God was in it Jesus himself prayed that God would take the cup from him but when the cup came to him he said shall I not drink the cup that my father has given me or was he looking at look at Judas and the soldiers these were not God these were evil people these were the devil's people but he says this is the cup my father has given me he saw in his trials as Christians should the hand of God Job did to Job said the Lord gave and the Lord took away blessed be the name of the Lord now you see one of the things that is true but invisible to our eyes but we must acknowledge in our trials if we're to benefit from them is that God is sovereign that God could have prevented this if he wished and the fact that he did not choose to prevent it means that he intended for me to deal with it and therefore it can be received as from the hand of God no matter who the agent is that God used it may be the devil that brings it but it's God who sent it and that's one thing you have to see in your sufferings God's hand God's sovereignty well Naomi saw that but she still got better because some people see that but there's something else invisibly up to see that they're not saying they see that God did it but they don't see that God is good in what he did they don't see that God is loving and that is something that is certainly not very visible in our trials when we're in trials it's not obvious that God is loving when everything is going really well and our prayers are being answered and and we're comfortable and prosperous and everything is well it's easy to say wow God is so good it's obvious to me that he's good because he's done such good things for me things that I see as good and desirable but when God does things in my life that I don't see as good or desirable then is my faith is tested as to whether I believe God is good anyway the thing he has given me is not what I would have chosen for myself but do I still trust that it's the good thing that he has in mind that he has good reason that he is still a loving God and notwithstanding the evidence or notwithstanding the first face I might place on the circumstances do I believe that under all of that God has a good purpose and therefore it's right for him to do it and this shall be good for me and that God will work all things together for good to those who love him and who are called according to his purpose that's an unseen thing too when we're in trials there's two things that are not obvious to us one is that God is still in control and bringing things into our lives the other is that God is good that's not obvious in our trials we hold to both those things by faith and that's what faith is is seeing what is unseen faith is the evidence of things not seen Hebrews 11 one says so how do we look at that which is unseen in our trials well it's faith it's a matter of trusting what God has said about himself Naomi had half of this down she recognized God was sovereign that's good she said it's the Lord who did this to me as Job said the Lord gave the Lord took away but she was different than Job Job said blessed be the name of the Lord Job said basically well God is good and and when his wife challenged that he said well shall we receive only the good things from the Lord not the evil things also in other words God is just as good no matter what she gives us it's appropriate for him to give what he wants to give and for us to receive it as his legitimate prerogative God is not bad when he does things that we don't want him to do

he's still good and if we can embrace the fact that he is in it and that he is good then that transforms the experience of the trial it's still painful but it transforms the outcome in our lives are in our attitudes and we will then not become bitter Naomi seemed not to be fully embracing the idea that this was good she would find it to be so if these things had not happened to her then Ruth would never have married Boaz and it was the marriage of Ruth to Boaz that brought David along eventually David would never have come through this line if Malon and Chilion had not died and left their Moabite widows and Boaz would we don't know whether Boaz would have been in the same position if Elimelech was still alive it gets to be a legally complicated situation with all these birthrights and inheritance things going on but technically at the end when the child Obed is born the people say oh a child is born to Naomi well Naomi had nothing to do with it bloodline wise this is her daughter-in-law not even related to her this is Ruth's child not born from Naomi's line at all but the connections the family connections and how this affected the inheritance in the way a child was figured in it's a very complex thing to our minds because our culture does not see these things the same way in any case because these things happened or at least through these things happening God arranged something good for Naomi that she could not foresee at this point we can only see in hindsight and that is really how it is with virtually all of our trials really even the worst of them when you're going through a trial it never seems at the time that any good could come of this or if any good could it couldn't be worth all the pain it can't be more good than the bad that's been experienced and and I have been through a few trials where I felt exactly that way about I just thought okay this one is so bad that no matter what good God may bring for it can't be as good as this is bad you know I mean it just can't be worth this I really have felt that a couple of times in my life and yet I was wrong as it turned out in both cases it was I was wrong what came of it that could not have come about without it that is without the particular trial the outcome could never have come it was much better and I can see in retrospect as we always will be able to and sometimes we may not see it clearly until we're at the very end of our life or even on the other side after you die we can look back and say oh that's why that was good but most of the time we can look at our early trials and even in our lifetime we go back say well this actually ends up for the good don't always see it but it is always so and we can often see it later and Naomi after the story ran its course I'm sure she looked back and said oh all these things God did that was really so this result could come out which is a really happy and good result my son apparently was sterile in 10 years he couldn't get her pregnant and then he died so I lose my son but I get a grandson that I would not have had if my son had lived I would have been without grandchildren if these sons had lived they obviously were not able to father children in 10 years time with fertile wives they couldn't do it so getting Ruth's first husband out of the way as it were tragic as that seemed made it possible for her to marry someone who would give a grandchild that means the line could be carried on further than if those boys had lived now you could see that at the end but not at this point and that's the point we need to remember that when we're in our trials we can't see it at the time but we will see it later and what faith

says is well since I will see reason to rejoice in this at a later time why wait why don't I just rejoice in it now Paul says we also glory in tribulations knowing that tribulation works patience and patience hope and hope does not make shame for the love of God who should have brought our hearts by the Holy Spirit we know that tribulation is going to work something good so we just glory in the tribulation itself why because we know we're going to glory in it later when we see all this brought about this that was good this pain was a price that was paid for this commodity of blessing that is much better than the price paid someday we'll be glad that this happened so if we're going to someday why not now if I'm gonna be happy someday why wait if I know I'm gonna be happy about this later why don't I just skip the misery and choose to be happy about it now in a sense it is possible by faith to praise God and to glorify him in the trials because we are confident that he's going to bring about something that is not yet seen faith is the evidence of things not seen it's the substance of things that are hoped for but they're hoped for confidently because our promises that God will work things out therefore in trials we need to see that God's hand is in fact in it but not make that an occasion for being grumpy at God as she seemed to be but rather an occasion for being optimistic and saying God who did this is God who happens to be on my side he is a God who happens to work all things for the good the God who is doing this thing in my life actually is a God that I trust to have a good plan in what he does and so I'll rejoice in what he does whether it's good or ill at the moment because later it'll be good at least it will be if I respond properly if I don't I can just take steps down away from God by my attitude of bitterness and so verse 22 Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her who returned from the country of Moab now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest that'd be around March so Ruth is going to find some work because they're going to be harvesting and there'll be some gleanings for the poor we'll come back to that after we take