

## The Long Road Home #3

Ruth 1: 19-22

We know that Naomi had left the land of Bethlehem-Judah with her husband to sojourn in the land of Moab. What began as an intended temporary stay turned into ten long years of difficulty and heartache. Now Naomi has heard that the Lord had visited His people in Bethlehem once again and she has decided to make the long trip home.

This trip would not be an easy one, but it would certainly be a beneficial one. Naomi would have to face the sins of her past, but she had at least made the decision to go back to the land of her people and her God. She had left with her family and the hope of a better future. Moab delivered no hope and she lost her family in that desolate place. Now she is returning, broken and empty, but at least she is going home.

In this account of Naomi's life we find many similarities to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Sin is never pretty. It never brings the results that we thought it would. Sin always demands a heavy price. But there is hope for those who are wayward and wandering from the ways of God. Those who are far from home can always return. I want to consider the blessed hope that is revealed in the text as we think on: [The Long Road Home](#).

**I. The Town of Her Return** (19a) – [So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.](#) Bethlehem was a special place. It had much to offer the child of God. Let's take a moment to examine the atmosphere in Bethlehem. It was:

**A. A Place of Exaltation** – Bethlehem was located in the land of Judah and was often referred to as Bethlehem-Judah. The word Judah actually means "*praise*." This was a place where the Lord was honored. It was a place where He was worshipped. It was a land where God was recognized as the true and living God. Bethlehem was a city where God was praised.

- We find no record of a tabernacle in Moab. We find no record of any public worship. In fact it appears that Naomi had thought little about the Lord during her time in Moab. This is a picture of the world. The world offers little praise unto the Lord. The world doesn't recognize Him or desire to serve and worship the Lord. I like to be around those who desire to praise the Lord. I want to be in a place where He is worshipped and honored!

**B. A Place of Visitation** (6) – [Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.](#) Bethlehem was a place where God visited His people. It

was a place where He manifested His presence in their midst. It was a place where men could fellowship with the Lord and experience His glory!

- You will never find that in the world. God may come to one who is wayward and backslidden in conviction and rebuke, but He will not visit you with His power and glory. If you desire to experience God in great and mighty ways, you must abide where He dwells!

**C. A Place of Provision** – Naomi had left Bethlehem because of a famine in the land. She had made her way to the wasteland of Moab. To her disappointment there was no provision in Moab. We cannot look to the world and expect to be fed. Bethlehem means “*house of bread.*”

- If you are interested in being fed of the Lord, and receiving what you need for your soul, you must abide near the Lord. I want to dwell where the bread is. I want to dwell where praise is offered. I want to dwell where He is!

**D. A Place of Association** – Bethlehem was a place where the people of God dwelt. We found that He visited His people there. Naomi did not enjoy the fellowship and encouragement of God’s people in Moab. She was not surrounded and supported by those of like faith. She did not have the privilege or the ability to worship at the house of God.

- There is something special about God’s people. There is help and encouragement among the church that isn’t found anywhere else. We need to find ourselves at the house of God, associating with the people of God! You can’t live for the Lord and never attend the house of God. If you are not meeting with God’s people in corporate worship, it won’t be long until you are not meeting with God. Attending worship services and fellowshiping with the saints is essential if we are to maintain a right relationship with God.

**II. The Testimony of Her Return (19b-21)** – As Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she was recognized. V.19b – And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? As the people gathered around, Naomi spoke of God.

**A. She Spoke of His Holiness (20-21)** – And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. [21] I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? Naomi realized that her time in Moab had come at a price. She had walked away from Bethlehem, the place where God dwelt, and made her home in a worldly land. In essence she had lived in sin for ten years. She had abandoned the ways of God for the ways of the world. Because of sin, God had dealt with her, very bitterly.

She had endured the suffering and despair that sin had caused. She **went out full**, blessed of God, and **returned empty**.

- There is a profound truth revealed here for all to see. God did not condone or overlook sin in the life of Naomi and He will not in our lives either. He is a God of holiness, One who demands that we live in a way that honors Him. When we choose to abandon the ways of God for the lure of the flesh, we can rest assured that God will deal with us regarding our sin. A child of God cannot sin without consequence or chastisement.
- Many have realized this truth through severe chastisement. Some lived lives that were full and abundant and now they are empty spiritually. It is serious to walk away from the Lord and live only to please the flesh.

**B. She Spoke of His Faithfulness** (21a) – **I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.** She realized that she had received her just reward because of sin, but even in judgment God was faithful. He could have left her to die in Moab like the others. He could have prevented her from hearing of His provision in Bethlehem. But even as she lived outside the will of God, He was faithful.

- This does not encourage or promote sin, but it does offer hope for those who have strayed from the Lord. You may have to deal with the consequences of your sin, but God is always faithful. He stands ready to forgive and restore those who will make their way back to Him. Lu.15:4, 7 –

**What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? [7] I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.**

**III. The Time of Her Return** (22) – **So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.** We find that Naomi returned at the beginning of barley harvest. This was a special time that has a wonderful application for us as well. Barley harvest was:

**A. A Time of Sacrifice** – The Bible reveals in **Lev.23** that the **Passover** was held at the beginning of barley harvest. Passover was celebrated in remembrance of the lamb that was slain and its blood applied to the doorposts and the lintel. It was there that God passed over them when the death angel came. This is a wonderful picture of the sufficiency of the sacrifice that was made. Blood was shed and atonement was received.

- What hope that gives us today. The blood that was shed on the cross of Calvary, the sacrifice that our blessed Lord made was sufficient to cover all our sin. We may stray from the Lord and miss the mark, but we can be forgiven and cleansed through the blood that was shed!

**B. A Time of Security** – During the barley harvest God’s people also celebrated the Feast of Firstfruits. This was a time where the priest would take a sheaf of the first of the harvest and wave it before the Lord. This was called a “*wave offering*.” This was done in thanksgiving for the harvest that the Lord had provided and in anticipation of more to come. The Feast of Firstfruits was viewed as a time of new beginnings and renewed hope.

- Surely Naomi rejoiced in her heart at this time. Life had been difficult and devastating, but there was hope for a new beginning and the anticipation of future blessing. When a wayward child comes home it is a time of rejoicing. It is a time to begin anew and look forward to the blessing that is yet to come. It is a time of rededication and thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

**C. A Time of Sufficiency** – Do you remember why Naomi left Bethlehem? There was a famine in the land; the people were hungry. I realize that she looked in all the wrong places to find what she needed, but the fact remains that she left hungry and returned in a time of plenty. The harvest was now ready. God had blessed with abundance and she would be there to enjoy His blessing.

- You may be struggling today. You may have left the fold of God in search of the pleasures of the world only to find despair and hunger. If that is the case, there is hope for you. We are in the midst of some very difficult days, but there is abundance in the presence of the Lord. He is more than able to supply our need. If the world has left you lacking, why not seek the Lord and receive all that He has to offer?

**D. A Time of Surrender** – This really has nothing to do with it being the beginning of barley harvest. As Naomi returned, she wanted to be known as Mara from that point on. She declared that God had dealt very bitterly with her. Mara means “*bitter*.” I don’t view this as an attitude of bitterness, but one of repentance. She did not blame God; she just realized that her decisions had brought bitterness to her life. Naomi was submitting to the Lord and His will for her life. She had tried it on her own and that only resulting in failure and defeat. Now she was resigned to the ways of God, whatever that may be.

- God honored her submission. She may have desired to be known as Mara, but God continued to call her Naomi which means “*pleasant*.” She had lived in the midst of despair for many years, but God had some pleasant things in store for her future.

- There is hope for all today. Our lives may not have been what we desired or what the Lord wanted, but we have not been forsaken. If you are a child of God, He will not cast you

aside. If we are to enjoy His abundance once again though, we must admit our failures, repent of our sin, and return unto the Lord.

This has been a message of hope and humility. We need to understand that God is well able to meet our needs and restore our fellowship, but we must come before Him fully recognizing our need.

Is there a need in your life today? If so I would encourage you to depart from Moab and begin the journey toward Bethlehem. God is faithful and He will provide!