



<sup>19</sup> So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. 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? <sup>20</sup> And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> 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? <sup>22</sup> 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. (Ruth 1:19-22)

There are important lessons on choices we make in our lives, and how those decisions are hurtful to us when made outside the counsel of Almighty God. There are a couple of old German Dutch sayings which go: "We grow too soon old, and too late smart," and "It is better to lose the anchor than the whole ship." These wise old sayings suggests to our minds that time is fleeting, and opportunity flies away; however, with only a small bit of time left, after all the time wasted, we should make the best of that time remaining in life. Though Naomi has wasted some of her best years in Moab, she has, in her latter days, returned to the place of her birth and the favored home of blessing. Better late than never, and even with our last remaining days, we can find that favor of God in our lives. Though our ship of life may be grounded on the breakers or stones of the far shore, we may yet reach out for that life preserver that the Lord makes continually available to shipwrecked seaman.

Though Naomi left Bethlehem in Judah with a husband and two sons, she now returns with a single soul so well favored by the Lord – Ruth. There have been very few women of the character of Ruth. She is a singular example to all women – and to those of us less lovely men. She had a character of faith and love that was not affected, but genuine and pure to such a degree that the Lord allowed her to be included in the accounted genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. She was, as well, privileged to be the great-grandmother of King David. So the line of David and Jesus descends from a Jew and a Gentile.

“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.” We may start out with more than we finish with in the way of souls. Churches certainly seem to do so. Three began the journey, and one (Orpah), turned back. Confucius said “the journey of one thousand miles begins with the first step.” He could have added wisdom to that statement if he ended his comment with “and ends with the last step.” Unless the last step is taken toward Bethlehem, one falls short of the journey. But “they two went until they came to Bethlehem” – all of the way! The lesson of life here is that a journey worth beginning is worth completing.

“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?” The women travelled together apparently on foot to Jerusalem. The going must have been slow due to Ruth’s aging mother-in-law (Naomi), but determination and perseverance will at last realize success. After so many years, and such great losses, Naomi once more graces the gates of Bethlehem. She had been away so very long that all of her family, friends, and neighbors considered that she must be dead – but God never gave up watching over Naomi even if she had been in a far country, and a great distance out of His divine will. The whole city was anxious to see Naomi. They probably could not believe their eyes for two reasons:

1. As stated earlier, they presumed she had perished in Moab;
2. The years had not been kind to Naomi.

Naomi’s name means pleasant, but she does not appear at all to fulfill the merits of that name anymore. That is the toll that living away from God can take on a body. They all wondered, “Is this really Naomi?” Well, yes, it WAS Naomi. Though the container was battered and bruised, the soulful contents were the same.

It is amazing how ingeniously we are able to find ways for blaming God when we have departed from Him. When the women asked, “Is this Naomi?” she responded, “Call me not Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter): for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.” That is like a young child going into the briar patch where his mother has forbidden him to go, and then blaming his mother for all of the cuts and scratches he got there. We go where God has not told us to go, get into deep ruts and troubles, and then have the audacity to blame God for what has happened to us! Has God really dealt bitterly with Naomi in Moab where God was not a partner to her misfortune. She placed herself in jeopardy by going where she was not supposed to go, and she did so with her eyes open.

At this point in the lesson, I will ask a question of the reader: Why did Naomi leave Bethlehem-Judah in the first place and travel to Moab? Was it not due to famine in Canaan? “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 Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.” (Ruth 1:1) Naomi and Elimelech were of the higher strata of society in Bethlehem. Famine may have placed a great want on the common people of the city, but those who were in Naomi’s class were by no means starving. They left for better opportunity – and lost all. See how Naomi blames God for her predicament: “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?” Don’t blame God for the consequences of sin – sin bears its own punishments. Observe that Naomi went out full (that is right, in the midst of a famine she and her family were quite well off and able to endure the deprivation of famine.) Do you know that the Lord never moves – He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our sins MOVE us from God. Naomi blames God for her returning empty, but God never told Naomi to go to Moab. Naomi took herself away from God’s

protection in Moab, but blames God for all that transpired there.

I received a letter recently from a close friend who had finally met a perfect gentleman. He is mannerly, considerate and loving, yet, he is an unbeliever. What is his reason for being an unbeliever, you might ask? Here is his tale: He went to the Vietnam War as an Army Intelligence officer (I know, a misnomer!), and saw such terrible cruelty and mayhem that he asked, "How could God allow that?" That is it! That is his reason for not believing! I should say, more correctly, that it is his EXCUSE for not believing in a God to whom he does not wish to surrender that 'free will' that is yet in bondage to sin. God is not the Author of sin and wickedness – man is. The only force on earth that brings man's heart into closer harmony with love and compassion is the element of faith in God. Without it, cruelty and mayhem rule.

I love this last verse of Ruth, Chapter 1: "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." It is always 'harvest time' when a soul returns to, or comes for the first time, to the Lord. The very best time to return home is NOW – during the time of barley harvest. Home is certainly where the heart should be, but often wanders from it. Home is where God is pleased for you to be always. Wandering about in the briar patches and pig sties of the world will never profit no matter how large the berries appear. I have been to the briar patch, and I have been in the pigsty as well. They are not the place to grow and to live a rewarding life. One cannot move without getting cut by the briars, or walk without stepping in unmentionable filth. So why go there. Why not remain close to God – even by His side (hand in hand). The times of my childhood when I felt most secure was when I walked, hand in hand, with my father. Regardless the city traffic, or the beasts of the woodland hills, I felt secure when my father held my hand. Do you believe that the old Serpent of the Garden will dare approach if you are walking hand-in-hand with God? No, he has learnt a lesson. He has already been vanquished from Heaven and from the Garden eastward at Eden, and he is just about to be banished from the inhabitable main-lands of the earth into the fires of the deep.

But the only way you can walk with God is to surrender that old wicked, human will (erroneously called Free Will) to His divine and perfect will. Amos has already posited the question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) Are you, my friend, in perfect agreement with God – enough so that you may place your hand in His and walk side by side on the same path? If not, why not leave Moab now and return home to God?