

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SEVENTEEN: RUTH 1:15

"And she said, Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law."

After Orpah turned away and followed the road back to Moab, Naomi again urged Ruth to return to her people. "Return" is a key word in the book of Ruth. It is used 8 times in the first chapter (verses 6, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16, 22).

The Hebrew word "shub" is translated "return" ("returned" in verse 22). It means a reversal of direction, "to turn back," or "turn around." This same word is also translated "repent" (Ezekiel 14:6 for example). It implies a changing of the mind about something (when translated "repent" that something is sin!).

Three things are true about the action of returning. First, some time in the past you were at the place you are returning to. Second, at some point you left or moved away from the place you are returning to. Third, you are reversing direction and going back to the place from which you moved.

Orpah started out as an idol worshipper. When she married Chilion she moved on from worshipping idols to the worship of the true God (at least, we hope so). But in verse 15 we learn that she "returned" to idol worship.

Naomi began our story in Bethlehem among people who worshipped the God of Israel. She moved to a country where the people worshipped idols. After ten years, Naomi decided to reverse course and "return" to Bethlehem to live among the people who worship the true and living God.

Ruth, like Orpah, started out an idol worshipper. When she married Mahlon she became a worshipper of the true God. Ruth never "returned" to where she started. She never reversed direction. She never turned back. Once introduced to the God of heaven, Ruth moved forward and never looked back. She abandoned the land of idols and took up residence among the people of her God.

The book of Ruth is the story of three widows. They shared the same tragedy: the loss of a husband. But each was in a different place in her spiritual life.

Orpah was apparently "playing church." From her actions it does not appear that her conversion was sincere. At best, her faith was shallow and did not endure.

Naomi's relationship with her God had changed. She felt that He was angry with her and treated her harshly. But she desired to get back to where she started.

Ruth's faith was new. She wanted a closer walk with her God. She moved on to a place where the people shared her faith. A place where she could learn and grow in the knowledge of God and His Word.

Who do you identify with? Are you moving away from the Lord, like Orpah? Are you moving toward the Lord but you aren't quite at the place you once were spiritually, like Naomi? Or, are you right where you should be and advancing step by step toward a closer walk with the Lord, like Ruth?

"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou had left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou are fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Revelation 2:4-5