

Dear Friends,

RUTH 1: 18-19

Two women from Moab, Orpah and Ruth, have married two brothers from Bethlehem, they have married outsiders. Their husbands die. Their mother-in-law, Naomi, decides to go back to her home in Israel. Orpah chooses to stay in Moab, Ruth to go with Naomi. I have been suggesting that Orpah made the safer decision. While Ruth took the riskier option. But every story can be seen in a number of different ways.

Some have pointed out that when a person marries outside of their tribe, their tribe can sometimes turn against them. Perhaps Orpah will not be so well received in Moab as I have suggested. Maybe Ruth is sticking with Naomi because she knows that she has nowhere else to go. This perspective may slightly spoil the flow of the story in the way that I've been telling it. But I thought it worth mentioning.

We have got to the point where Naomi has tried her hardest to persuade Ruth to go back to Moab. But Ruth has made up her mind to stay with Naomi and nothing is going to shift her. It says that when Naomi saw Ruth's determination "She said no more to her". It could be that she said no more to Ruth on this particular subject. That is, she gave up trying to convince her to return to Moab. But it could also be that she stopped talking to her at all. Ruth has been defiant. She has been, in Naomi's mind, a disobedient daughter-in-law. She has not done what she was told to do. Naomi therefore punishes her with silence. Or, it could be that Naomi's grief takes hold of her and she sinks into depression. Her words run dry. She has nothing more to say. Her deep sadness will certainly be seen in the next scene. Or she could be plunged into silence as the moment of her arrival in Bethlehem gets nearer and she wonders what on earth she is going to say to all those people that she has not seen for so long.

They arrive in Bethlehem. Their journey would have taken them seven to ten days through about fifty miles of steep and rugged terrain around the Dead Sea and across the River Jordan. News that Naomi was back quickly spread. Not that Bethlehem was large. Even calling it a town is rather grand. It was a settlement, a cluster of small houses. Nevertheless, a community of people lived there and they were all soon talking about Naomi's return, wanting to see her and waiting to hear what she had to say.

The moment arrives. It feels as though everyone has gathered. The women of Bethlehem say, "Is this Naomi?" Naomi opens her mouth to speak to them for the first time in ten years.

God bless you,

Tony