

## INTRODUCTION 引言

We will begin a short series on the book of Ruth for four weeks. I give it an overall title “The Gospel According to Ruth.” We will cover one chapter each Sunday. I encourage you to read the whole book in your free time. Ruth is my favorite female character in the Old Testament. I will gradually tell you why in this series. The stories of Ruth happened during the time of the judges. It was about 1100 BC. Those judges were not officials in court. They were military generals who directed the Israelites to fight against foreign enemies. The Israelites did not only need political leaders, they also needed a spiritual compass. Their spiritual status at that time was a mess. The last verse in the book of Judges sums in all: **In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.** Someone had to guide them back to God. It was shocking for the Israelites to forget God in merely one generation. That again underscores the importance for Christian parents to help their children follow Jesus. However, people’s rebellion would not derail God’s plan. Though God’s people abandoned Him, He would never forget the covenant He made with them. No one could ever imagine that God intended to save Israel through a foreign lady. Her name is Ruth. God loves to use ordinary people. Some of us may never be rich or famous. Just like what God would do through Ruth, He can accomplish great things through us when we commit ourselves to Him. It all begins with a decision to return to God.

The story begins with the migration of a family. Verses 1-3 give us some background: **1 In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.** From Bethlehem, this family went east and crossed the river Jordan to Moab. It is understandable for people to move elsewhere in a famine to look for food. Abraham and Jacob took their families to Egypt for the same reason. However, for Elimelech’s family, the relocation led to unexpected outcomes.

## EXPLANATION 解釋

### 1. Signs of Desperation 絕望的跡象

We see some signs of desperation in the subsequent plots. Continue to read verses 4-5: **4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, 5 and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.** Verse 3 says Elimelech had passed away. His two sons then married Moabites. Sadly, ten years later both sons also died. In the ancient

world, men were the source of income in a family. Now all the men were gone. How could three widows survive? Sometime later, Naomi received news that Judah had food. She figured it would be wiser to go back. She could seek help from relatives and townsfolks. Naomi suggested Orpah and Ruth to go back to their people. She knew that Moabites might not be welcome in Israel. After all, the two daughters-in-law were still young. They could remarry and start a new life. But they were reluctant to leave. Naomi tried to persuade them in verses 11-13: **11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.”** The desire of Orpah and Ruth adds to the pain of Naomi. She did not want them to suffer with her. It was unreasonable for them to wait till Naomi found another husband and had two sons. Naomi concluded that God brought all those troubles to her family. You can sense a lot of helplessness in her words. She might be thinking: “If we had not come to Moab then my husband would not have died. My boys would not have married foreigners either. Everything would not be the same.” Regret is a powerful and devastating emotion. Sometimes we wish we could turn back time and go a different route when things do not work out. We say to ourselves: “Perhaps I should not have come to the United States, I should have gone to another city, studied another subject, found a different job, married another person or saved up more money when I was young.” The list goes on and on. Worse still, we attribute our misfortune to the hand of God. He must be punishing me for some sins I committed. Do you lament over your life like that? Don’t be! It is true that we have to bear the outcomes of our deliberate sins. There will be legal consequence too if we broke the law. However, not every problem is the result of sin. Also, God is patient and merciful. He never gives up on us even when we go astray. He always gives us an opportunity to return to Him. He promises to forgive us if we confess to Him. The blood of Jesus will wipe us clean. We cannot erase our past. But we can begin a bright future by God’s grace.

## 2. Show of Determination 決心的表示

Naomi decided to go home. Orpah listened to her mother-in-law’s advice and went back to her homeland. In comparison, Ruth showed her determination to follow Naomi. Verses 16-17 is her profession of faith: **16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”** Ruth determined to be with Naomi wherever she might go. She even backed up everything with an oath. She was willing to receive any penalty from God if she betrayed her promises. Imagine what Ruth had to give up. She left her family and her hometown. She had no idea whether she would see her relatives and friends again. People in most cultures hope that they will be buried in their birthplace. Quite likely, Ruth had to forsake that wish too. The most significant part was to make Naomi’s God her God. There was a general belief in the ancient

world that deities had their own territories. If Ruth thought the same, then moving to a new place means she had to worship new gods. Why did Ruth choose to worship Jehovah? We can make some logical guess. At that time, a wife moved into her husband's home after marriage. Ruth observed first-hand their expression of faith. They rested on the Sabbath, obeyed the local laws and showed kindness to others. Even if they could pretend to be godly in public, there was no way to hide their true self at home. Ruth witnessed that their faith was real. At the very least, the in-laws accepted Orpah and Ruth even though they were non-Jews. Nowadays, most couples move out from their parents after they are married. Regardless, marriage is not only between two persons, it is also between two families. As a parent, how do you prepare your kids for their future spouses? God gives us an important task to bring up our children according to Biblical principles. We hope that our children will love God and love people, and follow Jesus the rest of their lives. If they obey God when they are single, more than likely they will continue to honor God in their marriage. If they love Jesus first, you do not have to worry that they will not love their spouse. Besides, you must welcome your son-in-law and daughter-in-law into your family. Naomi did that. Eventually, she influenced a pagan worshipper to become a follower of Jehovah. But that does not mean that God encourages a believer to marry a non-believer. More than likely, a non-Christian will stumble instead of strengthen the faith of his/her spouse. Naomi finally arrived in Judah. People could hardly recognize her. Naomi lamented over her hardship again in verse 21: **"I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"** The name "Naomi" means sweet. Her current situation is far from sweet. Naomi looked at God like a fair judge. Since her family ran away from God, they deserted God's protection and blessings. She admitted that she deserved those misfortunes. Now two widows were in Judah. How could they make a living? Read the rest of the book if you would like to know what happened next. One thing for sure is that God had an amazing plan in the life of Ruth.

## CONCLUSION 結論

God can accomplish great things through those who commit themselves to Him. It all begins with a decision to return to Him. Naomi's plan was to go back to a familiar place. But from a spiritual sense, she was returning to God. The same Hebrew word for "return" appears eight times in this chapter. That is significant! Naomi returned to the land that God reserved for His people. You need to return to God too if you have wandered away from Him. You consider yourself a Christian in your head, but your conducts say otherwise. Do not just profess your faith through the lips. You must also practice all you believe through your life. You need to take some concrete actions. Perhaps it can be as simple as making church attendance your top priority. You return to God's house on a weekly basis. But do not just drag your body here. Bring your heart too! You are not a customer, but you are a member of this family. Come here to worship, learn, grow and serve with fellow believers. Show your love for God and share your love with one another. Make up your mind and say to yourself: "I determine to return to the Lord who love me and died for me."

## INTRODUCTION 引言

我們開始為期四週的關於路得記的簡短系列。我給它起了一個總標題「路得記中的福音」。我們每個主日都會學習一章。我鼓勵你在空餘時間閱讀整卷書。路得是我在舊約中最喜歡的女性人物。我會在這個系列中逐步告訴你原因。路得的故事發生在士師時代。那是大約公元前 1100 年。英文翻譯的「士師」指的不是法庭上的官員。他們是指揮以色列人對抗外敵的軍官。以色列人不僅需要政治領袖，他們也需要屬靈的指南針。他們當時的屬靈狀態是一團糟。士師記的最後一節總結：**那時，以色列中沒有王，各人任意而行。**必須有人引導他們回到神的身邊。以色列人僅僅過了一代就忘記神，這是令人震驚的。這再次強調基督徒父母幫助孩子跟隨耶穌的重要性。然而，人們的叛逆並不能破壞神的計劃。雖然神的子民離棄了祂，但祂永遠不會忘記與他們所立的約。沒有人能想像神會透過一位外國女子來拯救以色列。她的名字是路得。神喜歡使用普通人。我們一些人可能不會富有或出名。就像神透過路得所做的那樣，當我們將自己交託給祂之時，祂可以透過我們成就偉大的事。這一切都從於回到神身邊的決定開始。

故事要從一個家庭的遷移開始。第 1-3 節給我們一些背景：**1 當士師秉政的時候，國中遭遇饑荒。在猶大的伯利恆，有一個人帶着妻子和兩個兒子往摩押地去寄居。2 這人名叫以利米勒，他的妻名叫拿俄米；他兩個兒子，一個名叫瑪倫，一個名叫基連，都是猶大伯利恆的以法他人。他們到了摩押地，就住在那裏。3 後來拿俄米的丈夫以利米勒死了，剩下婦人和她兩個兒子。這個家庭從伯利恆向東走，渡過約旦河到達摩押。人們在飢荒中搬到其他地方尋找食物是可以理解的。亞伯拉罕和雅各基於同樣的原因帶著他們的家人到了埃及。然而，對以利米勒的家人來說，搬遷帶來了意想不到的結果。**

## EXPLANATION 解釋

## 1. Signs of Desperation 絕望的跡象

我們在隨後的情節中看到了一些絕望的跡象。請繼續讀第 4-5 節：**4 這兩個兒子娶了摩押女子為妻，一個名叫俄珥巴，一個名叫路得，在那裏住了約有十年。5 瑪倫和基連二人也死了，剩下拿俄米，沒有丈夫，也沒有兒子。第 3 節說以利**

米勒已經過世。他的兩個兒子隨後與摩押人結婚。不幸的是，十年後，兩個兒子也相繼去世。在古代世界，男人是家庭的經濟來源。現在所有男人都不在了。三個寡婦如何生存？過了一段時間，拿俄米收到消息說猶大有食物。她覺得還是回去比較明智。她可以投靠親戚和同鄉。拿俄米建議俄珥巴和路得回到他們的同胞那裡。她知道摩押人在以色列可能不受歡迎。畢竟兩個媳婦還年輕，他們可以再婚並開始新的生活。但她們捨不得離開。拿俄米在 11-13 節中試圖勸她們：**11 拿俄米說：「我女兒們哪，回去吧！為何要跟我去呢？我還能生子作你們的丈夫嗎？12 我女兒們哪，回去吧！我年紀老邁，不能再有丈夫；即或說，我還有指望，今夜有丈夫可以生子，13 你們豈能等着他們長大呢？你們豈能等着他們不嫁別人呢？我女兒們哪，不要這樣。我為你們的緣故甚是愁苦，因為耶和華伸手攻擊我。」**俄珥巴和路得的意願反而增加了拿俄米的痛苦。她不想讓她們和她一起受苦。要等到拿俄米找到另一個丈夫並生兩個兒子是不合理的。拿俄米得出的結論是，神給她的家人帶來了所有這些麻煩。從她的語氣中，你可以感受到很多的無奈。她可能會想：「如果我們沒有來到摩押，那麼我的丈夫就不會死。我的兒子們也不會娶外邦人。一切都會不一樣。」後悔是一種強大且具破壞性的情緒。有時，當事情不順利時，我們希望能夠回到過去選擇別的路。我們對自己說：「也許我不應該來美國，我應該去另一個城市，學習另一個專業，找別的工作，與另一個人結婚，或者在年輕時存更多的錢。」我們覺得遺憾的事情還有許多。更糟的是，我們把自己的不幸歸咎於神的身上。祂一定是因為我犯了某些罪而懲罰我。你是否也這樣感嘆自己的人生？不要這樣！我們的確需要承擔故意犯罪帶來的結果。如果我們觸犯了法律，也需要接受法律的制裁。然而，並非所有問題都是罪引起的。此外，神是有忍耐和有憐憫的。縱使我們偏行己路，祂也不會放棄我們。祂總是給我們機會回到祂身邊。如果我們向祂認罪，祂應許會饒恕我們。耶穌的寶血會把我們洗淨。我們無法抹去我們的過去。但靠著神的恩典，我們可以開始一個光明的未來。

## 2. Show of Determination 決心的表示

拿俄米決定回家。俄珥巴聽從婆婆的勸告，回到了祖國。相比之下，路得表示了跟隨拿俄米的決心。第 16-17 節是她信心的宣告：**16 路得說：「不要催我回去不跟隨你。你往哪裏去，我也往那裏去；你在哪裏住宿，我也在那裏住宿；你的國就是我的國，你的神就是我的神。17 你在哪裏死，我也在那裏死，也葬在那裏。除非死能使我相離！不然，願耶和華重重地降罰與我。」**路得決定無論拿俄米去哪裡，都要跟她在一起。她甚至用誓言來確認。如果她違背自己的承諾，她願意接受神的懲罰。想想看路得需要放棄的事情。她離開了家人和家鄉。她不知道是否還能再見到自己的親戚和朋友。在大多數的文化中，人們都

希望被埋葬在自己的出生地。很可能，路得也必須放棄這個心願。最重要的一點是她要拿俄米的神成為她的神。古代世界普遍相信神靈有自己的地頭。如果路得也是這麼想，那麼搬到一個新的地方就意味著她必須敬拜別的神。路得為什麼選擇敬拜耶和華？我們可以做出一些合乎邏輯的猜測。當時，妻子結婚後會搬到丈夫的家。路得親眼目睹了他們信仰的表達。他們在安息日休息，遵守當地的法律，並對別人表現恩慈。就算他們可以在公眾場合假裝虔誠，但在家裡卻無法隱藏真實的自我。路得見證他們的信心是真實的。至少，公公婆婆接納了俄珥巴和路得，雖然他們不是猶太人。如今，大多數夫妻結婚後會搬離父母的家。無論如何，婚姻不只是兩個人之間的事，也是兩個家庭之間的事。身為父母，你如何準備孩子迎接將來的配偶？神賦予我們一項重要的任務，就是要按照聖經原則來教養孩子。我們希望孩子愛神愛人，並一生跟隨耶穌。如果他們在單身時期順服神，他們很可能在婚姻中會繼續榮耀神。如果他們先愛耶穌，你就不必擔心他們不會愛他們的配偶。此外，你必須接納你的女婿和媳婦進入你的家庭。拿俄米就是這麼做的。最終，她影響了一位異教崇拜者，使她成為耶和華的跟隨者。但這並不表示神鼓勵信徒與非信徒結婚。非基督徒很可能會絆倒而不是鞏固配偶的信仰。拿俄米終於抵達猶大。人們幾乎認不出她來。拿俄米在 21 節再次為自己的苦難感嘆：「我滿滿地出去，耶和華使我空空地回來。耶和華降禍與我；全能者使我受苦。既是這樣，你們為何還叫我拿俄米呢？」「拿俄米」這個名字的意思是「甜」。她目前的光景遠非甜蜜。拿俄米認為神就像一位公正的法官。自從她一家人遠離神，他們便失去神的保守與祝福。她承認這些不幸是他們罪有應得的。現在兩個寡婦回到猶大。他們以後如何謀生？如果你想知道接下來發生了什麼，請閱讀本書的其餘部分。有一件事情的肯定的：神對路得的生命有一個奇妙的計劃。

## CONCLUSION 結論

神能夠透過那些將自己交託給祂的人來成就偉大的事。這一切都從於回到神身邊的決定開始。拿俄米的計劃是回到一個熟悉的地方。但從屬靈的層面來看，她是歸回神。「歸回」這個希伯來文的字在這一章中出現了八次。這很關鍵！拿俄米回到了神為祂的子民保留的地方。如果你已經遠離神，你也需要回到神身邊。你在頭腦中認為自己是基督徒，但你的行為表現卻是不一致。不要只在嘴巴上表達你的信仰，你也必須在生活中實踐你的信仰。你需要採取一些具體行動。也許最簡單的是把參加教會聚會視為重要。你每週都會回到神的家。但不只是人來，你的心也要一起來！你不是個顧客，你乃是這個家庭的成員。來這裡與其他信徒一起敬拜、學習、成長、服事。表達你對神的愛，並向他人分享你的愛。下定決心，對自己說：「我決心回到愛我、為我而死的主身邊。」