

# The Faith of Ruth

Devotional Reading: Acts 10:34-38

Background Scripture: Ruth 1; 4:13-22

Today's Scripture: Ruth 1:6-18, 22

## I. First Exchange

### Ruth 1:6-10

**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.**

**7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.**

**8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.**

**9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.**

**10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.**

6. Regarding the journey *from the country of Moab* to Bethlehem. Returning to her people was Naomi's best option to be cared as a widow. God's renewed provision in her homeland meant that her family's legal obligations to care for her would not burden an already famished community. The inclusion of *her* (Moabite) *daughters in*

*law* might surprise us, as their families of origin would be expected to care for them in their widowhood.

7. There is no clear indication regarding how soon after her sons' deaths Naomi received news that the famine in Judah had ended (Ruth 1:6). For Naomi, the journey *unto the land of Judah* was a return to her family and the safety net they represented. But using the same rationale of familial obligation and care, Naomi's *two daughters in law* would have been expected to stay in their homeland, Moab. That the Moabite women began this journey with their mother-in-law speaks to the depth of their love for and devotion to her.

8a. We might have expected Naomi to urge the widows back to their fathers' homes. But returning *each to her mother's house* might mark a shift in focus from the material benefit of marriage to the relational. Or it may be a tacit acknowledgement of polygamy. In this case, the mother's house would be a separate dwelling from the father's primary residence.

More than these options, though, the language suggests that Naomi was relinquishing her rights to any support *her two daughters in law* might offer. She was not their mother, and they were not obligated to share in the difficulties that widowhood would represent for Naomi.

8b-9a. As Moabite widows, Ruth and

Orpah would be incredibly vulnerable in Israel. Naomi's words *deal kindly with you* have a ring of covenant language. She intended to leave the women in the Lord's care even though she also intended to leave them in the land of Moab. Naomi did not explicitly say but clearly believed that *the Lord* was not only able but also willing to bless the younger widows, even outside of Israel. As is true throughout the book of Ruth, the Lord's kindness would be experienced through human relationships (example: Ruth 2:4-12). *Rest* for the widows was expected to be found in their mothers' homes before moving on to new families in the houses of new husbands.

9b-10. *They lifted up their voice, and wept* is clearly lament language. In context it could be for the general position in which they all found themselves—husbandless and with uncertain futures—or it could specifically have been in response to the pain these two younger women felt at the thought of separating from Naomi. *Surely we will return with thee unto thy people* does not constitute a binding oath but does communicate great devotion to Naomi. It was not a pragmatic response or a thought-out plan; it was the pleading of two daughters-in-law who didn't want to see their mother-in-law leave.

## II. Second Exchange

### Ruth 1:11-14

**11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?**

**12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;**

**13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daugh-**

**ters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.**

**14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.**

11. Naomi emphasized the darker, more painful truth about her motivation to send them away: she could not bear *any more sons* to grow up and care for her dead sons' wives. This concern was in keeping with a provision within the Law of Moses concerning care for widows (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This not only ensured care for the widow but also allowed her dead husband's lineage to continue. Due to Naomi's own widowhood and age, she knew that her *womb* would not provide new *husbands* for Orpah and Ruth.

12-13a. The phrase *I am too old to have a husband* continued the "reality check" for the two daughters. Naomi's child-bearing years were behind her, such that no man of her times would be inclined to marry her. And even if she had hope that she could remarry that very day and conceive *sons* that night, how could the widows be expected to wait years for those sons to be old enough to marry?

13b. *The hand of the Lord* can refer to God's blessing, guidance, and protection. But His hand conversely can refer to curse, discipline, and judgment. *Gone out against me* illustrates Naomi's feeling that God had not so much abandoned her; rather, He was judging her. The writer doesn't outright confirm or deny Naomi's feeling. But when she returned home, Naomi asked to be called *Mara* ("bitter"), "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). We can make too much of the fact that the writer never called Naomi *Mara*. But it subtly suggests that the writer didn't accept that Naomi's life was bitter, or at least that it wasn't irretrievably bitter.

14. At first *Orpah* and *Ruth* had responded in lament following Naomi's goodbye kiss (Ruth 1:9-10). But then Orpah *kissed* Naomi. As with Naomi's previous gesture, this was a kiss goodbye. We might be tempted to conclude that Orpah acted faithlessly toward Naomi. But the text does not indicate here or elsewhere that Orpah made a poor decision. She acted in keeping with the wisdom of her time and with Naomi's greatest hopes for Orpah's future thriving. By contrast, Ruth would not be swayed by any argument Naomi could make. Ruth *clave unto her* and would not change her mind.

### III. Third Exchange Ruth 1:15-18, 22

**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.**

**16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:**

**17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.**

**18 When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.**

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**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.**

15. Naomi made one last plea to Ruth to turn back. Returning *unto her people* would be a comfortable cultural fit for

Ruth, complete with a return to worship of Moabite gods. In the ancient world, gods were often associated not only with certain spheres of activity but also with geographic regions. The Israelites were meant to be distinct from their neighbors by rejecting all gods other than the Lord—never worshipping a pantheon of multiple deities. Ruth's choice was between what she had known before and what she had come to know in her husband's household.

16-17a. The introductory statement is an emphatic statement of Ruth's immovable will to follow Naomi, strengthened by Ruth's listing her commitments to Naomi. Ruth's response reflected Naomi's hopes for Ruth but unexpectedly anticipated their fulfillment to be found in a future that included the two women together. The commitment to Naomi's people and God directly tied back to Naomi's plea for Ruth to follow Orpah's example. The commitments to *go* and *lodge* with Naomi tied Ruth's future to Naomi's. Whatever provision Naomi would find among her people, Ruth would accept as well. Naomi would expect to die well before Ruth. Yet Ruth's commitment was to *die* in Judah and *be buried* there. In these ways, Ruth declared Naomi to be her mother and outlined the devotion that she would demonstrate as Naomi's true child.

17b-18. Unlike Orpah and Ruth's spontaneous declaration in Ruth 1:10, this is the most solemn of vows. Ruth had carefully considered the cost of going with Naomi. Realizing this, Naomi stopped trying to convince Ruth to take a different journey.

22. *Bethlehem* can be literally translated as "house of bread," giving an ironic cast to the famine that had occurred there.

The mention of the *barley harvest* confirmed that the famine was broken. The beginning of that harvest took place sometime in mid-March to mid-April.

# Involvement Learning

## The Faith of Ruth

### Into the Lesson

Describe a major life change you've gone through, either recently or in the past.

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Today we're going to look at the life of Ruth and how love motivated her to take a leap of faith.

### Into the Word

Consider the motivations of the women in today's story and answer the following questions from the perspective of each woman.

What motivated you to leave Moab?

Naomi \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth \_\_\_\_\_

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What concerns did you have for the woman you were traveling with?

Naomi \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth \_\_\_\_\_

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How did your experience of God's care influence your decision-making?

Naomi \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth \_\_\_\_\_

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What hope and future possibilities did you have in Moab?

Naomi \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth \_\_\_\_\_

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How did your hope and future possibilities change for the better or worse in Judah?

Naomi \_\_\_\_\_

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Ruth \_\_\_\_\_

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### Key Verse

Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

—Ruth 1:16

### Into Life

What is the biggest and most fearsome challenge you, or someone close to you, are facing?

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What are three reasons for hope in this situation?

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What is one courageous action you can take in response to your reasons for hope?

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### Thought to Remember

Remain steadfast in your love for the Lord and His people.