

Ruth 1:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

Analysis

Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me. Naomi completes her argument with two rhetorical questions expecting negative answers. "Would ye tarry for them till they were grown?" (hallahen tesabernah ad asher yigdalu, בְּלֹהֵן תִּשְׁבְּרָנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדָּלָו) uses the verb *sabar* (שָׁבַר), meaning "wait" or "hope"—asking whether they would realistically wait 15-20 years for hypothetical sons to reach marriageable age. The second question intensifies: "would ye stay for them from having husbands?" (hallahen te'agennah levilti *heyot le'ish*, בְּלֹהֵן תִּשְׁגַּנָּה לְבָלָתִי הַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ), asking whether they would forfeit marriage and motherhood during their prime childbearing years. Both questions obviously expect "No" as answer.

"Nay, my daughters" (al benotay, אֲלֹ בָּנוֹתֵי) literally means "No, my daughters" or "Don't, my daughters"—emphatic prohibition against such foolishness. Then comes Naomi's bitter theology: "it grieveth me much for your sakes" (mar-li me'od mikkhem, מָרְלִי מְאֹד מִקְהֵם) uses the same root (*marar*, מָרַר, "bitter") she later applies to herself in verse 20 ("call me Mara"). The phrase "much more bitter to me than to you" suggests her grief exceeds theirs because she understands the full hopelessness.

Most significantly, she declares "the hand of the LORD is gone out against me"

(yatse'ah vi yad-YHWH, בַּיָּד־יְהוָה יָצָא). This is covenant language—God's "hand" represents His powerful intervention, usually for deliverance (Exodus 3:20; Deuteronomy 4:34) but sometimes for judgment (1 Samuel 5:6; 12:15). Naomi interprets her losses as divine opposition, not recognizing that God's hand "going out" would ultimately bring redemption. Her theology of suffering lacks the perspective that Romans 8:28 and Joseph's life (Genesis 50:20) later illustrate—God works all things, even apparent judgment, toward redemptive purposes. Naomi's bitter providential interpretation blinds her to God's hidden grace already at work.

Historical Context

Naomi's reference to "the hand of the LORD" going out against her reflects covenant theology. In Deuteronomy 28, God promises blessings for obedience (vv. 1-14) and curses for disobedience (vv. 15-68). Among the curses: loss of children (v. 32, 41), widowhood (v. 54), and famine (v. 23-24). Naomi's experience—famine in Israel, migration to enemy territory, death of husband and sons—could reasonably be interpreted through this covenant curse framework. Her theology wasn't entirely wrong; God does discipline His people (Hebrews 12:5-11).

However, Naomi's interpretation was incomplete. She couldn't yet see how God was working redemption through these very losses. The famine brought her family to Moab where Ruth became part of the family. The deaths created the situation allowing Ruth to glean in Boaz's field unmarried. The return to Bethlehem positioned Ruth to meet Boaz. Every element Naomi identified as God's hand against her was actually God's hand orchestrating redemption. This demonstrates the limits of human perspective in real-time versus God's comprehensive providence visible in retrospect.

Ancient Near Eastern cultures universally interpreted prosperity as divine favor and suffering as divine disfavor. Job's friends exemplified this theology, insisting suffering proves sin (Job 4:7-9; 8:3-6; 11:13-15). While God does discipline sin, not all suffering indicates judgment—sometimes it prepares for greater blessing, forms character, displays God's glory, or accomplishes purposes beyond human understanding. Naomi's bitter interpretation, though understandable, missed the

redemptive narrative God was writing. Believers throughout history face similar challenges: trusting God's goodness when circumstances suggest His opposition.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do your interpretations of suffering shape your ability to recognize God's ongoing gracious purposes?
2. What bitter providential interpretations might be blinding you to God's redemptive work in your circumstances?
3. How can you hold together honest lament over losses while maintaining trust in God's ultimate goodness and wise purposes?

Interlinear Text

בָּלָהו	וְיִצְחָק	לֹא	תִּשְׁבַּב	רְנָה	בָּלָהו	בָּלָהו
for them	Would ye tarry	H5704	H834	till they were grown	for them	H3860
H3860	H7663			H1431		
בָּנָת	וְאַל	לֹא	וְש	לְבָלָת	וְתַעֲגַג	בָּנָת
would ye stay	H1115	H1961	H376	from having husbands	H408	nay my daughters
H5702					H1323	
בְּ	וְאַצְאָה	הַ	בְּ	מִ	מִזְאֵד	מִרְאֵן
for it grieveth	H0	H3966	H4480	H3588	is gone out	H0
H3588	H4843				H3318	
תְּ	יְהִיָּה	וְ	תְּ	מִ	מִ	מִ
for your sakes that the hand	of the LORD	H3027	H3068			

Additional Cross-References

Job 19:21 (Parallel theme): Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.

Psalms 32:4 (Parallel theme): For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

Judges 2:15 (References Lord): Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

Psalms 38:2 (Parallel theme): For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org