

Ruth 1:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. Naomi's stark reasoning produces emotional response: "they lifted up their voice, and wept again" (vatissenah qolan vatibkenah od, וַיַּשְׁנָה קָלָן וַיְתִבְקַנָּה עַד). The verb "lifted up their voice" is Hebrew idiom for loud, unrestrained crying. "Again" (od, עַד) refers back to verse 9's weeping, suggesting brief respite followed by renewed grief. The weeping reflects the heartbreak of an impossible choice—love for Naomi versus practical necessity, loyalty versus survival, costly faith versus secure unbelief.

Then comes the decisive moment: "Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her." The contrast is stark, introduced by the adversative "but" (ve). Orpah's kiss (vatishaq, וַיִּשְׁחַק) signifies farewell—affectionate but final. She chooses the reasonable path Naomi urged, returning to family, security, and familiar gods (v. 15). There's no indication Orpah's choice was wrong in purely human terms; she did exactly what Naomi advised and cultural expectation demanded. Yet she disappears from the narrative, her name (possibly related to "neck" or "back") symbolizing one who turns back.

Ruth, however, "clave unto her" (davqah vah, וַיַּכְלֵה בָּה). The verb davaq (כָּלַח) "cling," "cleave," "hold fast") is the same used in Genesis 2:24 for marriage union ("shall cleave unto his wife") and in Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 30:20 for Israel's covenant loyalty to God ("cleave unto him"). This is not casual association but covenant commitment—Ruth bonds herself to Naomi with marriage-like and

worship-like devotion. The word suggests being glued together, inseparably joined. Ruth's clinging embodies covenant faithfulness (*hesed*, חֶסֶד, v. 8) in action, becoming living testimony to the loyalty Israel was called to show Yahweh. Her choice illustrates saving faith: clinging to God's people and God's covenant despite cost, uncertainty, and contrary human wisdom.

Historical Context

The contrasting choices of Orpah and Ruth have been interpreted variously throughout history. Orpah wasn't condemned in the text—she did what Naomi advised and what cultural expectation demanded. Yet her reasonable choice led to obscurity while Ruth's unreasonable choice led to blessing, royal lineage, and inclusion in Messiah's genealogy (Matthew 1:5). This pattern recurs in Scripture: Abel's faith-offering versus Cain's reasonable offering; Abraham leaving Ur versus Lot choosing Sodom's prosperity; Moses choosing identification with suffering Hebrews versus pleasure in Pharaoh's house (Hebrews 11:24-26).

The Hebrew word *davaq* ("cling/cleave") creates powerful theological resonance. When used for covenant loyalty to Yahweh (Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Joshua 22:5; 23:8), it describes the total commitment God requires—not casual religious observance but passionate, exclusive devotion. Ruth's cleaving to Naomi demonstrated this same quality, making her a model of covenant faithfulness. Later Jewish tradition greatly honored Ruth; the book is read during Shavuot (Feast of Weeks/Pentecost) celebrating the giving of the Law, linking Ruth's commitment to Israel's covenant commitment to God.

The narrative's silence on Orpah after verse 15 is striking. We never learn whether she remarried, had children, or prospered in Moab. Her story ends when she turns back. This literary choice emphasizes that significance comes not from following cultural expectations but from covenant commitment to God's people and purposes. Ruth's name appears 12 times in the book; Orpah's appears only twice. The path of least resistance leads to historical irrelevance; the costly path of faith leads to eternal significance. Every believer faces similar choices between reasonable self-preservation and unreasonable faith—Ruth's example calls us to cleave to Christ and His people regardless of cost.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What 'Orpah choices' are you facing where the reasonable, culturally acceptable path conflicts with costly covenant faithfulness?
2. To whom or what are you 'cleaving' with the kind of inseparable commitment Ruth demonstrated toward Naomi?
3. How does Ruth's example challenge your willingness to make faith commitments that appear foolish by worldly calculation?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּשְׁלַח־	קֹל־	וַיַּתְבֹּכֶל־	יְהוָה	וְעַד	וַיַּתְשִׁלַּח־	עַרְפָּה
And they lifted up	their voice	and wept again	H5750	kissed	and Orpah	

לְסִמְמֹת הָ	וְתִרְיָה	בְּקָה	בָּה:
her mother in law	but Ruth	clave	H0

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 18:24 (Parallel theme): A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Matthew 19:22 (Parallel theme): But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Matthew 16:24 (Parallel theme): Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

Matthew 10:37 (Parallel theme): He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Hebrews 10:39 (Parallel theme): But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Isaiah 14:1 (Parallel theme): For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

Proverbs 17:17 (Parallel theme): A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Zechariah 8:23 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

Deuteronomy 10:20 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.

1 Kings 19:20 (Parallel theme): And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?