

Ruth 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

Analysis

And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.

The sons' marriages to Moabite women represents further assimilation into Moabite culture. The verb "took" (vayis'u, וַיִּשְׁאַל) is the standard term for marriage but carries undertones of active choice—they selected Moabite wives rather than returning to Judah to find Israelite brides. Given Deuteronomy 23:3-6's prohibition against Moabites entering the assembly, these marriages were controversial at minimum, possibly explicitly prohibited.

"Orpah" (Orpah, עַרְפָּה) possibly derives from oref (עָרֵף, "neck" or "back of the neck"), perhaps foreshadowing her later decision to turn back (turn the neck) to Moab. "Ruth" (Rut, רָת) may derive from re'ut (רָעֵת, "friendship" or "association"), suggesting companionship—fitting given her loyal friendship to Naomi. Alternatively, it may relate to ravah (רָאַת, "to drink" or "be saturated"), signifying satisfaction or abundance.

The phrase "they dwelled there about ten years" indicates the family's complete settlement in Moab. What began as temporary sojourn during famine became a decade of residence, including marriages establishing permanent connections. The round number "ten years" may be literal or symbolic, suggesting a complete

period. During this decade, the sons presumably could have returned to Judah (famine doesn't last ten years), yet they remained, raising questions about their commitment to covenant identity versus comfort in Moab.

Historical Context

Marriage to foreign women was a recurring issue in Israel's history. While the law prohibited marriage to Canaanites (Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4) because of idolatry risk, other foreigners could be incorporated through conversion. Ruth and Rahab (both foreigners, both in Christ's genealogy) demonstrate that ethnicity wasn't the ultimate issue—covenant faith was. However, Deuteronomy 23:3-6 specifically excluded Moabites, creating tension with these marriages.

Jewish interpretation debated whether Deuteronomy 23:3's prohibition applied to women or only men. The Targum and many rabbis limited the prohibition to Moabite men, allowing marriage to Moabite women. This interpretation permitted Mahlon and Chilion's marriages while maintaining legal propriety. However, the text provides no indication the brothers consulted such legal reasoning—their marriages appear pragmatic rather than theologically considered.

The ten-year period without children (implied by the absence of grandchildren) may indicate divine disfavor. Ancient Near Eastern culture viewed children as primary blessing and barrenness as curse (Deuteronomy 28:4, 11 versus 28:18). That these marriages produced no children during a decade might signal God's disapproval, though the text doesn't explicitly state this. The marriages' barrenness creates narrative tension—no heirs to preserve Elimelech's name or provide for Naomi.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What patterns of incremental compromise can you identify in your spiritual life, and how can you reverse this drift?
2. In what areas are you expecting God's blessing while living in ways contrary to His revealed will?
3. How does Ruth's example of faith transcending ethnicity challenge your attitudes toward those from different backgrounds coming to Christ?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּשְׁאֵל	לְפָנָים	נְשִׁים	מִאָבִי	וְתִּשְׁמַשׁ	וְשִׁמְמָה	בְּאַמְתָּה
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וְשִׁמְמָה	רְוֹת	בְּשִׁנְיָה	וְתִּשְׁבַּבּוּ	וְשִׁבְבּוּ	וְשִׁבְבּוּ	
was Orpah	and the name	of the other	Ruth	and they dwelled		H8033
וְשִׁמְמָה:						
there about ten	years					
H6235	H8141					

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 1:5 (Parallel theme): And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;