

Ruth 1:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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 kindly with the dead, and with me.

Naomi's command "Go, return" (lekhnah shovnah, לְקַנֵּה שׁׁוֹבֵנָה) uses the imperative form, urging decisive action. She doesn't merely suggest but commands them to turn back to Moab. The reference to "mother's house" rather than "father's house" (the typical expression) is unusual, possibly indicating that their fathers were deceased, or emphasizing the female sphere where young widows would find comfort and eventually new marriages.

The phrase "the LORD deal kindly with you" invokes Yahweh's blessing despite urging them to return to Moab. This demonstrates Naomi's recognition that Yahweh's care extends beyond ethnic boundaries—He can bless even Moabites who show covenant loyalty. The word "kindly" translates chesed (חֶסֶד), one of the Old Testament's most significant theological terms, meaning loyal love, covenant faithfulness, or steadfast mercy. It describes God's unwavering commitment to His promises.

Naomi's prayer asks God to show chesed to her daughters-in-law "as ye have dealt kindly with the dead, and with me." She recognizes their loyal love (chesed) toward her deceased sons and herself. This is remarkable—Naomi sees her pagan

Moabite daughters-in-law as having demonstrated covenant loyalty, the very quality that should characterize God's people Israel. Their faithfulness to their Israelite husbands and widowed mother-in-law exemplified chesed more than many Israelites demonstrated during the judges period.

Historical Context

The concept of chesed (covenant loyalty) is central to Old Testament theology, describing both God's faithfulness to Israel and the loyalty expected within covenant relationships. It goes beyond mere legal obligation to include genuine affection, commitment beyond what duty requires, and steadfast loyalty regardless of circumstances. That Naomi attributes chesed to Moabite women demonstrates this virtue transcends ethnicity—it's a quality of character, not merely cultural identity.

Returning to their mothers' houses would mean Ruth and Orpah rejoining Moabite society with prospects of remarriage to Moabite men. Ancient Near Eastern customs expected young childless widows to remarry, providing economic security and continuing family lines. Naomi's urging them to return wasn't callousness but realism—she had nothing to offer them in Judah, while Moab offered security and future prospects.

The historical irony is profound: during Israel's judges period, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25), two Moabite women demonstrated covenant loyalty surpassing many Israelites. This pattern repeats throughout Scripture—God finds faith in unexpected places (Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, the Syrophoenician woman, the Roman centurion) while covenant people often fail in faithfulness. Election doesn't guarantee faithfulness; grace produces gratitude-motivated loyalty wherever hearts genuinely encounter God.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. In what relationships might you be prioritizing your needs over others' genuine welfare, and how can you more selflessly serve their best interests?
2. Where might you be failing to recognize genuine godly character in people outside your familiar circles, and how can you cultivate eyes to see God's work more broadly?
3. How does Naomi's confidence in God's universal justice challenge any tendencies toward spiritual tribalism in your thinking about who deserves God's blessing?

Interlinear Text

שָׁבַתָּה	לִכְבָּה	כָּלָתִים	לְשִׁתִּים	בְּנָתִים	וְתִּאְמַר	
said	And Naomi	unto her two	daughters in law		return	
H559	H5281	H8147	H3618	H1980	H7725	
הָיָה	לְבַתְּהָרָה	עֲשֵׂיתָם	אֶת־הַ	יְהָוָה	עַמְּכֶם	חִסְדָּךְ
each	house	to her mother's	deal	the LORD	kindly	
H802	H1004	H517	H6213	H3068	H5973	H2617
וְעַמְּדָה	בְּמִתְּהָרָה	עֲשֵׂיתָם	עִם	רְאֵשָׁתָה		
deal	with the dead					
H834	H6213	H5973	H4191	H5973		

Additional Cross-References

Ruth 1:5 (Parallel theme): And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

Colossians 3:18 (References Lord): Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Ephesians 5:22 (References Lord): Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

Ruth 2:20 (Word): And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.

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