

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, לֵכְנָה שׁוּבָנָה) 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

וַתֹּאמֶר	נָעֻמִּי	לְשֵׁנִי י	כָּלֹתַי יְה	לִי כְנָה	שׁ בָּנָה
said	And Naomi	unto her two	daughters in law	H1980	return
H559	H5281	H8147	H3618		H7725
הָאִשָּׁה	לְבֵיתָהּ	אֵמָּהּ	עָשִׂיתִי	יְהוָה	עִמָּכֶם
each	house	to her mother's	deal	the LORD	H5973
H802	H1004	H517	H6213	H3068	kindly
					H2617
רָאשָׁיו	עָשִׂיתִי	עִמָּם	הַמֵּתִים	וְעִמָּדֵי:	
H834	deal	H5973	with the dead	H5973	
	H6213		H4191		

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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