



Time to Reflect

- Can you think of an occasion in your life when you experienced the gracious provision of God? How were you impacted and how did it affect your faith?
- Read (v11-13). What impacts you the most about Naomi's reaction and her words?

Last week we introduced Ruth and we saw that there is much for us to reflect on as we consider themes of faithfulness, grace and compassion. We discovered that this is a story about loss, love and legacy. This week we narrow our focus as we look more closely at Naomi and her daughters-in-law – Ruth and Orpah. We will reflect on God's gracious provision and why it is important to remain faithful to God.

"Have you ever faced a turning point, a crossroads? In this passage, a geographical and spiritual turning point exists; for the story is not merely about turning back to Bethlehem, but also turning back to the Lord in faith."

(Tony Merida, *Ruth For You*, p29)

Specifics

- After the cliffhanger ending of last week, we pick up the story of Naomi and her daughters-in-law with a revelation of some good news (v6). Naomi had heard that "...the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them."
- The famine that we read about in (v1) was over and a new season of hope was dawning. Blessing had returned as God met the needs of His people. Grace abounds in (v6) and we are clearly told that this was the Lord's provision.
- Tony Merida writes, "At this bleak time in history, God opened his hand and provided food for the hungry.¹" The phrase "...had come to the aid of..." could also be interpreted as 'comforted' or 'visited.' Either way, God's gracious provision is clear to be seen and Naomi heard about it in Moab.
- (v6) provides the context for the remainder of the passage. Having heard about the gracious provision of God, Naomi and her daughters-in-law had to decide what to do next.
- One of the key words in Ruth 1 is 'return.' It appears twelve times, although it is sometimes translated as 'turn back,' 'go back,' or 'bring back.' As we approach (v7) we encounter the language of return.
- We must remember that Naomi was an Israelite, so, as she left Moab, she sought to return home. Ruth and Orpah were Moabites and as such they were not undertaking a return trip. Rather, they were embarking on a journey into the unknown – a move to a new homeland.
- There had to be much in Naomi's mind as she set out on this journey. Merida contends, "...Naomi is returning. We might wonder what is in her head as she makes this decision. She is returning differently than the way she left. She is a widow. How will she be treated? Will people care for her or scoff at her? She has lived in Moab, of all places, for ten years!²"

¹ Tony Merida, *Ruth For You* (The Good Book Company, 2020), p30.

² Ibid, p33.

- This return journey is one that is punctuated by conversations. Indeed, conversations dominate the book of Ruth, with 56 of the 85 verses consisting of dialogue!
- (v8-10) record how Naomi addressed both Ruth and Orpah. She tried to persuade them to return to Moab. We see elements of love and honesty in Naomi's words.
- Note how she encouraged them to return to their mother's house (v8), as opposed to the home of their father. This only occurs three other times in the Old Testament (Genesis 24:28 and Song of Songs 3:4, 8:2). In all instances it is used in the context of love and marriage, as it also is here (v9).
- Naomi also prayed for her daughters-in-law (v8b-9) and she longed for the Lord to show them kindness as they showed kindness to her and her sons. She wants them to be richly blessed.
- There is real sincerity here and a depth of loving compassion. The emotion pours over when she kissed Orpah and Ruth and sought to bid them goodbye (v9b). The language used refers to mourning and loud crying.
- Ruth and Orpah initially refused Naomi's request (v10). They offered to stay with their mother-in-law. However, Naomi insisted (v11-13) in what is her longest speech recorded in this book. Again, we see thoughtfulness and sincerity in her words.
- Merida suggests, "**Naomi is surrendering her daughters-in-law to what she is sure will be a brighter future.**"³ In contrast to this, she also engaged in lament in relation to her own experience (v13b).
- Naomi reflected deeply on her situation and (v13b) certainly gets us thinking about the place of lament in our spiritual lives. She sought to discern God's involvement in her life.
- Robert Hubbard Jr offers a brilliant observation as he contends that "**...bitter complaint cloaked firm faith**" in Naomi's life⁴.
- Orpah and Ruth responded in different ways (v14) and this offers us a direct contrast between them. Ruth clung to Naomi and the words recorded in the passage convey the imagery of deep loyalty.
- Ruth was prepared to leave her known world behind and step forward into an uncertain future. We see faithful dedication here.
- This is not lost on Merida who observes, "**Ruth is a picture of risk-taking faith. Her decision to go with Naomi is rooted in her trust in Yahweh, as Ruth 1:16 goes on to highlight. Orpah's decision makes sense on a practical level. But Ruth's decision requires something more than conventional wisdom; it requires faith – the kind of faith we should imitate. It is the kind of faith that bears fruit. It is a relational faith, an active faith.**"⁵
- Ruth's faith and loyalty shine brightly in (v16-17) and these words are some of the most famous that we find in the Old Testament.
- She was loyal and dedicated to Naomi. Yet Ruth's action went even further than this. She was also committed to stepping into an unknown future but was willing and ready to trust God.
- This is both inspirational and challenging. It gets us thinking about the barriers that are holding us back in our own spiritual journeys and how easy it is to hold on to what is comfortable.
- Ruth encourages us to be courageous and faithful, dedicated and committed. Her example challenges us to trust God and follow His leading in our lives – even it that calls us to take a leap of faith.
- Remember how Corrie Ten Boom said, "**Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.**"

³ Merida, *Ruth For You*, p36.

⁴ Robert. L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (Eerdmans, 1988), p116.

⁵ Merida, *Ruth For You*, p37.