

Introduction. While the Israelites and the Moabites were neighbours and had extensive interaction they were also often in conflict. The Book of Ruth depicts a period of relative peace between the two peoples.

1:1-5. An Israelite family travelled from Bethlehem across the rift valley, over the Jordan River and crossed into the land of the Moabites. There was a famine which caused Elimelech and Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Kilion to settle in the land of Moab. Their dislocation becomes more precarious with the death of Naomi's husband. It would seem they are unable to return to their country, so her sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi's grief is compounded with the death of her two sons 10 years after her husband's death.

1:6-13. Naomi learns that **'the Lord has come to the aid of His people** by providing food for them' (v. 6) so she prepares to return to her homeland. Initially Naomi heads toward Judea with her daughters-in-law but then seeks to persuade them to return to their country and find new husbands. Note how she speaks to them, **'may the Lord** show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. **May the Lord** grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband' (v. 8-9). When they protest that they will go with her, she expresses her own feelings of rejection and bitterness, **'the Lord's hand has gone against me!'** (v.13).

1:14. Orpah farewells her mother-in-law but Ruth **'clung to her'**.

Response: Do you feel, or have you felt, that the Lord's hand is against you? How do we encourage others to trust in the Lord when we feel He is not blessing us? How to we recognise God's hand at work in our lives?

v. 15-17. Ruth makes a remarkable series of commitments to her mother-in-law Naomi, **'Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.'**

i. Ruth promises to travel and stay with Naomi. There is no qualification in Ruth's commitment. She is greatly limiting if not giving up her chance to remarry as she has committed herself, in modern terms to be Naomi's carer.

ii. Ruth promises to change her citizenship as it were for the sake of her mother-in-law. Naomi has not requested this, but in her promise Ruth shows her deep love and devotion to Naomi.

iii. Ruth commits herself to serve and follow Naomi's God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
v.17-21. As in verse 13 Naomi expresses her distress at her predicament **'call me Mara, because the Lord Almighty has made my life very bitter.'** ... **'the Lord has made me empty'...the Lord has afflicted me the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me'**. Is Naomi, right?

v. 22. Naomi arrives safely back in Bethlehem.

Reflection/Response: Naomi is not condemned for expressing her anger and disappointment with God. Do we tell God when we feel abandoned or afflicted by Him? Developing a Christlike perspective can bring significant change to our response to our circumstances.

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